

LESSON 04 JAIN HISTORY AND SCRIPTURES

The Jain religion is one of the oldest religions in the world. The Jain religion was also known as Shraman Dharma, Nirgrantha Dharma, etc. It is not an offshoot of any other religion but is an independent religion recognized by these various names during different time periods. It has been taught by Tirthankaras also called Jina. A follower of a Jina is called a Jain and the religion followed by Jains is called Jainism. Each Tirthankara revitalizes the Jain order. The Jain Order is known as the Jain congregation (Sangh). The current Jain congregation was reestablished by Lord Mahavira, who was the 24th and last Tirthankara of the current time period. The Jain congregation/sangh is composed of the following four groups:

- 1) Monks (Sadhus)
- 2) Nuns (Sadhvis)
- 3) Male householders (Shrawaks)
- 4) Female householders (Shrawikas)

The first Tirthankar of the current time period was Lord Rushabhdev, who is also known as Adinath. Names of other popular Tirthankaras are Lord Shantinath (16th Tirthankara), Lord Neminath (22nd Tirthankara), Lord Parshvanath (23rd Tirthankar), and Lord Mahavira (24th Tirthankara). We are at present living under the religious rule of Lord Mahavira.

Lord Mahavira attained nirvana (liberation from the worldly existence) in 527 B. C. He had eleven ganadharas (disciples). Nine ganadharas attained liberation (salvation) during the lifetime of Lord Mahavira, while another two Gautamswami and Sudharmaswami survived him. Gautamswami attained perfect knowledge and perfect perception and became omniscient (Kevali) the very night of Lord Mahavira's nirvana. The remaining ganadhara, Sudharmaswami, was the next to attain perfect knowledge and perfect perception and became omniscient. Jambuswami, the disciple of Sudharmaswami was the last omniscient of the present half time cycle. After Jambuswami none attained perfect knowledge and the knowledge declined slowly as time went on.

Lord Mahavira's teachings were carried on by his ganadharas to us in the form of scriptures (Agamas). They were compiled into twelve separate parts, known as the dwadashangi (twelve parts). These twelve compositions were acceptable to all followers. However, the dwadashangi were not put in writing for a long time. The Jain pupils learned them by memorizing them. About 150 years after the nirvana of Lord Mahavira, there was a drought for 12 years. During this time, some monks along with Bhadrabahuwami migrated to South. After the drought was over, some monks came back to North. They observed that there was some inconsistency in oral recollection of the Jain scriptures by different monks. That made them to compile scriptures. To accomplish that, the first council (conference) of monks was held in Patliputra about 160 years after Lord Mahavira's nirvana. Monk Bhadrabahuwami, who had the knowledge of all 12 major texts (Angas), could not be present at that meeting. The rest of the monks could compile only the first eleven major texts by recollection and thus, the twelfth major text was lost. The monks from the South did not agree with this compilation, and the first

split in Jainism started. Jains divided into two main groups, Svetambara and Digambara. Svetambara monks wear white clothes. Digambara monks do not wear any clothes at all.

The second council (conference) was held in Mathura, 825 years after the nirvana of Lord Mahavira, under the leadership of monk Skandil. Simultaneously, another council was held in Valabhi under the leadership of Monk Nagarjunasuri. However, the texts of Jain Scriptures were not written systematically until after the third council that was held at Valabhi 980 years after the nirvana of Lord Mahavira under the leadership of monk Devarthigani.

Agama or Canonical Literature (Agama Sutras)

Agama literature consists of many texts, which are the sacred books of the Jain religion. They are written in the Ardha-magadhi language.

Non-agama Literature

Non-agama literature consists of commentary and explanation of Agama literature, and independent works, compiled by ascetics and scholars. They are written in many languages such as Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsa, Old Marathi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannad, Tamil, German, and English.

Agamas:

Agamas have twelve books each called Ang with their own name. They are:

1. Acharang Sutra (Aayarang)
2. Sutratrang Sutra (Suyagdang)
3. Sthananga Sutra (Thanang)
4. Samavayanga Sutra
5. Vhakhya Prajnapti or Bhagawati Sutra (Viyah Pannati)
6. Jnata Dharma Kathanga Sutra (Nayadhammakahao)
7. Upasaka Dashanga Sutra (Uvasagdasao)
8. Antah Kradashanga Sutra (Anatagaddasao)
9. Anuttaroupa Patika Dashanga Sutra (Anuttarov Vaiya Dasao)
10. Prashna Vyakrana Sutra (Panha Vagarnai)
11. Vipaka Sutra (Vivagsuyam)
12. Drastivada Sutra

The Digambara sect believes that there were 26 Agama-sutras (12 Anga-pravishtha Agamas + 14 Anga-bahya Agamas). However, they were gradually and partially forgotten starting from one hundred fifty years after Lord Mahavira's Nirvana.

In the absence of acceptable scriptures, Digambaras follow two main texts, three commentaries on the main texts, and four Anuyogas consisting of more than 20 texts as the basis for their religious philosophy and practices. These scriptures were written by great acharyas (scholars) from 100 to 1000 A.D.

List of Digambara texts as they are used in absence of Original Scriptures:

Shatakhand-agam or Mahakamma-payadi Pahuda or Mahakarma Prakriti Prabhrut		Acharya Pushpadanta and Bhutabali	160 A.D.
Kashaya-pahuda or Kashaya-prabhruta		Acharya Gunadhara	
Dhavala-tika	Commentary on Shatakhand Agam Vol. 1 to 5	Virsen	780 A.D.
Maha-dhavala-tika	Commentary on Shatakhand Agam Vol. 6	Virsen	780 A.D.
Jayadhavala-tika	Commentary on Kashaya-pahuda	Virsen and Jinsen	780 A.D.

Jain order had divided into two major sects.

The Digambara sect

The Svetambara sect

Monks and nuns are people who have voluntarily given up their household lives and worldly affairs and have accepted the five major vows to uplift their souls on the spiritual path. They strictly follow the rules laid down for them. Householders, on the other hand, continue to lead worldly lives. They may observe in full or to a limited extent, twelve minor vows laid down for them.