

Jainism, Founder, Symbol, Teachings, Beliefs

Description

Jainism represents one of India's oldest religious traditions. This faith emphasizes non-violence and spiritual liberation profoundly. Understanding Jainism is essential for UPSC preparation thoroughly. The religion influenced Indian culture, art, and philosophy. Comprehensive knowledge of Jainism is crucial for examinations.

The Founder and Origins

Rishabha: The First Tirthankara

Rishabha founded Jainism in ancient India originally. He was the father of King Bharata significantly. Bharata was India's first Chakravarti king historically.

References to Rishabha

Source	Description	Significance
Vishnu Purana	Describes Rishabha as Narayana incarnation	Hindu recognition
Bhagavat Purana	Mentions Rishabha as divine avatar	Cross-religious connection
Rigveda	References Jaina Tirthankara Rishabha	Ancient origins
Indus Valley	Male nude torso connected to Tirthankaras	Archaeological evidence

The Tirthankara Tradition

Twenty-four Tirthankaras appeared throughout Jain history sequentially. All Tirthankaras were Kshatriyas by birth always. They belonged to royal families throughout generations.

Tirthankara Characteristics

Aspect	Details	Significance
Number	Twenty-four total	Complete lineage
Caste	All Kshatriyas	Royal warrior class
Family	Royal families	Noble birth
23rd Tirthankara	Parsvanatha (850 BC)	Immediate predecessor
24th Tirthankara	Vardhamana Mahavira	Final Tirthankara

Jainism in Ancient Times

Evidence of Jainism exists from very ancient periods. Multiple sources confirm its antiquity and importance clearly.

Historical Evidence

Evidence Type	Details	Period	UPSC Importance
Rigvedic Reference	Rishabha mentioned	Very ancient	High
Puranic Literature	Rishabha as incarnation	Ancient	Moderate
Indus Valley	Nude torso sculpture	2500 BC	Very High
Literary References	Multiple mentions	Various periods	High

Concept of Tirthankaras

According to Jainism, Tirthankaras descended on earth. They came from time to time periodically. Their purpose was guiding the masses spiritually.

Vardhamana Mahavira: The 24th Tirthankara

Early Life and Birth

Vardhamana Mahavira was born in 540 BC. His birthplace was Kundagrama village near Vaishali. His family background was royal and distinguished.

Birth Details

Aspect	Details	Significance
Birth Year	540 BC	UPSC important date
Birthplace	Kundagrama near Vaishali	Bihar region
Father	Head of Jnatrika clan	Kshatriya nobility
Mother	Lichhavi princess	Royal lineage
Birth Name	Vardhamana	Later became Mahavira

The Journey to Enlightenment

At thirty years, Vardhamana became an ascetic. He wandered for twelve years continuously without settling. Perfect knowledge (kaivalya) came at age forty-two.

Spiritual Journey Timeline

Age	Event	Significance	Duration
30 years	Became ascetic	Renunciation	Starting point
30-42 years	Wandered places	Spiritual quest	12 years

Age	Event	Significance	Duration
42 years	Attained kaivalya	Perfect knowledge	Enlightenment
42-72 years	Propagated religion	Teaching period	30 years
72 years	Passed away	Death/Nirvana	468 BC

Conquering Suffering

Through kaivalya, Mahavira conquered misery and happiness. This conquest earned him the title 'Mahavira'. The term means 'great hero' in Sanskrit.

He is also called 'Jina' meaning conqueror. His followers became known as 'Jainas' consequently.

Propagation of Jainism

Mahavira propagated his religion for thirty years. His mission covered extensive geographical areas systematically.

Places Visited by Mahavira

Region	Modern Location	Significance
Kosala	Uttar Pradesh	Major kingdom
Magadha	Bihar	Important center
Mithila	Bihar-Nepal border	Cultural center
Champa	Bihar	Ancient city

Death and Mahaparinirvana

Mahavira passed away at seventy-two years age. Death occurred in 468 BC at Pavapuri. This place is near modern Rajgir in Bihar.

Jain Cosmological Concepts

Jains accept the concept of God distinctly. However, they place it below Jina or Mahavira.

Cosmic Cycle Concept

Concept	Term	Meaning	Significance
Rising Phase	Utsarpini	Universe origin	Progressive era
Declining Phase	Avasarpini	Universe decline	Regressive era
Cycle	Chakra	Complete cycle	Time wheel

The 63 Great Men (Shalaka Purushas)

Every cosmic cycle has sixty-three great men. These include specific categories of great personalities.

Categories of Great Men

Category	Number	Role
Tirthankaras	24	Spiritual teachers
Chakravarti Rajas	12	Universal emperors
Others	27	Various heroes
Total	63	Complete set

Core Teachings of Jainism

The Five Great Vows (Pancha Mahavratas)

Jainism taught five fundamental doctrines to followers.

Five Doctrines Explained

Vow	Sanskrit Term	Description	Added By
Non-violence	Ahimsa	Do not commit violence	Parsvanatha
Truthfulness	Satya	Do not speak lies	Parsvanatha
Non-stealing	Asteya	Do not steal	Parsvanatha
Non-possession	Aparigraha	Do not acquire property	Parsvanatha
Celibacy	Brahmacharya	Observe continence	Mahavira (added)

Only the fifth doctrine was added by Mahavira. The other four came from Parsvanatha originally.

Rejection of Vedic Authority

Jainism rejected the authority of Vedas completely. It dismissed Vedic rituals as unnecessary practices. The religion did not believe in God existence.

Core Beliefs

Belief	Jain Position	Significance
Vedas	Rejected	Anti-Brahmanical
God	Not believed	Atheistic approach
Karma	Believed	Cause-effect
Transmigration	Believed	Soul rebirth
Nirvana	Believed	Liberation goal

Three Jewels (Ratnas) of Jainism

Path to Moksha

Attainment of Moksha or Nirvana was paramount. Jainism says Moksha comes through three ratnas.

The Three Jewels

Jewel	Sanskrit Term	Description	Importance
Right Faith	Samyak Vishwas	Belief in omniscient Lord Mahavira	Foundation
Right Knowledge	Samyak Jnana	Understanding Jain doctrines	Understanding
Right Conduct	Samyak Karma	Fulfilling five great vows	Practice

Right conduct specifically means fulfilling five vows. These are ahimsa, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-attachment, and brahmacharya.

Jain Sects: Division and Diversity

The Great Schism

Parsva asked followers to cover body portions. Mahavira asked them to discard clothes completely. This difference caused sectarian division eventually later.

Two Major Sects

Sect	Meaning	Dress Code	Founder's View	Followers
Svetambara	White-clad	White dress	Parsva's tradition	Moderate austerity
Digambara	Sky-clad	Complete nudity	Mahavira's strictness	Extreme austerity

Other Jaina Sects

Multiple sub-sects emerged from major divisions over time.

Sub-Sects Classification

Sect Name	Origin	Region	Key Feature	Special Mention
Yapaniya	Svetambara	Karnataka	Tantric influence	Vikramaditya VI inscription
Pujyapada	Svetambara	Various	Supported idol worship	Worship practices
Terapanthi	Svetambara	Various	Reform movement	Modern origin
Sthanakavasi	Svetambara	Gujarat	Non-idol worship	Reform sect
Bisapanthi	Digambara	Various	Supported idol worship	Temple builders

Sacred Literature of Jainism

Original Doctrine: The Purvas

According to Svetambaras, original doctrine was in Purvas. Mahavira taught fourteen old texts called Purvas. These were passed orally initially through generations.

Later they were compiled as twelve Angas. This compilation preserved the teachings systematically for posterity.

Language of Sacred Texts

Sacred literature is written in Ardhamagadhi Prakrit. This form of Prakrit was commonly understood.

Literary Classification

Category	Number	Content Type	Acceptance
Twelve Angas	12	Core texts	Svetambara only
Twelve Upangas	12	Secondary texts	Svetambara only
Ten Prakirnakas	10	Miscellaneous	Svetambara only
Six Chhedasutras	6	Disciplinary codes	Svetambara only
Four Mulasutras	4	Basic texts	Svetambara only

Commentarial Literature

Niryuktis and Churnis are commentaries on Purvas. These explain and elaborate original teachings clearly.

Sectarian Differences

Digambaras do not accept Svetambara literature at all. Svetambaras accept their own canonical texts fully. This represents major doctrinal division between sects.

The Twelve Angas

Complete List of Angas

Number	Anga Name	Subject	Importance
1	Acharanga	Conduct rules	Very High
2	Sutrakritanga	Doctrinal issues	High
3	Sthananga	Numerical categories	Moderate
4	Samavayanga	Classification	Moderate

Number	Anga Name	Subject	Importance
5	Vyakhyaprajnapiti	Explanation	High
6	Jnatadharmakathanga	Stories	Moderate
7	Upasakadashanga	Lay followers	Important
8	Antakritadashanga	Salvation stories	Moderate
9	Anuttaraupapaticadasanga	Highest heavens	Moderate
10	Prasnavyakarana	Questions-answers	Important
11	Vipakasruta	Karmic results	Important
12	Drishtivada	Lost text	Originally most important

Jaina Philosophy

Syadvada: Theory of Maybe

All our judgments are necessarily relative always. Conditional and limited perspectives define human knowledge.

Seven-fold Predication (Saptabhangi)

Mode	Statement	Meaning
1	Syad asti	Maybe it is
2	Syad nasti	Maybe it is not
3	Syad asti nasti	Maybe it is and is not
4	Syad avaktavya	Maybe it is indescribable
5	Syad asti avaktavya	Maybe it is and indescribable
6	Syad nasti avaktavya	Maybe it is not and indescribable
7	Syad asti nasti avaktavya	Maybe it is, is not, and indescribable

Absolute affirmation and absolute negation are both wrong. All judgments must be conditional and relative.

Anekantavada: Doctrine of Many-Sidedness

Jaina metaphysics is realistic and relativistic pluralism. This is called Anekantavada or many-sidedness doctrine.

Core Concepts

Concept	Term	Nature	Status
Matter	Pudgala	Physical reality	Independent
Spirit	Jiva	Spiritual reality	Independent

Concept	Term	Nature	Status
Relationship	Separate	Not unified	Dualistic

Matter and Spirit are separate independent realities. Neither reduces to the other completely ever.

Instruments of Knowledge (Pramanas)

Jaina philosophy recognizes five knowledge instruments clearly.

Five Types of Knowledge

Type	Sanskrit Term	Method	Accessibility
Sensory Perception	Matijnana	Sense organs, mind	Common people
Scriptural Knowledge	Srutajnana	Revealed scriptures	Learned people
Clairvoyance	Avadhijnana	Supernatural perception	Advanced souls
Telepathy	Manahparyayajnana	Mind reading	Very advanced souls
Omniscience	Kevalajnana	Absolute knowledge	Tirthankaras only

Jaina Councils

Historical Context: The Great Famine

By fourth century BC end, serious famine struck. The Ganges valley suffered severely from drought. Many Jaina monks migrated to Deccan and south.

Migration Details

Aspect	Details	Significance
Leader	Bhadrabahu	Senior monk
Companion	Chandragupta Maurya	Emperor turned monk
Destination	Sravana Belgola	Karnataka
Duration	12 years	Extended period
Stay-back Leader	Sthulabahu	Remained in Magadha

Changes and Division

The group staying in Magadha changed conduct codes. These changes led to major sectarian division eventually. Digambaras and Svetambaras emerged as separate sects.

First Jaina Council

Council Details

Aspect	Details	Significance
Place	Pataliputra	Magadha capital
Leader	Sthulabahu	Senior monk
Period	Beginning 3rd century BC	After famine
Outcome	Compilation of 12 Angas	Replaced lost 14 Purvas
Purpose	Preserve teachings	Canonical texts

Second Jaina Council

Council Specifics

Aspect	Details	Significance
Place	Valabhi	Gujarat
Period	5th century AD	Much later
Leader	Devaradhi Kshamasramana	Senior monk
Outcome	Final compilation	12 Angas, 12 Upangas
Purpose	Standardize canon	Complete texts

Spread of Jainism

Organization of Followers

Mahavira organized an order of his followers. Both men and women were admitted equally. His followers reportedly numbered fourteen thousand total.

Initial Challenges

Jainism didn't clearly distinguish itself from Brahmanism. This lack of distinction prevented mass attraction. Despite this, Jainism spread to south and west.

Regional Spread

Geographical Expansion

Region	Period	Patron	Mode of Spread
Karnataka	4th century BC	Chandragupta Maurya	Royal patronage
Kalinga (Orissa)	4th century BC	General spread	Gradual
Kalinga	1st century BC	King Kharavela	Royal patronage
Tamil Nadu	2nd-1st century BC	Merchants	Trade routes
Malwa	Later centuries	Merchants	Commercial
Gujarat	Later centuries	Wealthy merchants	Trade centers

Region	Period	Patron	Mode of Spread
Rajasthan	Later centuries	Merchants	Desert trade

Chandragupta Maurya's Role

According to late tradition, Chandragupta Maurya became Jain. The emperor gave up his throne willingly. He spent last years in Karnataka ascetically.

His patronage significantly helped Jainism spread in south. This royal support legitimized the religion substantially.

King Kharavela's Patronage

Kharavela ruled Kalinga in first century BC. He enjoyed Jainism and patronized it extensively. He defeated princes of Andhra and Magadha.

His military successes enhanced Jainism's prestige regionally significantly.

Southern Penetration

Jainism reached southern Tamil Nadu districts gradually. Second and first centuries BC witnessed this expansion. Maritime trade facilitated religious diffusion across regions.

Modern Distribution

Even now, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Malwa have. Jainas are mainly engaged in trade and commerce. This occupational concentration continues from ancient times.

Architectural and Artistic Contributions

Structural Monuments

Jains built stupas with elaborate decorative elements. Railings, pillars, and gateways adorned these structures.

Important Jain Sites

Site	Location	Features	Period	Significance
Hathi Gumph	Orissa	Cave inscriptions	Ancient	Kharavela inscription
Udayagiri	Orissa	Caves	Ancient	Jain relics
Khandagiri	Orissa	Caves	Ancient	Monastic cells
Mathura	Uttar Pradesh	Art center	Kushana period	Sculpture excellence

Monumental Sculptures

Famous Jain Statues

Monument	Location	Height	Year	Significance
Gomateshvara	Sravana Belgola, Karnataka	57 feet	983-984 AD	Architectural marvel
Karkala statue	Karnataka	Large	Medieval	Artistic excellence

Temple Architecture

Jain temples represent superb workmanship and artistry.

Notable Temple Complexes

Temple	Location	Features	Period	Architectural Style
Dilwara Temples	Mount Abu, Rajasthan	Marble work	11th-13th century	Exquisite carving
Ranakpur	Rajasthan	1444 pillars	15th century	Complex design
Palitana	Gujarat	Temple city	Medieval	Hill temples
Moodabidri	Karnataka	Thousand pillar	Medieval	Southern style

Royal Patronage in South

Dynasties Supporting Jainism

Dynasty	Region	Period	Contribution
Gangas	Karnataka	Ancient-Medieval	Temple building
Kadambas	Karnataka	Medieval	Patronage
Chalukyas	Deccan	Medieval	Royal support
Rashtrakutas	Deccan	Medieval	Extensive patronage

Merchant Patronage

In Gujarat, wealthy merchants patronized Jainism extensively. Their commercial success enabled temple building activities. Merchant communities maintained Jain traditions through generations.

Five Categories of Siddhas

Jain tradition recognizes five categories of perfected beings.

Classification of Siddhas

Category	Status	Role	Veneration
Tirthankara	Attained salvation	Spiritual teachers	Highest

Category	Status	Role	Veneration
Arhat	Near Nirvana	About to liberate	Very High
Acharya	Ascetic head	Community leader	High
Upadhyaya	Teacher	Saint, instructor	High
Sadhu	Monk	Practitioner	Respected

Cultural Impact of Jainism

Social Reform

Jainism made first serious attempt at reform. It mitigated evils of varna order systematically. Ritualistic Vedic religion was challenged directly and effectively.

Reform Contributions

Area	Reform	Impact
Caste System	Challenged hierarchy	Social equality
Rituals	Rejected elaborate ceremonies	Simplified religion
Language	Adopted Prakrit	Accessible to masses
Women	Admitted to order	Gender inclusion

Linguistic Contributions

Early Jainas discarded Sanskrit language deliberately completely. Sanskrit was mainly patronized by Brahmanas exclusively. They adopted Prakrit language of common people.

Literary Language Development

Language	Purpose	Contribution	Period
Ardhamagadhi	Religious texts	Canonical literature	Ancient
Prakrit	Preaching	Accessible doctrine	Ancient-Medieval
Apabhramsha	Literature	Earliest important works, grammar	Medieval

Academic Contributions

Jainism contributed significantly to multiple academic fields.

Fields of Contribution

Field	Contribution	Significance
Lexicography	Dictionaries	Language study

Field	Contribution	Significance
Poetry	Literary works	Cultural enrichment
Mathematics	Numerical concepts	Scientific advancement
Astronomy	Celestial observations	Scientific knowledge
Astrology	Predictive systems	Traditional science
Political Thought	Governance ideas	Statecraft

Regional Language Development

Jainas contributed to growth of regional languages. Their literary works enriched local linguistic traditions.

Regional Language Contributions

Language	Region	Jain Contribution	Impact
Tamil	Tamil Nadu	Religious texts	Early literature
Telugu	Andhra Pradesh	Literary works	Language development
Gujarati	Gujarat	Extensive literature	Major influence
Hindi	North India	Early works	Language formation
Marathi	Maharashtra	Religious texts	Literature growth
Rajasthani	Rajasthan	Folk literature	Cultural preservation
Kannada	Karnataka	Extensive corpus	Major literary tradition

Apabhramsha Development

Jainas composed earliest important Apabhramsha works significantly. They prepared its first grammar systematically clearly. This linguistic contribution was groundbreaking for literature.

Decline of Jainism

Factors Contributing to Decline

Multiple factors caused Jainism's gradual decline over centuries.

Reasons for Decline

Factor	Description	Impact
Competition	Hinduism and Buddhism	Lost followers
Lack of Preachers	No charismatic leaders after Mahavira	Reduced spread
Sectarian Division	Digambara-Svetambara split	Weakened unity
Loss of Royal Patronage	Later rulers withdrew support	Reduced resources

Factor	Description	Impact
Brahmanical Revival	Hindu renaissance	Absorbed followers
Limited Geography	Didn't spread beyond India	Regional limitation
Conversion Policy	Refrained from active conversion	Limited growth
Mild Principles	Peaceful, non-aggressive approach	Less assertive

Survival and Continuity

Despite decline, Jainism continues till present day. It retains hold on small follower body. The community remains concentrated in specific regions.

Modern Jain Distribution

Region	Concentration	Primary Occupation	Status
Gujarat	High	Trade, commerce	Prosperous
Rajasthan	High	Business	Wealthy
Maharashtra	Moderate	Commerce	Well-established
Karnataka	Moderate	Various	Traditional

Comparison with Buddhism

Jainism never reached Buddhism's popularity level worldwide. Buddhism spread across Asia extensively and successfully. Jainism remained largely confined to India geographically.

Jaina Philosophy: Summary for UPSC

Key Philosophical Concepts

Understanding Jain philosophy is essential for examinations.

Core Philosophical Ideas

Concept	Meaning	UPSC Relevance
Syadvada	Conditional reasoning	Important
Anekantavada	Multiple viewpoints	Very Important
Ahimsa	Non-violence	Most Important
Karma Theory	Cause-effect	Important
Nirvana	Liberation	Important

Comparative Religion

Jainism vs Other Religions

Aspect	Jainism	Buddhism	Hinduism
God	No creator god	No creator god	Multiple gods
Vedas	Rejected	Rejected	Accepted
Caste	Challenged	Challenged	Supported
Language	Prakrit	Pali	Sanskrit
Founder	Mahavira	Buddha	No single founder

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