

Jainism - Tirthankaras, Vardhaman Mahavira & Triratna

Origin of Jainism

- Jainism is a very ancient religion. As per some traditions, it is as old as the Vedic religion.
- The Jain tradition has a succession of great teachers or Tirthankaras.
- There were 24 Tirthankaras the last of which was Vardhaman Mahavira.
- The first Tirthankara is believed to be Rishabhanath or Rishabhadev.
- The 23rd Tirthankara was Parshvanatha who was born in Varanasi. He may have lived in the 8th or 7th century BC.
- All the Tirthankaras were Kshatriyas by birth.

Founder of Jainism – Vardhaman Mahavira (540 – 468 B.C.)

- Considered the last Tirthankara.
- He was born at Kundagrama near Vaisali.
- His parents were Kshatriyas. Father – Siddhartha (Head of Jnatrika Clan); Mother – Trishala (Sister of Lichchhavi chief Chetaka). (Chetaka's daughter married Haryanka King Bimbisara).
- He was married to Yasoda and had a daughter Anojja or Priyadarsana.
- At the age of 30, Vardhaman renounced his home and became a wandering ascetic.
- He also observed self-mortification.
- After 13 years of penance, he attained the highest spiritual knowledge called Kevala Jnan. He attained this at Jimbhikagrama village under a sal tree aged 42. This is called Kaivalya. Thereafter, he was called Mahavira, Jina, Jitendriya (one who conquered his senses), Nigrantha (free from all bonds), and Kevalin.
- He preached his teachings for 30 years and died at Pava (near Rajagriha) aged 72.

Causes of the rise of Jainism

- Vedic religion had become highly ritualistic.
- Jainism was taught in Pali and Prakrit thus was more accessible to the common man as compared to Sanskrit.
- It was accessible to people of all castes.
- Varna system had rigidified and people of the lower castes led miserable lives. Jainism offered them an honourable place.
- About 200 years after the death of Mahavira, a great famine in the Ganga valley prompted Chandragupta Maurya and Bhadrabahu (last Acharya of the undivided Jain sangha) to migrate to Karnataka. Jainism spread to Southern India after that.

Teachings of Jainism

- Mahavira rejected Vedic principles.
- He did not believe in God's existence. According to him, the universe is a product of the natural phenomenon of cause and effect.
- He believed in Karma and transmigration of the soul. The body dies but the soul does not.
- One will be punished or rewarded as per one's karma.
- Advocated a life of austerity and non-violence.
- Stressed on equality but did not reject the caste system, unlike Buddhism. But he also said that man may be 'good' or 'bad' as per his actions and not birth.
- Asceticism was taken to a great length. Starvation, nudity, and self-mortification were expounded.
- Two elements of the world: Jiva (conscious) and Atma (unconscious):
 - Right faith
 - Right knowledge
 - Right conduct (observance of five vows)
 1. Ahimsa (non-violence)
 2. Satya (truth)
 3. Asteya (no stealing)
 4. Parigraha (no acquiring property)
 5. Brahmacharya (abstinence)

Split in Jainism

- When Bhadrabahu left for South India, Sthulabahu remained in the North with his followers.
- Sthulabahu changed the code of conduct and said that white clothes could be worn. Thus, split Jainism into two sects:
 1. Svetambaras: White-clad; Northerners
 2. Digambaras: Sky-clad (naked); Southerners

Jainism – Jain Councils

First council

- Held at Pataliputra in the 3rd century BC.
- Presided by Sthulabahu.

Second Council

- Held at Vallabhi in Gujarat in 512 AD.
- Presided by Devardhigani.
- 12 Angas was compiled here.

Royal patrons of Jainism

South India

- Kadamba dynasty
- Ganga dynasty
- Amoghavarsha
- Kumarapala (Chalukya dynasty)

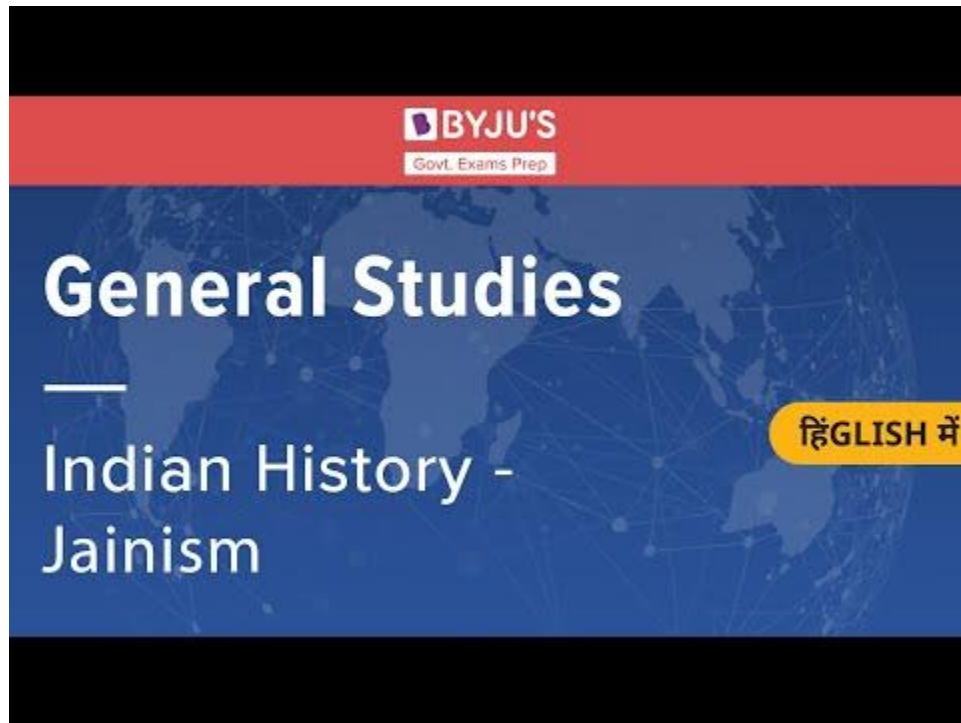
North India

- Bimbisara
- Ajatasatru
- Chandragupta Maurya
- Bindusara
- Harshavardhana
- Ama
- Bindusara
- Kharavela

Other Facts about Jainism relevant for UPSC

There are a few important details about Jainism that aspirants should know for the [UPSC Prelims](#) examination:

1. The doctrine of Jainism is older than the Buddhist doctrine
2. Buddha and Mahavira were contemporaries
3. The word 'Jaina' has meaning. It means the follower of 'Jina,' which means 'Victor' (Someone who has attained infinite knowledge and who teaches others how to attain moksha.)
4. The other name to 'Jina' is 'Tirthankara,' which means ford builder.
5. There is a Jain conception of time which is divided into six stages called Kalas.
6. The 22nd Tirthankara Neminatha is said to have belonged to the Saurashtra region of Gujarat.
7. The 23rd Tirthankara Parshvanath lived in Benaras
8. All Tirthankaras are supposed to have taught the same doctrine.
9. A Jina is said to possess 'Avadhijnana,' (Superhuman cognition or psychic power.)
10. Jain doctrine insists that:
 - Reality is Anekanta (Manifold)
 - Sat (Being) has three aspects – Substance (Dravya), Quality (Guna), and Mode (Paryaya.)
 - Jain Doctrine of Anekantavada mentions the manifold nature of reality.)



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Frequently Asked Questions related to Jainism

Does Jainism believe in God?

Jainism recognised the existence of god but placed them lower than Jina (Mahavira). According to Mahavira, a person is born in higher or lower varna as the consequence of the sins or the virtues in the previous birth. Thus, Jainism believes in the transmigration of the soul and the theory of Karma.

How many types of Jains are there?

Jains are divided into two major sects; the Digambara (meaning sky clad) sect and the Svetambara (meaning white clad) sect. Each of these sects is also divided into subgroups. The two sects agree on the basics of Jainism, but disagree on: details of the life of Mahavira.

How is Buddhism different from Jainism?

Buddhism is centered upon the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha, whereas Jainism is centered on the life and teachings of Mahavira. Jainism is also a polytheistic religion and its goals are based on non-violence and liberation of the soul.

Which is the oldest religion?

The word Hindu is an exonym, and while Hinduism has been called the oldest religion in the world, many practitioners refer to their religion as Sanātana Dharma (the Eternal Way), which refers to the idea that its origins lie beyond human history, as revealed in the Hindu texts.

What are the basic beliefs of Jainism?

Jainism is a religion of self-help. There are no gods or spiritual beings that will help human beings. The three guiding principles of Jainism, the 'three jewels', are right belief, right knowledge and right conduct. The supreme principle of Jain living is non-violence (ahimsa).