

History of Jain Sects

The Jain religion is one of the oldest religions in the world. The Jain religion was also known as Shraman Dharma, Nirgranth 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 Sangh. The current Jain Sangh was reestablished by Lord Mahāvira, who was the 24th and last Tirthankar of the current time period. The Jain Sangh is composed of the following four groups:

- 1) Sādhus (Monks)
- 2) Sādhvis (Nuns)
- 3) Shrāvaks (Male householders)
- 4) Shrāvikās (Female householders)

The first Tirthankar of the current time period was Lord Rushabhdev, who is also known as Ādināth. Names of other popular Tirthankars are Lord Shāntināth (the 16th Tirthankar), Lord Nemnāth (the 22nd Tirthankar), Lord Pārshwnāth (the 23rd Tirthankar), and Lord Mahāvira (24th Tithankar). Lord Mahāvira is the most popular Tirthankar of our time.



Lord Mahāvira attained nirvān (liberated from the worldly existence) in 527 B. C. He had eleven ganadharas (disciples). Nine ganadharas attained liberation (salvation) during the lifetime of Lord Mahāvira, while another two Gautamswāmi and Sudharmāswāmi survived him. Gautamswāmi attained perfect knowledge and perfect perception and became Arihant the very night of Lord Mahāvira's nirvān. The remaining ganadhar, Sudharmāswāmi, was the next to attain perfect knowledge and perfect perception and became Arihant. Jambuswāmi, the disciple of Sudharmāswāmi was the last Arihant of the present half time cycle. After Jambuswāmi none attained perfect knowledge and the knowledge declined slowly as time went on.

Lord Mahāvira's teachings were carried on by his ganadharas to us in the form of scriptures (Agams). 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 Mahāvira, there was a drought for 12 years. During this time, some monks along with Bhadrabāhuswami 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 Mahāvira's nirvana. Monk Bhadrabāhu, who had the knowledge of all 12 Angas, could not be present at that meeting. The rest of the monks could compile only the first eleven Angas by recollection and thus, the twelfth Anga 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, Svetāmbaras and Digambaras. Svetāmbara monks wore white clothes. Digambara monks did not wear any clothes at all.

Jain order had divided into two major sects.

1. The Digambara sect
2. The Svetambar sect

The Digambara sub-sects

The Digambara sect, in recent centuries, has been divided into the following sub-sects:

Major sub-sects:

1. Bisapantha,
2. Terapantha, and
3. Taranapantha or Samaiyapantha.

Minor sub-sects:

1. Gumanapantha
2. Totapantha.

Bisapantha

The followers of Bisapantha support the *Dharma-gurus*, that is, religious authorities known as *Bhattarakas* who are also the heads of Jain Mathas, that is, religious monasteries. The Bisapanthas, in their temples, worship the idols of Tirthankaras and also the idols of Ksetrapala, Padmavati and other deities. They worship these idols with saffron, flowers, fruits, sweets, scented 'agara-battis', i.e., incense sticks, etc. While performing these worships, the Bisapanthis sit on the ground and do not stand. They perform *Arati*, i.e., waving of lights over the idol, in the temple even at night and distribute *prasada*, i.e., sweet things offered to the idols. The Bisapantha, according to some, is the original form of the Digambara sect and today practically all Digambara Jainas from Maharashtra, Karnataka and South India and a large number of Digambara Jainas from Rajasthan and Gujarat are the followers of Bisapantha.

Terapantha

Terapantha arose in North India in the year 1683 of the Vikram Era as a revolt against the domination and conduct of the Bhattarakas, i.e. religious authorities, of the Digambara Jainas. As a result in this sub-sect, the institution of Bhattarakas lost respect in North India, however in South India the Bhattarakas continue to play an important role. In their temples, the Terapanthis install the idols of Tirthankaras and not of Ksetrapala, Padmavati and other deities. Further, they worship the idols not with flowers, fruits and other green vegetables (known as *sachitta* things), but with sacred rice called '*Aksata*', cloves, sandal, almonds, dry coconuts, dates, etc. As a rule they do not perform *Arah* or distribute *Prasada* in their temples. Again, while worshipping they stand and do not sit.

From these differences with the Bisapanthis it is clear that the Terapanthis appear to be reformers. They are opposed to various religious practices. As according to them, these are not real Jain practices. The Terapantha had performed a valuable task of rescuing the Digambaras from the clutches of wayward Bhattarakas and hence the Terapanthis occupy a peculiar position in the Digambara Jain community. The Terapanthis are more numerous in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

It is pertinent to note that even though the name Terapantha sub-sect appears both among the Digambara and the Svetambara sects. Still the two Terapanthis are entirely different from each other. While the Digambara Terapanthis believe in nudity and idol-worship, the Svetambara Terapanthis are quite opposed to both.

Taranapantha

The sub-sect Taranapantha is known after its founder Tarana-Svami or Tarana-tarana-Svami (1448-1515 A.D.). This sub-sect is also called *Samaiyapantha* because its followers worship *Sarnaya*, i.e., sacred books and not the idols. Tarana-Svami died at Malharagarh, in former Gwalior State in Madhya Pradesh, and this is the central place of pilgrimage of Taranapanthis.

The Taranapanthis strongly refute idolatry but they have their own temples in which they keep their sacred books for worship. They do not offer articles like fruits and flowers at the time of worship. Besides the sacred books of the Digambaras, they also worship the fourteen sacred books written by their founder Tarana-Svami. Further, Taranapanthis give more importance to spiritual values and the study of sacred literature. That is why we find a complete absence of outward religious practices among them. Moreover, Tarana-Svami; was firmly against the caste-distinctions and in fact threw open the doors of his sub-sect even to Muslims and low-caste people.

These three main traits of the Taranapanthis, namely, (a) the aversion to idol worship, (b) the absence of outward religious practices, and (c) the ban on caste distinctions, were evolved as a revolt against the religious beliefs and practices prevailing in the Digambara Jaina sect, and it appears that Tarana-Svami might have formulated these principles under the direct influence of Islamic doctrines and the teachings of Lonkashaha, the founder of the non-idoltrous Sthanakvasi sub-sect of the Svetambara sect.

The Taranapanthis are few in number and they are mostly confined to Bundelkhand, Malwa area of Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh area of Maharashtra.

Gumanapantha

The Gumanapantha is not so important and in fact very little is known about it. It is stated that this sub-sect was started by Pandit Gumani Rama or Gumani Rai, who was a son of Pandit Todaramal, a resident of Jaipur in Rajasthan.

According to this Pantha, lighting of candles or lamps in the Jaina temples is strictly prohibited, because it regards this as a violation of the fundamental doctrine of Jaina religion, viz., non-violence. They only visit and view the image in the temples and do not make any offerings to them.

This pantha became famous in the name of *shuddha* amnaya, that is pure or sacred tradition, because its followers always stressed the purity of conduct and self-discipline and strict adherence to the precepts.

Gumanapantha originated in the 18th. Century A.D. and flourished mainly during that century. It was prevalent in several parts of Rajasthan, and it is found now in some areas of Rajasthan around Jaipur.

Totapantha

The Totapantha came into existence as a result of differences between the Bisapantha and Terapantha sub-sects. Many sincere efforts were made to strike a compromise between the Bisa (*i.e. twenty*) Pantha and the Tera (*i.e. thirteen*) pantha and the outcome was sadhesolaha (*i.e., sixteen and a half*)-Pantha or 'Totapantha'. That is why the followers of Sadhesolaha Pantha or Totapantha believe to some extent in the doctrines of Bisapantha and to some extent in those of Terapantha.

The Totapanthis are extremely few in number and are found in some pockets in Madhya Pradesh.

In connection with the account of the major and minor sub-sects prevailing among the Digambara sect. it is worth while to note that in recent years in the Digambara sect a new major sub-sect known as 'Kanji-pantha', consisting of the followers of Kanji Swami is being formed and is getting popular especially among the educated sections. Saint Kanji Swami (from whom the name 'Kanji-pantha' is derived), a 'Svetambara-Sthanakvasi' by birth, largely succeeded in popularizing the old sacred texts of the great Digambara Jaina saint Acharya Kunda-Kunda of South India. But Kanji Swami's efforts, while interpreting Acharya Kunda kunda's writings, to give more prominence to *nischaya-naya*, that is, realistic point of view, in preference to *vyavahara-naya*, that is, practical view point, are not approved by the Digambaras in general as they consider that both the view points are of equal importance. However, the influence of Kanjipantha is steadily increasing and Sonagarh town in Gujarat and Jaipur in Rajasthan have become the centers of varied religious activities of the Kanajipanthis.

The Svetambara sub-sects -

Like the Digambara sect, the Svetambara sect has also been split into three main sub-sects:

1. Murtipujaka,
2. Sthanakvasi, and
3. Terapanthi

Murtipujaka

The original stock of the Svetambaras is known as Murtipujaka Svetambaras since they are the thorough worshippers of idols. They offer flowers, fruits, saffron, etc. to their idols and invariably adorn them with rich clothes and jeweled ornaments.

Their ascetics cover their mouth with strips of cloth while speaking, otherwise they keep them in their hands. They stay in temples or in the specially reserved buildings known as *upasrayas*. They collect food in their bowls from the *sravakas* or householders' houses and eat at their place of stay.

The Murtipujaka sub-sect is also known by terms like (i) *Pujera* (worshippers), (ii) *Deravasi* (temple residents), (iii) *Chaityavasi* (temple residents) and (iv) *Mandira-margi* (temple goers)

The Murtipujaka Svetambaras are found scattered all over India for business purposes in large urban centers, still they are concentrated mostly in Gujarat.

Sthanakvasi

The Sthanakvasi arose not directly from the Svetambaras but as reformers of an older reforming sect, viz., the Lonka sect of Jainism. This Lonka sect was founded in about 1474 A.D. by Lonkashaha, a rich and well-read merchant of Ahmedabad. The main principle of this sect was not to practice idol-worship. Later on, some of the members of the Lonka sect disapproved of the ways of life of their ascetics, declaring that they lived less strictly than Mahavira would have wished. A Lonka sect layman, Viraji of Surat, received initiation as a *Yati*, i.e., an ascetic, and won great admiration on account of the strictness of his life. Many people of the Lonka sect joined this reformer and they took the name of Sthanakvasi, meaning those who do not have their religious activities in temples but carry on their religious duties in places known as *Sthanakas* which are like prayer-halls.

The Sthanakvasi are also called by terms as (a) *Dhundhiya* (searchers) and (b) *Sadhumargi* (followers of *Sadhus*, i.e., ascetics). Except on the crucial point of idol-worship, Sthanakvasi do not differ much from other Svetambara Jainas and hence now-a-days they invariably call themselves as Svetambara Sthanakvasi. However, there are some differences between the Sthanakvasi; and the Murtipujaka Svetambaras in the observance of some religious practices. The Sthanakvasi do not believe in idol-worship at all. As such they do not have temples but only *sthanakas*, that is, prayer halls, where they carry on their religious fasts, festivals, practices, prayers, discourses, etc. Further, the ascetics of Sthanakvasi cover their mouths with strips of cloth for all the time and they do not use the cloth of yellow or any other color (of course, except white). Moreover, the Sthanakvasi admit the authenticity of only 31 of the scriptures of Svetambaras. Furthermore, the Sthanakvasi do not have faith in the places of pilgrimage and do not participate in the religious festivals of Murtipujaka Svetambaras.

The Svetambara Sthanakvasi are also spread in different business centers in India but they are found mainly in Gujarat, Punjab, Harayana and Rajasthan.

It is interesting to note that the two non-idolatrous sub-sects, viz., Taranapanthis among the Digambaras and Sthanakvasi among the Svetambaras, came very late in the history of the Jaina Church and to some extent it can safely be said that the Mohammedan influence on the religious mind of India was greatly responsible for their rise. In this connection Mrs. S. Stevenson observes: "If one effect of the Mohammedan conquest, however, was to drive many of the Jainas into closer union with their fellow idol-worshippers in the face of iconoclasts. Another effect was to drive others away from idolatry altogether. No oriental could hear a fellow Oriental's passionate outcry against idolatry without doubts as to the righteousness of the practice entering his mind, Naturally enough it is in Ahmedabad, the city of Gujarat, that was most under Mohammedan influence, that we can first trace the stirring of these doubts. About 1474 A.D. the Lonka sect, the first of the non-idolatrous Jaina sects, arose and was followed by the Dhundhiya or Sthanakvasi sect about 1653 A.D. dates which coincide strikingly with the Lutheran and Puritan movements in Europe." (vide *Heart of Jainism*, p. 19).

Terapanthi

The terapanthi sub-sect is derived from the Sthanakvasi; section. The Terapanthi sub-sect was founded by Swami Bhikkanaji Maharaj. Swami Bhikkanaji was formerly a Sthanakvasi saint and had initiation from his

Guru, by name Acharya Raghunatha. Swami Bhikkanaji had differences with his *Guru* on several aspects of religious practices of Sthanakvasi ascetics and when these took a serious turn, he founded Terapantha on the full-moon day in the month of Asadha in the year V.S. 1817, i.e., 1760 A.D.

As Acharya Bhikkanaji laid stress on the 13 religious principles, namely, (i) five *Mahavratas* (great vows), (ii) five *samitis* (regulations) and (iii) three *Guptis* (controls or restraints), his sub-sect was known as the *Tera* (meaning thirteen)-pantha sub-sect. In this connection it is interesting to note that two other interpretations have been given for the use of the term Terapantha for the sub-sect. According to one account, it is mentioned that as there were only 13 monks and 13 laymen in the *pantha* when it was founded, it was called as *Tera* (meaning thirteen) -*pantha*. Sometimes another interpretation of the term Terapantha is given by its followers. *Tera* means yours and *pantha* means path; in other words, it means, "Oh! Lord Mahavira! it is Thy path".

The Terapanthis are non-idolatrous and are very finely organized under the complete direction of one *Acharya*, that is, religious head. In its history of little more than 200 years, the Terapantha had a succession of only 9 *Acharyas* from the founder *Acharya* Bhikkanaji as the First *Acharya* to the present *Acharya* Tulasi as the 9th *Acharya*.

This practice of regulating the entire Pantha by one *Acharya* only has become a characteristic feature of the Terapantha and an example for emulation by other *Panths*. It is noteworthy that all monks and nuns of the Terapantha scrupulously follow the orders of their *Acharya*, preach under his guidance and carry out all religious activities in accordance with his instructions. Further, the Terapantha regularly observes a remarkable festival known as *Maryada Mahotasava*. This distinctive festival is celebrated every year on the 7th day of the bright half of the month of *Magha* when all ascetics and lay disciples, male and female, meet together at one predetermined place and discuss the various problems of Terapanthis.

The penance of Terapanthis is considered to be very severe. The dress of Terapanthi monks and nuns is akin to that of Sthanakvasi monks and nuns. But there is a difference in the length of *muhapatti*, i.e., a piece of white cloth kept always on the mouth. The Terapanthis believe that idolatry does not provide deliverance and attach importance to the practice of meditation.

Further, it may be stressed that the Terapantha is known for its disciplined organization characterized by one *Acharya* (i.e., religious head), one code of conduct and one line of thought. The Terapanthis are considered reformists as they emphasize simplicity in religion. For example, the Terapanthis do not even construct monasteries for their monks, who inhabit a part of the house which the householders build for themselves. Recently their religious head, *Acharya* Tulasi, had started the *Anuvrata Andolana*, that is, the small vow movement, which attempts to utilize the spiritual doctrines of the Jainas for moral uplift of the masses in India.

The rise of Terapantha is the last big schism in the Svetambara sect and this *Pantha* is becoming popular. The Terapanthis are still limited in number and even though they are noticed in different cities in India, they are concentrated mainly in Bikaner, Jodhpur and Mewar areas of Rajasthan.

Sādhus (monks) and Sādhvis (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. Shrivaks and shravikas, 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.