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### **RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN JAINISM**

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Jainism, traditionally known as Jain Dharma, is one of the most ancient Indian religions. The three main principles of Jainism are *ahimsa* ('non-violence') *anekantavada* ('non-absolutism') and *aparigraha* ('non-attachment'): it is also characterized by *asceticism*. Followers of Jainism take five main vows: *ahimsa* ('non-violence'), *satya* ('truth'), *asteya* ('not stealing'), *brahmacharya* ('celibacy', 'chastity'), and *aparigraha* ('non-attachment'). These principles have impacted Jain culture in many ways, such as leading to a predominantly vegetarian lifestyle that avoids harm to animals and their life cycles. *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* ('the function of souls is to help one another') is the motto of Jainism. Namokar Mantra is the most common and basic prayer in Jainism.

Followers of Jainism are called "Jains", a word derived from the Sanskrit word *jinal* ('victor') and connoting the path of victory in crossing over life's stream of rebirths through an ethical and spiritual life. Jains trace their history through a succession of twenty-four victorious saviors and teachers known as Tirthankaras, with the first being Rishabhanatha, who is believed to have lived millions of years ago, and twenty-fourth being the Mahavira around 500 BCE. Jains believe that Jainism is an eternal *dharma* with the Tirthankaras guiding every cycle of the Jain cosmology.

Jainism has two major ancient sub-traditions, Digambaras and Svetambaras: and several smaller sub-traditions that emerged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium CE. The Digambaras and Svetambaras have different views on ascetic practices, gender and which Jain texts can be (*sravakas*) supporting the mendicant's spiritual pursuits with resources.

Jainism has between four and five million followers, with most Jains residing in India. <sup>(5)</sup> Outside India, some of the largest Jain communities are present in Canada, Europe, Kenya, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Suriname, Fiji, and the United State. Major Jain festivals include Paryushana and Daslakshana, Mahavir Jayanti, and Diwali.

Of all the major Indian religions, Jainism has had the strongest austerity-driven ascetic tradition, and it is an essential part of a mendicant's spiritual pursuits. Ascetic life may include nakedness symbolizing non-possession of even clothes, fasting, body mortification, penance, and other austerities, in order to burn away past karma and stop producing new karma, both of which are believed in Jainism to be essential for reaching *siddha* and *moksha* (liberation from rebirths, and salvation).

Jain texts such as *Tattvartha Sutra* and *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* discuss ascetic austerities to great lengths and formulations. Six outer and six inner practices are most common, and of repeated in later Jain texts.<sup>(54)</sup> According to John Cort, outer austerities include complete fasting, eating limited amounts, eating restricted item, abstaining from tasty foods, mortifying the flesh, and guarding the flesh ( avoiding anything that is a source of temptation). Inner austerities include expiation, confession, respecting and assisting mendicants, studying, meditation, and ignoring bodily wants in order to abandon the body.

The list of internal and external austerities in Jainism vary with the text and tradition. Asceticism is viewed as a means to control desires, and a means to purify the *jiva* ('soul'). The Tirthankaras of Jainism, such as the Mahavira (Vardhamana) set an example of leading an ascetic life by performing severe austerities for twelve years.

### **Food and fasting**

The practice of non-violence towards all living beings has led to Jain culture being vegetarian, with most Jains practicing lacto-vegetarianism (no eggs, but dairy products permitted). If there is violence against animals during the production of dairy products, veganism is encouraged. Jain monks and nuns do not eat root vegetables such as potatoes, onions, and garlic because tiny organisms are injured when the plant is pulled up, and because a bulb or tuber's ability to sprout is seen as characteristic of a higher living being.

Jains fast on different occasions throughout the year, particularly during festivals. This practice is called *upavasa*, *tapasya* or *vrata*. According to Singh, this takes on various forms and may be practiced based on one's ability. Some examples include Digambara fasting for *Dasa-laksana-parvan* where a Jain layperson eats only one or two meals per day, drinking only boiled water for ten days, or a complete fast on the first and last day of the festival. These practices bring the layperson to mimic the practices of a Jain mendicant during the festival. A similar practice is found among Svetambara Jains on eight day *paryusana* with *samvatsari-pratikramana*.

The fasting practice is believed to remove karma from one's soul and to gain merit (*Puny*). A "one day" fast in Jain tradition lasts about 36 hours, starting at sunset before the day of fast and ending 48 minutes after the sunrise the day after. Among laypeople, fasting is more commonly observed by women, where it is believed that this shows her piety, religious purity, gains her and her family prestige, leads to merit earning and helps ensure future well being for her family. Some religious fasts are observed as a group, where Jain women socially bond and support each other. Long fasts are celebrated by friends and families with special ceremonies.

## Meditation

Jainism considers meditation (*dhyana*) a necessary practice, but its goals are very different than those in Buddhism and Hinduism. In Jainism, meditation is concerned more with stopping karmic attachments and activity, not as a means to transformational insights or self-realization in other Indian religions. Meditation in early Jain literature is a form of austerity and ascetic practice in Jainism, while in late medieval era the practice adopts ideas from other Indian traditions. According to Paul Dundas, this lack of meditative practices in early Jain texts may be because substantial portions of ancient Jain texts were lost.

According to Padmanabh Jaini, *Samayika* is a practice of “brief periods in meditation” in Jainism which is a part of *Siksavrata* (ritual restraint). The goal of *Samayika* is to achieve equanimity, and it is the second *siksavrata*. The *siksavrata* ritual is practiced at least three times a day by mendicants, while a layperson includes it with other ritual practices such as *Puja* in a Jain temple and doing charity work. According to Johnson, as well as Jaini, *samayika* connotes more than meditation, and for a Jain house holder is the voluntary ritual practice of “assuming temporary ascetic status”.

The Digambara Jain scholar Kundakunda, in his *Pravacanasara* states that Jain mendicant should meditate on “I, the pure self”. Anyone who considers his body or possessions as “I am this, this is mine” is on the wrong road, while one who meditates, thinking the antithesis and “I am not others, they are not mine, I am one knowledge” is on the right road to meditating on the “soul, the pure self”.

## Rituals and worship

There are many rituals in Jainism’s various sects. According to Dundas, the ritualistic lay path among Sevambara Jains is “heavily imbued with ascetic values”, where the rituals either revere or celebrate the ascetic life of Tirthankaras, or mendicants, or progressively get closer to psychologically and physically living ever more like an ascetic. The ultimate ritual is *sallekhana*, a religious death through ascetic abandonment of food and drinks. The Digambara Jains follow the same theme, but the details differ from Svetambaras, and according to Dundas, the life cycle and religious rituals are closer to the liturgy found among Hindu traditions. The overlap in Jain and Hindu rituals is largely in the life cycle (rites-of-passage) rituals, states Padmanabh Jaini, and likely one that developed over time because Jains and Hindus societies overlapped, and rituals were viewed as necessary and secular ceremonies.

Jains do not believe in a creator god, but do ritually worship numerous deities. The Jinas are prominent and a large focus of this ritualism, but they are not the only *deva* in Jainism. A Jina as *deva* is not an avatar (incarnation) in Jainism, but the highest state of omniscience that an ascetic Tirthankara achieved. Out of the 24 Tirthankaras, the Jain devotional worship is predominantly centered around four, Mahavira, Parshvanatha, Neminatha and Rishabhanatha. Among the non-Tirthankara saints, devotional worship is common for Bahubali among the Digambaras. Some of Jain rituals remember the five life events of the *Tirthankaras* called the *Panch Kalyanaka* are rituals such as the *Panch Kalyanaka Pratishtha Mahotsava*, *Panch Kalyanaka Puja*, and *Snatrapuja*.

The basic worship ritual practiced by Jains is *darsana* ("seeing") of *deva*, which includes Jina, or other yakshas, gods and goddesses such as Brahmadeva, 52 Viras, Padmavati, Ambika and 16 Vidyadev is (Sarasvati, Lakshmi, others). The Terapanthi sub-tradition of Digambaras do not worship many of the deities popular among mainstream Digambaras, and they limit their ritual worship to Tirthankaras. The worship ritual is called the *devapuja*, is found in all Jain sub traditions, which share common features. Typically, the Jain layperson enters the temple inner sanctum in simple clothing and a bare foot, with a plate filled with offerings, bows down, says the namaskar, completes his or her litany and prayers, sometimes is assisted by the temple priest, leaves the offerings and then departs.

Jain practices include performing *abhisheka* ("ceremonial bath") of the images. Some Jain sects employ a *pujari* (also called *upadhye*) for rituals, who may be a non-Jain (a Hindu), to perform special rituals and other priestly duties at the temple. More elaborate worship includes ritual offerings such as rice, fresh and dry fruits, flowers, coconut, sweets, and money. Some may light up a lamp with camphor and make auspicious marks with sandalwood paste. Devotees also recite Jain texts, particularly the life stories of the Tirthankaras.

The traditional Jains, like Buddhists and Hindus, believe in the efficacy of mantras and that certain sounds and words are inherently auspicious, powerful spiritual. The most famous of the mantras, broadly accepted in various sects of Jainism, is the 'five homage' (*pancanamaskara*) mantra which is believed to be eternal and existent since the first world-maker's time. The medieval era Jain worship practices, according to Ellen Gough, also developed tantric diagrams of the *Rishi-mandala* where the Tirthankaras are portrayed. The Tantric traditions within Jainism use mantra and rituals that are believed to accrue merit for rebirth realms.

### **Sourees**

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