



Mahavir Jayanti

For Prelims: Lord Mahavira, Jainism.

For Mains: Important Personalities, Ancient Indian History.

Why in News?

The Prime Minister has greeted people on [Mahavir Jayanti](#), recalling the noble teachings of Bhagwan Mahavir, especially the emphasis on peace, compassion and brotherhood.

What is Mahavir Jayanti?

▪ About:

- Mahavir Jayanti is **one of the most auspicious festivals in the [Jain community](#)**.
- This day marks the **birth of Vardhamana Mahavira**, who was the 24th and the last Tirthankara who succeeded the 23rd Tirthankara, Parshvanatha.
- According to Jain texts, Lord Mahavira was born on the 13th day of the bright half of the moon in the [month of Chaitra](#).
 - As per the [Gregorian calendar](#), Mahavir Jayanti is usually celebrated during the month of March or April.
- A procession is called with the idol of Lord Mahavira **called the Rath Yatra**.
- Reciting stavans or Jain prayers, statues of the lord are given a ceremonial bath called [abhisheka](#).

▪ Lord Mahavira:

- Mahavir was born to King Siddhartha of Kundagrama and Queen Trishala, a Lichchhavi princess in the year **540 BC in the Vajji kingdom**, identical with **modern day Vaishali in Bihar**.
- Mahavira belonged to the **Ikshvaku dynasty**.
- There are several historians who believe that he was born in a place called Ahalya bhumi and the land has not been plowed for hundreds of years by the family that owns it.
- Lord Mahavir was named **Vardhamana, which means “one who grows”**.
- He abandoned worldly life at the age of 30 and **attained ‘kaivalya’ or omniscience at the age of 42**.
- Mahavira taught ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), asteya (non-stealing), brahmacharya (chastity) and aparigraha (non-attachment) to his disciples and his **teachings were called Jain Agamas**.
- Ordinary people were able to understand the teachings of Mahavira and his followers because **they used Prakrit**.
- It is believed that the **Mahavira passed away and attained moksha (liberation from the cycle of birth and death) at the age of 72** in 468 BC at a place called **Pavapuri near modern Rajgir in Bihar**.

What is Jainism?

- The word Jaina comes from the term **Jina, meaning conqueror.**
- Tirthankara is a Sanskrit word meaning '**Ford maker**', i.e., **one who is able to ford the river, to cross beyond the perpetual flow of earthly life.**
- Jainism attaches **utmost importance to ahimsa or non-violence.**
- It preaches **5 mahavratas** (the 5 great vows):
 - Ahimsa (Non-violence)
 - Satya (Truth)
 - Asteya or Acharya (Non-stealing)
 - Aparigraha (Non-attachment/Non-possession)
 - Brahmacharya (Celibacy/Chastity)
- Among these 5 teachings, the **Brahmacharya (Celibacy/Chastity) was added by Mahavira.**
- **The three jewels or Triratna of Jainism include:**
 - Samyak Darshana (right faith).
 - Samyak Gyana (right knowledge).
 - Samyak Charitra (right conduct).
- **Jainism is a religion of self-help.**
 - There are no gods or spiritual beings that will help human beings.
 - It does not condemn the varna system.
- In later times, it got divided into two sects:
 - **Shvetambaras (white-clad)** under Sthalabahu.
 - **Digambaras (sky-clad)** under the leadership of Bhadrabahu.
- The important idea in **Jainism is that the entire world is animated:** even stones, rocks, and water have life.
- Non-injury to living beings, especially to humans, animals, plants, and insects, is central to Jaina philosophy.
- According to Jain teachings, the **cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped through karma.**
- Asceticism and penance are required to free oneself from the cycle of karma and achieve the liberation of the soul.
- The **practice of Santhara is also a part of Jainism.**
 - It is the ritual of fasting unto death. Swetambara Jains call it Santhara whereas Digambaras call it Sallekhana.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. With reference to the religious practices in India, the “Sthanakvasi” sect belongs to (2018)

- (a) Buddhism
- (b) Jainism
- (c) Vaishnavism
- (d) Shaivism

Ans: (b)

Q. With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements: (2017)

1. Sautrantika and Sammitiya were the sects of Jainism.
2. Sarvastivadin held that the constituents of phenomena were not wholly momentary, but existed forever in a latent form.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

Q. With reference to the history of ancient India, which of the following was/were common to both Buddhism and Jainism? (2012)

1. Avoidance of extremities of penance and enjoyment
2. Indifference to the authority of the Vedas
3. Denial of efficacy of rituals

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Q. Anekantavada is a core theory and philosophy of which one of the following? (2009)

- (a) Buddhism
- (b) Jainism
- (c) Sikhism
- (d) Vaishnavism

Ans: (b)

[Source: PIB](#)

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