



# Mahavir Jayanti

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## Why in News?

Recently, the **Prime Minister** of India inaugurated the **2550<sup>th</sup> Bhagwan Mahaveer Nirvan Mahotsav**, on the auspicious occasion of Mahaveer Jayanti.

- Jains celebrate **five Kalyanak's (major events) of every Tirthankar** including Mahavir Swami Ji: Chyavana/Garbha (Conception) Kalyanak; Janma (Birth) Kalyanak; Diksha (Renunciation) Kalyanak; Kevaljnana (Omniscience) Kalyanak and Nirvana (Liberation/Ultimate Salvation) Kalyanak.
- Prime Minister has also released a **commemorative stamp and coin** on the occasion.

## 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 **24<sup>th</sup>** and the **last Tirthankara** who succeeded the 23<sup>rd</sup> 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:

- Bhagwan Mahavir Swami left an indelible mark on humanity through his profound **spiritual practices and teachings**.
- Lord Mahavir was named **Vardhamana**, which means "one who grows".
- During his **twelve-year period** of spiritual practices, Bhagwan Mahavir exhibited **four extraordinary qualities**:
  - **Deep and Undisturbed Meditation:** His unwavering focus allowed him to attain profound insights.
  - **Rigorous Penance:** He endured extreme physical hardships to purify his soul.
  - **Tolerance of Pain:** Mahavir Swami demonstrated remarkable endurance.
  - **Ultimate Equanimity:** His inner balance remained unshaken.
- On the tenth day of the Vaishakh, Mahavir's journey reached a pivotal moment.
- **Among the 5 teachings of Jainism the Brahmacharya (Celibacy/Chastity) was added by Mahavira.**

# VARDHAMAN MAHAVIRA

The 24<sup>th</sup> and last Tirthankara; succeeded the 23<sup>rd</sup> Tirthankara, Parshvanatha  
(Mahavira was not the founder of Jainism)

## BIRTH

- To King Siddhartha of Kundalgram and Queen Trishala, a Lichchhavi princess
- In 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Vajji kingdom (modern day Vaishali, Bihar)
- Belonged to Ikshvaku dynasty

Mahavir Jayanti, one of the most auspicious festivals for Jains, marks the birth of Vardhamana Mahavira

## SPIRITUAL LIFE

- Abandoned worldly life at age 30
- Attained '*kaivalya*' (omniscience) at age 42
- Delivered his first sermon at Pava (near Patna)

A symbol is associated with every Tirthankara, Mahavira's symbol was a lion

## DEATH

- Believed to be passed away and attained Moksha at age 72 (5<sup>th</sup> century BC)
- Died at Pavapuri (near modern-day Rajgir, Bihar)

Moksha - liberation from the cycle of birth and death

## TITLES

- Mahavira (great hero)
- Jaina/Jitendriya (who conquered all his senses)
- Nirgrantha (who is free from all bonds)

## TEACHINGS (JAIN AGAMAS)

- Ahimsa (non-violence)
- Satya (truth)
- Asteya (non-stealing)
- Aparigraha (non-attachment)
- Brahmacharya (chastity) (propounded by Mahavira)

Mahavira and his disciples taught in Prakrit to teach ordinary people



## 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).
- In later times, Jainism 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's

philosophy.

- According to Jain's 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 Digambara call it [Sallekhana](#).
  - In the **Nikhil Soni vs Union Of India Case**, the **Rajasthan High Court** declared the Jain practice of Santhara as an offence punishable under the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)**. However, the matter is still sub-judice in Supreme Court.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### Prelims:

**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 the 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)**

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