

### **III RELIGIOUS SPLITS**

#### **1. RISE OF SECTIONS IN JAINISM**

**From the history of Jaina religion upto Mahavira it appears that sects and sub-sects had not arisen till that time. But later on we find that various schisms arose in Jaina religion as a result of which Jainism was divided into several sects and sub-sects. There were various reasons which contributed to the splitting of Jainism in small sects and sub-sects.**

##### **1. Increase in the extent of Jainism**

**In the first place it may be mentioned that during the lifetime of Mahavira the spread of Jainism was limited, but after the Nirvana of Mahavira. his successors and followers succeeded to a large extent in popularising the religion throughout the length and breadth of India, so that it did not fail to enlist for a long period the support of kings as well as commoners. As the number of adherents to the Jaina religion fast increased and as they were scattered practically in all parts of the country, the *Acharyas*, that is, the religious leaders, and the religious pontiffs must have found it very difficult to look after and organise their followers. Naturally,**

**different conditions, customs, manners and ways of life prevailing in different parts of the country in different periods of time might have influenced in giving rise to various religious practices which might have ultimately resulted in creating factions among the followers of Jainism.**

## **2. Interpretation of Jaina Canons**

**Secondly, the religious doctrines, principles and tenets of Jainism of they were enunciated and taught by Mahavira were not committed to writing during the lifetime of Mahavira or immediately after his Nirvana. The important fact was that the religious teachings of Mahavira were memorised by his immediate successors and they were thus handed down by one generation to another, till they were canonised at the Council of Pataliputra in the early part of the 3rd century B.C. By this time much water had flown down the Ganges and what was canonised was not acceptable to all, who vigorously maintained that the canon did not contain the actual teachings of Mahavira.**

**Again, there was the question of interpreting what had been canonised. As time passed on differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of many doctrines arose and those**

**who differed established a separate school of thought and formed themselves into a sect or sub-sect.**

### **3. Revolts against Jaina Religious Authorities**

**Thirdly, it may be maintained that sects and sub-sects arise as a direct result of the revolts against the actions and policy of ruling priests or religious authorities including the heads of the Church. Those who are at the helm of religious affairs are likely to swerve from their prescribed path and debase themselves or they are likely to be too strict in maintaining and preserving the religious practices in a manner they think it proper, without taking into account the needs of the changing conditions. In both the cases natural indignation is bound to occur on the part of the thinking population and there should not be any surprise if this accumulated indignation and discontent take a turn in formulating and organising a separate sect. For example, Martin Luther revolted against the high-handed policy of Popes and Priests in Christian religion and founded the section of Protestants in that religion. Generally, the same thing happened in Jaina religion also.**

**As a result of these factors the Jaina religion which was one and undivided upto the time of Tirthankara Mahavira and**

even upto the beginning of the Christian Era got divided first into the two major sects, viz. Digambara and Shvetambara, and later on into many sub-sects in each sect. This has given rise to a number of sections and sub-sections in Jainism and the process, in one form or another, is still going on.

## **2. THE TWO MAJOR SECTS**

It is worthwhile to see what is the exact difference between the Digambara and Shvetambara sects of Jainism. Literally Digambara. means. ‘sky-clad’ and Shvetambara means ‘white-robed’, that is, the monks of the Digambaras are naked while those of the Shvetambaras wear white clothes. In fact, there are no ‘fundamental doctrinal differences between the two sects. For example, the most Authoritative sacred text of the Digambaras, viz. ‘Tattvarthadhigama Sutra’ by Umasvati, is one of the standard texts also of the Shvetambaras. However, there are some major as well as minor points on which the two sects are opposed to each other.

### **(A) Major Points of Differences**

The three major points of differences between the Digambaras and Shvetambaras are as follows:

#### ***(i) Practice of Nudity***

**Digambaras stress the practice of nudity as an absolute prerequisite to the mendicant's path and to the attainment of salvation. But the Shvetambaras assert that the practice of complete nudity is not essential to attain liberation.**

***(ii) Liberation of Woman***

**Digambaras believe that a woman lacks the adamantine body and rigid will necessary to attain Moksha, ie. liberation; hence, she must be reborn as a man before such an attainment is possible. But the Shvetambaras hold the contrary views and maintain that women are capable, in the present lifetime, of the same spiritual accomplishments as men.**

***(iii) Food for Omniscient***

**According to the Digambaras, once a saint becomes a “*Kevali*” or “*Kevala-jnani*”, that is, omniscient, he needs no food and he can sustain life without eating. But this view is not acceptable to the Shvetambaras.**

**(B) Minor Points of Differences**

**Leaving aside the trivial differences in rituals, customs and manners, the following are some of the minor points on**

which the two, sects of Digambara and Shvetambara do not agree:

***(1) Embryo of Mahavira***

The Digambaras assert that Mahavira was born of Kshatriya lady, Trishaladevi. But the Shvetambaras hold that the embryo of Mahavira was changed from the womb of Devananda, a Brahmin lady, to that of Trishaladevi.

***(2) Marriage of Mahavira***

The Digambaras firmly assert that Mahavira remained unmarried throughout his life. But the Shvetambaras contend that Mahavira was married to Princess Yashoda at a fairly young age.

***(3) Tirthankara Idols***

According to the Digambara tradition the idols of Tirthankaras are naked, unadorned and with down-cast eyes in the contemplative mood. But the Shvetambara tradition depicts the idols of Tirthankaras as wearing a loin-cloth, bedecked with jewels and with glass-eyes inserted in the marble.

***(4) Food of Ascetics***

The Digambara monks take food standing and with the help of knotted upturned palms and in one house only where their '*Sankalpa*', i.e., preconceived idea, is fulfilled. But the Shvetambara monks collect their food from different houses and eat food so collected at their place of shelter.

**(5) *Dress of Ascetics***

The Digambara monks of the ideal 'Nirgrantha' type remain always naked. But the Shvetambara monks wear white clothes.

**(6) *Possessions of Ascetics***

The Digambara ascetic is allowed to have only two possessions, viz. a '*Pichchhi*', i.e. a peacock-feather whiskbroom, and a '*Kamandalu*', i.e. a wooden water-pot which is meant only for washing hands, etc. and not for drinking purposes. But the Shvetambara ascetic is permitted to have fourteen possessions like loin-cloth, shoulder-cloth, stick, begging bowl, etc.

**(7) '*Agama*' Literature**

The Digambaras assert that the '*Agamas*', i.e. scriptures containing the '*Vira-Vani*', i.e. the actual sayings and teachings of Mahavira, were first brought

into written form by Acharya Pushpadanta and Bhutabali during 683rd year after the Nirvana of Mahavira. But the Shvetambaras do not accept this tradition and believe that the '*Agamas*' were collected and modified at the Councils of Ascetics held at Pataliputra, Mathura and Valabhi during a span of nearly one thousand years after the Nirvana of Mahavira. As such both the Digambaras and the Shvetambaras have their separate Agama literature.

### **3. THE SUB-SECTS**

The division of the Jaina religion into two sects was only the beginning of splitting the religious order into various sub-sects. Each of the two great sects, viz. the Digambara Sect and the Shvetambara Sect, got sub-divided into different major and minor sub-sects according to the differences in acknowledging or interpreting the religious texts and in the observance of religious practices. These major and minor sub-sects gradually sprang up for the most part on account of different interpretations the pontiffs put on the canonical texts from time to time and due to revolt or opposition by sections of people against the established religious authorities and the traditional religious rites and rituals.



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

- (i) Bisapantha,**
- (ii) Terapantha, and**
- (iii) Taranapantha or Samaiyapantha.**

**The Digambara Sect has been divided into two main sub-sects known as Terapantha and Bisapantha. It is really very pertinent to note that these two sub-sects entirely agree on the basic precepts pertaining to Tirthankaras, Scriptures and Ascetics. But there are some differences in their manner of worship. For example, the Bispanthis include fresh fruits and flowers in the worship of idols but the Terapanthis do not do so.**

**The third sub-sect of Taranapantha came into existence in the 16th century and though it honours the traditional Digambara scriptures, it does not observe the practice of idol-worship. The followers of this sub-sect are very few in number and in fact are restricted only to certain districts in Central India.**

**The Shvetambara Sect has also been split up into three main sub. sects, viz. the Murtipujaka Shvetambara, the**

**Sthanakavasi Shvetambara and the Terapanthi Shvetambara.**  
**Among these sub-sects only the Murtipujaka Shvetambaras**  
**observe the practice of idol worship, while Sthanakavasi and**  
**Terapanthi Shvetambaras are quite opposed to idol-worship.**

