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Antiquity of Jainism

Professor Mahavir Saran Jain

Lord [MAHAVIRA](#) is not the founder of [Jainism](#). Since Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhism, belonged to the same region of Magadha as MAHAVIRA - the 24th Tirthankar of Jainism, and because both were contemporaries, it was assumed erroneously that Jainism was contemporary of Buddhism or was an off shoot of Buddhism.

It is now accepted that Jainism is not only older than Buddhism but it has got its roots going deep into the antiquity in pre-Aryan and pre- *Vedic* times. [Herman](#)

[Jacobi](#), states in his article on *Jainism* in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Vol. II, pp. 465-74):

“Notwithstanding the radical difference in their philosophical notions, Jainism and Buddhism being outside the place of Brahmanism, present resemblances in outward appearance, so that even Indian writers occasionally have confounded them. It is therefore not to be wondered that some European scholars who became acquainted with Jainism through inadequate samples of Jain literature easily persuaded themselves that it was an outcome of Buddhism. But it has since been proved that their theory is wrong.”

According to Jain beliefs, the [universe](#) was never created, nor will it ever cease to exist. Time is divided into Utsarpinis (Progressive Time Cycle) and Avsarpinis (Regressive Time Cycle). An Utsarpinis and an Avsarpinis constitute one Time Cycle (Kalchakra). Every Utsarpinis and Avsarpinis is divided into six unequal periods known

as Eras. During the Utsarpinis half cycle, humanity develops from its worst to its best. During the Avsarpinis half-cycle, these notions deteriorate from the best to the worst. Jains believe we are currently in the fifth Era of the Avsarpinis phase, with approximately 19,000 years until the next Era. After this Avsarpinis phase, the Utsarpinis phase will begin, continuing the infinite repetition of the Kalchakra.

[Lord Rishabha](#) (ऋषभ) is regarded as the first and [Lord Vardhamana](#) ([Mahavira](#), महावीर) is regarded the last [Tirthankar](#) to attain enlightenment (599-527 BCE) of the present six-cycle period of Jain chronology. Before Mahavira, Jain tradition was known by many names such as

1. [Sraman](#)
2. [Nigganthas/nirgranthas](#)
3. [Arhat](#)
4. [Vatarshana Muni](#)
5. [Vratya](#)

1. The Sraman Tradition

Dr. [Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar'](#) has discussed the opinion of Sanskrit Grammarian 'Panini' about the perpetual struggles between two different cultures/traditions:

1. Sramanas
2. Brahamanas

They were called Sramanas (Monks) because they were believed in the equality of all beings and practiced non-violence etc.

In his *Indus Civilization and Hindu Culture*, the eminent scholar, [P. R. Deshmukh](#) says:

”The first Jain *Tirthankar* belonged to Indus civilization. The Indus Valley deities were nude. The Jains sustained that culture and worshipped nude Tirthankaras”.

[H.T. Colebrook](#) has traced the non-Aryan origins of Jain culture and he observes in his *Observation on the Sect of Jains* that the Greek authors of the third Century B.C. divided all philosophers into two groups *Shramanas* and

Brahmans so greatly differentiated that they considered them as belonging to different races. From this Dr. Guseva concludes:

“Only one interpretation can be given to this, and that is, in those times followers of Jainism were, in the main, representatives of pre-Aryan population of the country. This means that there is basis to assert that the chief components of this non Vedic religion were engendered by non Aryan ethnical environment.”

Ex. *Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India*, M. N. Deshpande states,

“This extract helps in satisfactorily understanding the distinctive nature and origin of Jain asceticism which was distinct from *Brahmanic* asceticism. This path of the *Shramanas* inculcates complete *nivratti* (turning away completely from worldly life) and *pravrajya* (renunciation), enjoining total *anagaratva* (the state of homelessness) together with the vow of non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing and celibacy. The concept of “*Trigupti* or the total

abstinence by mind (*manas*), body (*kaya*) and speech (*vacha*), further tends to sharpen the ascetic ideal to a point that casting one's body by prolonged fast (*sallekhana*) is recommended in no other religious order. Among other distinctive practices of the Jain faith mention may be made of *alochana* or confession of sin's and the daily ceremony of *pratikramana* or expiation of sins" (*The Background and Tradition, Ch-2 in The Jain Art and Architecture, Bharatiya Jnanapitha, Vol. I, 1974*)

2. The *Nigganths* tradition

They were called Nigganths/Nirgranths because they were detached and free from passions.

[Bhikshu Dharmananda Kosambi](#) has said; "In *Tripitakas*, there is a mention in several places about *Nigganths*-Jains. From this it is clear that the *Nigganths* tradition was in existence many years before Buddha. It is mentioned in the *Anguttara Nikaya* that one "Bappa" named *Shakya* (belonging to the clan of *Shakyas* in which Buddha was born) was a lay follower (*Sravaka*) of the

Nigganthis (Jain). In the same *Sutta's Atthahatha* it is also said that this "*Bappa*" was an uncle of Buddha."

It may be mentioned here that *Nigganthis* means unattached, without possessions, an ancient name for the Jain community.

Buddhist texts refer to the existence of large numbers of *Nigganthis* (unattached ones) who followed the *Samvara*.

Prof. [Jacobi](#) notes:

"The *Nigganthis* are frequently mentioned by the Buddhists, even in the oldest part of the *Pitakas*. But I have not yet met with a distinct mention of the Buddha in any of the old *Jain Sutras*. As it is inconsistent with our assumption of a contemporaneous origin of both creeds, we are driven to the conclusion that the *Nigganthis* were not a newly founded sect of Buddha's time. This seems to have been the opinion of the *Pitakas* too, for we find no indication to the contrary in them." ("*On Mahavira and His Predecessors*" in *the Indian Antiquary*, IX, 1880 158-163)

3.The *Arhatas*

They were called Arhatas /Arhantas (worthy of Worship) because they were lived virtuous life. Several authors contend that during the time when Vedas were taking shape, a number of elements, which had subsequently entered in Jain religion, were already known. This is confirmed by the fact that monks are called *arahans* or *arahatas* in Rigveda and Atharva Veda.

4.The *Vatarshana* Munis

Rishabhadeva has been described as the incarnation of Vishnu for the establishment of the religion of *Vatarashana Munis*. “These *Munis* appeared *pisanga* (*Pingalavarna*) because they were indifferent to bathing, even though they were *Maladhari* that is unclean, due to sweat etc. They used to remain silent and looked wild owing to their meditative practices. By controlling breathing (by means of [*pranayama*](#)) they used to attain to godhood. The mortal world could only see their external bodies, not their inner soul”:

मुनयो वातरशना पिशंगा वसते मलाः
वातस्यानु श्रांजिं यंति यद्वैत्रासो अविक्षत्ः
उन्मतिदा मौनयेन वातां जा तास्थैमा वयम्
शरीरे दस्माकं युयं मतांसो अभि पश्यथ (ऋग्वेद, १०, १३६, २)

Dr. [Hiralal Jain](#) has explained” They are *Munis* and their ways of renunciation, silence and non- attachment distinguish them from the *Rishi* tradition. But a new word *Vatarashana* is connected with them. *Vata* means air and *vashana* means girdle or waistband. Therefore the meaning is air-cloth or one whose clothing is air, that is, naked. This is not a new term for the Jain tradition, and it occurs in [Jina sahasranama](#) – Thousand names for *Jina*-
Thus: -

“According to this *Vatarashana*, *Digvasa*, *Nigganthis* and *Digambara*, all these are synonymous terms and indicate a naked or nude state, So it can be concluded that at the time of the *Rigveda* composition such *munis* were in existence who used to go about naked and who were revered as gods in the *Rishi* tradition and were eulogized and worshipped.

5. The *Vratya* Tradition

In *Atharva Veda* 15th chapter there is a description of *Vratyas* who are said to be unversed in *Vedic* tradition and ritual and belonging to *Licchavi*, *Natha* and *Malla* clans.

Dr. [Guseva](#), the Russian scholar in her ethnological monograph **Jainism** states:

“Ancient Indian literature contains indications of the deep antiquity of the sources of Jainism and it also indicates that the *Ksatriyas* and ascetics from *Vratyas* i.e. non-Aryans played noticeable role in establishing non-Vedic teachings.

The word JAINISM is derived from JIN which means conqueror - One who has conquered his passion and desires, love and hate, pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion, and has thereby freed his "[soul](#)" from the karmas obscuring knowledge, perception, truth, and ability. In this respect Jain Dharma/ Jainism is self-

originated. Any One does not found it. The tradition of Jain religion is propounded by such conquerors/ Tirthankaras. According to Jain philosophy, all Tirthankaras / *Arihants* / Siddhas/ *Jinas* were born as human beings but they attained a state of perfection or enlightenment through meditation and self- realization or atmadarshan.

There is no doubt that Jainism prevailed before Bhagwaan Mahavira.

Dr. [Hermann Jacobi](#) believes that "Jainism goes back to a very early period, and to primitive currents of religious and metaphysical speculation, which gave rise to the oldest Indian philosophies. Critical and comparative study has brought to light several words like 'Asrava', 'Samvara' etc., which have been used by Jains in the original sense but which have been mentioned in Buddhist Literature in figurative sense. On the basis of these words, Dr. Jacobi has concluded that Jainism is much older than the religion

of Buddha and therefore it is incorrect to imagine Jainism as the offshoot of Buddhism.

Dr. [A. N. Upadhye](#) remarked:

“The origins of Jainism go back to the pre-historic times. They are to be sought in the fertile valley of Ganga, where they flourished in the past, even before the advent of Aryans with their priestly religion, a society of recluses who laid much stress on individual exertion, on practice of a code of morality and devotion to austerities, as means of attaining religious Summum Bonum.”

German [Indologist Heinrich Zimmer](#) agreed that there is truth in the Jain idea that their religion goes back to a remote antiquity, the antiquity in question being that of the pre-Aryan, so called Dravidian period, and that Jainism is the oldest of all Dravidian born philosophies and religions.

[Noel Retting](#), another Indologist, writes, "Only in Jainism, of all the living religions, do we see a fusion of the primitive with the profound. It has preserved elements

from the first stage of man's religious awareness, animism. It affirms the separateness of spirit from matter, even though our modern philosophers and religionists regard neither form of dualism as untenable. Despite the opinion of these men, Jainism is fundamentally scientific. And, it may very well be, contrary to the opinions of many anthropologists and students of comparative religion, the oldest living faith."

[Professor L. P. Tessitory](#) is of opinion that "Jainism is of a very high order. Its important teachings are based upon science. The more the scientific knowledge advances the more the Jain teachings will be proven".

In fact, the Jain system of thought is so wonderfully consistent with modern realism and science. Dr. [Walther Schubring](#) observes, "He who has a thorough knowledge of the structure of the world cannot but admire the inward logic and harmony of Jain ideas. Hand in hand with the refined cosmographical ideas goes a high standard of astronomy and mathematics."

The Pre-Aryan aspects of the Jain tradition can be traced to Indus Valley civilization, which flourished six to eight thousand years ago. Nude standing images found in the Indus Valley ruins bear a striking resemblance to the oldest Jain sculpture. There may be a link in the bull seals of Indus and the bull *lanccchana* of Rishabhanatha. It is significant as various scholars have suggested that the nude standing images in the Indus Valley in a typical Jain ascetic *Yogic* pose [*Kayotsarga*](#) bear a striking resemblance to the oldest Jaina sculptures, and further that there is a link between the *Indus* bull-seals and the bull insignia (*lanccchana*) of Rishabha. . In the *Adi Purana Book XV III*, *Kayotsarga* posture is described in connection with the penance of Rishabha or Vrashabha,”

In his *Indus Civilization and Hindu Culture*, the eminent scholar, [P. R. Deshmukh](#) says:” The first Jain *Tirthankar* belonged to Indus civilization. The Indus Valley deities were nude. The Jains sustained that culture and worshipped nude Tirthankaras”.

The opinion of Dr. Guseva is notable: “ --- in those times followers of Jainism were, in the main, representatives of pre-Aryan population of the country. This means that there is basis to assert that the chief components of this non Vedic religion were engendered by non Aryan ethnical environment.”

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan affirms, “ *The Bhagavata Purana* endorses the view that Rishabha was the founder of Jainism. There is evidence to show that so far back as the first century B.C. there were people who were worshipping Rishabhadeva, the first *Tirthankar*. There is no doubt that Jainism prevailed even before *Vardhamana* Mahavira, or Parsvanatha. The *Yajurveda* mentions the names of three *Tirthankaras*, Rishabha, Ajitnath and Aristanemi” (*Indian Philosophy*, P.287)

Historicity of First Tirthankar

The idea of Rishabha *Tirthankar* being an epoch-making man is deep-rooted in the Jaina scriptures. He was the son of the fourteenth *Kulakara* or Manu known as Nabhi.

He is also known as Adinath. Rishabha inaugurated the *karmabhumi* and pioneered human civilisation and culture.

Rishabha was the first preacher of the [ahimsa dharma](#), the first *Tirthankar* or ford-maker to the path of liberation according to Jain *Sramanic* path of purification and liberation. He attained [nirvana](#) on the summit of Mount Kailasa in Tibet.

[P. C. Roy Choudhury](#) states in his *Jainism in Bihar;*” Not much research is possible in the pre-historical age as to the role Bihar played in the story of Jainism. But some of the ancient Jain scriptures mention that Jainism had been preached in Magadha (Bihar) by Lord Rishabha at the end of Stone Age and the beginning of the agricultural age. At the remote period Magadha was separated from the rest of India by *Ganga-sagar*. The ancient history of Nepal bears this out”. (P.7)

The point to be noted is that there is a consistent tradition found in the Jaina religious literature and also in the

Itihasa-Purana Brahmanic lore from earliest time of invoking Rishabhadeva as *Rudra* or *Shiva*.

It is in this context it is important to consider the definite opinion of [Sir Marshall](#) that the Vedic Aryans adopted Shiva worship (*Shiva, Pashupati, Rudra*) from Indus valley civilisation. It is significantly suggested by the various scholars that the nude standing images in the Indus Valley in a typically Jain *Sramanic* yogic pose-*Kayotsarga*-abandonment of the body in meditation- bears a striking resemblance to the oldest Jain sculpture and further that there is a link between the Indus bull seals and the bull *insignia (lancchana)* of Rishabha.

From Vedic times the alternative names or designations for Rishabha dev have been: Digambara, *Digvasa*, *Tapomaya*, *Charukेशha*, *Shanta*, *Akshobhya*, *Ahimsa*, *Jnani*, *Kapardi*, and Jati. These are such attributes as become perfectly applicable in their meaning to Rishabha *Tirthankar*. The characteristic mark of Shankar as found in Jaina creations and images known as *Triratna* which is

found clearly marked in the cave of *Sarata Kharavelaat* Udaigiri in Orissa. It is found marked in the ancient images of Rishabha and other *Tirthankaras*.

The arch-form of this symbol is found in the sign of tri-horn on the Indus Valley seal images. It should not be surprising if the same mark evolved later as a phase of moon, *Om*, *swastika* and the cross of Christianity as well as the mood and the star of Islam as noted by [Dr.Hiralal Jain](#).

The disciples of *Shiva* are collectively called *Gana*, whose leader is called Ganapati and Ganesh. The group of *munisor* disciples established by Rishabha is also called *Gana* and its leader, the chief disciple, is called *Gandharva*. The tradition of *Gana* and *Gandharvais* found unbroken till the last *Tirthankar*, Mahavira. Such parallels and spiritual affinities since pre-historic times between Rishabha and Shiva show unmistakably that Jainism and its first profounder have been the precursor of the later *Shiva* doctrine.

The most notable example of the fusion and synthesis of not only the Jaina, Shiva, but also the Brahmanic, Vedic, Buddhist and other Indian philosophies are found in the great Himalayan centre of pilgrimage, *Badrinatha* or *Badri Vishala*. In the *Badri Vishala* temple the following *stotra* is recited in the daily worship:

यं शैवा समुपासते शिव इति ब्रम्हेति वेदांतिन्ः
बौध्दा बुध्द इति प्रमाणपटवःकर्त्रैति नैयायिका
अर्हिन्रत्यथ जैनशासनरताः कर्मेति मीमांसकाः
सोऽयं वो विदधातु वाञ्छितफलम त्रैलोक्यनाथो प्रभुः (हनुमन्नाटक)

Meaning: “One who is revered as *Shiva* by the Shaivas, as *Brahma* by the Vedantins, as *Buddha* by the Buddhists, as the *Cause* by the Naiyayikas, *Arahan* by the Jains, *Karma* by the Mimamsakas, such god of the three worlds may grant us our longed for fruits.” This illustrates how the Badrinatha embodies the true secular synthesis of India.

India Known As Bharatvarsha After Bharata Son Of Rishabha:

Dr. [Hiralal Jain](#) has stated:

“But they have ignored other mentions in the same *Purana* and elsewhere about Rishabha son Bharata....For this opinion the necessary testimonials have not been adduced. Probably these cannot be anything else than the *slokas* quoted above. But the fact that in the same *Purana* it is clearly mentioned elsewhere that the name *Bharatvarsha* was given by Rishabha son Bharat, and that the word “*Desha*” or “*Varsha*” does not occur with Dushyanta’s son Bharata, does not appear to have been considered carefully by these scholars before asserting their opinion”

In the *Purana* it is clearly mentioned:

ऋषभो मरुदेव्याश्च ऋषभात् भरतो भवेत्
भरताद् भारतं वर्षं, भरतात् सुमतिस्त्वभूत्

That is “Rishabha was born to Marudevi, Bharat was born to Rishabha, *Bharatvarsha* (India) arose from Bharat, and Sumati arose from Bharat.”

Historicity of twenty-second Tirthankar

Besides Rishabhadeva, Neminatha has also been mentioned as the *Tirthankar* of the Jains. He is said to be the twenty-second *Tirthankar*.

Neminatha is connected with the legend of Sri Krishna as his relative. According to the *TrilokpuruS charit*, he was a cousin of Lord Krishna who negotiated his marriage with Rajamati, daughter of Ugrasena, but Neminatha, taking compassion on the animals which were to be slaughtered in connection with the marriage feast, left the marriage procession suddenly and renounced the world. He then left Dwarika and proceeded to a garden called Sahasramarvana on the mount Raivataka, where he practiced asceticism and attained salvation. According to the [*Kalpasutra*](#), he lived up to the age of 1,000 years.

The *Chandogya UpaniSad* refers to Krishna, son of Devaki, as a disciple of Ghora Angirasa who instructed him about *Tapas* (austerity), *Dana* (charity), *Aarjava* (simplicity or piety), Ahimsa (non-injury) and Satyavachana (truthfulness) - virtues which are extolled by

Krishna in the *Gita*. According to Jain tradition Bhagwaan Krishna was contemporary of *Tirthankar* Neminatha who preceded Parsvanatha.

Historicity of twenty-third Tirthankar (Parsvanatha as an Historic Figure)

H. [Jacobi](#) and others have proved on the authority of both the Jaina and the Buddhist records that Parsvanatha was an historical personage. (Sbe, XLV, pp. xx-xxiii.) Their arguments are as follows:

1. In the Buddhist scriptures, there is a reference to the four vows ([Chaturyama Dharma](#)) of Parsvanatha. The Buddhists could not have used the term Chaturyama Dharma for the Nigganths unless they had heard it from the followers of Parsvanatha. This proves the correctness of the Jaina tradition that the followers of Parsvanatha, in fact, existed at the time of Mahavira.
2. The Nigganths were an important sect at the time of the rise of Buddhism, as may be inferred from the fact that they are frequently mentioned in the *PiTakas* as opponents of Buddha and his disciples. This is further supported by another fact. Mankhali GoSala, a contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira, divided

mankind into six classes, and of these, the third class contained the *Nigganthas*. GoSala, probably, would not have ranked them as a separate class of mankind if they had recently come into existence. He must have regarded them as members of a very important and at the same time an old sect.

3. The Majjhima Nikaya records a dispute between Buddha and Sakdal, the son of a Nirgrantha. Sakdal was not himself a Nirgrantha. Now, when a famous controversialist, whose father was a Nirgrantha, was a contemporary of Buddha, the Nirgrantha sect could scarcely have been founded during Buddha's life-time.
4. The existence of Parsva's Order in Mahavira time is proved by the reported disputes between the followers of Parsvanatha and those of Mahavira. The followers of Parsvanatha, who did not fully recognize Mahavira as their spiritual guide, existed during Mahavira life-time. A sort of compromise has been affected between the two sections of the Jaina Sangha.

These arguments clearly show that Parsvanatha was a real historical figure. Very few facts of his life are, however, known. The *Kalpasutra* informs us that Parshva was the son of king Ashvasena of Varanasi (Banaras) and queen Vama.

Many legends have gathered round Parshva. Throughout his life, he was connected with '*snakes*' in one way or the other. In his childhood, for instance, while he lay by the side of his mother, a serpent was seen crawling about. When he grew up, he saved a serpent from the grave danger it was in. He also saved a poor terrified snake which had taken shelter in a log of wood to which a Brahmanic ascetic had set fire. After its death, the snake became God Dharanendra who spread a serpent's hood over Parshva.

According to Svetambaras, Parshva was married to Prabhavati, the daughter of Prasenajit the king of Kaushala. But according to Digambaras, Parshva was unmarried. He lived for thirty years in great splendor and happiness as a householder, and then, forsaking all his wealth, became an ascetic. After 84 days of intense meditation, he attained the perfect knowledge of a Tirthankar, and from that time, he lived for about seventy years in the state of most exalted perfection and sainthood. At last, he attained Nirvaana²² (liberation) in

777 B.C. on the summit of Mount *Sammed shikhara*, now named Parsvanatha hill after him.

A man of practical nature, Parsvanatha was remarkable for his organizing capacity. He organized the *Sangha* (Organization) efficiently for the propagation of Jainism. He is said to have visited many cities for the dissemination of Jainism.

The Jaina *Sutras* and the early Buddhist texts enlighten us about the doctrines and followers of Parsvanatha. The religious order founded by him was reputed for a high and rigid standard of conduct. He made four moral precepts binding upon his followers, precepts, which were later, enforced by Mahavira and Buddha upon their followers. His rules were not confined only to these four precepts but they embraced many other rules laid down for the practical guidance of the fraternity and laity.

The *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* furnishes a dialogue, which sheds abundant light on this obscure point. The interlocutors are the two leading representatives of the

Nigganthat Order of the time. Kasha, a follower of Parsvanatha rule, asks Gautama, who was one of the chief disciples of Mahavira: "When the four precepts promulgated by the great sage Parsvanatha, are equally binding upon the two orders, what is the cause of difference between us?" "Wisdom" replies Gautama, "recognizes the truth of the law and the ascertainment of true things. The earlier saints were simple but slow of understanding, the last saints, prevaricating and slow of understanding, those between the two, simple and wise; hence there are two forms of the Law.

About the teachings of Parsvanatha, it must be admitted, we have no exact knowledge. His religion was, however, meant for one and all without any distinction of caste or creed. He allowed women to enter his Order. He laid stress on the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. According to him, strict asceticism was the only way to attain salvation.

Fundamentally, the doctrines of Parsvanatha and Mahavira were the same. Parsvanatha preached four vows instead of five. According to H. [Jacobi](#), the Order of

Parsvanatha seems to have undergone some changes in the period between the Nirvana of Parsvanatha and the advent of Mahavira.

Parsvanatha enjoined on his followers four great vows: (1) Abstinence from killing living beings; (2) Avoidance of falsehood; (3) Avoidance of theft, and (4) Freedom from possessions. H. Jacobi has clearly perceived that a doctrine attributed to Mahavira in the Buddhist *Literature*, properly belonged to his predecessor, Parsvanatha, insofar as the expression *Chaturyama Samvara* is concerned. (Sbe, XLV, pp. xix-xxii.) The doctrine is that, according to Mahavira, the way to self-possession, self-command, and imperturbability consists of 'a four-fold self-restraint', such as restraint in regard to all things, restraint in regard to all evil, and restraints imposed for the purification of sin and feeling a sense of ease on that account. (Die, II, pp. 74-75.)

Parsvanatha had a large number of followers around Magadha even in the days of Mahavira. Mahavira parents,

who belonged to the Kshatriyas, were worshippers of Parsvanatha ([Achaaraang](#), II, 15-16.) Following the teachings of Parsvanatha, they peacefully died practicing slow starvation Sallekhana. The *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* relates a meeting between Keshi and Gautama as representatives of the two Jaina Orders, the old and the new. ([Uttaradhyayan](#), 23, pp. 119-129.) The *Bhagavati Sutra* refers to a dispute between a follower of Parsvanatha and a disciple of Mahavira. ([Bhag](#), I, 76.) The *Bhagavati Sutra* refers to Gangeya, a follower of Parsvanatha (Bhag, IX. 32). A follower of Parsvanatha named Udaka met Gautama, the first GaNdhara of Mahavira. Gautama was successful in winning over Udaka to his side. (Sutra, II 7.) From the dialogue between Udaka and Gautama, it appears that the followers of Parsvanatha and the disciples of Mahavira were respectively known as the Nirgrantha Kumaraputtas and the Nirgrantha Nathaputtas.

Mahavira was an elder contemporary of Buddha? As a matter of a fact, Buddhist literature and history establish

that after he had renounced the world Buddha was for some time an ascetic following the Jain cult of Parsvanatha, the 23rd Tirthankar whose death took place 250 Years before Mahavira.

About 2600 years ago Lord Mahavira or Vardhamana (599 to 527 BC), the twenty fourth and the last Tirthankar of this era revived the Jain philosophy previously preached by his predecessor Lord Parshva (950 to 850 BC) in India. He expanded the code of conducts and implemented daily rites for his followers. He felt that such changes are essential for proper religious practice. The present Jain scriptures reflect only his teachings. Thus Mahavira was more of a reformer and propagator of an existing religious order than the founder of a new faith. He followed the well-established creed of his predecessor Tirthankaras.

Jainism does not believe in any divinity as the creator of this universe because according to Jain cosmology and metaphysics the world is beginning less and endless, and each human being, by the dint of his own ethical discipline

as laid down in Jainism, that is, [Ratnatraya](#) *Dharma-Sam yak Darshana, Samyag Jnana, Sam yak Charitra –Right perception, Right knowledge and Right conduct-* can attain liberation without the intervention of any deity.

Thus, one may sum up, the antiquity of Jainism in the words of Hermann Jacobi:

“In conclusion let me assert my conviction that Jainism is an original system, quite distinct, and independent from all others.”