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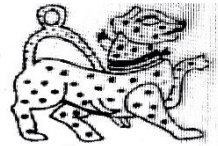
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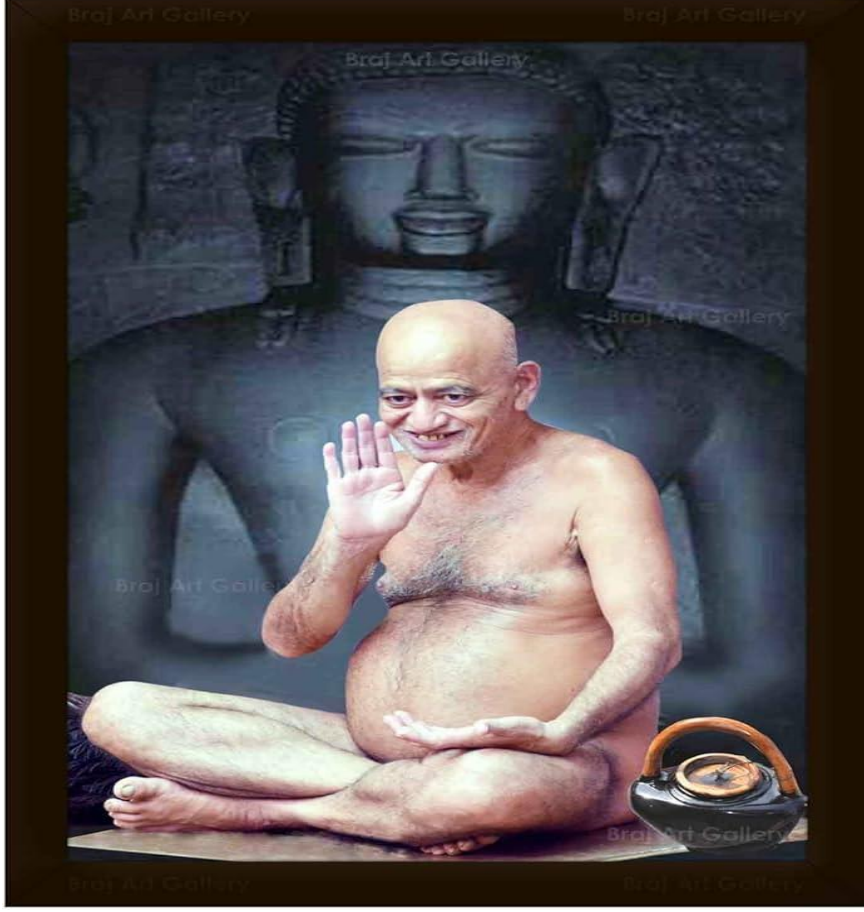
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Obituary: Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj (10 October 1946 – 18 February 2024)

With profound sorrow, we announce the passing of Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, a revered spiritual luminary and stalwart of the Digambara Jain tradition. Acharya Vidyasagar Ji left his mortal coil on 18 February 2024, at Chandragiri Teerth in Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh, leaving behind a legacy that profoundly impacted countless lives across India and beyond.

Born on 10 October 1946, in Sadalga, Karnataka, Acharya Vidyasagar Ji, known affectionately as Vidyadhar in his youth, exhibited early signs of piety and scholarly prowess. His journey into monkhood began in 1968 when he took diksha under the guidance of Acharya Gyansagar Ji Maharaj in Ajmer, Rajasthan. This marked the beginning of a life dedicated to asceticism, austerity, and spiritual enlightenment.

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's life was defined by unwavering adherence to Jain principles and rigorous spiritual practices. Renowned for his profound scholarship in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindi, and other languages, he authored several literary works, including the epic Hindi poem "Muk Mati," which remains a testament to his literary and spiritual prowess.

His ascetic life was marked by strict observances, abstaining from milk, curd, green vegetables, and fruits, and limiting his diet to plain dal and roti, consumed once daily. As an Acharya, he further abstained from salt, sugar, oil, and ghee, exemplifying the highest ideals of renunciation and discipline in the Digambara tradition.

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji's influence transcended spiritual boundaries. He founded educational institutions like Pratibhasthali Gyanodaya Vidhyapeeth, emphasizing holistic education that combined academic rigor with moral and ethical teachings, particularly benefiting girls.

Throughout his life, Acharya Vidyasagar Ji undertook extensive viharas (journeys) across India during Chaturmas, engaging in spiritual discourses and guidance that resonated deeply with his followers and disciples. His teachings attracted a diverse following, including political leaders, scholars, and admirers from around the world, who sought his wisdom and blessings.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi aptly summarized Acharya Vidyasagar Ji's impact, acknowledging his contributions to spiritual awakening, social welfare, education, and healthcare. His passing leaves an irreplaceable void in the hearts of millions who cherished his teachings and guidance.

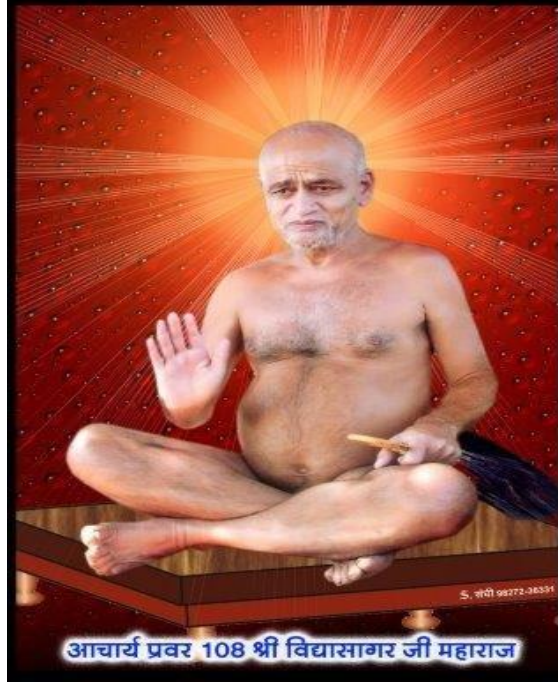
The states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh observed state mourning, reflecting the profound respect and admiration for Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj. His disciples and followers continue to uphold his teachings, ensuring that his legacy of compassion, knowledge, and spiritual enlightenment endures through generations.

In honoring Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's life and legacy, we mourn his physical departure while celebrating the profound impact he made on the spiritual and social fabric of our nation.

May his soul attain moksha, and may his teachings continue to illuminate the path of righteousness for all.



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Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj: A Spiritual Journey

Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj (10 October 1946 – 18 February 2024) was a revered Digambara Jain monk from India, celebrated for his profound scholarship and unwavering austerity. Born in Sadalga, Karnataka, into a Jain family, young Vidyadhar, later known as Vidyasagar Ji, displayed early signs of piety and learning, often teaching his younger siblings religious principles amidst visits to local temples.

In 1968, at the age of 22, Vidyasagar Ji undertook diksha, embracing a life of asceticism under Acharya Gyansagar Ji Maharaj in Ajmer, Rajasthan. His commitment to spiritual discipline and rigorous practices earned him recognition across Jain communities. His ascetic life was marked by strict observances; he abstained from milk, curd, green vegetables, and fruits, and limited his diet to plain dal and roti, consumed once daily.

Elevated to the status of Acharya in 1972, Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj continued his austere practices, foregoing even salt, sugar, oil, and ghee, adhering strictly to the Digambara tradition. His teachings and discourses attracted followers and scholars alike, drawn to his profound wisdom and dedication to Jain principles.

Throughout his life, Acharya Vidyasagar Ji undertook extensive viharas (journeys), spending the Chaturmas (four months of the monsoon season) in different regions of India. His wanderings included prolonged stays in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and other states, where he engaged in spiritual discourse and guidance.

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's influence extended beyond spiritual realms. He founded educational institutions such as Pratibhasthali Gyanodaya Vidhyapeeth, focusing on imparting life skills alongside traditional education, especially for girls. His literary contributions, including the epic Hindi poem "Muk Mati," enriched Jain literature and found a place in academic curricula.

In recognition of his impact, leaders from various fields sought his blessings and guidance. Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, along with several prominent political figures and international diplomats, visited him, acknowledging his spiritual leadership and contributions to society.

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji's passing on 18 February 2024, at Chandragiri Teerth in Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh, marked the end of an era in Jainism. His legacy lives on through his disciples and followers, who continue to uphold his teachings and principles across India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in expressing grief at his demise, highlighted Acharya Ji's significant contributions to spiritual awakening, poverty alleviation, healthcare, and education in Indian society.

The states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh observed state mourning, reflecting the widespread respect and admiration for Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj. His disciples and followers continue to commemorate his life and teachings, ensuring his legacy endures through generations.



The Profound Contribution of Sañt Śiromaṇi Digambarācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj, a Symbol of Excellence of Knowledge and Penance

Dr. Arihant Kumar Jain*

Sañt Śiromaṇi Digambarācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj, a revered spiritual leader, a great ascetic, a philosopher, a great poet, an epitome of scholarship and spiritual insight, has left an indelible mark on the spiritual landscape through his profound teachings and exemplary life. He is also known as the Saint of Sadalaga because he was born in the village Chikkodi in Belgaum (Sadalga) district of Karnataka on *Aśvina Śukla Pūrṇimā* (*Śarada Pūrṇimā*), 10 October 1946, Vikram Samvat 2003. He had the privilege of getting the discipleship of Ācārya Śrestha Mahākavi Jñānsāgarji Mahārāj. His journey from Vidyādhār, his childhood name, to Vidyāsāgar was one of deep commitment towards acquiring and imparting knowledge. He, who was detached from worldly ostentation, has dedicated his life to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge. Born into a world yearning for enlightenment, he emerged as a guiding light who led the country on the path of intellectual awakening. (Jain, 2024)

Epitome of Jain Wisdom:

One of Ācārya Vidyāsāgar Ji's most notable contributions is his relentless effort to revive and propagate the ancient Jain wisdom. In a rapidly changing world, he emphasized the timeless relevance of Jain teachings, guiding his followers on a path of self-realization and

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spiritual enlightenment. Through discourses, writings, and educational initiatives, he sought to preserve and transmit the profound knowledge embedded in the *Āgamas* (Canonical Texts).

I consider myself extremely fortunate that I, along with my father and mother, had the privilege of visiting him at many places like *Damoh, Kundalpur, Garhakota, and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh (Bharat)*, and got the great fortune of giving him *Āhāra Vidhi* at some places. Ācārya Śrī had a special blessing for my father Prof. Phoolchand Jain Premi, Varanasi. My father had done research work ‘‘Critical study of *Mūlācāra*’’ on ‘*Mūlācāra*’ – Prakrit Canonical Text of Ācārya Vattakera, which is considered an ideal research work on *Śramanācara* (code of conduct of Ascetics) in the field of research. Ācārya Śrī’s whole life was based on *Mūlācāra*. With the blessings of Ācārya Śrī, later on, my father and mother Dr. Munni Jain, by working on the rare ancient manuscripts found, also brought to light a scripture called *Mūlācāra Bhāṣhā Vacanikā*. Ācārya Śrī also did sermons of this scripture in his huge *Muni Sangha*. With his inspiration, after years of research and hard work, my father wrote a well-researched work named ‘*Śramaṇa Saṃskṛti aur Vaidika Vratya*’, which was published by Bharatiya Jnanpith, and also inaugurated by Acharya Shri.

At the heart of Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj’s legacy lies his profound understanding and promotion of the Prakrit language. In an era where the world is rapidly evolving, he staunchly held onto the roots of our linguistic heritage, emphasizing the importance of preserving and promoting the rich tapestry of Prakrit literature. His tireless efforts in reviving interest in Prakrit have not only safeguarded our linguistic diversity but have also ignited a renewed passion for the beauty and depth inherent in our ancient texts.

An ideal embodiment of penance and renunciation

Saint Ācārya Muni Vidyasagar used to follow strict rules. He never consumed things like sugar, salt, green vegetables, fruits, dry fruits, oil, allopathic medicines, milk and curd in his ascetic life. These things were completely prohibited in his diet. Saint Ācārya Muni Vidyāsāgar used to take *Āhār* (pure and faultless food) once a day by making fingers of his hands (*Karpatra*) and also used to take a limited diet i.e. less than the number of *Grāsa* (mouthful intake of food) decided by him. Never ate much. He used to drink water only once a day, that too 5 anjuli before and 5 anjuli after meals. He had fixed rules not only for eating but also for sleeping. He used to sleep on one side only on a wooden bed. Neither mattress, sheet, nor mat was spread on it. Ācārya Muni Vidyasagar never took money from anyone. Nor was any trust ever formed. He was strictly against taking money. Ācārya Muni Vidyasagar was *Aniyat Vihari*. He never made a travel schedule. Whenever he used to travel, no one knew in

which direction he would go. Even when the devotees asked, he never gave this information (WD, n.d.).

Literary Contributions

The Ācārya's literary oeuvre is a testament to his brilliance. His writings, characterized by their intellectual depth and spiritual resonance, have touched the hearts and minds of readers worldwide. His ability to distill complex philosophical concepts into accessible and meaningful prose has made his work a beacon for seekers of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. His spiritual and literary genius has given to society and mankind at large rare books of Scholarly wisdom, couched in a language that even the lay and common reader can understand with ease. He is a linguist, versatile in Hindi, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Marathi, Bengali, English and other Indian languages. Some of his notable publications are as follows –

1. *Narmadā kā Narama Kaṅkara* (The Soft pebble of Narmada)
2. *Dubo Mat, Lagāo Dubakī* (Don't be drowned but Dip-dive)
3. *Totā kyon Rotā* (Why does a parrot cry?)
4. *Cetanā ke Gaharāva Mein* (In the depths of consciousness)
5. *Mukmati (Mute Clay) is the crowning glory* – his philosophical epic.

His *Mahākāvya* (The Great Epic) 'MŪKMĀTI' grouped under the various heads of marvelous topics taking into consideration the utility of the soil and its reflection on the life of mankind to mould and divert to achieve the blissful journey of life. It consists of ślokas, chhaṇḍ, and talented sayings and proverbs curved into lyric and poetry by the Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji. With the vivid topics more connected with life, Philosophy, Spirituality, ethics, and the National awakening of human beings, it added another link of golden chains to the great scriptures of Indian heritage and philosophy (Chhabra, 2007). 'Mook Maati' has been and is being translated into Marathi, English, Bengali, Kannada, Gujarati, Urdu, Sanskrit Languages, and Brahmi script etc. Ācārya Śrī has evaluated the epic on the basis of five grounds, namely:- 1) Establishing the human values of life (2) Setting the ideals of life of the age, (3) Cooperation in cultural upliftment, (4) Advanced philosophical thoughts, and (5) Capability to produce life-giving energy (Soni, 1991). About 283 Hindi scholars have written reviews on 'Mook Maati' Mimamsa (Part 1, 2, 3), which have been published by Bharatiya Jnanpith. On this, 4 D.Litt, 50 Ph.D., 8 M.Phil., 2 M.Ed., and 6 M.A., etc. have been done (Patni, n.d.). We have amply seen that the Ācārya Śrī has done justice to test this compendium of monasticism which provides a direction to the other philosophies of the world through Jain philosophy to which Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Mahārāj is devoted and dedicated heart and soul.

With the vivid topics more connected with life, Philosophy, Spiritual, ethical, and National awakening of human beings, it added another link of golden chains to the great scriptures of Indian heritage and philosophy. He additionally contributed *hiṇḍī śataka*, *ācārya stuti saroja*, More than 500 haiku poems, Verse translation of 22 texts of Jainācāryas, 10 spiritual hymns, 9 devotional Geet, Written compositions in languages like English, Bengali, Kannada, Prakrit etc.

He has created many texts in the Sanskrit language, among which the *Śāradā Stuti*, *Pañcāstikāya kā Saṃskṛta Pratirūpaka*, *Dhīrodaya Campūkāvya*, *Saṃskṛta Śataka*, (*Śramaṇaśatakam*, *Niraṇjanaśatakam*, *Bhāvanāśatakam*, *Parīṣahajayaśatakam*, *Sunītiśatakam*, etc.) are prominent. Ācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj's contributions extend beyond the realms of literature.

‘Bade Bābā’ of Kundalpur and Visionary Ācārya Śri

Ācārya Śri was the main source of inspiration for the construction of the new main temple for the ancient idol of the first Jain Tirthankara Adinath Rishabhdeva, popularly also known as 'Bade Bābā'. According to an inscription of Vikram Samvat 1757, the former temple situated on the hill was the oldest temple of Kundalpur (District Damoh, Madhya Pradesh), in which 'Bade Baba' was seated, with the inspiration of Ācāryashree, this ancient idol has been shifted to a new grand huge temple today, whose historical *Pañcakalyanaka* had happened in 2022, witnessing the gathering of 1.5 million devotees. This beautiful temple is in Nagara architectural style and is one of the tallest Jain temples in the world, completed it only under the guidance of Ācārya Śri, who is often referred to as "*Chhote Baba*" in relation to the image of 'Bade Bābā'. (Sources, n.d.)

Social Welfare Initiatives

A true embodiment of selfless service, Ācārya Śri Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj actively engaged in various social welfare initiatives and humanitarian activities. He championed causes related to poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, environmental preservation, and community development. His teachings inspired countless followers to actively contribute to the well-being of society, emphasizing the importance of compassion and service to humanity.

Due to his inspiration, artificial limbs, hearing aids, crutches, and three-wheel cycles have been distributed in many handicapped camps organized by Jain Samaj. Free eye operations, medicines, and spectacles have been distributed through the camps. A free handicapped assistance centre is running in 'Sarvodaya Tīrtha' Amarkantak. In the spirit of kindness to animals, *Dayodaya Gaushālās* have been established in various states of the

country, where thousands of animals going to slaughter are being brought and given protection. Ācārya Śrī feels that the public awareness campaign to stop animal meat export should not be limited to any party, religion, or society, but there should be collective participation of all political parties, society, religious leaders, and individuals in it. (Patni, n.d.)

His social and humanitarian endeavors have left an indelible impact on society. Through educational initiatives, he has empowered countless individuals, providing them with the tools to navigate the challenges of the modern world while staying rooted in our cultural ethos. Likewise, he saw a paramount role for agriculture in our economy, also stressing making agriculture modern as well as sustainable. His work towards reforming jail inmates was also noteworthy.

Ācārya Śrī always used to say that “it is the duty of all of us to support the weaker sections of the society and make them like you. One can never be made one's own self through money, but one can be taught good deeds by giving one the means to earn money. For this, this non-violent work of handloom can be considered the best work”. Some key initiatives by him are –

- **Promotion of Universal Values through Education**

Education was an area very close to his heart. It was his firm belief that education is the cornerstone of a just and enlightened society. He championed the cause of knowledge as a means to empower individuals, enabling them to lead lives of purpose and contribution. Ācārya Vidyasagar wanted our youngsters to get an education that is rooted in our cultural ethos. He also believed that a holistic education is one that focuses on skilling and innovating. He took immense pride in India's linguistic diversity and encouraged youngsters to learn Indian languages. (Modi, 2024)

Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj advocated for universal values that transcend cultural and religious boundaries. His teachings emphasized the core principles of love, compassion, tolerance, and selflessness. He always used to say – ‘*caraṇa nahīṇ, ācaraṇa chuo*’ (Touch the conduct, not the feet). By promoting these values, he aimed to foster harmony and understanding among people of diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of global unity and interconnectedness.

- **Who raised the voice of calling 'Bhārat' as 'Bhārat'**

Ācārya Śrī's slogan was '*India nahin, Bhārat bolo*'. He had been saying in his sermons that Bharat should be called Bharat. He had even been running a nationwide campaign since 2017.

He said that since ancient times, our country has been known as *Vishwaguru* by the name of Bhāratvarsha. But after independence from 200 years of British slavery, the name of the country was changed to India in English. The ancient history of the country should not be forgotten, hence the original authentic name of the country, Bharat, should be recognized. (Upadhyay, 2019)

- **Educational Reforms and Promoting Girl Education :**

Recognizing the pivotal role of education in shaping individuals and societies, Ācārya Vidyāsāgar Ji spearheaded educational reforms rooted in spiritual principles. He believed in an education system that not only imparts academic knowledge but also nurtures moral and ethical values. His efforts led to the establishment of educational institutions that aimed at holistic development, fostering a harmonious blend of academic excellence and character-building.

Pratibha Sthali is a unique and unique girls' residential educational institution across India, which has blossomed and flourished due to the immense grace and vision of Maharaj Ji. On 18 February 2004, the foundation stone of Pratibhasthali was laid in the presence of Ācārya Śrī 108 Vidyāsāgar ji Maharaj Chaturvidh Sangh at Tilwara Ghat on the holy banks of the holy river Narmada in Jabalpur. Today, along with Jabalpur, branches of Pratibha Sthali in Dongargarh (Chhattisgarh), Ramtek (Maharashtra), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Lalitpur (Uttar Pradesh) are also smoothly engaged in propagating Vidya. Here education is not a means of earning money but is a sacred process of imparting knowledge. Here, Bal Brahmacharini Vidushi and trained teachers are providing their selfless services to build a bright future for the girls. This C.B.S.E. recognized institute is reviving the memory of ancient Gurukuls in today's modern environment. "The aim of education here is not to sustain life but to build it." (Sthali, n.d.)

Building a *Svāvalambī* (self-reliant) *Bhārata* through *Hathkarghā*

He believed that since ancient times, India has been the world's largest textile production centre due to its textile manufacturing art, but in this era of mechanization, we have hurt handicrafts a lot. As a result, rural areas, which are called the soul of India, are today facing serious problems like unemployment, poverty, and migration. To solve many such problems, with the blessings of His Holiness Ācārya Guruvar Śrī 108 Vidyasagarji Maharaj, many handloom training and production centres are being operated across India. Under the blessings of Ācārya Pravara, 'Chal Charkha Women Training and Employment Centres' are being operated at 9 places in different states of India like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Uttar

Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. Tihar Jail signed an MoU with Chal Charkha, Pratibhamandal Trust. This organization will provide skill training in the field of handloom and handicrafts to the women prisoners in jails and will also provide employment to these women prisoners after their release. (Vidyapeetha, n.d.)

Golden Memories

I remember in March 2020, I reached Pratibha Sthali, Jabalpur early in the morning with my wife Smt. Neha Jain to have his darshan. He was doing *Swādhyāya*, I went near him, touched his feet, and introduced myself to him. He was very happy to know that I am the son of 'Premiji' and am working in the field of Jain philosophy to continue the legacy. With his familiar smile, he also asked about my father Prof. Phoolchand Jain Premi, mother Dr. Munni Jain, elder brother Dr. Anekant Jain, and elder sister Dr. Indu. It was surprising to know that he was speaking everyone's name. He also asked me about my research topic 'Contribution of Ācārya Kundkund in the development of philosophical and spiritual thinking' and also happily blessed me. I wanted to capture that moment in my eyes. Even today, when I close my eyes and remember him, this golden scene comes to my mind. (Jain, 2024)

Heartfelt Tribute

Ācārya Śrī was a great ascetic who observed 36 'Basic Gunas' in his philosophy of life. During today's *Pañcam Kāla* (Fifth Ara), his Routine duties were like that of the *Caturtha Kāla* (fourth Ara). Enduring health-related *parishaha's* (hardships) with equanimity, Ācārya Śrī gave up the title of *Ācāryatva* and accepted full *Sallekhanā* (Voluntary Ritualized death). He had completely given up the *Caturvidha Āhār* (fourfold diet) three days earlier and then on 18th February 2024, at the age of 77, he attained Samadhi-Marana at Chandragiri Tirtha in Dongargarh (Chhattisgarh, Bharat) and merged into the Panchatatva. If we analyze his 'Municharya' carefully, it becomes clear that his 'Sallekhana' had been going on for many years.

As we pay tribute to Ācārya Śrī Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj, let us reflect on the profound influence he has had on our nation and the literary world. His legacy is not confined to the pages of history but lives on in the hearts of those who have been touched by his wisdom and benevolence. He embodies the Jain ideal of universal welfare (*lokasaṅgraha*) by his humanitarian outreach to all beings. His life and teachings continue to inspire and guide millions on their spiritual journey. His contributions to reviving Jain wisdom, promoting universal values, initiating educational reforms, engaging in social welfare, and fostering interfaith dialogue have left an indelible impact on society. As we reflect on the legacy of this

revered Ācārya, may we draw inspiration from his teachings to create a more harmonious and compassionate world.

Ācārya Vidyāsāgar Ji Munimahārāj, a true luminary, has lit the way for generations to come. May his teachings continue to guide us, and may his spirit inspire the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and compassion in the years to come.

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Sage of the Ages: The Enduring Literary and Philosophical

Impact of Ācārya Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja

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(Abstract)

[This paper explores the profound literary and philosophical contributions of Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, a distinguished figure in contemporary Jainism. Renowned for his ascetic practices and erudition, Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has significantly influenced the Jain community through his teachings, writings, and social reforms. Born in 1946 in Karnataka, he embraced monastic life at a young age and has since devoted his life to the propagation of Jain principles. His literary works, written in multiple languages including Sanskrit, Prākṛit, Hindi, and Kannada, are a testament to his scholarly prowess. Key works such as "*Niranjana Śataka*," "*Bhāvana Śataka*," and the Hindi epic "*Mukamāti*" reflect his deep philosophical insights and artistic expression. These texts not only elucidate Jain doctrines but also serve as a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern thought. Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's commitment to social equality and religious democracy has further solidified his legacy, promoting unity and ethical living among his followers. His teachings on self-realization, ethical conduct, and spiritual discipline continue to inspire and guide countless individuals. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of his contributions, highlighting his role in revitalizing Jain philosophy and literature in the 20th and 21st centuries. The enduring impact of Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's work underscores the timeless relevance of Jain principles in contemporary society.]

Keywords: Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, Jainism, literary contributions, philosophical insights, social equality, spiritual leadership

Introduction

Jaina ācāryas have historically played a pivotal role in preserving and disseminating the Jaina religion, reaching even the farthest corners of the land with their teachings. Their lives of devotion and self-sacrifice have left an indelible mark on their followers, addressing not only their spiritual and philosophical needs but also guiding them towards self-realization. The profound impact of these religious leaders has been integral to maintaining the relevance and vitality of Jainism throughout the centuries.

In the 20th century, the Jaina religion witnessed a remarkable revival and spread through the efforts of Digambara Jaina *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj. His exceptional influence has ensured that Jainism remains a vibrant and dynamic force within India. By upholding and propagating the core tenets of Jain philosophy, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has made significant contributions to the Jain community, both in terms of spiritual guidance and literary enrichment.

This article aims to explore the extensive contributions of *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, focusing on his efforts in restoring and spreading Jaina tenets and philosophy. It delves into his life, highlighting his journey from a young aspirant to a revered spiritual leader, and examines his literary works, which have made Jaina principles accessible to a broader audience. Furthermore, it underscores his role in fostering humanitarian principles and social welfare, showcasing how his teachings have transcended religious boundaries to impact society at large.

India owes a great debt to its Jaina *ācāryas*, whose contributions have not only preserved religious traditions but also promoted social well-being. Among them, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj stands out as a prominent figure, whose efforts in the improvement of Jaina religion and literature continue to resonate. His life and works exemplify the profound influence that a dedicated spiritual leader can have on both individual followers and the broader community, making his legacy a subject worthy of thorough study and appreciation.

Life of *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj

Ācārya Shri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, one of the most esteemed contemporary Digambara Jain *Ācāryas*, is renowned for his profound knowledge and rigorous austerities (*tapasya*). Born on October 10, 1946, on Sharad Purnima (full moon) in Sadalga, Belgaum district, Karnataka, his birth name was Vidyadhar. He was the second of four sons born to Mallappa and Shrimati. Vidyadhar displayed an early inclination towards spirituality and learning, regularly visiting shrines and teaching his younger siblings the principles of religion and philosophy. Despite his youth, he was dedicated and focused, known for his disciplined approach to studies and his natural talent for painting.

In 1968, at the age of 22, Vidyadhar was initiated as a Digambara monk by *Ācārya* Gyansagar Ji Maharaj, who was a disciple in the lineage of *Ācārya* Shantisagar Ji Maharaj. This significant event took place in Ajmer. Following his initiation, Vidyadhar adopted the name Vidyasagar. His commitment to the monastic life was so profound that his entire family,

excluding his elder brother, joined the sangha. Two of his sisters and two of his brothers took diksha (initiation), with his brothers becoming Muni Yogasagar and Muni Samaysagar. His elder brother chose to marry and continue the family lineage.

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's spiritual journey is rooted in the traditions established by *Ācārya* Shantisagar Ji Maharaj. This lineage continued with *Ācārya* Virasagar Ji Maharaj, followed by *Ācārya* Shivsagar Ji Maharaj and *Ācārya* Gyansagar Ji Maharaj, ultimately leading to *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj. In 1972, he was elevated to the status of *Ācārya*, marking a significant milestone in his spiritual journey.

His dedication to the Jain monastic life has inspired many. As of 2001, about 21% of all Digambara monks were under his guidance. Among his notable disciples was Muni Kshamasagar Ji, who attained *samādhi* (liberation) in 2015. Other well-known disciples include Muni Sudhasagar and Upādhyāya Guptisagar. Through his leadership, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has inspired the founding of numerous institutions aimed at promoting the welfare of all living beings.

The number of monks (*munis*) and nuns (*āryikas*) initiated and directed by him exceeds two hundred, spread across more than 60 locations in India during *cāturmās*, from Gujarat to Jharkhand and Haryana to Karnataka. As a traditional Digambara Jain monk, he adheres strictly to the monastic code, never staying in one place for more than a few days, except during the four months of the rainy season (*cāturmās*). His movements are unpredictable, though followers often try to estimate his next destination.

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has embarked on numerous '*Padayātra*' (spiritual journeys on foot) across the country, preaching religious principles, worship, eternity, and the true nature of the soul. He has delivered countless discourses, and his teachings have reached diverse audiences due to his command of multiple languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsa, and English.

His lifestyle is marked by extreme simplicity and austerity. He abstains from salt, sugar, fruits, milk, and other traditionally prohibited foods, eating only once a day. His dietary discipline reflects his commitment to self-purification and spiritual growth. Despite his rigorous practices, his serene and approachable demeanour has attracted thousands of followers, who find inspiration in his teachings and way of life.

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's influence extends beyond his immediate followers. His efforts have revitalized the Jaina religion, making its principles accessible and relevant to contemporary society. His life, characterized by deep spirituality, rigorous discipline, and profound scholarship, serves as a beacon of inspiration for those seeking a path of self-realization and ethical living.

Literary Contributions of *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj stands as a towering figure in the *Śramana* tradition, dedicating his life to intense penance, self-study, and the propagation of Jaina principles through his literary works. His contributions to Jaina literature are vast and multifaceted, encompassing various languages and literary forms, thereby making profound philosophical concepts accessible to a wider audience.

Prolific Authorship

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj is a scholar proficient in multiple languages, including Sanskrit, Prākṛit, Hindi, and Kannada. His literary works span these languages, showcasing his versatility and deep understanding of Jaina philosophy. Some of his most notable works include:

1. *Niranjana Śataka*: A collection of hundred verses focusing on spiritual purity and inner contemplation.
2. *Bhāvana Śataka*: Another collection of hundred verses that delve into the various states of mind and their impact on spiritual growth.
3. *Parishah Jaya Śataka*: This work addresses the triumph over life's trials and tribulations through steadfast adherence to Jaina principles.
4. *Suniti Śataka*: It emphasizes the importance of virtuous conduct and ethical living.
5. *Śramana Śataka*: A tribute to the ascetic way of life, highlighting the values of renunciation and self-discipline.

Epic Poetry

One of his most significant contributions is the Hindi epic poem *Mukamāti*, which has also been translated into English as "The Silent Earth." This epic presents Jaina religious philosophy and spirituality through the metaphor of a potter crafting sacred pitchers from base

clay. The potter's process—kneading the soil, removing impurities, shaping the clay, and baking it in a furnace—symbolizes the soul's journey toward liberation from the bondage of karma and its path to perfect purification. The English translation, done by Lal Chandra Jain, was presented to the President of India, highlighting its importance and recognition.

Haiku and Unpublished Works

In addition to his well-known works, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has composed nearly seven hundred Haiku poems, which remain unpublished. These Haiku poems, known for their brevity and depth, reflect his contemplative mind and ability to convey profound philosophical insights in concise form.

Academic Influence and Accessibility

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's literary works are not just confined to religious circles but have also found their way into academic curricula. His epic poem *Mukamāti* is included in the MA Hindi syllabus in various institutions, allowing students to engage with Jaina philosophy through his poetic expression. His writings serve as essential resources for scholars pursuing master's and doctoral degrees, contributing to academic research and understanding of Jaina principles.

Dissemination of Jaina Principles

Through his literary endeavours, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj aims to make Jaina principles accessible to everyone. His works are designed to be easily understood by the common people, facilitating their engagement with complex religious doctrines. He ensures that his disciples are well-versed in these principles, enabling them to propagate Jaina teachings effectively.

His writings emphasize practical aspects of life grounded in religious principles, advocating for a life of ethical conduct and spiritual pursuit. By practicing the doctrines he preaches, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj embodies the ideal of living by example, inspiring others to follow suit.

Symbolism and Modern Relevance

Mukamāti, his most celebrated work, uses rich symbolism to convey spiritual messages. The potter-artisan in the poem represents the *Mahamuni* (great ascetic) who shapes the votary householder's thoughts, feelings, and conduct, guiding them on the true path of spiritualism.

The epic also references modern scientific trends, the destructive power of the atom, and the role of faith as a savior. These contemporary references make his teachings relevant to modern readers, bridging the gap between ancient philosophy and present-day challenges.

Role of *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj

The role of a saint in the spiritual and philosophical realms is unique and unparalleled. *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, through his life and works, exemplifies the ideal of a spiritual teacher who not only preaches but lives by the doctrines he espouses. His contributions to the Jaina community and the broader Indian society are profound and multifaceted, encompassing religious, literary, and social dimensions.

Spiritual Leadership and Ethical Guidance

As a spiritual leader, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has guided countless individuals on the path of self-realization and ethical living. His teachings emphasize the importance of self-purification, ethical conduct, and adherence to religious principles. Through his discourses and writings, he has illuminated the path of spiritual progress, showing that true realization comes from within and is achieved through a disciplined life of penance, meditation, and moral integrity.

Social Impact and Religious Equality

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has played a crucial role in promoting social welfare and religious equality. He has fought against social discrimination and has worked tirelessly to establish a form of religious democracy that transcends socio-economic divisions. His efforts have brought about a sense of unity and inclusiveness within the Jaina community, bridging gaps between the rich and poor, men and women, and different social classes.

Literary Contributions and Academic Influence

His literary works have made significant contributions to Jaina literature, providing deep insights into Jaina philosophy and ethics. By writing in multiple languages and utilizing various literary forms, he has made complex religious concepts accessible to a broader audience. His works are not only revered in religious circles but are also studied in academic institutions, furthering the understanding and appreciation of Jaina thought.

Inspirational Presence and Personal Influence

The personal influence of *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj is profound. His modest, approachable demeanour, coupled with his rigorous ascetic practices, has inspired thousands. His speeches and teachings resonate with people from all walks of life, drawing large gatherings and fostering a community of dedicated followers. His ability to communicate in multiple languages has allowed him to reach diverse audiences, spreading the message of Jainism far and wide.

Legacy of Penance and Practice

The *Ācārya's* life is a testament to the power of living by example. His rigorous penance and unwavering commitment to monastic discipline serve as a powerful inspiration for those seeking spiritual growth. His adherence to a simple, austere lifestyle and his emphasis on *svādhyāya* (self-study) and *dhyāna* (meditation) underscore the importance of personal practice in achieving spiritual enlightenment.

Lasting Impact

The lasting impact of *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's contributions extends beyond his lifetime. His disciples, many of whom have become esteemed teachers and leaders in their own right, continue to propagate his teachings. The institutions and initiatives he has inspired play a vital role in promoting the welfare of living beings and upholding the principles of Jainism.

In summary, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's life and works embody the essence of Jaina philosophy and spirituality. His dedication to the propagation of ethical values, his literary brilliance, and his efforts to promote social and religious equality make him a beacon of inspiration. His legacy continues to guide and influence countless individuals, fostering a deeper understanding of the path to self-realization and ethical living. The valuable contributions of this revered Jaina *ācārya* merit thorough study and continued appreciation, as they offer timeless wisdom for navigating the complexities of modern life with integrity and spiritual insight.

Concluding Remarks

Ācārya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's contributions to Jaina philosophy, literature, and social welfare are profound and far-reaching. As a spiritual leader, his life exemplifies the highest ideals of Jainism, demonstrating the transformative power of penance, meditation, and ethical

living. His literary works have enriched Jaina literature, making complex philosophical concepts accessible to a broad audience and inspiring academic inquiry.

Beyond his intellectual contributions, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's efforts to promote social equality and religious democracy have had a lasting impact on the Jaina community and Indian society at large. His teachings transcend socio-economic barriers, fostering a sense of unity and inclusiveness that is essential in today's world.

The *Ācārya*'s ability to inspire and guide others is evident in the large number of disciples and followers who continue to propagate his teachings. His personal example of austere living and relentless pursuit of self-realization serves as a powerful inspiration for those on the spiritual path.

In conclusion, *Ācārya* Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's life and works stand as a testament to the enduring relevance of Jaina principles in contemporary society. His legacy of wisdom, compassion, and ethical leadership continues to illuminate the path for future generations, making his contributions invaluable to both the Jaina community and the world at large. The study and appreciation of his life and works are essential for anyone seeking to understand the profound depths of Jaina philosophy and the practical application of its teachings in daily life.

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Ganadharas of Mahāvira

Dr Sachchidanand Srivastava

Soon after the attainment of *kaivalya* Mahāvira visited Pāva and held religious discourse in the garden of one Mahāsena. In the same garden a *Brahmana* named Somila had made arrangement for a *yagya* and invited learned *Brāhmanas*. Eleven of them came to Mahāvira with a desire to have religious discussion with him. They were influenced by the personality and spiritual attainments of Mahāvira so, much so, that they decided to join him as his disciples. Incidentally, the first disciples of Mahāvira turned to be his principal disciples known as *Ganadharas*. They became well-versed in the twelve *angas* and fourteen *pūrvas*. Details about them are:

Name	Caste	Gotra	Residence
1. Indrabhuti	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Gautama</i>	Gobbaragrama
2. Agnibhuti	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Gautama</i>	Gobbaragrama
3. Vāyubhuti	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Gautama</i>	Gobbaragrama
4. Vyakta	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Bhāradvaja</i>	Kottaga Sannivesa
5. Sudharman	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Agnivesyayana</i>	Kottaga Sannivesa
6. Mandila	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Vasista</i>	Mauriya Sannivesa
7. Moriyaputra	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Kāsyapa</i>	Mauriya Sannivesa
8. Akampita	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Gautam</i>	Mithila
9. Achalabhrāta	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Hāritayana</i>	Kosal
10. Metārya	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Kaundinya</i>	Tungiya Sannivesa
11. Prabhāsa	<i>Brahmana</i>	<i>Kaundinya</i>	Rājagriha

Though the *samgha* consisted of only nine *ganas* all these eleven chief disciples were called *ganadharas* because they had instructed *Sramanas* in great number. The *Kalpa Sūtra*¹

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mentions exact number of *Sramanas* instructed by each one of them, but we cannot be sure on this point. Except Indrabhuti and Sudharman, rest nine *ganadharas* died in the very life time of Mahāvira. Indrabhuti is said to have died twelve years after the *nirvana* of Mahāvira at the age of 92.

Though he was favourite of Mahāvira and survived him, it was Sudharman who became head of the Jain *Samgha* after Mahāvira². Sudharman died twenty years after the demise of Mahāvira. The *Kalpa Sūtra* states that all the *nirgrantha Sramanas* of the present time are descendants of Sudharman and rest of the *Ganadharas* left no descendants.³

Jain Samgha after Mahāvira

The sources which contain information about the successors of Mahāvira in the pontificate of the *Samgha* are *Kalpa Sūtra Theravali (Sthaviravali)*, *Nandi Sūtra* and *Avasyaka Sūtra*. The list of the pontiffs given in the *Nandi* and *Avasyaka Sūtras* is quite in agreement with the list given in the *Kalpa Sūtra* up to Mahāgiri and Suhastin who belonged to the eighth generation after Mahāvira. After it the succession list of the pontificates gets divided into two branches, one starting from Mahāgiri and the other starting from Suhastin. The list of patriarchs given in the *Nandi* and *Avasyaka Sūtras* is quite distinct from the one given in the *Kalpa Sūtra*. The list of the; *Kalpa Sūtra* begins from Suhastin and this was the most prominent line of succession as almost all the legends found in the *Parisistapārvan* of Hemachandra and other later Jain texts pertain to the lives of the patriarchs of this line. The names of first six successive leaders of the Jain *samgha* are: (i) Sudharman, (ii) Jambu, (iii) Prabhava, (iv) Svayarnbhava, (v) Yasobhadra, (vi) Bhadrabāhu and Sambhutavijai. Then after the burden of the leadership of the *samgha* fell on the shoulders of Sthulabhadra. It was during this period that the Council of Pataliputra was held and the *angas* took a definite shape. Sthulabhadra had two disciples, Mahāgiri and Suhastin. With Mahāgiri and Suhastin started two lines of succession. It appears that at this stage the unity of the *samgha* was shattered and finally the *samgha* was split into *Svetāmbara* and *Digambara* sects.

Schisms in the Jain Samgha

The evidence of the early Jain texts clearly indicates that the monastic life in Jain religion had started in quite early times. The *samgha* organised by twenty third tirthankara Pārsvanātha was very effective and remained functioning centuries after his demise. The twenty third chapter of the *Uttaradhyayana Sūtra* entitled "*Gautam-Kesi Samvāda*" clearly tells us that the monastic orders of Pārsvanātha and Mahāvira functioned simultaneously as separate

organisations for some time. The same text tells us that the unity between the two orders was forged as a compromise between Kesi Kumāra and Indrabhuti Gautama, the followers of Pārsvanātha and Mahāvira respectively.

It appears that the Jain *samgha* was clearly split into two sects, *Digambara* and *Svetāmbara*, after a few centuries of the demise of Mahāvira. This division proved to be of lasting effect and even today the Jain community is divided into these two major schools.

Even before the division of the Jain *samgha* into *Digambara* and *Svetāmbara* sects some minor schisms had already taken place in the Jain order. These splits have been chistened as *Nihnava*s in the Jain texts. These *Nihnava*s are said to be seven in number.

First *Nihnava*

This *nihnava* is known as *bahurayavada* and was started by Jamali the son-in-law of Mahāvira. Jamali has been referred to in a number of Jain texts such as *Visesāvasyaka bhāṣya*, *Āvasyaka*, *Haribhadriya Tīkā*, *Sthānāṅga* commentary and *Uttarādhayayana* commentary by Nemichandra.

Jamali, a resident of Kshatriya Kunda, was initiated as a monk by Mahāvira. However, he developed doctrinal difference with Mahāvira and finally separated himself with his followers from the *samgha* and started the first *nihnava* fourteen years after Mahāvira obtained omniscience. The sect started by him could not last long and finally most of his followers rejoined the original *samgha*.

Second *Nihnava*

The second *nihnava* is known as *jīvapaesiya nihnava* and was started by Tisyagupta sixteen years after the attainment of *kaivalya* by Mahāvira. He disagreed with the tenet that *jīva* is the composition of all the parts of an animate being into one whole and instead held that the last part of the soul which completes its composition is *jīva*. The sect started by Tisyagupta also could not last long. Finally, his followers realised the falsity of his views and came back to the original *samgha*.

Third *Nihnava*

The third *nihnava* is known as *avattagaaddin*. This schism was started by Asadhabhuti at Seyaviya two hundred fourteen years after the death of Mahāvira. The adherents of this sect

believed that there is nothing *vyakta* in the world. Hence, they disregarded all the external observances. This is precisely the reason that this *nihnava* has been named *Avyakta nihnava*.

Fourth Nihnava

This split was started by Asvamisra two hundred twenty years after the death of Mahāvira. The followers of Asvamisra were known as *samuccheiyavadin*. They held that everything of the world is transient and is destroyed after its origination. So, the effects of good or bad deeds are immaterial.

Fifth Nihnava

This *nihnava* came into existence two hundred twenty-eight years after the death of Mahāvira and was started by *Ganga*, a disciple of Dhana Gupta. The followers of *Ganga* were called '*dokriyavadin*' They did not agree with the original Jain tenet that the experience of different actions cannot be had simultaneously. Instead, they held that opposite feelings, such as warmth and cold, can be experienced simultaneously.

Sixth Nihnava

This schism was started by Roha Gupta at a place named Antaranjia five hundred and forty-four years after the death of Mahāvira. The adherents of this school were called *nojīvavadin* as well as *Terasiya* (*trairasika*). They held that there is a third category of *dravya* called *Nojīva* in addition to *jīva* and *ajīva*.

Seventh Nihnava

The leader of this split was Gosthamahila It was started by him at Dasapur five hundred and eighty-four years after the death of Mahāvira. The followers of Gosthamahila were called *Abadhiyavadin*. They believed that the soul is simply touched by the *karma-paramamis* and not bound by them.

It is to be noted that the *Nihnava*s discussed above were minor schisms and could not adversely affect the Jain monastic order. They could not last long and either became obsolete or got merged in the original *samgha*. The veracity of the accounts of these schisms as given in the Jain texts is very difficult to ascertain. Much of the details is fanciful. But the fact that there have been minor schisms in the Jain order can hardly be denied.

The split of Jain Samgha into Svetāmbara and Digambara Sects

The organisation of the Jain *samgha* remained almost unaffected by the minor schisms mentioned above. Their impact was very short lived. But the split of Jain *samgha* into the *Digambara* and *Svetāmbara* sects is a major event in the history of Jain religion. The Jain community was divided into two separate groups who, in course of time, developed their distinct organisation, literature and tradition of art. Even to-day they have maintained their distinct identities.

It is to be noted that both the sects do not have serious doctrinal differences. Their religio-philosophical beliefs and mythologies are identical. The only point of difference in mythological beliefs is that Mallinātha, the nineteenth *Tīrthamkara*, was a woman according to the *Svetāmbaras* whereas, according to the *Digambaras*, he was a man. The ideological basis of this difference of contention lies in the fact that according to the *Digambaras* a woman is not entitled to the enlightenment whereas the *Svetāmbaras* believe that a woman can obtain it. The main differences between them are related with ethical practices.

When and how the split of Jain *samgha* into *Swetmbara-Digambara* sects took place is a problem which is still not convincingly solved and the historians are not unanimous on the point. Even the *Svetāmbaras* and *Digambaras* give different account of this rift.

The *Digambara* version of the rift is recorded in the *Brihatkathā* composed by Harisena in 931 AD. It is stated here that Bhadrabāhu had predicted a terrible famine in the country of Magadha for a period of twelve years during the reign of Chandra Gupta Maurya. In order to save their lives from the famine a section of monks under the leadership of Bhadrabāhu migrated to the south India and the rest remained in the north India.

After sometimes the leaders of the order in north India met in Ujjayini. Still the calamity of famine was persisting and the leaders allowed the monks to wear a piece of cloth (*ardhaphālaka*) in order to avoid obscenity while touring for begging alms. These monks got accustomed to wearing *ardhaphālaka* and they refused to get rid of this practice even when the famine was over. The conservative elements in the order and particularly those who had returned from the south Indian migration highly resented to this development. It is further stated that these *ardhaphālaka* monks were once invited by Chandralekha queen of king Lokapala of Valabhipur. Seeing them neither clothed nor naked the king got annoyed where upon the queen asked the monks to wear full clothes. Thenceforth, the monks began wearing white clothes and came to be called *Svtapatas* or *Svetāmbaras*.

Thus, according to the *Digambaras* the Jain monks did not wear any clothes in the beginning but later on a section of them started wearing white clothes and got split from the original *samgha* (*mūla samgha*) and the split of *samgha* in the forms of *Digambara* and *Svetāmbara* was affected.

However, the *Svetāmbaras* give a different account of the split. According to them the *samgha* was divided six hundred nine years after Mahāvira's death by Sivabhuti. It is stated in the *Āvasyakabhāṣya*, a work of 5th century AD, that Sivabhuti, a resident of Rathavirapur, was an employee of the local king. He had successfully fought many battles on behalf of the king and had won laurels. Consequently, he turned to be very proud and used to come home very late in the night. On the complaint of his wife, one night his mother did not open the door and asked him to go elsewhere. Sivabhuti left the home and entered in a dwelling which was incidentally a Jain monastery (*upāśraya*). He requested the acharya (priest) of the monastery to initiate him but his request was turned down. Sivabhuti, then, plucked out his hairs himself and started wandering as a monk with others. After some time, he came to his native place. When the king was informed of his arrival, he sent a precious shawl (*ratna kambala*) to him as a gift. Possession of such a precious article by a monk was protested by his senior but Sivabhuti did not pay any heed to his advice. His senior, then tore off the shawl and used it as mattress. At that time Sivabhuti did not say anything but out of reaction gave up all clothing which ultimately resulted in the schism of the order.

In another version of Sivabhuti episode it is stated that Sivabhuti did not agree with his teacher Krisnarsi that the *jinakalpikas* (adherents of *jinakalpa*) are of two kinds. While some observe absolute non possession, others may have necessary requisites. Sivabhuti asserted that a follower of *jinakalpa* should strictly observe the principle of austerity including nudity. He gave up all clothing and created a schism. He was joined by Kaundinya and Kottavira as his disciples. His sister Uttara is also said to have joined him, but was forbidden by him from observing nudity. The members of this group were initially called *bodiyas* but because of their practice of nudity they were later on known as *Digambaras*.

Thus, according to the *Svetāmbara* tradition the *Digambara* sect originated 609 years after Mahāvira's death, that is, in the first century AD.

The accounts of the *Svetāmbara* and *Digambara* traditions are so discrepant that on the basis of them it is very difficult to reach a conclusion as to when and how the split occurred. Nonetheless, they give us certain clues which may help us in settling this issue.

Hoernle in his article on the *Ājivikas* in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics expressed the opinion that the Digambaras were originally *Ājivikas* who, after their annoyance with Gosāla, joined the order of Mahāvira as his disciple. Hoernle was led to derive this conclusion on the basis of the practice of *achelakatva* (nudity) of the *Ājivikas* and a statement of the commentator Silānka in his commentary on the *Sūtrakritariga* that the revilers of the followers of Mahāvira were the *Ājivikas* or *Digambaras*. Hoernle's contention is hardly convincing and A. K. Roy is quite correct when he states. "The bulk of the evidence however is against Hoernle's conjecture, and the theory that some *Ājivikas* formed the nucleus of the *Digambara* sect cannot be built upon this one stray reference by Silānka".⁴

A. K. Roy thinks that the process of split was gradual but it was completed at the end of 5th century A. D. when the Valabhi Council was held. He has cited some epigraphic and iconographic evidence in support of his contention.⁵ But his conclusion is based more on assumption than on evidence. Moreover, the assignment of such a late date for the split is not in consonance with what the facts of the traditions have to tell us.

It is quite evident from the early Jain texts that Mahāvira lived strict austere life and observed *achelakatva* (nudity) and preached the same to his disciples. His followers earnestly observed the ethical regulations for some time even after his death. Parallel to Mahāvira's. order the *samgha* established by Pārsvanātha was also functioning. The followers of Pārsvanātha did not observe the practice of nudity and used to wear clothes. After the death of Mahāvira, Indrabhuti Gautama was leading the *samgha* and Kesi Kumara was the leader of the *samgha* of ParSva Natha. The twenty third chapter of the *Uttarddhyaṇa Sūtra* entitled '*Gautama-Kesi Samvāda*' inform us that the two leaders incidentally met in Sravasti with their followers. It was generally realised by the monks that both the laws are pursuing the same end but why does the order of Pārsvanātha allow an under and upper garment and that of Mahāvira enjoin five vows and forbid wearing clothes? When this question was raised by Kesi, Gautama gave a convincing reply so far as the discrepancy in the number of vows is concerned and Kesi was fully satisfied. On the matter of nudity or wearing of clothes the reply of Gautama was : "Deciding the matter by their superior knowledge, the *tīrthamkaras* have fixed what is necessary for carrying out the law. The various outward marks (of religious men) have been introduced in order that people might recognise them as such; the reason for the characteristic marks is their usefulness for religious life and their distinguishing character. Now the opinion (of the *tīrthamkaras*) is that knowledge, faith and right conduct are the true causes of final liberation."⁶ After being fully satisfied Kesi with his followers accepted the law of the five

vows and both the *samghas* got united. It appears that the question of wearing clothes or not was left to the desires of monks. But the existence of two-fold *kalpa*, namely, *jinakalpa* and *sthavirakalpa*, in an organisation could not last long. As a result, in course of time, the *samgha* got split into two sects *Digambara* and *Svetāmbara*.

The lists of the names of the leaders of *samgha* after Mahāvira found in the *Kalpa Sūtra*, *Nandi Sūtra*, *Āvasyaka Sūtra* and *Parisīptapārvaṇ* indicate that the unity of the *samgha* was maintained up to the time of Sthulabhadra as both the traditions generally agree with the succession of pontificates up to Sthulabhadra. He had two disciples Mahāgiri and Suhastin and the lists of the names of successors of these two are given in the *Nandi Sūtra* and *Kalpa Sūtra* which are quite different. On the basis of it, it may be construed that the split in the *samgha* was affected soon after Sthulabhadra. The major events of the Jain monastic order are reckoned with reference to Mahāvira era which is supposed to have started from 527 B.C., the traditional date of the nirvana of Mahāvira. According to it the accession of Chandra Gupta Maurya to the throne and the death of Bhadrabāhu took place in 155 and 170 years respectively after the death of Mahāvira. If these dates are converted into the Christian era, they will be 357 B. C. and 372 B. C. respectively. It is a point of general agreement among historians that Chandra Gupta's accession took place in and around 321 B. C. This date does not tally with the traditional calculations of the Jains. The possibility of miscalculation on the part of the Jains cannot be ruled out. Since the reign of Chandra Gupta ended in 297-298 B. C. and the contemporaneity of Chandra Gupta and Bhadrabāhu is attested by the Jain sources, it may be safely assumed that in the beginning of the third century B. C., Sthulabhadra took the charge of the leadership of the Jain *samgha*. Thus, there is a strong possibility that the schism occurred in the first half of the third century B. C.

This conjecture gets support from an account of the Jain texts. It is said that Sthulabhadra convened a council at Pataliputra during the period off a mine when Bhadrabāhu had gone to south India with a section of monks and he did not invite Bhadrabāhu to attend this council. It is quite strange that Bhadrabāhu who was the only person well-versed in all the *angas* and *pūrvas* was not invited and in his absence, the form of canonical literature was fixed in this council. Does this not bespeak of some sort of dissension in the Jain Order?

It appears that after the amalgamation of the orders of Pārsva and Mahāvira the discipline of nudity got loosened. The *Sthavirakalpa* became more popular among monks. However, more orthodox among them continued adhering to the *jina kalpa*. So long as the

number of monks was small, there was no difficulty in maintaining the *jina kalpa*. We know that the monks depend on society for their subsistence. With the increase of number of monks, the magnitude of their dependence on society might have increased. As such, movement of monks in big number in nude form for begging purposes might have caused a sense of shyness and hesitation. They will have been prompted to put on clothes without incurring any sacrilege particularly when *sthavirakalpa* was there. After all, wearing clothes or nudity are simply outer marks of religion and they are insignificant so far as the realisation of *moksha* is concerned.

This, is not to say that *Jina Kalpa* was replaced by the *sthavira kalpa*. The monks with strong orthodoxal attitude continued the practice of nudity. In their eyes complete detachment from worldly possession was essential for the realisation of the highest goal and possession or putting on clothes constituted the transgression of the canon of *aparigraha*. The number of such monks was not very small and they formed a group in the general community of the monks. With the passage of time their attitude got more and more stiffened and they disagreed on more points with the rest others. They denied the womanhood of Malli Natha, the nineteenth Tirthankara of the Jain tradition, only on the ground that *Jinahood* can't be obtained without practising nudity and a woman cannot do it. They also deny the efficacy of womenfolk in obtaining salvation. Their orthodoxal attitude is reflected in their denial of Mahāvira's marriage. In this context we can understand as to why they do not accept the authenticity of canonical texts compiled in the councils of Pataliputra and Valabhi.

It is to be noted here that the split of the order did not occur all of a sudden. The process of division was gradual. It seems to have started in the first half of third cent. B. C, as has been pointed earlier, and was completed in the first coming A.D. If some minor details of the *Svetāmbaras* account are overlooked there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the account that the *Samgha* was split into the *Digambara* and *Svetāmbara* sects 609 years after the death of Mahāvira, that is first cent A. D. The tradition cannot be rejected lock, stock and barrel.

Main Points of difference between *Svetāmbara* and *Digambara* traditions

1. While *Svetāmbaras* used to wear white garments, the *Digambaras* practised nudity.
2. The *Svetāmbaras* believed that Mahāvira was married with Yasoda and had a daughter from her, the *Digambaras* altogether deny it.
3. According to the *Svetāmbaras* 19th Tirthankara Mallinātha was a woman, but the *Digambaras* believe that Mallinātha was a man.

4. The *Svetāmbaras* believe that a woman can obtain moksha but according to the *Digambaras* they are not entitled to it.
5. According to the *Svetāmbaras* the embryo of Mahāvira was transferred from the womb of *Kshatram* Trisala to that of *Brahman* Devananda. The embryo transfer story is not accepted by the *Digambaras*.
6. The *Svetāmbaras* believe in the authenticity of the existing twelve *angas*. The *Digambaras* believe that the original twelve *angas* are extinct.
7. The *Svetāmbaras* adorn the images of Tirthankaras with clothes and ornaments. The *Digambaras* are opposed to such clothing or ornamentation.

In addition to these major differences, they developed differences on some minor points as well. They are trivial and have little historical significance. In fact, there were no significant doctrinal differences. Almost all the cardinal principles of Jainism are accepted by both of them.

References

1. *Kalpa Sūtra* (S.B.E. Vol. XXII) p. 286-87.
2. According to *Digambara* tradition Indrabhuti Gautam succeeded Mahāvira. It is quite strange as to why the *Svetāmbaras* tradition has ignored him as immediate successor of Mahāvira*
3. *Kalpa Sūtra* (S.B.E. Vol XXII) p. 287,
4. Roy, A, K, *A History of the Jains*, p, 90
5. Ibid. p. 93-95,
6. *Uttarddhayan Sūtra* (SBE, Vol XLV) p, 123.



Life, Culture, and Economy: A Comprehensive Study of the Sarāk Community in Karaya Village, Purulia, West Bengal

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Introduction

Jainism is one of the classical religions, cultures and sects that enriched India's wealth of diversity. According to historians and pundits, around 500 years before the birth of Christ, at the hands of the twenty-fourth *Tīrthankara* Mahavīraswami, Jainism entered the Indian map as a protestant and reformist religion and sect. Although the origin of this religion occurs more than two and a half thousand years ago, the opinion of the followers of that religion and the estimation of some historians. Eastern and adjacent northern India has been identified as the origin of Jainism. Based on several archaeological and written evidences, it is also assumed that the early followers of this religion lived in North and East India, i.e. historical Magadha and Anga territories who were known as '*Srāvakas*'. These *Srāvakas* settled in ancient Bengal before the historical period and played an important role behind the initiation of metallurgical civilization in the region and became the main driving force of the economy of the place. This *Srāvaka* category is later mentioned and known as '*Sarāk*' in various sources. The *Sarāk* caste is present in the historic land area of West Bengal and adjacent Jharkhand i.e. Purulia and Bankura in West Bengal, in some parts of Burdwan, Birbhum, Medinipur and several villages in the districts of Bokaro, Dhanbad, Ranchi, Jamtara, Dumka etc. in Jharkhand; Some parts of Orissa are still inhabited today. *Kareya* is one such village inhabited by *Sarāk* caste belonging to Nala block of Jamtara district of Jharkhand. It belongs to Bindapathar police station. About 45 families live in the village. *Sarāk* residents with the titles of Rai, Mandal, Maji and Singh can be found in the village. The following report has been written based on the information obtained during the field survey in the said village on January 2, 2024.

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Objectives of the Research:

The field study was mainly carried out for the purpose of carrying out a research project funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), whose main target is the historical land area of West Bengal (which is now in some parts of Purulia, Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum, and Medinipur belonging to the district) and to observe the socio-economic, cultural and various aspects of life of *Srāvaka* or *Sarāk*, the original Jain community living in the historical Singhbhum and Manbhum fields of adjacent Jharkhand, in the light of sociology. Therefore, in order to implement the project, a survey has been carried out in one of the *Sarāk* villages of Jharkhand, some of the objectives of which are,

First, to understand the economic diversity of *Sarāk* society in terms of livelihood and to review its comparative value with neighbouring ethnic groups.

Secondly, to discuss the socio-social context of the *Sarāk* community in the light of the data emerging from the survey of several important aspects related to daily *Sarāk* life, such as food habits and cooking, drainage system, houses and public transport system etc.

Thirdly, to highlight the aspects like public health system, toilets, drinking water etc. of the said village and provide it if there is any crisis.

Fourthly, in the context of public education, the signature of *Sarāk* society, to promote the flow of women's education as well as overall education.

Fifth, an informative reference to the religious and reform traditions of *Sarāk* society and its current form.

Economic Patterns:

Most of the *Sarāk* families in the village depend on agriculture for their livelihood. In this case, there is a tendency to cultivate by employing labourers instead of cultivating by oneself. Rice is mainly grown as a cash crop, as evidenced by the extensive paddy fields surrounding the village (Fig. 1). Adjacent to the *Sarāk* neighbourhood live the *Bauri* community, who are also largely economically dependent on paddy cultivation. It would probably not be an exaggeration to say that this cultivation is the occupation of *Sarāk* or other neighbouring nations. Although a large section of *Sarāks* have now largely distanced themselves from their profession. At present, due to various risks in agriculture such as water uncertainty, lack of rain, crop value, wages, etc., many *Sarāks* have moved away from agriculture and some of them

have moved out of the district or the state and are working in various private companies or factories. In this context the names of two sons Keshav Kumar Singh and Kishore Kumar Singh of Sukhendu Bikas Singh, both of whom live in Howrah, West Bengal, working in jute mills.



(Fig. 1. extensive paddy fields surrounding the Kareya village, Purulia)

Many educated youth of the village have migrated to other states in the hope of work. In this regard, the names of Dulalchandra Roy's thirty-nine-year-old Chennai-resident son Shekhar Roy, Alakaranjan Mandal's Hyderabad-resident elder son Arindam Mondal, an engineer by profession, are mentioned. There are also a couple of people working as priests in Jain temples in other states. Interviewed in this context, the two sons of Irabala Devi (60 years old), Sujoy Mondal and Sudeep Mondal, who are currently worshipers of a Jain temple in Chhattisgarh. Apart from this, *Sarāk* residents working in government work in the village are also visible. In this regard, the names of 70-year-old retired Vinod Bihari Singh, who used to work in the office of the West Bengal government, and his 65-year-old unmarried sister Dr Banani Sinha, a professor of Bengali by profession, should be mentioned. Apart from all these, the village also has a medicine store run by the *Sarāks* and a couple of small grocery stores.

Sarāk residents of Kareya village depend on multiple banks located at 'Nala' 12 km away for banking facility. Bank of India, State Bank of India, Jharkhand Rajya Bank etc. can be mentioned in this context. ATM service is also located in 'Nala'. At least one member of every *Sarāk* family has at least one banking account. But very few do regular banking transactions. In the context of banking comes the word of loan. The survey revealed that a small number of people have taken loans from the state government banks for agriculture, some of them have also repaid the loans. Many of the *Sarāk* community in the village also have life insurance.

Home, Household and Other:

Most of the houses in the village are either half-pucca or fully-pucca (brick-house), there are hardly any mud house. The number of two-storied houses (Figure no. 3) is also high, which mainly indicates the financial stability of the local *Sarāks*. Tin (Fig. 2) or tiles are used as roofs on half-timbered houses. Houses usually have two to three rooms, but in joint families the number is sometimes as high as 6-7. Except for one or two houses, every house in the village has a toilet. During the survey, it was found that many toilets have been constructed for the purpose of Central Project Grant. In the interview, everyone said that they use the toilet.



(Fig. 2 & 3. Two-storied Brick house and mud house in the Kareya village, Purulia)

Sarāk households in the village generally use coal as fuel, gas and wood are used to a lesser extent. In some completed houses, fuel gas is used for daily cooking, but in most houses, gas consumption is very limited. Each house has a separate space for cooking, in this case some houses have a separate kitchen and some houses have a small kitchen coexistence with the balcony. But generally the kitchen and gas oven for coal and wood heating are located in the balcony section (Fig. 4, 5).



(Fig. 4 & 5. coal and wood heating kitchen and gas oven kitchen in the Kareya village, Purulia)

Every single house in the village has electricity connection. However, when the issue of drinking water came up, many people expressed problems in the interview phase. A handful of houses (about 7-8) have underground tubewells, several old wells are also observed (Fig. 6),



(Fig. 6. old wells as drinking water resource in the Kareya village, Purulia)

although almost all of them have to rely on government taps located within 500 meters at one end of *Sarāk Mahalla* for drinking water. In fact, the problems of the water layer due to the rocky soil and the excess of minerals in the water are the reasons for the problem of drinking water, said several people of the village.



(Fig. 7 & 8. open and covered drainage system in the Kareya village, Purulia)

There is no public drainage system within the *Sarāk Para* of the village. In addition, many houses have water drainage systems, but it has gone into the cesspit. So, in that sense the drainage system is not visible. However, open and buried drains can be seen in several houses (Figures 7 and 8). On the whole, the drainage system of rural style is seen there.

Animal Husbandry:

Cows account for more than half of the livestock in *Sarāk* households. Cow's milk is considered as a marketed beverage in addition to being in their diet. Besides, cow dung is also

used for making fuel. The presence of goats is also visible in a few houses. Although many *Sarāk* households used to have oxen for agricultural purposes, they are no longer seen due to the difficulty of rearing them and the fact that the practical utility of oxen in agriculture has declined somewhat, although in the neighbourhood of the Bauri tribe, oxen, buffaloes and goats are also reared in addition to cows (Fig. 9).



(Fig. 9. A herd of cattle beside the Kareya village, Purulia)

Transport, its means-forms and problems:

Most of the houses in the village have both bicycles and motorbikes. Even some lower middle-class households can find motorbikes. As the reason for this, many interviewees were asked that since there is no decent and regular public transport system in the area yet, in that case own motorbike is the only option. It is good to say in this context that the roads or communication system in or around Kareya is not very good. The distance from the village to the nearest traffic road is about 3 to 4 km. Although traffic is very low due to public transport on the road, in this case reserved tempo or toto are relied upon to come from the local market area i.e. Nala Block sector to the village. This communication difficulty has become quite a barrier in terms of education and employment among the local *Sarāk* community.

Different aspects of education:

The primary school is located within the village. The high school is situated at a distance of 8 kilometres in Machladihi, serving as the sole educational institution for the majority of *Sarāk* pupils in the area. The nearest college is 12 km away at Nala, and the university is Sidho Kanu University at Dumka, about 60-65 km away. In spite of this obstacle of distance to educational institutions, the number of educated *Sarāk* youth is not less. There are many boys with BA, BSc, many have completed industrial training. A few engineering (B.Tech.) students

are also among the village *Sarāk* society. However, girls do not exhibit a significant inclination towards pursuing higher education. One example is Dr. Banani Sinha, who holds a degree in Bengali language and literature. She grew up in a rural area and has dedicated her career to teaching, which is now coming to an end. In addition, a female school instructor was hired, although it was not possible to meet her owing to time limitations. Currently, both young and senior *Sarāk* youth have a certain reluctance towards pursuing higher education. This is mostly owing to the high availability of enrolment opportunities and the lack of economic prospects inside the state. A significant number of young individuals are employed in private enterprises abroad without securing employment opportunities after completing their education. Additionally, the *Sarāk* community in Jharkhand is facing exclusion from the state's administrative register, resulting in a lack of valid official identification cards. Simultaneously, despite their status as a minority population, the *Sarāk* community harbours suppressed feelings of bitterness and anger due to the lack of access to numerous possibilities. This sentiment was evident in the interviews conducted as part of the survey.

Public health, medical infrastructure and initiatives

Due to time constraints, a comprehensive survey of all families in the village was not feasible. However, among the families that were surveyed, it was found that 45 percent of them have at least one chronic disease, such as diabetes or hypertension. Consequently, conventional medication is utilised in all of those households. Gas-heartburn is a common occurrence in most families, although it has not become a chronic condition. In addition to these factors, numerous families have various age-related ailments such as respiratory infections and musculoskeletal disorders. Nevertheless, a significant number of individuals have yet to achieve a drug-free status despite their diligent efforts and the influence of the contemporary lifestyle. Within the village, there exists a pharmacy managed by a *Sarāk* individual. This establishment serves as a sanctuary for both the *Sarāk* community and those from other castes during times of adversity. In addition, there is a practitioner of homeopathy named Alokranjan Mandal. In addition to the villagers, individuals from nearby villages who have faith in homeopathic treatment also seek his services. There is no authorised medical facility located within the village. The closest government health centre is located approximately 7-8 kilometres away at Bindapathar. The prominent government medical facility in the area is Nalay, located approximately 12 kilometres away. Additionally, there is the Jamtara Zilla Sadar Hospital, situated at a distance of 26-28 km. Furthermore, there are various nursing homes in close proximity. Despite the relatively short distance, the inadequate road infrastructure and

public transportation system pose a significant hurdle to emergency treatment. Numerous local residents have voiced their discontent. Maternal health and child health are inherently interconnected with the health system. According to the survey data, it is evident that pregnant women currently choose to give birth at Jamtara Hospital or, in some cases, at private nursing homes, following modern medical practices. Many women reported that the traditional practice of giving birth at home has been abandoned in this area for approximately twenty to twenty-five years. The Government of Jharkhand fulfils many obligations in ensuring the well-being of mothers and children by offering immunisation, promoting physical fitness, and providing growth-enhancing medications, among other measures.

Sociology: Division, Marriage and Feminism

The *Sarāk* community in the nearby area is generally cohesive. Marriage typically involves forming a connection with the *Sarāk* family, although there are also instances of unconventional marital unions observed in contemporary times. Multiple *Sarāk* individuals said that there used to be a customary practice of marriage within the *Sarāk* community, but it is no longer present in contemporary times. In previous eras, there was a prevailing inclination to arrange marriages for daughters at a tender age, a practice that is no longer perceived in the same manner. The marriage customs of the indigenous *Sarāks* adhere to customary and widely practiced traditions, without any distinct customs observed.

Diet

The survey phase of asking the housewives and others from numerous *Sarāk* houses revealed that a few families and some older individuals who are not aware with the tradition of Jan *Sarāk* community adhere to a vegetarian diet. The majority of the remaining individuals consume non-vegetarian meals. In the Bengali-speaking *Sarāk* family of Karaya, rice with vegetable curry and dal is widely regarded as the primary meal, consumed in the afternoon, while bread is commonly eaten at night. Their diet consists of a diverse range of seasonal vegetables (Figure No. 10), various types of legumes, cow's milk, fish, eggs, meat, and other foods.



(Fig. 10: Winter vegetables kept for cooking by a family of Karaya village; It should be noted here that radish is prohibited in the Sarāk diet, just like other subterranean items.)

Many individuals have stated that they consume non-vegetarian cuisine when dining out, although adhering to a vegetarian diet at home. According to multiple *Sarāk* individuals, the absence of a Jain temple in this area renders any form of religious practice ineffective.

Religion, Reforms and Rituals

The Sarāk people residing in Karaya village are members of the Adideva clan, whilst two out of four families belong to the Rishideva clan. Despite being fully cognisant of their authentic tribe and religious affiliation, hardly anyone practices Swadharmacharan. Located in the village of Bindapathar, there is a Jain temple where the Jain religious royal family hosts numerous Jain religious festivities. Residents of this village also actively engage in these events. The incidents of Parusana, Oli, etc. are explicitly identified as specific occurrences. Nevertheless, some individuals have reported that they did not receive an invitation or phone contact during the previous year. According to an anonymous individual from the Sarāk community, they have no incentive to convert since they do not receive any religious or other benefits from the Jain organisation. The village previously had a Jain Pathshala, overseen by Saikat Singh, but it is no longer operational. The majority of the Sarāk family members residing in the village travelled to Madhuban and paid a visit to Parshnath. However, the number of visitors to Parshanath in recent years is very low. Nevertheless, the Sarāks in villages predominantly adhere to Hindu religious customs. Vinodbihari Sinha, whose family resides in Sarāk Para of Durga Mandir, is the subject of discussion in this case. Every year, Durga Puja and Kali Puja are celebrated at this location. He mentioned that sacrifice is also performed at Kali Puja. In addition, Charak Puja is also performed on Charak Sankranti. To put it simply, it may be stated that his family has just become deeply involved in Hindu Shaktism following a significant period of religious engagement. The ubiquity of tulsi mancha in every household of

Echara village, together with the adornment of tulsi garlands by several individuals, unequivocally signifies the prevalence of Vaishnava religious observance in the area.

Conclusion

The objective of this research paper is not to reveal any basic aspects, but rather to offer a full diary of the current flow of the society, economy, and culture of the traditional Sarāk community in the form of sociology. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the research study. In the event that the current work contributes, either directly or indirectly, to the growth of the aforementioned nation and society at some point in the future, the author will consider his efforts to be partially beneficial.

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8. Interview with Saikat Singh, taken by Siddhartha Das, January 02, 2024.
9. Interview with Irabala Devi, taken by Siddhartha Das, January 02, 2024.

10. Interview with Binod Bihari Singh, taken by Siddhartha Das, January 02, 2024.
11. Interview with Anil Roy, taken by Siddhartha Das, January 02, 2024.
12. Interview with Saikat Singh, taken by Siddhartha Das, January 02, 2024.
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-Appeal to Authors in India and Abroad-
Commemorate Acharya Sri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj

Dear Esteemed Authors,

We write to you with a deep sense of reverence and urgency to commemorate the profound life and teachings of Acharya Sri Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja, a revered spiritual leader of the Digambara Jain tradition, who recently left us on 18 February 2024. His life was a beacon of spiritual enlightenment, compassion, and unwavering dedication to the upliftment of society.

Acharya Sri Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja's journey began in Sadalga, Karnataka, on 10 October 1946, and unfolded into a saga of spiritual awakening and scholarly excellence. His initiation into monkhood in 1968 marked the beginning of a life devoted to asceticism and the pursuit of spiritual truth. Renowned for his deep knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindi, and various other languages, Acharya SriJi authored numerous literary works, including the epic Hindi poem "Muk Mati," which stands as a testament to his literary genius and spiritual insight.

Throughout his life, Acharya Sri Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja advocated for education, morality, and compassion. He founded educational institutions like *Pratibhasthali Gyanodaya Vidhyapeeth*, emphasizing holistic education that combined academic rigor with ethical teachings, particularly benefiting young girls.

His ascetic practices were exemplary, characterized by strict observance of Jain principles and rigorous spiritual disciplines. He eschewed comforts, adhering to a simple diet and leading a life of renunciation that inspired millions across the globe.

As we mourn his physical departure, we recognize the importance of preserving and propagating his teachings for future generations. We appeal to you, esteemed authors, to contribute articles, essays, and scholarly reflections on Acharya Sri Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja's life, teachings, and impact on society in English for publication in a special issue of Jain Journal. Your contributions will not only honour his memory but also serve as a guiding light for those seeking spiritual enlightenment and ethical living.

Let us join hands in ensuring that Acharya Sri Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja's legacy continues to inspire and educate, fostering a world where wisdom, compassion, and spiritual awareness flourish.

Thank you for considering our appeal. Together, through our collective efforts, we can perpetuate the profound legacy of Acharya Sri Vidyasagara Ji Maharaja.

Warm regards,

Editor, Jain Journal