Jainism and Mahavir Jayanti

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-I- Religion

- Mahavir Jayanti is one of the most auspicious festivals in the Jain community.
- This day marks the birth of Vardhamana Mahavira, who was the 24th and the last Tirthankara who succeeded the 23rd Tirthankara, Parshvanatha.
- According to Jain texts, Lord Mahavira was born on the 13th day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Chaitra.
  - As per the Gregorian calendar, Mahavir Jayanti is usually celebrated during the month of March or April. In 2020, Mahavir Jayanti was celebrated on 6th of April.
- A procession is called with the idol of Lord Mahavira called the Rath Yatra.
- Reciting stavans or Jain prayers, statues of the lord are given a ceremonial bath called abhisheka.

Lord Mahavira

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

Jainism

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