

## II-8. Tradition of Austere Monks

If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.

-Ralf Waldo Emerson

Laymen learn to cultivate and contribute to the meaning of shared knowledge through practice. Continuity of a tradition is based not only on teacher-student transfer of ideas, but also on the user feedback. School of thought develops through training of cultivated men to carry out collective search, scrutiny, and continuing evaluation. Beyond that if you want to do something significant, it helps to be relatively free of the burden of survival needs and slightly under-employed.

The Ary claimed that their book of knowledge the Ved is from the non-human sources. It probably meant that it is not a work of a single person. Its hymns celebrate the life experiences of wandering herdsman. With the rise of the Ary influence in the Ganga Valley, the native ideas from the people without book or "book-less" (*nigganth*) began to challenge the authority of Ved. Both Mahaveer (599-527 BCE) and Buddh (550-480 BCE) took a stand against the Vedic practices and beliefs. By 557 BCE Mahaveer was recognized as the leader of the group of jin-kalp monks who had a continuous line of succession going back to the 23rd Jin Parshvnath (b. 923 BCE). Mahaveer became leader of the tradition of the book-less knowledge of, for, and by humans. As is clear from his reasoned discourses he was a forceful and articulate spokesman of this tradition. Mahaveer attracted many disciples, including some followers of Ved.

Buddh was born some 50 years later. His message is also about knowledge of, for, and by humans. He developed a following among the people of North and East of Patliputr. The monks of both the groups were called the *shraman sthavir* or monks who strive for knowledge *by mild speech paying all those gifts of heart* for their survival. Arrian writes that when Alexander asked some of these monks why they were paying so little attention to the great conqueror, their anti-imperial egalitarian reply was:

*King Alexander, every man can possess only so much of the earth's surface as this we are standing on. You are but human like the rest of us, save that you are always busy, and up to no good, travelling so many miles from your home, a nuisance to yourself and to others.. you will soon be dead, and then will own just as much of the earth as will suffice to bury you.*

**Intellectual legacy.** The language used by Mahaveer, and also most of ancient written material, of this tradition is in the native language (natural = *Prakrit* or *Prakrat*) of the common people of that period (Essay II-10). Reliance on the oral tradition was necessary because most people could not read and write. Also acceptable writing technologies were not available. Technology of an effective writing medium (such as paper) was not well developed (in China) until about 2200 years ago. Use of skin and parchment as a medium for writing was unacceptable to those who did not see any point in harming the living beings even for the knowledge. Buddhist monks used birch bark and bamboo splices from living trees for their writings in Pali, the local language of the Himalayan foot-hills. However it was frowned upon by the followers of Mahaveer because of the damage to the living trees.

Both traditions were open to all. Dependence of the monks on the lay public for their survival needs provided the testing ground for ideas with feedback and new inputs. This relationship is certainly not based on obligation, let alone on an implied sense of authority. A very strict and demanding code of behavior and scholarship also kept out the unwanted elements. Monks followed a very austere life-style. For much of his life after the age of 42 Mahaveer stayed without clothes and without personal possessions. It became the norm for others. None of the worldly advantages come from being a monk. The merit based basic training took 10 to 20 years. The tradition thrived on direct teacher to student relationship to assure quality. For daily food and shelter both depend on the society at large. Strict adherence to austerity also came in the way of royal patronage. But it also shielded them from fickleness, envy, and intrigue of the power.

**What kept the tradition of Mahaveer viable in India?** It is certainly remarkable that the tradition of Mahaveer survived in India, albeit through a viable numerical minority. Several facts stand out as the contributing factors.

1. The early founders left the organization not only at the mercy of the monks and nun, but also placed great emphasis on inputs from laity of both genders.
2. Lay people manage public places which also provide shelter and sustenance to monks, scholars, and pilgrims. Lay people exercise control, including the choice and permission to appoint the intellectual leader (*Acharya*), in all social ceremonies that are open to all.
3. A system of checks and balance promotes consensus and activism on social issues. Evangelism in any form is always frowned upon.

4. The monks did not have worldly needs and did not depend on individual favors which kept them away from social intrigues.
5. By adhering to high standards of scholarship and intellectual integrity, even in impassionate discourse between the scholars, the monks try to understand all sides of an argument.
6. The monks interfere little with the lives of layman. It gives freedom to try out alternatives and find ones own level of interaction with the group at large.
7. Monks are taken as model for a strict code of conduct. Beyond that neither the monks nor laity is organized into a hierarchy like that of church or western religions with a central authority.
8. After dispersal of the original group from Patliputr, the scattered groups regained viability as they adopted to the local conditions in other parts of India.
9. *Itthivay* (Drashtivad in Sankstrit) is the deeper intellectual basis that provides a cohesive force for the tradition of Mahaveer.

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### ***What is itthivay about?***

Thrust of *itthivay* (the 12th Ang of Mahaveer (599-527) is perception that is how a living being perceives itself and how others perceive it. Two orthogonal approaches facilitate consistency by minimizing liabilities in behaviors (developed on this site):

- A. *Nay* methods identify contradictions and inconsistencies to encourage consistency with reality.
- B. *Achar* (consistent code of conduct) minimizes liabilities from subjective judgment and conflict of interest. *Jeevatthan* provides a reality-based matrix of the properties for the criteria based evaluation of diversity of animate beings.

**Table II- 2. Key dates Leading to Jeevatthan and fragmentation of *itthivay*, the Twelfth Ang (Table II-3).**

**599-515 BCE** Gautam (607-515) and Saudharm (580-490) organized and developed the available knowledge in 12 parts for oral transmission by the original group (*Mool sangh*) in Patliputr.

**400-300 BCE** The orally transmitted knowledge is consolidated in the form of Gatha. It coincides with the decision of Bhadrabahu to disperse away from Patliputr in separate groups.

**35 to 85 CE:** Dharsen completed (ca. 37c) teaching Jeevatthan to Pushpdant and Bhutbali. During the next 50 years this and other work was organized as the Shatkhandagam (*shat*, six; *khand*, part, *agam*, prior knowledge): *Khand 1 (Jeevatthan)*: Pushpdant and Bhutbali completed. Later Bhutbali completed *Khand 2* (Khuddabandh), 3 (Band-swamitv), 4 (Vedna), and 5 (Vargana). Kashay-Pahud (Khand 6) came from Gundev and Brashabh.

**100 to 1500 CE.** Interpretations, notes and elaborations inspired from Shatkhandagam: Parikarm on Khand 1, 2 and 3) by Kundkund (ca. 150 CE); Samantbhadra (ca 200 CE) on Khand 1-5; Shamkund (ca. 300 CE) on Khand 1-5;

**The Moodbidri Pandulipis (ca. 1060 CE) include:**

- Shatkhandagam and its Dhavla *tika* (Veersen 827 CE).
- Khasay Prabhat, Kashy Pahud, and its Jai Dhavla *tika*
- Mahabandh and its MahaDhavla *tika*

**Table II-3. Gautam and Saudharm Organize the Twelve Ang**

[According to Aklank (Akalank, Akalanka) in Tatvarth Rajvartik (ca 700 CE)]

1. *Achar*: Code of conduct for behavior.
2. *Stepkrat*: Knowledge, reverence and humility.
3. *Sthan*: Description of scriptural topics.
4. *Samvay*: Matter, space, time and mode of entities.
5. *Vyakhya-pragyapti*: Questions and answers about beings.
6. *Dharm-katha*: Narrative and didactic tales and parables.
7. *Upasak-dasha*: Topics for the concerned follower.
8. *Antakradasa*: Biographies of ten monks from the order.
9. *Anuttar-aupadika dasha*: Biographies of ten later monks.
10. *Prasn-vyakaran*: Analysis of points and counter-points in the contemporary and ancient beliefs.
11. *Vipak-pad*: Actions and Consequences.
12. *Itthivay* (*ithtivad, drishtivad*): Nay methods from 2, 4, 5, 10 and 11 are reexamined to elaborate the doubt (Syad) and multiple (Anekant) characteristics of concern for validation. As we know it now crux of the reality based-perception is in Shatkhandagam.

The currently available versions of the first 11 (*puvv*) are in the form of *kosh* or compendium. Unfortunately, continuity of thought is lost in such a format. According to the tradition while the first 11 Ang are learnt, as the part of the twelfth Ang the *kevali* perception develops with ones own reasoning and practice. Bhadrabahu was the last *kevali*. His disciple Sthulbhadr was not considered worthy possibly because he boasted (of his powers to scare his sisters).

Vishakhacharya and Sthulbhadr became leaders of geographically separated branches of the original group (ca. 350 BCE). Another 400 years later the schism formalized into the

Digambar and Shvetambar sects. Even to this day the Digambar monks retain a strict code. A somewhat relaxed code for the possessions permitted the Shvetambar monks to preserve parts of the tradition as the written works. The currently available Agam material from the Shvetambar tradition was collected, compiled and organized by the Council at Vallabhi (ca. 5th century AD). The content and style attests to its ancient origins. From these reorganized works one can not be sure if they are complete. Also without suitable context it is not possible to reconstruct continuity of thought and reasoning.

**Note:** My guess-estimated dates are approximate to within two decades. The dates given here are reconstructed from those derived from the traditional Jain sources (Dhavla (800 BCE), Indrnandi Shrutavtar (600 BCE) and Ham Chandr (1000 BCE), as well as the modern historical material from Buddhist and other sources. Jainendra Kosh is a remarkable repository of such information. In the writings of the tradition the periods are mentioned after the death of Mahaveer in terms of the periods of leadership. Much of the earlier confusion about the dates came from the fact that Mahaveer and Buddh were thought to be the same person.

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