

Dr. Padmanabh S. Jaini

**- Dilip V Shah
Philadelphia**

Rajamati (Radhamma), the eldest daughter of Shantiraja Shetty of Bethangandy Jain Pete in Karnataka attended school only up to grade 7th but was nonetheless a self-studied Sadhak of Jain Dharma. In 1918, she married Halemane Shreevarma Shetty of Nellikar. Even after her marriage, she continued to read many Kannada Purānas, specially Sri Padmāvatidevi Mahatmya (an eighteenth-century poet – Padmanabh’s 1400 verses praising Devi Padmavati). When Radhamma had her first child in 1923, she named him Padmanabh during a ceremony at the holy shrine of Hombuja. Radhamma made Padmanabh, at the age of three, memorize all the Nakshatras and the names of all the twenty-four Tirthankaras of the past, present and future chovishis. She composed Bhajans and Ārtis and her mega opus Vardhman Purana in more than 1300 verses won her lifetime achievement award from Bahubali Mahamastak Abhishek trust in 1957. But she had no idea that her first born son will one day become famous all over the world - a scholar of Jainism and Buddhism.

Padmanabh’s father, the only schoolteacher in Nellikar at that time, taught Padmanabh to read English and Sanskrit alphabet even though at home they spoke Tulu and Kanada. For high school, Padmanabh was sent to a boarding school far away from home in Karanja (northern Maharashtra) that also emphasized Jain studies. Founder of that Boarding school – Devchand K Shah had studied works of Acharya Kundakunda and he was initiated as a Kshullaka (Bhattarak) with a new name – Samantbhadra.

When Padmanabh arrived at the boarding school, he did not speak Marathi – the language of the state and the medium of instructions. Muni Samantbhadra took him under his wings and assigned him a companion who spoke Marathi to ease him into the Ashram life that was very regimented fused with Jain rituals. During summer vacations, boys were enrolled in special courses for reading important Jain texts like Dravya Sangraha. After three years at the boarding school, Padmanabh was one of the two students chosen to go to Bahubali Ashram situated at the foot of Bahubali Hill for newly started Eighth grade. Padmanabh’s mentor, Samantbhadra Maharaj was in residence there and he got to listen to his many discourses. Nearby there was a Svetambara temple and that year Acharya Ramvijayji with other sadhus and Sadhvis stayed there for the monsoon months. Their presence allowed Padmanabh to observe differences between Svetambara and Digambar traditions. He matriculated in 1941 from the Nagpur Board of Education with distinction and took up a teaching job for two years at a school newly opened by the Ashram.

He was now ready for the college education but had no funds or resources. He presented himself to the Principal of Thakarsi college of Arts in Nashik and requested help. The principal, learning that he was a Jain and had performed seva as a teacher, wrote a note to one Rajasthani Jain merchant Mr. Gothi simply saying, “this student needs help”. Mr. Gothi interviewed Padmanabh and offered him a job for a year as superintendent of “Oswal Jain Boarding House”. The boarding house was for Sthanakvasi students and this was the first time Padmanabh learned that there were Jains who did not worship in Temples. This was his first encounter with Sthanakvasis and Padmanabh decided to study their scriptures that were not even considered authentic by Digambers. For such a study, he needed to learn Ardhamagdhi in addition to Sanskrit which he was planning to study anyway for his pursuit of B.A. After a year with Gothiji, a part time Ardhamagdhi teaching position at a nearby high school in Nashik came his way offering a small salary and a place to stay.

In 1947, Padmanabh completed college and obtained B.A. with honors in Sanskrit and Prakrit. His fondest memory of those college years were his frequent encounters with Samantabhadra Maharaj ji, travels with him and receiving occasional letters from him. He now desired to pursue a Master's degree with a concentration on Digambara and Shvetambara canonical works. To explore scholarship possibilities for that goal, he moved to Mumbai and stayed at Hirabaug Dharmasala for a while. Nearby there was a bookstore owned by Pandit Nathuram Premi and one day Padmanabh approached him to seek his guidance. Premji listened carefully. He guided Padmanabh to go meet Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghvi who would be happy to have a student wishing to study Svetambara scriptures and was in Mumbai at that time.

Pandit Sukhlalji, who lost his eyesight at the age of 16 due to smallpox studied Sanskrit, Prakrit and Jain scriptures. He taught Jainism at the Banaras Hindu University until retirement in 1944 moved to Mumbai for a while as a guest at Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya. When Padmanabh approached him with a referral from Premji and long list of accomplishments, Sukhlalji saw in him a future scholar of Jainism. He readily accepted him as his student and took him with him to Bholabhai Institute in Ahmedabad. Panditji saw to it that Padmanabh got scholarship and a place to stay.

Padmanabh Became an assistant to Panditji waking at 5:00 am, holding his hand during morning walks. During these walks, they would encounter famous poets, writers and Jain scholars. Listening to their conversations, Padmanabh quickly learned Gujarati. The afternoons were reserved for visits by a scholar, Ratibhai Desai. He would help Panditji with his mails - reading them and answering them, read newspapers, books and articles. One of the frequent writers to Panditji was Professor Dalsukhbhai Malvania, Panditji's successor at the BHU. Panditji had one other routine. Frequently visiting with Muni Punyavijayji. Padmanabh had the privilege of walking with Panditji and listening to the exchanges between the two giants of Jainism. He also got the opportunity to observe life of a Svetambara Muni – a legend in his time and began to shed his sectarian prejudices.

For his regular studies, Panditji prescribed Padmanabh Prakrit texts of Uttaradhyayan Sutra and Acharang Sutra with English translation and Herman Jacobi's "The Jaina Sutras". Next, Panditji asked Padmanabh to try to obtain Buddhist canonical texts in Pali that were brought by Dharmanand Kosambi from Sri Lanka and housed in the library of Gujarat Vidyapith. The Vidyapith did let Padmanabh read the texts but did not allow them to be taken out of the library so Padmanabh started to produce handwritten copies of the text to read with Panditji. This helped Padmanabh to compare Magdhi and Ardhmagdhi Prakrit and learn the differences and similarities between the Buddhist, Jain and Ajivika Schools. Padmanabh began thinking about going to Sri Lanka and study Buddhism with the aim of doctoral study on a comparative study of Buddhism and Jainism.

Ratibhai arranged Padmanabh to move to nearby house belonging to Seth Popatlal Hemchand who was a benefactor of lectures of Jainism and other religions at the Gujarat Vidyasabha. As the time went by Padmanabh became a sort of family member of Popatlal seth and accompanied the family to various Svetambara pilgrimage places like Sankhesvara, Palitana and Ranakpur and learned many of the rituals Svetambaras perform in their temples. Nearby, lived a Professor Athavale, who invited Padmanabh to join a small study group at his home on weekends. These Swadhyays exposed Padmanabh to Samkhya and Vedanta traditions. Professor Athavale also introduced Padmanabh to Pandit Bechardas Doshi, professor of Prakrit. In his frequent visits with Bechardasji, Padmanabh learned his views on the divisions of Svetambara Jains along Deravasi, Sthanakvasi and Terapanthi divides.

After completing M.A. in May 1949, Panditji suggested that Padmanabh go meet Muni Jinvijayji, Director of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for possible job. Muniji was impressed by Padmanabh's

learning Pali from Dharmanand Kosambi's books and put him in touch with Kaka Kelkar who awarded a one-year scholarship to Padmanabh to study at the Vidyodaya College for Buddhist monks in Colombo. At the Vidyodaya, the elder monk who was also the chief monk of the west coast of Sri Lanka. was delighted to have a new student who had studied Sanskrit and Pali from reading Kosambi's collection who was a student at Vidyodara. Padmanabh also got a chance to meet Dr. Malalasekera who had studied at the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) and was the head of the Department of Pali at Ananda College, Colombo. Dr. Malalasekera was very happy to see a Jain studying Buddhism in Sri Lanka and asked Padmanabh to teach Jain text to his advanced Pali students. This was going to be the very first time for those students to be learning words of a non-Buddhist leader Niganth Nataputta mentioned in Pali scriptures.

Padmanabh attended a lecture by a German Buddhist monk Nayanaponika Thera (1878-1957). Nayanaponika was a renowned scholar of Buddhist Philosophy and presented his *Abhidhamma Studies* to Padmanabh and urged him to dedicate one more to study several doctrines of new Buddhist sects. The Kosambi scholarship awarded to Padmanabh had run out after one year and Padmanabh needed a new place to stay so he approached Shri Ramkrishna Mission near Vidyodaya. The mission offered him a small room in the library giving Padmanabh the chance to study Shri Ramkrishna and his disciples. After appearing in the final examinations on Sutta Pitika and passing with distinction, Padmanabh began studying Abhidhamma through works Anuruddha with Pali commentary and Vibhavini tika by Sariputta available in Sinhalese and Burmese scripts. This was the beginning of Pasdmanabh's study of the Theravada Abhidhamma.

In 1951, the First World Fellowship of Buddhists was held in Colombo. Delegates from Burma, Siam, Cambodia, China, Korea, Japan, the U.K. and India attended this conference. Padmanabh met several times with the Indian delegation that was represented by the Dalits. Prominent amongst them was Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar who saw Buddhism as the only savior of the caste ridden Indian society.

In March of the same year, Padmanabh graduated from Vidyodaya and that ended his stay in Sri Lanka. He arrived home at Karkala to spend some time with his ailing father. It turned out that this was the last time Padmanabh would see his Father. After a few days, he went back to Ahmedabad. He resumed his morning walks with Pandit Sukhlalji who arranged for a job at Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya as a Daharmik teacher. Later that year Padmanabh was appointed as a lecturer of Pali and Buddhism at B. J. Institute. This was Padmanabh's first real employment as a teacher and memorialized an account of his stay in Ceylon which in 1953 became his first published book.

Padmanabh often accompanied Panditji when he traveled. One such event was a trip to Mumbai for Panditji's lecture for a popular annual lecture series during Paryushan by Mumbai Jain Yuvak Sangh (Paryushan Vakhyanmala). This series of scholarly lectures during Paryushan was inspired by Pandit Sukhlalji himself. The organizers took advantage of Padmanabh's presence and asked him to speak about absence of Buddhist nuns presently in contrast to a large number of Jain Sadhvis in the Jain community. This was a starting point for Padmanabh's research on gender and Moksha according to Svetambara Jains.

In 1951, Prabodh Pandit (son of Pandit Becharadas Doshi) who had obtained his PH. D. in linguistics from SOAS in London came to visit Panditji. Conversations with him inspired Padmanabh to consider going to SOAS to get his doctoral degree. In December of 1951, Padmanabh's father passed away. Year later, Padmanabh's sister Rohini got married and his mother returned to her mother's home in Bethangandy. In June of 1953, Padmanabh was appointed as a lecturer of Pali at the Banaras Hindu university where Padmanabh got to listen to spirited doctrinal debates between three venerable Digambar pandits – Kailashchandra Shastri, Phoolchandra Siddhantshastri and Mahendrakumar Nyayacharya. Padmanabh gained a lot of fundamental tenets of Digambara from these debates and

learned of the new movement by a Sthanakvasi monk Kanji swami that had shaken up many north Indian Digambar monks. All along, Padmanabh was studying for comparative study of the Theravada and the Vaibhashika Abhidharma for a Ph. D. degree. He also came in contact with Buddhist scholars from SOAS who were stopping over at BHU on their way to Nepal.

In June 1956, Padmanabh got married to Shashiprabha from Moodbidri. But just days earlier, he got job offer of three years teaching Pali at SOAS. The job offer from UK was seen by the family as good tidings in brought to the family by the new bride. In October, Padmanabh flew to London alone because Shashi was pregnant. She joined him in January of 1957 and gave birth to their son, Arvind in May.

At that time, SOAS had 125 faculty members and 300 students. The Department of Indian Languages had courses in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Kannada, and Malayalam. The Department of History had many historians of India and famous amongst them was Professor Arthur L. Bahsam who was also a scholar of Jainism and Buddhism. For the first year on the job for teaching Pali, there were no students registered. So Padmanabh registered himself as a Ph. D. candidate under Professor Brough, chairman of the Department of Indian languages and Literature. It gave him opportunity to finish editing of Abhidharmadipa he had started to work on at B.H U. and it became his thesis in two parts (800 pages) for his Ph. D. thesis. By 1957, Padmanabh had three students in his Pali class. In 1958 Padmanabh obtained his Ph. D. in Sanskrit literature and his job as lecturer was made permanent. The family settled down in their new home in a suburb of London called Isleworth.

Many of Padmanabh's articles were published Bulletin of the SOAS and in The Tibetan Sanskrit Works series by the K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna. In March 1960, he was invited to present a paper at the multifaith conference on "Prayer" in Venice. Padmanabh chose his subject – "Prayer in Jainism" his first on a Jain theme to a western audience.

President of the Pali Text Society in London gave Padmanabh a 1961 Pali manuscript in Cambodian characters for editing. It prompted Padmanabh to visit countries of Thailand, Burma and Cambodia to collect unpublished Pali manuscripts for translating and publishing by Pali Text Society. Professor Brough arranged for Padmanabh a leave for nine months and a travel grant. Introduction letters to prominent persons in Burma and Thailand were provided for his search of Pali manuscripts in Buddhist monasteries. Before going to Burma, the family visited with his mother in Belthangady and Shashi's mother in Moodbidri. He left wife and the two kids in Moodbidri and in September of 1960 proceeded to Rangoon, Burma.

In Rangoon, he met with U Chan Htoon, Head of the Burma Pali Text Society who took him to a famous monastery near Golden Pagoda. The Mahathera, Chief monk of the monastery was very impressed with Padmanabh's ability to speak Pali and read Burmese script. He helped Padmanabh get a 400-page old copy of 1981 non canonical work - *Zimme Pannāsa*.

In Burma, obtaining vegetarian food was a real problem. Mr Htoon recognized the difficulty and introduced him to a great Hindu industrialist – Satya Narayan Goenka who assigned one of his staff to accompany Padmanabh to the monasteries and found a hotel where vegetarian south Indian meals were available. One day Mr. Goenka took Padmanabh to meet with his teacher U Ba Khin at a hilltop shrine outside the city. The sign outside read: International Meditation Center, Vipassanā foundation. U Ba Khin engaged with Padmanabh in a discussion on Buddhist meditation. When he learned that Padmanabh had never practiced meditation, he offered a stay with him for the new weekly meditation program starting that evening.

U Ba Khin was a renowned master of Buddhist meditation practice known as Vipassanā (Mindfulness). Padmanabh accepted the invitation and he was told of the rules: One meal a day, sleeping on the floor, no talking with anybody, no contacts with the outside world through radio or telephone, and practice Vipassanā from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. Due to personal interest taken by U Ba Khin, Padmanabh learned the fundamentals of Vipassanā.

After a week of Vipassanā, Padmanabh went to Mandalay and to Pagan in search of manuscripts of the *Zimme Pannasā*. In Pagan, he found a man who had a manuscript but was unwilling to part with it. Padmanabh got the manuscript photographed with help of Goenka.

Next Padmanabh reached Thailand. The Bangkok Museum had many Pali manuscripts in Cambodian script and Padmanabh was able to secure microfilms of them as well as an unpublished manuscript of Pali work - *Lokaneyyappakarana* that he later edited and published in Pali Text Society in 1986. The curator of the museum directed Padmanabh to certain monasteries in the north that had wall paintings of Pali canonical stories. After spending a fortnight in those monasteries, Padmanabh next went to Angkor Wat ruins in Cambodia famous for its temples of Brahmanical gods. Padmanabh spent several days with the curator who gave Padmanabh many detailed guided tours of Angkor Wat museum.

Padmanabh was not happy with what he had found thus far so he chose to go to Indonesia which was not on his original itinerary. Once in Indonesia, he visited the famous 9th century stone structure Borobudur (the big Buddha) with carvings depicting Buddha's past and present life according to Mahāyāna scriptures. Padmanabh photographed all that and concluded he had collected enough material to last a lifetime. And he started journey home visited with his mom in Belthangady and returned to UK with his family in April 1961.

Upon returning to SOAS, Dr. Padmanabh started preparing his report on his findings. He made a list of books he had gathered for SOAS library, microfilmed manuscripts and photographs of the wall paintings etc. he had collected. Once he finished with report, he continued with his research work. In the summer of 1964, he got an offer from University of Michigan, Ann Arbor to teach Buddhism for a year. The same university invited him again after 2 years as a full professor of Sanskrit.

But before taking up that position, the family took a month-long vacation in India to visit with the family and also go to Ahmadabad to meet with Pandit Sukhlalji and Muniishri Punyavijayji. Seeing Padmanabh's achievements, Muniishri showed him recently discovered 10th century manuscript by Shri Amratchandra Suri and assigned Padmanabh to translate it in English.

After obtaining a permanent US residency (Green Card), the family moved to Ann Arbor in 1967 to teach Sanskrit and Buddhism. On his own, Padmanabh started study of hostility between the Shramans (Jain & Buddhist) and Brahmanas. In 1971 Dr. Padmanabh attended the International Oriental Congress in Canberra, Australia. At the conference, Dr. Padmanabh met A. N. Upadhye – Professor of Prakrit and Jain Studies at Mysore University who urged him to produce a graduate level textbook on Jainism.

During summer of 1971, Dr. Padmanabh was a visiting professor at the University of California at Berkeley. The University was preparing to establish a new Department of South Asian studies and asked Dr. Padmanabh to consider joining U. C. Berkeley. Since in his four years at Ann Arbor did not convince University of Michigan to establish a graduate program in Buddhist studies, Dr. Padmanabh saw a chance to install a graduate program in Buddhism and agreed to join University of California at Berkeley.

Bidding goodbye to Michigan, and before landing in California, Dr. Padmanabh took family to India visiting with family. He met with old acquaintances in Ahmadabad and visited Shri Mahavir Jain Vidyalaya whose students gifted him a large Gujarati work on Shrimad Rajchandra. This collected works and letters of Shrimadji inspired Dr. Padmanabhs' non-sectarian study of Jains.

At Berkeley, Dr. Padmanabh, with other faculty members formed a Buddhist study group and began search for appropriate text for teaching Jainism. The only English book on Jainism he could locate was written by a western scholar from Christian point of view. This prompted Dr. Padmanabh to prepare his own material based on authentic Jain texts.

In the early 1970's many cities in America, Jains were forming informal Jain groups. It was also the time Gurudev Chitrabhanuji and Acharya Sushil Muni arrived in America. In 1974, there were only five Jain families in Berkeley, all from different sects. Dr. Padmanabh was instrumental in forming a Jain group and resolved to study together and celebrate Mahavir Jayanti together.

In 1976, Dr. Padmanabh finished the first draft of his first independent work: *The Jain Path of Purification* that was sponsored by the University. In the preparation of the book, Dr. Padmanabh believed it important to study the theme of liberation of women without being reborn as a male – a major point of contention between Svetambara and Digambars. He decided to undertake a research on the subject and obtained a Research Fellowship from his University in 1978. He decided to go to India to interview scholars and Jain Sadhus. But before reaching India he got a chance to pay visit Bamiyan Buddhist monuments in Afghanistan and Taksha Shila in Pakistan.

Arriving in Delhi with a draft of his *Jaina Path of Purification*, Padmanabh met up with a group of Digambars who took him to Bharatiya Gnayanpith, a famous Jain publishing house. There he discussed with the owners of the publishing house difficulties of finding a reliable English language books to aid in teaching Jainism as against pile of literature for Buddhism. The owners arranged for Padmanabhji a visit with his holiness Dalai lama who was in Delhi at that time with many of his followers. Padmanabhji was introduced as a scholar of *Abhidharma* and Dalai Lama greeted him very graciously as he himself was very interested in different versions of Abhidharma.

From Delhi, Padmanabhji reached Ahmedabad again and traveled to Sankhesvara where Muni Shri Jambuvijayji was residing. From Muni Shri, Padmanabhji learned many aspects of the sectarian debate on the subject of liberation for women. Munishri graciously advised Padmanabhji to approach Digambar scholars also for his research. From Sankhesvara, Padmanabhji traveled to the cities like Veraval and Jamnagar to study lives of Jain Sadhvis. Padmanabhji wanted to hear from the Sadhvis the reason they abandoned household life, took Diksha and their views of liberation for women. Those discussions proved very valuable in Padmanabhji's quest on the subject of liberation for women.

From Gujarat, Padmanabhji traveled to his former school – Bahubali Ashram where his mentor Muni Shri Samantbhadraji was in residence. Padmanabhji discussed his reservations on Digambar position that "A Jain nun needed to be reborn as a man and become a Digambara Muni to attain Moksha" as against Svetambara position that women can attain Moksha. Padmanabhji discussed difficulties in presenting that particular point of view to his western students who took it as another discriminatory doctrine against women.

For a period of 15 days, In presence of many Digambar scholars and Muniji, a thoughtful reading of Nyaykumudachandra took place every afternoon. Muniji only spoke at the end of the fifteen 15 days. He contrasted western teachings of just one life (one body) and day of judgment after death with Jain belief of cycle of birth, death and rebirth until Liberation. He advised Padmanabhji to

proceed in his teaching job by explaining the doctrine to his students and that the Digambar position is not a discriminatory one, but a belief held from beginningless of time. Also, he should teach that with full confidence.

From Bahubali, Padmanabhji visited Moodbidri and Karanja before returning to Berkeley on January 1 of 1979 and happily found copy his first book. The book was had received many praises and a laudatory review in Journal of Asian Studies by no less than eminent scholar K. W. Folkert. The book followed by a year publication of his *Laghutattvasphota* by L. D. Institute in Ahmedabad which too received rave reviews in the Journal of Indian Philosophy.

After the publication of the two books on Jainism, Padmanabhji returned to his work on Buddhist manuscripts in Sanskrit and Pali and published 4 works by various institutions in India and London. In 1983, National Endowment for the Humanities gave a 3-year Text & Translation grant to Padmanabhji to work on *Stri Nirvan Prakranam* that resulted in a 1991 book titled *Gender and Salvation: Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women*. The book was hailed as an example of how Sanskrit scholars can make rare texts available to general public and detail main sectarian polemics between the two important Jain sects. He was invited by the London based Institute of Jainology to the First International Jain Conference in 1983 and that led to collaboration with Dr. Nathmal Tatia on “the Jaina Faith and its History” for International Sacred Literature Trust, London in 1994.

In the Fall of 1989, Padmanabhji was visiting the Department of History of Religion at a University in Sweden as a guest of Professor Olle Qvarnstrom who had translated “Yogshastra of Hemchandra: a Twelfth Century Handbook on Jainism” that appeared in Harvard Oriental Series in 2002. and later published it in enlarged form as *A Handbook of on the Three Jewels of Jainism* by Hindi Granth Karyalaya, Mumbai. At that time Professor Qvarnstrom developed a plan for a conference of scholars of Buddhism and Jainism at his University which did take place ten years later in 1998 under his leadership.

Padmanabhji was invited to join the group of ten Jains from UK to the first Interfaith Dialog between Christianity and Jainism organized by The Institute of Jainology at the Vatican in 1995. The Jains were led by Dr. L. M. Singhvi, the High Commissioner of India while the Christian group was headed by a Cardinal. The next day, the Jain group had an audience with His Holiness Pope John Paul II at his residence and Padmanabhji got the opportunity to present his book *The Jain Path of Purification* to the Pope. The U.K. press widely reported the Interfaith Dialog between Catholicism and Jainism at the Vatican and when the delegation returned to London, BBC interviewed them. The interview was later published in a book “Christianity & Jainism”.

During his frequent visits to India in search of unpublished manuscripts, Padmanabhji found a manuscript in Jain Temple library at Karanja called *Cauryamsi Bol* that was not entered in the Temple catlog because it was in Hindi and a controversial subject by a 1770 North Indian Digambar scholar against the Svetambara Jains. Padmanabhji obtained a Xerox copy of it, translated it in English and published it as “Eighty-four points of Contention between Svetambara and Digambar, Text and Translation” in the journal of Indian Philosophy, 2008.

Padmanabhji has published 17 books and more than 80 papers on Jain and Buddhist subjects. attended many international Jain gatherings and was awarded many honors like the “Ahimsa Day” celebration at the House of Commons in 2009. On his 90th birthday in October of 2013, A day long symposium hosted by Center of South Asia studies at Berkeley that was attended by a select group of academics from Europe and the US. The symposium was a fitting tribute to Padmanabhji and ascribed the strength and breadth that characterizes the Jainism today to his contributions to that

field. Although He retired from University of California, Berkeley in 1997 and became a professor emeritus of Buddhist studies, designation he is still holding in 2020.