

The Jain Digamber Sampraday

The history of Digamber sect for the first six centuries is very hazy. The *Digambers* unlike *Shwetambers* did not write detailed historical accounts of their sect, and what has been written seems to have been created around the 6th century AD (based on the inscription found in Shravana Belgola). According to *Digamber* tradition, the breakup of joint sangh began with Vishaka, who was a disciple of Bhadrabrabhu. Many believe that it was in the 2nd century AD that Acharya Kundakunda set the *Digamber* tradition on a firm footing. Today most *Digamber* traditions revere Acharya Kundakunda more than Vishaka and Bhadrabrabhu, who are otherwise above in the lineage of saints.

Digamber Sampraday, in recent centuries, has been divided into the following sub-sects:

Major sub-sects:

1. Bispanth
2. Digamber Terapanth
3. Taranapanth or Samaiyapanth

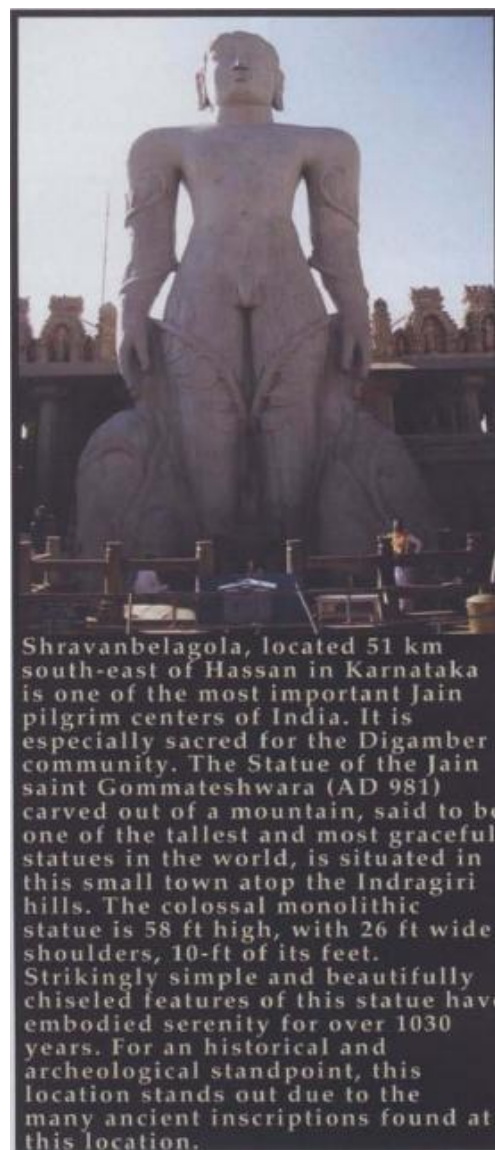
Other sub-sects:

- a. Gumanapanth
- b. Totapanth
- c. Kanji-Panth

1. Bispanth, according to some, is the original group of Digamber sect and has the highest following among all Digamber Jains. Bispanth has a large following in Karnatka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The followers of Bispanth support the Dharma-gurus, that is, religious authorities known as Bhattarak who are also the heads of Jain Maths (monasteries). The Bisapanth, in their temples, worship the idols of Tirthankaras. They also worship the idols of Ksetrapala, Padmavati and other deities.

2. Digamber Terapanth arose in North India in the year 1664 AD as a revolt against the domination and conduct of the Bhattarakas. As a result, in this sub-sects, the institution of Bhattarakas lost respect in North India. In their temples, the Terapanthis install the idols of Tirthankaras and not of other deities. The Terapanthis are more in number in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

3. Taranapanth is known after its founder Tarana Swami or Tarana-Tarana Swami (1448 – 1515 A.D.). This sub-sect is also called Samaiyapantha because its followers worship Sarnaya, i.e., sacred books and not the idols. Taranapanthis strongly refute idolatry but they have their own temples in which they



keep their sacred books for worship. Taranapanthis give more important to spiritual values and the study of sacred literature instead of any ceremonial pujas. The Taranapanthis are few in number and are mostly confined to Bundelkhand and Malwa area of Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh area of Maharashtra.

4. Gumanapanth is very small sect. This sub-sect was started by Pandit Gumani Rama or Gumani Rai , a son of Pandit Todaramal, a resident of Jaipur in Rajasthan. Gumanapanth originated in the 18th century A.D. and flourished mainly during that century. It is found now in some areas of Rajasthan and Jaipur.
5. Totapanth came into existence as a result of difference between the Bispantha and Terapanth sub-sects. Many sincere efforts were made to strike a compromise between the Bis (i.e. twenty) panth and the Tera (i.e. thirteen) panth and the outcome was sadhesolaha (i.e. sixteen and a half) panth or Totapanth. That is why the followers of Totapanth believe to some extent in those of Terapanth. The Totapanthis are very few in number and are found in some pockets of Madhya Pradesh.
6. Kanji Panth or followers of Kanji Swami are part of this new sect. Saint Kanji Swami largely succeeded in popularizing the old sacred texts of the great Digamber saint Acharya Kundakunda of South India. The influence of Kanjipanth is steadily increasing around the Sonagarh in Gujarat and Jaipur in Rajasthan. The compiled list of all the Digamber Acharyas is given in the end of this section. We have included the profiles of very few Acharyas whom we had a chance to meet or if any of the community member provided such information.

Content source: Jain Digest