

Background

Lord Mahavir's preaching was orally compiled by his disciples into many texts. This knowledge was orally transferred from acharyas (gurus) to the disciples over the course of about one thousand years. In olden times, monks strictly followed the five great vows of Jainism. Even religious scriptures were considered possessions and therefore knowledge of the religion was never documented. Also, during the course of time many learned acharyas (elder monks) compiled commentaries on the various subjects of the Jain religion.

Around 500 A.D., which was one thousand years after Lord Mahavir's nirvana (death), Jain acharyas realized that it was extremely difficult to keep memorizing the entire Jain literature compiled by the many scholars of the past and present. In fact, significant knowledge was already lost and the rest was polluted with modifications and errors. Hence, they decided to document the Jain literature as known to them. In this time period two major sects, namely Digambar and Svetambar, were already in existence. A thousand years later (1500 A.D.), the Svetambar sect divided into three subsects known as Svetambar Murtipujak, Sthanakvasi, and Terapanthi. Differences exist among these sects in their acceptance of the validity of the documented Jain scriptures and literature.