

Pathshala: The Next Generation of American Jains

(Version2 – July 22, 2017)

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Religion Environment of Indian and American Jain Youth:

Like any other immigrant communities, we Jain Americans are trying best to sustain our identity and working hard to ensure the next generation continues our Jain values, traditions, and rich heritage.

Growing up in India is a bit different. Jain youth by virtue of living in religious environments, attain knowledge of Jain religion and values from monks, elders, by visiting temples, listening to sermons, reading Jain literature, going on pilgrimage and through several other venues available to them.

It is a bit different in America. In comparison, the environment for American Jains is religiously dilute. Unlike in India, Jains here are spread too thinly to offer our youth a conducive Jain environment necessary to sustain the Jain way of life. Also, the accessible resources are replaced by formidable barriers of distance, culture, language and surroundings.

American Jain Youth Culture and Jain Pathshala:

How do we bridge this gap? How do we bring the community together and pass on our values to our youth?

To answer several of these types of questions, JAINA Education Committee was instituted. The Education Committee with help from several volunteers prepare and published a structured curriculum and Pathshala programs primarily based on American culture.

The word Pathshala, which literally means “learning place,” is traditionally used to describe classes where you learn about religion from gurus and teachers. In India, the focus is primarily towards the memorization of Sutras and rituals.

An attempt is made at American Pathshala to align and encourage youth towards understanding Jain principles and rituals. It is an exciting reincarnation of this age-old institution.

The main goal of the Pathshalas is to teach our kids based on current environment, the message of compassion and nonviolence in all aspects of life, encourage vegetarianism and vegan way of life, use environmental friendly product, and live alcohol and drug free lifestyle. This stems from a desire to practice compassion and nonviolence as well as instill Jain values, our rich culture and heritage.

The main function of the Education Committee is to prepare and publish non-sectarian Jain Educational material for children, youth, and young Jain professionals raised in North American cultural environment which should meet the above goal.

The religious material should be in simple American English which will allow them to effectively apply Jain principles and practices in their everyday lives.

The Jain children have grown up in American culture where:

- Both men and women are treated equally. Jain religious principles are not and should not be a male dominated principles. Several of our rituals are male dominated rituals.
- Proper explanation is needed with reasons and must appeal to our common sense. It is for a WHY generation Jains.
- No magic, Blind faith, and super power help from heavenly gods (Devs) and goddesses (Devis) by reciting Mantras are accepted and hence self-efforts and self-initiatives are valued.
- Humanitarian services and environmental protection activities take priority over traditional temple/sathanak rituals.
- All other religions and their cultures which are positive in nature treated properly and equally respected (recent survey shows that about 70% Jain children are marrying Americans).

Form compassion point of view, under the current environment, the American Jain youths understand that strict vegetarian (Vegan) food is more compassionate over any animal base foods such as milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, ice-cream, sweets, ghee. All commercial dairy product consumption involves significant violence and killing of five sense (Panchendriya) animals. Hence all YJA conventions serve mostly vegan foods and use environmental friendly paper plates and cups. No plastics/foam plates and cups are used.

Also, some of the Jain ritual Sutras are male dominated and few other Sutras indicate the superiority of our religion over any other religions. Hence the committee has a very difficult task to implement traditional rituals without modifying these sutras and rituals. Very few Jain Acharyas and scholars of India would help us in the preparation of Jain ritual material suitable for American culture.

Since our Pathshala material is prepared for American children, the committee has compromised few rituals and traditions which are place, time, and cultural dependent. However, under no circumstances, the basic Jain principles which reflects universal truth are compromised.

To date the committee has published 9 Pathshala books and 6 reference books for our children, youths and professionals.

There are more than 20 committee members performing various task of preparing, printing and distributing the material. As per our recent survey, there are about 4000 students ranging from elementary level to college level, attend Jain Pathshala classes in their centers and use the Jaina Education Material. These Pathshalas have about 400 teachers and supporting staff. (see Appendix - List of major Pathshalas in America)

In many cases, the parents of the kids in the Pathshala are themselves the teachers and are known to the kids first as uncles or aunties. There are about 400 adults offering volunteer service as teachers and other help. These teachers are aided by a very valuable resource like Jain eLibrary (www.jainelibrary.org) which JAINA Education Committee has produced.

Pathshala Curriculum:

A comprehensive, grade wise curriculum in simple English is presented in these 9 Pathshala and 6 reference books. These uniform books available to all the pathshalas and are sold at extremely low prices. These books are never copyrighted and the soft copies (pdf files) are all freely available on the JAINA and Jain eLibrary websites for easy downloads.

The JAINA Educational material covers basic Jain philosophy such as fundamental principles, the path of liberation; six universal substances; Nine Tattvas, theory of Karma, Anekantvad and Fourteen Gunsthanaks.

In conduct section students learn about Panch Parmeshti; Jain Ascetics, Mahavrats and Anuvrats, Bhavnas, Leshyas, Panchachar, Jain ethics, humanitarian and Jivdaya services, environment protection, and Jain yoga.

In literature section, the students learn about Jain Svetambar Agams and commentary literature, Digambar shastras, Jain history, life stories of various Tirthankars, important Acharyas, and virtuous shravaks/shravikas.

Students are also taught simple rituals like going to the Temples in both Svetamber and Digambar traditions, Pooja, Six Avashykas, Paryushan and Das Laxana. The sutra classes emphasize the meaning of sutra rather than blindly memorizing them.

The Educational material cover all traditions of Jainism. Svetamber, Digambar or Sthanakvasi parents, all send their kids to our unified pathshalas. Medium of instruction is always English but Gujarati and Hindi classes are offered as language studies.

The Pathshala books are continuously upgraded from the suggestions and comments received from the teachers, parents, and students. In fact, senior most students at some pathshalas undertake the task of revising materials in these books from the perspective of relevance, readability and age appropriateness. Some of the earliest books have now been revised five times!

The Education committee also conducts classes, workshop, seminars, and lectures at various centers in North America and other countries. It also provides a medium for interactions among pathshala teachers (Google Group) of North America.

Teachers from many centers contributed to finalize the uniform curriculum for Pathshala in teacher's conference held at various times. Each center uses this curriculum and implemented to fit their size of student body, available teachers and class rooms.

Teachers from various Pathshalas keep in touch to learn from each other to improve the quality of teaching. In addition to the uniform books throughout all Jain centers, Pathshala teachers hold a Teachers' conference during JAINA Conventions. In that meeting, teachers share their experiences and exchange project ideas as though members of a fraternity.

With all the goodwill and togetherness displayed at this gathering, these teachers make no effort to hide their zeal to display accomplishments of their students at the main event for all the Pathshalas – Jain Academic Bowl (JAB) competition. Teams from different Pathshalas are designated as junior teams or senior teams and undergo 3 to 4 rounds of elimination to win the most coveted prize of "Best Team".

Brief Description of Pathshala Books:

The following link gives brief description of each Pathshala and reference book. It also gives the link to download the pdf file of each book.

[http://www.jainlibrary.org/elib_master/jaina_edu/jaina_edu_book/\\$JES000_Pathshala_Books_Summary_000011_data.pdf](http://www.jainlibrary.org/elib_master/jaina_edu/jaina_edu_book/$JES000_Pathshala_Books_Summary_000011_data.pdf)

Summary:

In America, the Jain unity has played the dominant role in our progress. Because very few Shvetambar or Digambar monks or nuns come to the United States when they are fully ordained, the American Jain community has lost its dominant pattern of close interaction between lay people and mendicants. Most American Jains agree that the sectarian streams of Jainism that have been significant in India for over 2,000 years are fast losing their currency in twentieth-century America.

The main objective of the committee is to prepare, publish, and distribute the Jain Pathshala material for American youth living in the American cultural environment. Hence, we have to make few changes in the traditional rituals and procedures.

All the above shows the zeal with which Jain parents in North America are providing religious, cultural and spiritual training for their kids in a language they understand, in the culture they live in, and more importantly in a non-sectarian and non-male dominated manner in projecting JAINS of Tomorrow.

The most famous Sutra of Dasvaikalik Agam (Sutra no 56) States

पढमं नाणं तओ दया, एवं चिट्ठइ सव्वसंजए ।

अन्नाणी किं काही, किंवा नाही छेयपावगं?

પ્રથમ જ્ઞાન અને પછી દયા ચારિત્ર છે. આ પ્રમાણે જ્ઞાન પૂર્વક દયા પાળવાથી સાધક સર્વથા સંયમી રહી શકે છે. અજ્ઞાની માણસ શું કરશે? પોતાને માટે શું હિતકારી છે કે શું અહિતકારી છે, તે જાણી શકતો નથી.

First is knowledge then conduct or action; that is how the disciplined (Sadhak) live. How would an ignorant discriminate between good and evil for himself or for others”

We would like to apologize if any traditional adult feels that our approach in preparing JAINA education material in America is inappropriate.

We seek forgiveness for any mistake, oversight, understatement, or overstatement in the education material. We request you to use the material objectively and provide positive suggestions so that we can incorporate them into future revisions.

Feedback Comment:

To write a comment on this article, please click the following link of Pathshala eLibrary blog and go to the end of the article to write your comment. This way others can view your comment. You can also offer your comment anonymously.

http://jainaedu.blogspot.com/2017/07/pathshala-next-generation-of-american_25.html

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 JAINA Education Committee
 Federation of Jain Associations in North America
 Jain eLibrary in-charge
 July 22, 2017

Appendix - List of major Pathshalas in America

Following the list of major Pathshalas where Education Committee books are used

Srl #	Center Name	Total Students	Total Teachers	Coordinator
1	JSMC - Jain Society of Metropolitan Chicago	485	40	Darshana Shah
2	JCSC - Jain Center of Southern California	420	100	Sailesh Jain
3	JCNJ - Jain Sangh of New Jersey - Franklin temple	400	40	Anil Shah
4	JCNC - Jain center of Northern California	375	42	Krina Shah
5	JSNT - Jain Society of North Texas (Dallas)	280	20	Jadavji Kenia
6	JSH - Jain Society of Houston	225	42	Chini Mehta
7	JCA - Jain Center of America New York	150	15	Mrs.Suman Bafna
8	JSGA - Jain Society of Greater Atlanta	140	30	Sampurna Shah
9	JSMW - Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington	135	35	Monica Shah
10	JSGD - Jain Society of Greater Detroit	130	27	"Hamesh Shah
11	JCNJ - Caldwell Pathshala, Jain Center of NJ	125	33	Bipin Shah
12	JCGP - Jain Center of Greater Phoenix	120	12	Piyush Shah
13	JCGB - Jain Center of Greater Boston	110	13	Dev Jain
14	JSNE - JAIN Sangh OF NEW ENGLAND	105	14	Hemant Shah
15	CJJG - Central Jersey Jain Group Pathshala	60	11	Dharmesh Shah
16	JCNJ - Jain Sangh of New Jersey - Digambar Pathshala	60	12	Dharmesh Shah
17	JSSD - Jain Society of San Diego	60	9	Parul Kothari
18	JSCNC - Jain Study Center of North Carolina (Raleigh)	53	3	Rita Lodaya
19	JCNJ - Jain Sangh of New Jersey - Sthanak Pathshala	50	12	Jainesh Shah
20	JSCVA - Jain Society of Central Virginia (Richmond)	45	8	Pritesh Ravindra Mutha
21	JCC - Jain Center of Connecticut	40	5	Shikha Jain
22	JCGC - Jain Center of Greater Charlotte	40	4	Bela Shah
23	JCOCO - Jain Center of Central Ohio – Columbus	40	4	Mona Mehta
24	Jain Sangh of NJ - Cherry Hill	35	12	Leena Shah
25	Jain Society of Tampa bay	35	8	Devangi Shah
26	JSGC - Jain Society of Greater Cleveland	25	5	Kamna Jain
27	JSOFC - Jain Society of Central Florida - Altamonte Springs, FL	24	2	JENY SHAH

28	JCNJ - Jain Sangh of New Jersey - Hudson county	18	4	Priti Shah
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