

JAINISM AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Mr. Dada Ashok Managanvi

Guest Faculty, Department of Sociology
Government First Grade College, Telsang, Belagavi
Karnataka, India

Abstract

Jainism has contributed an important ethical and intellectual tradition to Indian education. Its approach to learning is grounded in ahimsa (non-violence), anekantavada (the many-sided nature of truth), aparigraha (non-possession), self-discipline, and self-study. Historically, Jain monasteries, basadis, and religious centres functioned not only as places of worship but also as centres for teaching, manuscript preservation, debate, and moral training. This article examines Jain education through a sociological lens: education is understood as a social institution that transmits values, builds group identity, shapes behaviour, and reproduces or challenges social inequalities. The study uses secondary sources and a qualitative, descriptive method. It finds that Jain educational thought promotes ethical citizenship, respect for diverse viewpoints, disciplined living, and social responsibility. At the same time, the tradition must be studied critically in relation to gender, caste, economic access, and the changing needs of modern, secular education. Jain ideas remain relevant to contemporary discussions of value education, environmental responsibility, peaceful coexistence, and inclusive classroom dialogue.

KEYWORDS: Jainism, education, sociology, ahimsa, anekantavada, aparigraha, value education, socialization, Indian education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is more than the transfer of literacy and occupational skills; it is also a process of socialization through which people learn values, norms, identities, and ways of relating to others. From this perspective, religious traditions can influence education by defining what counts as knowledge, moral conduct, discipline, and a good life.

Jainism is one of India's major ancient religious-philosophical traditions. Jain educational thought connects intellectual learning with ethical conduct and spiritual self-development. Historical accounts describe Jain religious institutions, including chaityas, basadis, and mathas, as spaces that developed educational roles, particularly in regions such as Karnataka. Jain traditions also encouraged teaching through local languages and preserved religious and literary knowledge through manuscripts and oral instruction. A sociological study of

Jainism and education therefore asks: How do Jain values shape learners? How does education maintain Jain community identity? In what ways can Jain concepts contribute to modern educational institutions?

CORE CONCEPTS

- a) **Ahimsa:** Ahimsa means non-violence in thought, speech, and action. In education, it can encourage empathy, respectful communication, non-bullying, and peaceful resolution of disagreement. Rather than treating academic achievement as competition alone, this principle frames learning as a responsibility toward other people and living beings.
- b) **Anekantavada:** Anekantavada is the Jain idea that reality has multiple aspects and cannot always be fully understood from one viewpoint. Sociologically, this is valuable for pluralistic classrooms because it encourages students to listen to different perspectives without assuming that disagreement automatically makes another person completely wrong. It supports dialogue, tolerance, and critical thinking.
- c) **Aparigraha:** Aparigraha means non-attachment or non-possession. In educational terms, it can be linked to simple living, responsible consumption, and environmental awareness. It challenges the idea that education should only produce wealth or status, emphasizing instead ethical use of knowledge and resources.
- d) **Svadhyaya and Self-Discipline:** Svadhyaya, or self-study, emphasizes reflective and continuous learning. Jain educational traditions treated reading, questioning, reflection, memorization, and teaching as connected elements of learning. This approach suggests that students should not merely receive information but should question, think, and apply ideas in life.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative and descriptive research design. It is based on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, historical studies, and digitized academic works on Jain education and Jain philosophy.

The analysis uses a sociological framework focused on four areas:

- a) **Socialization:** How Jain education transmits moral norms such as compassion, truthfulness, and self-control.
- b) **Social identity:** How religious learning helps sustain Jain community traditions, language, rituals, and collective memory.
- c) **Social integration:** How ideas such as non-violence and pluralism may support peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.
- d) **Social inequality:** How access to education may vary according to gender, class, location, and institutional resources.

The study is limited because it relies on published secondary material rather than field interviews, surveys, or observation in Jain schools and institutions.

THE ROLE OF JAINISM IN SHAPING THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The role of Jainism in shaping the Indian education system spans from ancient times to the modern era. By establishing a culture of literacy, institutionalizing libraries, and introducing inclusive values, Jainism has left a permanent imprint on India's educational heritage. The Jain system of education is deeply rooted in the ultimate spiritual goal of **Moksha** (liberation from the cycle of rebirth) by shedding karmic impurities. Unlike systems focused solely on intellectual or economic gains, Jain pedagogy treats education as a tool for the holistic development of the inner and outer self.

The Jain curriculum was vast and highly balanced, encompassing both spiritual and secular domains. It included the study of Jain metaphysics, ethics, cosmology, advanced mathematics, logical systems, and linguistics. A unique pillar of this education system is Anekantavada (the doctrine of the many-sidedness of reality). This philosophy taught students that truth is relativistic and pluralistic. In practice, it nurtured immense intellectual freedom and liberalism; students were taught to appreciate diverse viewpoints and were explicitly told they did not always have to agree blindly with their spiritual teachers.

- 1. Preservation of Knowledge and the "Bhandara" System:** One of Jainism's most critical contributions to Indian education is the preservation of rare manuscripts and texts across various subjects.
 - a) The Repository Network:** Ancient and medieval Jains established **Shastra Bhandaras** (temple libraries) across India (such as in Jaisalmer, Patan, and Moodbidri).
 - b) Secular Preservation:** These libraries did not just preserve Jain texts; they protected vital ancient Indian works on astronomy, mathematics, grammar, logic, medicine, and literature that might have otherwise been lost to time and invasions.
 - c) The Copying Tradition:** Copying and donating manuscripts was considered an act of high religious merit (Jnana Dana), ensuring continuous educational resources for scholars.
- 2. Democratization and Inclusivity of Learning:** Jainism was instrumental in breaking down the socio-religious barriers that restricted education in ancient India.
 - a) Rejection of the Caste System:** Jain schools (Pathshalas) opened doors to students from all social backgrounds, rejecting the idea that only certain castes were entitled to knowledge.
 - b) Promotion of Vernacular Languages:** While traditional education heavily relied on Sanskrit, Jain monks taught in the mother tongue or local dialects (like Prakrit and Apabhramsa). This made education accessible to the masses rather than just the elite.
 - c) Women's Education:** The Jain monastic order included an active community of nuns (Aryikas) who were highly educated, setting an early historical precedent for female literacy and education in India.
- 3. Advanced Pedagogical Methods:** Jain educators pioneered structured learning techniques designed to move beyond passive listening to active assimilation:

- a) **The Five-Step Learning Cycle:** Instruction followed a scientific method: Vachana (reading the text), Prachchana (asking analytical questions), Anupreksha (deep contemplation), Amnaya (systematic memorization and revision), and Dharmopadesha (sharing knowledge with others).
- b) **Intellectual Freedom (Anekantavada):** The Jain philosophy of Anekantavada (the pluralism of viewpoints) was deeply embedded in classrooms. Students were trained in **Syadvada** (the logic of relative truth), which encouraged them to look at a problem from multiple dimensions and respect differing intellectual opinions.
- 4. **Institutional Pillars: Upashrayas and Pathshalas:** Jain education was delivered through a well-organized system of institutional centers:
 - a) **Upashrayas and Apasaras:** Temporary or permanent monasteries where monks stayed and taught local communities, functioning as localized centers of higher learning.
 - b) **Pathshalas:** Community-funded schools attached to temples where young students were taught basic literacy, mathematics, and ethics.
- 5. **The Modern Legacy: Philanthropy and Institutions:** The ancient tradition of Jnana Dana (the gift of knowledge) remains highly active in modern India through the Jain community's philanthropic efforts.
 - a) **Modern Universities & Colleges:** The community runs highly ranked modern educational networks across India, including institutions like the Jain Deemed-to-be-University (Bengaluru), Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Institute of Indology (Ahmedabad), and thousands of schools, engineering colleges, and management institutes nationwide.
 - b) **Emphasis on Value-Based Education:** Modern Jain institutions heavily integrate Ahimsa (non-violence) and environmental ethics into their curriculum, advocating for holistic, values-driven development alongside professional training.
- 6. **Social Inclusivity and Legacy:** Jainism profoundly democratised education in ancient India by denouncing the rigid caste system and class hierarchies.
 - a) **Universal and Co-education:** Monasteries and schools welcomed individuals from all social backgrounds, promoting co-education and making significant strides in women's education.
 - b) **Use of Mother Tongue:** Rather than restricting knowledge to elite languages, teaching was often conducted in local vernaculars (mother tongues) to ensure universal accessibility.
 - c) **Institutional Support:** Backed heavily by the thriving Jain merchant communities, the education system left a lasting infrastructure footprint by establishing extensive libraries (Shastar Bhandars), maintaining historical manuscripts, and integrating holistic community welfare like medical support alongside centers of learning.

THE SCIENTIFIC FIVE-STEP METHOD OF TEACHING

Historical records indicate that the Jain system used a highly structured, scientific five-part pedagogical method to facilitate deep learning:

- 1) **Vachana (Reading):** The initial step of reading and reciting the sacred canonical texts (Agamas).
- 2) **Prachchana (Asking Questions):** Encouraging active student participation and critical inquiry by questioning the teacher.
- 3) **Anupreksha (Pondering Over):** Reflective meditation and deep contemplation on the lessons taught to internalise the concepts.
- 4) **Amhaya (Learning by Parts):** Breaking down complex philosophical or scientific concepts into smaller, digestible units for systemic memorisation.
- 5) **Dharmapalesa (Preaching):** Presenting and articulating the learned values to the wider masses, reinforcing the student's mastery.

RESULTS

The review indicates that Jain education combines intellectual development with ethical and spiritual formation. It historically used religious institutions as knowledge centres and promoted methods involving reading, questioning, contemplation, memorization, and public teaching.

In the Jain philosophy of education, learning is viewed not merely as the acquisition of intellectual facts, but as a transformative process. It is deeply rooted in the ultimate spiritual goal of Moksha (liberation) and the purification of the Jiva (soul) from Karma (material bondages).

Table: 01 Jain educational emphasis

Dimension	Jain educational emphasis	Sociological significance
Aim of education	Self-development, ethical conduct, and liberation	Shapes moral identity and social behaviour
Teaching method	Reading, questioning, reflection, memorization, preaching	Encourages active learning and transmission of culture
Core value	Ahimsa	Supports empathy, non-violence, and peaceful interaction
View of knowledge	Anekantavada	Encourages tolerance of multiple perspectives
Lifestyle orientation	Aparigraha	Promotes restrained consumption and ecological responsibility
Institution	Monasteries, basadis, and religious centres	Links community organization with education
Language	Use of mother tongue and regional communication	Broadens cultural participation and knowledge transmission

The table shows that Jain education was not limited to reading or gaining employment skills. It aimed to develop a person's character, way of thinking, and relationship with society.

- 1. Aim of education:** Jain education focused on self-development, moral behaviour, and spiritual progress. Sociologically, this helps learners build a moral identity and act responsibly toward family, community, and society.
- 2. Teaching method:** Learning involved reading scriptures, asking questions, reflecting on ideas, memorizing important knowledge, and listening to religious teaching. These methods made education active and helped pass cultural values from one generation to another.
- 3. Core value: Ahimsa:** *Ahimsa* means non-violence in thoughts, words, and actions. In social life, it encourages kindness, empathy, peaceful behaviour, and respect for all living beings.
- 4. View of knowledge: Anekantavada:** *Anekantavada* teaches that truth can have many sides. This encourages students to consider different opinions, avoid intolerance, and discuss disagreements respectfully.
- 5. Lifestyle orientation: Aparigraha:** *Aparigraha* means limiting excessive possessions and desires. It teaches simple living, self-control, and responsible use of resources, which is especially relevant to environmental protection today.
- 6. Institution:** Jain monasteries, *basadis*, and religious centres served as places of worship as well as learning. They connected education with community life and helped preserve Jain traditions, language, and literature.
- 7. Language:** The use of mother tongues and regional languages made learning more accessible to local people. It also helped communities preserve their cultural identity and spread knowledge beyond elite groups.

Overall, the table highlights that Jain education combined intellectual learning with ethical values, social responsibility, and cultural preservation. Historical studies report that Jain education stressed social, economic, and spiritual purposes, while Jain religious centres became important sites of learning. Some accounts also note the presence of women in Jain learning contexts, although real educational access would have varied historically across communities and periods.

Table: 02 Contemporary educational issue

Contemporary educational issue	Possible Jain contribution
Bullying and violence	Ahimsa-based empathy and non-violent communication
Religious and cultural diversity	Anekantavada-based dialogue and respect for differing views
Consumerism	Aparigraha and responsible use of resources
Academic dishonesty	Truthfulness, accountability, and

	respect for intellectual work
Environmental crisis	Care for living beings and limits on unnecessary consumption
Passive learning	Self-study, questioning, and reflection
Use of mother tongue and regional communication	Broadens cultural participation and knowledge transmission

This table connects present-day problems in education with Jain ethical ideas. It shows how traditional values can be used to improve students' behaviour, relationships, and responsibility.

- 1. Bullying and violence:** Jainism teaches *ahimsa*, or non-violence. In schools, this can encourage students to avoid hurting others through physical actions, words, online messages, or exclusion. Empathy and peaceful communication can help resolve conflicts.
- 2. Religious and cultural diversity:** *Anekantavada* teaches that truth may be understood from different viewpoints. This can help students respect classmates from different religions, castes, languages, and cultures. It promotes discussion instead of prejudice or intolerance.
- 3. Consumerism:** *Aparigraha* teaches limited possessions and freedom from excessive desire. Students can learn to avoid wasteful buying, value needs over wants, and use money, food, water, and materials responsibly.
- 4. Academic dishonesty:** Jain ethics emphasizes truthfulness and personal responsibility. In education, this means avoiding cheating, plagiarism, copying assignments, or unfair examination practices. Students are encouraged to respect their own learning and the intellectual work of others.
- 5. Environmental crisis:** Jainism promotes care for all living beings and discourages unnecessary harm. This can encourage environmental awareness, such as reducing waste, conserving water, protecting animals, and using natural resources carefully.
- 6. Passive learning:** Jain education values *svadhyaya*, or self-study, along with questioning and reflection. Instead of only memorizing what teachers say, students should read independently, ask questions, think critically, and connect lessons to everyday life.

Overall, the table suggests that Jain values can support a more peaceful, honest, environmentally responsible, and active educational environment. Modern interpretations connect Jain values with inclusive learning, sustainability, mindfulness, and academic integrity. These applications should not be treated as replacements for scientific,

constitutional, or secular education; rather, they can serve as ethical resources within a democratic and plural society.

Conclusion

Jainism offers a significant educational philosophy in which learning is inseparable from ethical responsibility. Its key principles ahimsa, anekantavada, aparigraha, and svadhyaya connect education with compassion, pluralism, self-restraint, critical reflection, and disciplined living. Sociologically, Jain education is important because it helps explain how communities transmit values, preserve knowledge, develop collective identity, and encourage social cooperation.

Its most relevant contemporary contribution is the idea that education should develop not only employable individuals but also thoughtful and responsible citizens. A Jain-informed educational approach can encourage learners to examine multiple viewpoints, reduce harmful behaviour, respect life, and use knowledge responsibly. However, any modern application must remain inclusive and critically attentive to inequalities related to class, gender, caste, and access to educational resources.

References

1. Batham, B. (2023). Indian knowledge systems: Traditions, science, and philosophy. AGPH Books.
2. Carrithers, M., & Humphrey, C. (Eds.). (1991). The assembly of listeners: Jains in society. Cambridge University Press.
3. Dasgupta, D.C., & Banerjee, S. (2000). Jaina system of education. Motilal Banarsidass Publishing House.
4. Das Gupta, D. C. Jain System of Education. Digital Library of India / Internet Archive.
5. "Jaina Education in Early India: A Historical Outline." History Research Journal.
6. "Jain Philosophy and Education: A Critical Examination of Values." Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities, 2025.
7. "From Ahimsa to Academic Integrity: Jain Values in Contemporary Education." International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, 2025.
8. Khadabadi, B. K. Jaina Path of Education.
9. Leumann, E. (1998). Catalogue of the papers of Ernst Leumann: Ancient Jain narrative texts and manuscript fragments (B. Plutat, Comp.). Institute for the Culture and History of India and Tibet, University of Hamburg.
10. Paleeri, S. (2020). A brief history of educational developments in India: Towards an educated society. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
11. Purshotam. (2014). The impact of philosophy of Jainism on various aspects of education. Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies, 2(12), 1255-1262.
12. Socio-Economic and Educational Development Society. (2018). Role of Jainism in the propagation of learning systems. MGM Publications.
13. National Commission for Minorities. (2019). Study report on "Contribution of Jain community in the field of education" (Report No. NCM-2019-SEEDS). Government of India.