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Samrat Samprati — The Jain Ashoka and Mauryan Patron of Jainism

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HISTORY & CULTURE**GS1**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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Samrat Samprati — The Jain Ashoka and Mauryan Patron of Jainism

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WHY IN NEWS

A museum dedicated to **Samrat Samprati** — the fifth Mauryan Emperor and the greatest royal patron of Jainism — was inaugurated at **Koba, Gandhinagar (Gujarat)** on March 31, 2026, coinciding with **Mahavir Jayanti** (the birth anniversary of the 24th Tirthankara, Lord Mahavira).

WHO WAS SAMRAT SAMPRATI?

Samprati was the **fifth emperor of the Maurya dynasty**, ruling approximately **c. 224–215 BCE**. He was the grandson of **Emperor Ashoka** and son of Crown Prince Kunala — making him part of the dynasty's later period when it began to fragment.

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Dynasty	Maurya
Reign	c. 224–215 BCE
Grandfather	Emperor Ashoka
Father	Prince Kunala (blinded by Ashoka's queen Tishyaraksha)
Capital	Pataliputra (Patna, Bihar)
Religion patronised	Jainism (Shvetambara tradition)
Called	“Jain Ashoka”

SAMPRATI'S CONTRIBUTION TO JAINISM

While his grandfather Ashoka was Buddhism's great royal patron, Samprati devoted his reign entirely to the propagation of **Jainism** — earning the epithet “**Jain Ashoka**”:

- Built approximately **1,25,000 Jain temples** across his empire
- Commissioned **12.5 million Jain idols** (pratimas)
- Established **~700 charitable houses** providing food, shelter, and medical care (daana shalas)
- Sent **Jain missionary expeditions** to Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Central Asia
- Rooted Jainism firmly in **Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan** — where it remains strongest today

JAINISM — KEY CONCEPTS FOR UPSC

Tirthankaras

Jainism recognises **24 Tirthankaras** (“ford-makers”) — enlightened beings who showed the path to liberation:

TIRTHANKARA	SIGNIFICANCE
Rishabhadeva (Adinatha)	1st Tirthankara; mentioned in Vedas and Vishnu Purana
Parshvanatha	23rd; historical figure (~8th century BCE); taught four vows (Chaturyama)
Mahavira (Vardhamana)	24th; 599–527 BCE; added Brahmacharya (celibacy) as 5th vow; contemporaneous with the Buddha

Jain Philosophy

CONCEPT	MEANING
Ahimsa	Non-violence — the supreme principle
Anekantavada	Many-sidedness of truth; no absolute perspective
Syadvada	Qualified predication — all statements are conditional
Karma	Material particles that bind the soul (jiva) based on actions, speech, thought
Moksha	Liberation; achieved by shedding all karma through right faith, knowledge, conduct (Triratna)
Jiva / Ajiva	Soul vs. non-soul — the two fundamental categories

Two Major Sects

SECT	CHARACTERISTIC	GEOGRAPHY
Shvetambara	White-clad monks; women can attain moksha	Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra
Digambara	Sky-clad (naked) monks; women cannot attain moksha in current form	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, MP

JAINISM VS. BUDDHISM — UPSC COMPARISON

FEATURE	JAINISM	BUDDHISM
Founder	Mahavira (24th Tirthankara)	Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)
Date	~6th century BCE	~6th century BCE
Soul (Atman)	Believes in eternal, individual soul (jiva)	Denies permanent soul (anatta)
God	No creator God; liberated souls as ideal	No creator God; Buddha as the ideal
Ahimsa	Absolute; even microbes not to be harmed	Important but more contextual
Royal patron	Samprati, Chandragupta Maurya (converted)	Ashoka, Kanishka
Texts	Agamas (Shvetambara); Angas	Tripitaka (Theravada); Mahayana sutras

MAHAVIR JAYANTI

- Celebrates the birth of **Vardhamana Mahavira** (599 BCE, Vaishali, Bihar)
- Observed on the **13th day of Chaitra Shukla Paksha**
- A **gazetted public holiday** in India
- Jains observe fasting, prayers, and processions

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1 — History, Art & Culture:

- Maurya dynasty and its cultural legacy — Ashoka (Buddhism) vs. Samprati (Jainism)
- Jain philosophy, Tirthankaras, Shvetambara vs. Digambara distinction
- Jainism's contributions to art: Dilwara temples (Abu Road), Ranakpur, Khajuraho Jain temples, Sravanabelagola (Gomateshwara statue)
- Interaction between heterodox (Nastika) traditions — Jainism, Buddhism, Charvaka — and Vedic Brahmanical tradition

FACTS CORNER

- **Samprati's capital:** Pataliputra (modern Patna) and possibly Ujjain

- **Chandragupta Maurya** (founder of Maurya dynasty) — according to Jain tradition, abdicated the throne and became a Jain monk under Bhadrabahu
- **Dilwara Temples:** Famous Jain marble temples at Abu Road, Rajasthan; built by Vimal Shah (1031 CE)
- **Sravanabelagola:** Karnataka; 57-foot monolithic statue of **Gomateshwara (Bahubali)** — tallest monolithic stone statue in India
- **Jain population in India:** ~4.5 million (0.4% of population); among the wealthiest communities per capita
- **Mahavira's Parinirvana:** 527 BCE, Pavapuri (Bihar) — celebrated as **Diwali** by Jains
- **Jain logic (Syadvada):** Influenced Indian philosophy; every statement must be qualified with “perhaps” (syat)

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Bharat Choudhary

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