

*Summary of the Paper*

Śramaṇa, Vol. 62, No. 1  
January - March 2011

## **Wilderness in the Jaina Śramaṇa Ascetic Tradition Its Contemporary Context**

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The 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE witnessed the appearance of a new religious movement, whose members' only objective was to obtain liberation through giving up household existence and embracing independent life of wandering mendicants who would exclusively engage in strict celibate discipline free from the shackles of the society and in austere conduct in the wilderness. This type of ascetics became known as *Śramaṇas*. Buddhist and Jains belonged to this tradition and they flourished for over two centuries in modern day Bihar, then known as Magadha before flourishing in other part of India. The unprecedented commitment and intensity of Jaina mendicants to this conduct is evident in Long's comparative definition of ascetics from different parts of the world as:

'One who practices austerities, usually in the form of renunciation, in the form of renunciation, in order to advance spiritually; a relatively mild form of asceticism would be the Christian practice of giving up certain luxuries during the period of Lent; a relatively difficult form of the asceticism would be the practice of constant nudity by a Digambara Jaina monk'.

The *Śramaṇa* movement allowed the person to separate from the Indian householders' values and enter the wilderness within which any claim to worldly possessions, inheritance, social position, family, or male successors was completely uprooted and annihilated. The process of abandoning a householder's existence was extricably connected with wandering away from Human settlements. This practice is expressed as *Araṇaya Vanavāsa*, *Vivikta-sayyāsana*, *Jinakalpī* in different Indian philosophical systems.

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The paper analyses this practice from Mahāvīra's time to-date, through various Jaina texts but primarily story literature, the places most popular (Śravaṇabelgola, caves and how they were made worthy of performing austerities) for such practice and the current state of this practice amongst Jain ascetics. The strong presence of the wilderness-narrative literature, if only in the background, suggest the continued importance of the role of wilderness as a support and reminder of the Jaina ideal of complete and unequivocal renunciation with its inevitable consequences of the life devoid of all worldly residue and filled with utter *tapas* in the wilderness. What is more, the *vanavāsa* state of mind is not only thriving in a latent and unrealized form but is actively being brought back to life by capable individuals.

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