

# The *Nikkhamaṇa* of Mahāvīra According to the Old Biographies<sup>1</sup>

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The history of the Jaina ceremonies of ordination is yet to be investigated.<sup>2</sup> Next to nothing is known about the missing links between contemporary practices and the ceremonies of ordination of common mendicants at the time of Mahāvīra and his immediate successors, as described in the hagiographic and narrative literature of the Jaina tradition. The two earliest procedures of monastic initiation mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures are the Buddha's so-called "self-ordination" (*svāmaṇ upasaṃpadā*), literally a contradiction in terms, turning him into a *svayambhū*, a self-created monk, of whom no extensive detail is given,<sup>3</sup> and the use of the short formula *ehi bhikkhu* or *ehi bhikṣu*, "come monk," by means of which disciples were apparently ordained by the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> The only evidence we have on the world-renunciation of Mahāvīra are three short descriptions in some of the earliest Śvetāmbara narratives of his life-story. Many of the contents in these accounts, such as interventions of the gods, are evidently legendary. Yet modern scholars regard at least some of the motifs of the highly stereotyped stories as rooted in historical fact, whether or not reflecting Mahāvīra's actual way of proceeding or practices prevalent in the Jaina tradition at a later time.

The following comparison of the overlapping, and partly contradictory, accounts of Mahāvīra's world-renunciation is aimed at identifying a shared core narrative, in order to compare and contrast it with the relatively well documented, nowadays to a large extent standardised rules and regulations and ceremonies for world-renunciation, initiation, and ordination — three steps that need to be carefully distinguished — in the Śvetāmbara (and Digambara) literature and practice. Once the core elements mentioned in the earliest relevant texts have been identified, missing links in the development of monastic jurisprudence and ceremonial can be further explored.

## Early Prescriptions and Narrative Accounts of the Ordination of Ordinary Mendicants

It is, as P. Dundas pointed out (2002: 24), "fruitless to attempt to locate a historical Mahāvīra outwith the parameters of the texts which describe him." More than anyone else, K. Bruhn (2003: 74f.) has scrutinised the biographies of Mahāvīra, particularly those in the universal histories.<sup>5</sup> When comparing them with the available information on Pārśva, he came to the sobering conclusion that:

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<sup>1</sup>The article is a revised version of a presentation prepared for the *Prakrit International Conference* in Śravaṇabeḷagoḷa on 3 November 2017. For a fuller exposition, see Flügel 2018: 393–412 and a forthcoming extended version of this article.

<sup>2</sup>Preliminary comparative work on contemporary rites of consecration was published by Shānta 1985 and by Flügel 2018: 377ff. (chapter 5), who also offers an analysis of the self-ordination of Mahāvīra and of early practices of monastic ordination.

<sup>3</sup>In the famous dialogue with the "argumentative" naked Jaina mendicant Saccaka, the Buddha is presented as describing the shaving of the head and putting on an ochre robe as the key acts before going forth: "[W]hen I was still young, black-haired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life, having shaved off my hair and beard — though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces — I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness." (MN 36).

<sup>4</sup>Tournier 1995: 69, 85.

<sup>5</sup>Besides B. Bhatt 1993, Balbir 1993, and Mette 2010.

“Perhaps we do not know anything reliable about the two personalities.” Considering this as a correct assessment of the facts, I will look at the narratives of Mahāvīra’s life only as texts, and study inter-textual relations, disregarding the practical implications that may follow from its results for one or other interpretation of Jaina history. Before I come to Mahāvīra’s extra-ordinary *nikkhamāṇa*, I shall start with a brief glance on the main sources of information presented in the Śvetāmbara canon on the ordination of common monks.<sup>6</sup>

The oldest surviving rules and regulations pertaining to the ordination of ordinary Jaina mendicants are probably those given in *Vavahāra* 10, a text which has been placed amid the earlier *Cheyāsutta* texts, and hence can possibly be dated some 150 years after Mahāvīra, or later. Amongst other matters, it lists the personal qualities regarded as preconditions for initiation. Section 10.11 distinguishes two stages of ordination, *pavvāvaṇa* and *uvaṭṭhāvaṇā*, which Schubring (1966: 88) translated respectively as “preliminary admission/ordination,” and as “final admission/ordination” (*uvaṭṭhāvaṇā*),<sup>7</sup> in view of parallel classical Buddhist procedures. *Dasaveyāliya* 4.11–17, a text which, as a whole, is ranked amongst the ‘seniors’ of the canon, that is, its oldest textual layer, for the first time the full ritual text for the adoption of the 5+1 *mahāvīryas* at the time of the final admission into the monastic community is spelled out.<sup>8</sup> Yet, neither these nor other prescriptive *Cheyāsutta*-texts offer information on the ceremonial context. Deo (1956: 216), therefore, suspected detailed prescriptions on the *vihi* to have been created in a much later period, and practices presupposed by the *Cheyāsuttas* to have been identical with older procedures:

No details regarding the actual process either of initiation or of confirmation pertaining to the ceremonial aspect of it can be had in the Chedasūtras or the Niryuktis. It may be, therefore, that those items remained unchanged, and perhaps were the same as given in the Aṅgas.

But what can be found in the Aṅgas? Only narrative texts of a more or less legendary character.

#### The Going Forth of Prince Mehā

With regard to the Śvetāmbara tradition, it is not the description of the self-ordination of Mahāvīra that serves as an early precursor, if not paradigm, for subsequent practice, but the narrative of Mahāvīra’s ordination of Meha Kumāra in the *Nāyadhammakahāo* (NDK,) 1.102-119. The fact that Mehā is not listed amongst the disciples of Mahāvīra in the Jaina *itihāsa* literature raises further questions, first, concerning the historicity of Mehā, and of the *gaṇaharas*, and, second, regarding the attribution of the permission to perform initiations not only to Mahāvīra, but also to the *gaṇaharas*, which betrays a late-canonical date of the text and points to a retrospective projection of later practices onto Mahāvīra’s *saṃgha*.

The procedure of “going forth” or “going into exile” (*pavvāvaṇa*) of Mehā depicted by the NDK echoes the depictions of Mahāvīra’s *nikkhamāṇa*, and therefore is however regarded by Mette (2010: 247), “with the exception of the objectively required changes,” as the paradigm for the narrative of Mahāvīra’s renunciation in *Jiṇacariya* 110–116, which she evidently regards as an even later text. The changes concern the following three elements that are missing in the narratives of Mahāvīra’s self-ordination, the role of relatives, the existence of an established mendicant order, with established rules and regulations:

<sup>6</sup> I am not aware of the description of an initiation ceremony for nuns in the Āgamas.

<sup>7</sup> Ratnacandra 1923/1988 II: 277 “fresh admission after expulsion”.

<sup>8</sup> The text is still recited today.

1. The formal request by the parents addressed to Mahāvīra to accept Mehā as his disciple, and Mahāvīra's permission.
2. (After the plucking of his own hair) Mehā's threefold circumambulation of Mahāvīra (*tikkhutto*).
3. Acceptance (*paḍivajjanayā*) and observance (*saṃjama*) of the teachings and rules of conduct taught on request by Mahāvīra.

Mahāvīra's teachings (*dhamma*) are characterised merely by a series of adjectives, referring to the procedure of going forth (*pavvāvaṇa*), the shaving of the head (apparently by Mahāvīra) (*muṃḍa*), and the subsequent instruction (*sikkhā*) regarding right conduct (*āyāra*), alms-round (*goyara*), discipline (*vinaya*), good conduct as defined by vows (*carāṇa*), periodical rites and duties (*karāṇa*), self-discipline, asceticism and atonement (*jāyā*), and degrees of moderation (*māyā*) (NDK<sub>1</sub> 118).

There is no mention of any formal acceptance of particular vows. The classical *sāmāyīya-vaya* and the *mahā-vvaya* are specifically not referred to, neither in this context nor in the context of Mahāvīra's self-ordination. The single-handed bestowal of the ordination to Mehā by Mahāvīra, *sayameva pavvāviyaṃ*, is narrated, albeit preceded by Mehā's self-determined *pavajjā*, symbolised by the pulling out of his own hair, no ceremonial detail furnished, such as the provision of Mehā with the basic paraphernalia of a Jaina-monk, which is, however, alluded to in NDK 109.

A possibly older passage in *Sūyagaḍa* 2.7.40, describing the conversion of the monk Udaya from the group of Pārśva to the group of Mahāvīra, mentions the five great vows that most standard biographies of Mahāvīra attribute to him: "Udaka [...] passed from the creed which enjoins four vows, to the creed which enjoins the five great vows and the Pratikramaṇa". A ceremony of vow-taking, in addition to instruction, is not mentioned, but may be implied.

#### Mahāvīra's Going Forth

Only a few passages of three old sources offer information on the procedure of Mahāvīra's world-renunciation: ĀvN 458, Āyāra 2.15.2–29, Jinacariya 94 and 110–116. Their contents are presented and discussed in the hypothetical historical sequence proposed by B. Bhatt (1993).

#### (A) ĀvN 458 (Dāra Gāha): 13 Events in Mahāvīra's Life

The following 13 keywords (*dāra-gāha*) in the Āvassayanijjuttī summarise the significant episodes in the life of Mahāvīra leading up to his act of word-renunciation:

*sumiṇa*<sub>1</sub>-*m-avahār'*<sub>2</sub> ***abhiggaha***<sub>3</sub> *jammaṇa*<sub>4</sub>-*m-abhisesa*<sub>5</sub> *vuddhi*<sub>6</sub> *saraṇaṇ*<sub>7</sub> *ca bhesaṇa*<sub>8</sub> *vivāh'*<sub>9</sub>,  
*avecca*<sub>10</sub> ***dāne***<sub>11</sub> ***saṃboha***<sub>12</sub> ***nikkhamāṇe***<sub>13</sub>

"1: dream, 2: transfer, 3: **decision**, 4: birth, 5: anointment, 6: growth, 7: remembering, 8: terribleness, 9: marriage, 10: progeny, 11: **gift**, 12: **awakening**, 13: **renouncing the world**"  
(tr. Bhatt 1993: 93).

Only 10 of the altogether 1623 verses of the ĀvN are dedicated to Mahāvīra's life (ĀvN 450–460, cf. ĀvBh 45–110).<sup>9</sup> And only 2 concern the sequence of events indicated by *dāra-gāhā* 11–13, without offering much further detail on the keyword "going forth"<sub>13</sub> (ĀvN 459–460).<sup>10</sup> Life-events after his *nikkhamāṇa* are not mentioned at all.

<sup>9</sup> Bruhn 1954: 41.

<sup>10</sup> Translated by 1993: 137.

The act of renunciation is usually described in general terms, either as *nikkhamaṇa* or as *pavvajjā*, or as *pavvai(y)a* (Skt. *pravrajita*), which Jaina-literature uses either as an adjective, “gone forth,” or as a substantive, designating “the one who has left the house in order to live as a mendicant” or the “monastic ordination.” Further sparse details associated with the keyword *nikkhamaṇa*, concerning the practices of plucking the hair (ĀvBh 106) and the renunciation of all sinful conduct (ĀvBh 109),<sup>11</sup> are only offered in the verses ĀvBh 89–111 (as well as the *Mahābhāṣya*),<sup>12</sup> an anonymous text, which Leumann (1934: 29), in view of its contents, placed in the time of Manu, and in the later Jaina commentarial literature.

In a formulation resembling Āyāra<sub>1,2</sub> 2.15.22b, ĀvBh 109 describes the renunciation of all sinful conduct explicitly as the act of self-imposition of a vow (*abhiggaha*):

*kāūṇa namokkāraṃ siddhāṇam-abhiggahaṃ tu so giṇhe |*  
*savvaṃ me akaraṇijjaṃ pāvamti carittam-ārūḍho ||*

Balbir (1993: 114, 134-7) and Bhatt (1993: 109f.) identified the following textual parallels regarding the pertinent episodes *abhiggaha*, *dāna*, *saṃboha*, *nikkhamaṇa*:

PARALLELS BETWEEN ĀVN 258, ĀVBH, ĀYĀRA 2.15.2-29, JC 2-109

	Bhatt 1993: 109f.		Balbir 1993: 114, 134-7	
Abhiggaha	ĀvBh 58	Āyāra 4	ĀvBh 46-68	JC 2-109
Dāna	ĀvN 459-460 etc.	Āyāra 2.15.17.i-iii	ĀvBh 81-82, 84	Āyāra 2.15.17.i-iii
Samboha	ĀvBh 88 (and 212), 86 (= 214), 87 (= 215)	Āyāra 2.15.17.iv-vi	ĀvBh 81-88	
Nikkhamaṇa	ĀvN 459-460, ĀvBh 89-92, 94-101, 103-105, 108, 110-111	Āyāra 2.15.18-23	ĀvN 459-460	Āyāra 2.15

### The Theory of B. Bhatt

Subsequent to Bruhn (1954: 37),<sup>13</sup> Bhatt (1993: 93, 109f.) found that the structure of the biography of Mahāvīra in Āyāra 2.15.2-29 corresponds to the chain of keywords of ĀvN 458,<sup>14</sup> and that many affiliated passages are phrased similarly.<sup>15</sup> He inferred from this, following Leumann (1934), that the ĀvN version must have been the source of Āyāra 2.15, rather than the other way round. Following Jacobi’s (1884b: lii–liii) thesis of the primarily “liturgical function” of the JC, serving in the first instance as a vehicle for the presentation of the 5 *kalyāṇakas*,<sup>16</sup> he argued that Āyāra 2.15, in line

<sup>11</sup> ĀvBh 109: *kāūṇa namokkāraṃ siddhāṇam-abhiggahaṃ tu so giṇhe | savvaṃ me akaraṇijjaṃ pāvamti carittam-ārūḍho ||* The formulation is a variant of Āyāra<sub>1,2</sub> 2.15.22b. Balbir 1993: 137 explained the formula as: “la resolution de ne jamais commettre d’acte mauvais.”

<sup>12</sup> See Leumann 1934, Balbir 1993, Bruhn 1998.

<sup>13</sup> “Im einzelnen folgen Āv und HTr [=TŚPC] durchgehend Āy., Jiṇa-c., Viy.” (Bruhn 1954: 37).

<sup>14</sup> Bhatt 1993: 109f. constructs the following parallels between the *dvāra-gāthas* ĀvN 258 and Āyāra 2.15.2-29 on the one hand and of ĀvN and ĀvBh on the other hand: *abhigraha*: *ĀvBh 58* ~ Āyāra 4; *dāna*: ĀvN 459-460 etc. ~ Āyāra 2.15.17.i-iii; *saṃboha*: ĀvBh 88 (and 212), 86 (= 214), 87 (= 215) ~ Āyāra 2.15.17.iv-vi; *niṣkramaṇa*: ĀvBh 89-92, 94-101, 103-105, 108, 110-111 ~ Āyāra 2.15.18-23. Balbir 1993: 114, 134-7 offers the following parallels: *abhigraha*: ĀvBh “46-68” ~ JC “2-109;” *dāna*: ĀvBh 81-82, 84 ~ Āyāra 2.15.17.i-iii; *saṃboha*: ĀvBh “81-88”; *niṣkramaṇa* (“ordination”): ĀvN 459-460 ~ Āyāra “2.15.”

<sup>15</sup> For example the crucial passage stating the act of world-renunciation in prose and verse: Āyāra 2.15.22: [...] *siddhāṇam namokkāraṃ karei, karettā savvaṃ me akaraṇijjaṃ pāvam kammam ti kaṭṭu sāmāiyam carittam paḍivajjai* [...]. ĀvBh 109: *kāūṇa namokkāraṃ siddhāṇam-abhiggahaṃ tu so giṇhe | savvaṃ me akaraṇijjaṃ pāvam ti carittam-ārūḍho ||*

<sup>16</sup> In view of the entirely different style, Jacobi 1879a: 23 ascribed the extensive descriptions in the JC of the identical dreams of Mahāvīra’s mother Devānandā and surrogate mother Triśalā after the settlement of his soul in the womb and

with its title *Bhāvanā* (reflections, clauses),<sup>17</sup> treats first of all the “5 mahā-vratas and the 25 bhāvanās,” “but not the Mahāvīra-biography” (p. 106), which, in his view, was placed in front of the vows and clauses at a later time, “to impress upon the successive generations that the discussion on these fundamentals came directly from the mouth of Mahāvīra” (p. 107).<sup>18</sup>

Yet, not all *nikkhamāṇa*-episodes in Āyāra 2.15.2-29 (and the similar passages JC 2-116) can be matched unambiguously with the identified correspondences in the ĀvN-ĀvBh-complex.

First, the sequence of the episodes 11-13 is different in the three texts. ĀvN 258: *dāna-saṃboha-nikkhamāṇa*, corresponds to Āyāra 2.15: *dāna-nikkhamāṇa-saṃboha*, and in JC: *nikkhamāṇa-saṃboha-dāna*. The variable placement of *nikkhamāṇa* seems to be a result, on the one hand, of the equivocal word *saṃboha*, which is variably interpreted either as independently gained “recollection,” “knowledge” or as an “awakening” of “right insight” (*samatta*) through an intervention of others (the gods),<sup>19</sup> and, on the other hand, of the unclear positioning of *abhiggaha*, the “resolution to renounce,” which the texts place either before the distribution of possessions or in the time of Mahāvīra’s existence as an embryo.

Second, the *abhiggaha* is not mentioned at the proper place in Āyāra 2.15. The embryo-transfer that is described in Āyāra 2.15.4 ~ ĀvBh 58 cannot be categorised as “resolution to renounce” (*abhiggaha*) as well, as postulated by Bhatt (1993: 109). It is as such only mentioned in JC 94 ~ ĀvBh 59.<sup>20</sup>

Third, the *saṃboha*-episode in Āyāra 2.15.17.iv-vi is presented only in an interpolated metrical form, and not at all in JC 111, which speaks against the theory of an adaptation of the keyword-chain from the ĀvN.

The issue is not resolved in the commentary literature either. Granoff (2012: 251f.) cites Haribhadra’s elucidations for the different placement of “*saṃbodha*” (“recollection of the vow”) before and after the *dāna*-episode in the narrations of the renunciations (“initiation”) of Ṛṣabha and Mahāvīra. Haribhadra offers two explanations: 1. The life-courses of the Jinās vary, 2. The sequence is not chronological, but determined by the quantity of details to be communicated. He does not privilege any of the two explanations. The problem illustrates once more that the biographies of

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after the transfer of the embryo (*avahāra*) to a “modern phase of Indian poetry.”

<sup>17</sup> Bhatt 1993: 86 defines the *Bhāvanās* as “(‘reflections’) which are necessary for ascetics in order to observe the five mahā-vratas.” They are not to be mixed up with the schematic twelve “reflections” (*anuprekṣā*) on the teaching of the Jina (S. 97).

<sup>18</sup> Contrary to the views of Jacobi 1879: 99, 1884: l-li, Charpentier 1922: 42, Schubring 1935 § 17: 26 and Dixit 1978: 60, who considered the JC as a text that is based on Āyāra 2.15 and was later interpolated into ĀD 8, because, as Jacobi suggested, “most of the prose paragraphs occur with but small alterations in the Kalpa Sūtra,” Bhatt (1993: 93) regards the JC as the older source, on the basis of the non-existence of the description of Mahāvīra’s death, that is evident only in the JC. Mahāvīra’s death is announced in Āyāra 2.15.1 = JC 1, but its description can only be found in the JC.

<sup>19</sup> The role attributed to the gods in the episode related to the keyword “awakening” or “perfect understanding” (*saṃboha*) in ĀvN 258 and ĀvBh 86-88 is mentioned in the apparently interpolated verses of Āyāra 2.15.17.iv-vi, but not in the JC. The narrative implies a distinction between “self-oriented renunciation” and “world-oriented teaching” (*tittha*), although at this stage Mahāvīra had not reached omniscience and hence possessed only imperfect knowledge, which in JC 112 is designated as *ābhoia*, described in the commentaries as “inferior to Avadhi knowledge” (Jacobi 1884: 257 n. 1). Āyāra 2.15.17.vi: *ete deva-nikāyā bhagavaṃ bohiṃti Jiṇavaraṃ Vīraṃ | savva-jaga-jjīva-hiyaṃ arahaṃ titthaṃ pavvattehiṃ ||* “These orders of gods wake the best of Jinās, the Venerable Vīra: ‘Arhat! propagate the religion which is a blessing to all creatures in the world!’ (vi).”

<sup>20</sup> JC 94: *ṇaṃ samaṇe bhagavaṃ Mahāvīre gabbhatthe im’eyārūvaṃ abhiggahaṃ abhigiṇhai: ‘no khalu me kappai amma-piṇhiṃ jīvaṃtehiṃ muṃḍe bhavittā agāra-vāsāo aṇagāriyaṃ pavvaittae’.* ĀvBh 59: *aha sattamammi māse gabbhattho cev’abhiggahaṃ giṇhe | nāhaṃ samaṇo hohaṃ amma-pi[y]arammi jīvaṃte ||*

Mahāvīra were constructed at a much later time. Because of their artificiality, they do not yield much useful information for the historian.<sup>21</sup>

(B) *Āyāra*<sub>1,2</sub> 2.15.22b ~ (cf. *Āv.*-niry. III 337 verse): Mahāvīra's Going Forth

*Āyāra* 2.15 offers much detail about the *nikkhamaṇa* of Mahāvīra. Two transmitted variants of the text are considered. The version of Jacobi (1882) = *Āyāra*<sub>1,2</sub> 2.15.22b and of Tulasī (1974) = *Āyāra*<sub>3</sub> 2.15.32:

*Āyāra*<sub>1,2</sub> 2.15.22b

*tao ṇaṃ samaṇe bhagavaṃ Mahāvīre dāhiṇeṇa dāhiṇaṃ vāmeṇa vāmaṃ pamcamutthiyam loyam karettā, siddhānam namokkāram karei, karettā “savvaṃ [me] akāraṇijjaṃ pāvaṃ [kammaṃ]” ti kaṭṭu sāmāiyam carittam paḍivajjai, sāmāiyam carittam paḍivajjittā devapariṣaṃ ca maṇuyapariṣaṃ ca ṭhaveli.*<sup>22</sup>

*Āyāra*<sub>3</sub> 2.15.32

*tao ṇaṃ samaṇe bhagavaṃ Mahāvīre dāhiṇeṇa{ṃ} dāhiṇaṃ vāmeṇa{ṃ} vāmaṃ pamcamutthiyam loyam karettā, siddhānam namokkāram karei, karettā “savvaṃ me akāraṇijjaṃ pāvakkammaṃ” ti kaṭṭu sāmāiyam carittam paḍivajjai, sāmāiyam carittam paḍivajjittā devapariṣaṃ ca<sup>23</sup> maṇuyapariṣaṃ ca {ālikkha-cittabhūyamiva} tthaveli.*<sup>24</sup>

After the Venerable Ascetic Mahāvīra had plucked out his hair in five handfuls (as described above), he paid obeisance to all liberated spirits, and vowing ‘to do no sinful act’, he adopted holy conduct. At that moment the whole assembly of men and gods stood motionless, like the figures on a picture” (Jacobi 1884: 199 = *Āyāra*<sub>2</sub> 2.15.22b).

The passage under consideration hence describes a threefold procedure, namely (1) pulling out of the hair (*loya*), (2) venerating the *siddhas* (*siddha namokkāra*), and (3) accepting right conduct according to the conventions (*sāmāiya caritta*) be renouncing violent conduct with the words “*savvaṃ me akāraṇijjaṃ pāvaṃ kammaṃ.*”

The word *sāmāiya* has puzzled interpreters, who translated it either as “relation to a social convention” or as “equanimity,” though it is clear that in the present context the second “general pre-*āvaśyaka* meaning” applies:

a. Jaina-commentaries: ~ sama-bhāva-rūpa etc. “equanimity” (Skt. sama)<sup>25</sup>

b. Wilson 1828/1862 I: 312<sup>26</sup> “conventional, ... actions as are permitted or prescribed”

c. Windisch 1874: 240 Fn. 81<sup>27</sup> ~

<sup>21</sup> The debates on relative dating of the different elements of the *ĀvN* and the detailed commentaries of B. Bhatt (forthcoming) could not be considered here.

<sup>22</sup> [] = Leumann 1934: 6b Fn. \* (words “forgotten” by Jacobi).

<sup>23</sup> “ca” is not in *Āyāra*<sub>3</sub>.

<sup>24</sup> {} and underlined words = Tulasī and Mahāprajña 1974 (*Āyāra*<sub>3</sub>)

<sup>25</sup> WBhag commentary, in Leumann 1883: 159.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson 1862 I: 312: “The sixth division of this class is *Chāritra*, practice or observance, of five sorts: *Sāmāyika*, conventional, or the practice and avoidance of such actions as are permitted or prescribed; *Chhedopasthāpaniya*, prevention of evil, as of the destruction of animal life; *Parihāraśuddhi*, purification by such mortification and penance as are enjoined by the example of ancient saints and sages. *Sulakshmasamparāya*, the practices of those pious men who have attained a certain degree of eminence; and *Yathākhyātam*, the same after all the impediments and impurities of human nature are overcome or destroyed.”

<sup>27</sup> Windisch 1874: 240: “Vgl. Wilson Sel. W. I 312 ‘Sāmāyika (sc. cāritra), conventional, or the practice and avoidance of such actions as are permitted or prescribed’. Wir dürfen hier an die sāmāyicārika-sūtra der Brahmanen erinnern. Auch in

- d. Weber 1883: 243f.: ~ ācāra “right conduct”<sup>28</sup> (Skt. samaya -> sāmāyika)
- e. Leumann 1883: 159: “related to a social convention” (Skt. samāyin)
- f. Jacobi 1884: 199: “holy conduct”
- g. Leumann 1934: 6a-b<sup>29</sup>: = sāmāyika (-vrata) (left untranslated)
- h. Bruhn 1981: 23 general pre-āvaśyaka meaning and specific (post-) āvaśyaka-meaning
- i. Mette 1991: 70,<sup>30</sup> 2010: 421 “commitment to the conventions (samaya)”
- j. Balbir 1993: 57, 63, 152: ~ sāmāyika (-vrata) “equanimity”
- k. Oberlies 1993: 159 “related to a doctrine”
- l. Watanabe 2007: 835, 1267 ~ samjama “self-control”
- m. Wright 8.5.2017: ~ samāja “appropriate to a council meeting, refined”

The process of accepting (*paḍivajjai*) established convention of mendicancy described in the text is better expressed in the new translation of the passage by A. Mette:

After the ascetic, the venerable Mahāvīra, had undertaken the pulling out of the hair in five handfuls, with the right hand right and with left hand left, he venerated the perfect ones (siddha) with the formula of greeting, then he vowed to follow the right conduct (caritram) according to the convention of monastic life with the words ‘Any evil deed (karman) is to be avoided by me!’ After he had vowed to follow the right conduct according to the monastic convention, he left the assembly of gods and the assembly of humans standing (Āyāra 2.15.32, translation of Mette’s 2010: 421 German translation of the original Prakrit).<sup>31</sup>

### (C) Jīnacariya 94 and 110–116: Mahāvīra’s Going Forth

Jīnacariya (JC) 94 and 110–116 offer a shorter, but more ornamented version of the *nikkhamāṇa* narrative. The Prakrit text is composed in the style of classical epic *kāvya*. Hence, is placed by A.

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obiger Stelle blickt die auf falscher Etymologie und Trübung der Tradition beruhende missbräuchliche Verwendung des Wortes sāmāika im Sinne von sāmāya, samatva durch, wie sie uns IV 51. 52 entgegentritt.”

<sup>28</sup> Weber 1883: 243f.: “Das Wort s ā m ā y i k a hat ursprünglich wohl eine mit ācāra wesentlich identische Bedeutung. Ich leite es nämlich von samaya her [Fn. 2: cf. Pāṇ. 5, 4, 34, wo im gaṇa sich sowohl samaya, als samayācāra als samāya (var. 1.) befinden; die Form sāmā wäre als eine absichtliche Differenzierung statt sāmā<sup>a</sup> zu betrachten; [...]] - Die Jaina selbst leiten das Wort verschiedentlich ab, sehen resp. in dem ersten Gliede meist sama. S. noch Bhag. 2, 186”] und meine, dass es sich mit dem brāhmanischen sāmāyācārika (s. M. Müller hist. Anc. S. Lit. P. 206 fg.) deckt, welches uns hier übrigens auch wohl noch in einem ganz unmittelbaren Reflex, in dem terminus: sāmāyārī nämlich, s. bei Uttarajjh. 26, vorliegt. In upāṅga 1, Schluss des ersten Theiles, wird der dharma des Mahāvīra ganz allgemein als s ā m ā i a, resp. als agārasāmāie dhamme und anagārasā<sup>a</sup> bezeichnet.”

<sup>29</sup> Leumann 1934: 6a-b: “Eine Hindeutung auf das Sāmāyika-Gelübde liegt vor in der Mahāvīra-Legende des Ācārāṅga (II 15, 22). Mahāvīra hat diesem Text zufolge seine geistliche Laufbahn begonnen, indem er (an Stelle des später üblichen Pancanamaskāra) den *siddhāṇaṃ namokkāra* sprach und sich mit den Worten *savvaṃ me akaraṇijjaṃ pāvam kammaṃ* zum *Sāmāiya caritta* verpflichtete. Offenbar hat der Verfasser der Stelle bereits den Pancanamaskāra als Einleitung zum Āvaśyaka gekannt. Die Stelle ist versificiert in Āv.-niry. III 337.”

<sup>30</sup> Mette 1991: 70: “As the acc. of samaya in Prakrit is homonymous with the acc. of samatā, it is not always easy to determine which of the two words was intended by the author, the reason for this being that equanimity (samatā) is indeed the real purpose of the fulfilled convention, the samaya.”

<sup>31</sup> Mette 2010: 421: “Nachdem der Asket, der erhabene Mahāvīra, mit der Rechten rechts, mit der Linken links das Ausreissen des Haars (den loca) mit fünf Griffen der zur Faust geballten Hände vollzogen hatte, ehrte er die Vollendeten (siddha) durch die Grußformel, dann gelobte er der Mönchskonvention gemäß mit den Worten ‘Jede böse Tat (karman) ist von mir zu meiden!’ den rechten Wandel (caritram). Nachdem er den der Mönchskonvention gemäßen rechten Wandel gelobt hatte, ließ er die Versammlung der Götter und die Versammlung der Menschen beiseite stehen.”

Mette (2010: 245 fn. 76 and 245ff.) in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, with even later additions being noted. The text includes key episodes which cannot be found in Āyāra 2.15, but have close parallels in the *Uvavāiya* (Uvav), the *Nāyādhammakahāo* (NDK) and the early commentaries to the *Āvassayanijjutti*, such as the interpretation of dreams, as in the 7<sup>th</sup> century ĀvC. Following Steinthal (1881), Leumann (1883) and Jacobi (1884), Mette (2010: 247) noted that NDK 1.1 was the principal text from which such passages were imported into the JC; most significantly the pre-birth resolution for renunciation, permissions for renunciation, Aśoka tree motif, and the change of clothes.<sup>32</sup>

In line with ĀvN 458, JC 94<sup>33</sup> attributes the resolution to renounce already to the embryonic form of Mahāvīra, in contrast to Āyāra 2.15, which remains silent on this point. The *nikkhamaṇa* itself is depicted in JC 110-116. Instead of analysing the structure of the well-known text in isolations, I compare its plot-structure straightaway with the one of Āyāra 2.15.

#### Comparison of Āyāra 2.15 and Jīṇacariya 94 and 110–116

A comparison of these two best known variants of the legend of Mahāvīra's *nikkhamaṇa* shows that even the basic plot structures of the narratives do not match.<sup>34</sup> The shared core of the story is the transformation of a young *kṣatriya* householder into a mendicant that is engaged in solitary peregrination. The status-transformation is accomplished with the help of seven steps of renunciation which are basically performed by Mahāvīra alone, without external intervention. The actions attributed to gods and other householders are secondary ornamentations. The decisive actions pertaining to the procedure that occur in both variants are: distribution of possessions, going forth, relinquishment of all decorations, fasting, and the plucking of the hair by the renunciant himself. JC 94 itself explicitly mentions that *nikkhamaṇa* and the *loya* are the most important and hence essential elements of the procedure of world-renunciation attributed to Mahāvīra.

INVARIABLE ELEMENTS OF THE PLOT	ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
dāna	
nikkhamaṇa / pavajjā	nikkhamaṇa / pavajjā
paṃca-muṭṭhiya loya	paṃca-muṭṭhiya loya
chaṭṭha-bhatta	

The sequence of actions 1-7 in the following reconstructed synopsis is oriented toward the chain of actions in Āyāra 2.15, though the sequence presented in JC appears to be more logical and less artificial (and from this perspective: possibly older) (idiosyncratic: JC - a-c and Āyāra 2.15 - x<sub>1</sub>-x<sub>4</sub>):

- a. Vow of renunciation as embryo (*abhiḡraha*);
- b. Permission of elder brother and political heads (*abhyanuḡñā*);
1. Intention of going forth (*abhiṇiṣkramaṇa-abhiprāya / ābhogika*);
2. Giving away of all possessions (*dāna*);
3. Awakening (*saṃbodha*);

<sup>32</sup> Steinthal 1881 identified the following parallels: JC 32 ~ NDK 1.1.21-22; JC 47-83 ~ NDK 1.1.23-56; JC 106f. ~ NDK 1.1.117; JC 108 ~ NDK 110; and Leumann 1883: 33: JC 16 ~ Uvav 20; JC 112 ~ Uvav 23; JC 114f. ~ Uvav 53f. See also Jacobi 1885: 429-44, who identified also hypermetric passages in the JC, which he placed "in die ersten vorchristlichen Jahrhunderte" (S. 405f.).

<sup>33</sup> See fn. 20.

<sup>34</sup> The most complete biography of Mahāvīra in the Śvetāmbara tradition, Hemacandra's (11th c.) *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* (TŚPC<sub>2</sub> 10, TŚPC<sub>3</sub> pp. 36-9), follows mainly Āyāra 2.15, but incorporates also episodes from the JC in free improvisation. Cf. the earlier Ādipurāṇa of Jinasena and Bruhn's 1954 comparison.



- x<sub>1</sub>. Perfect understanding conveyed by the gods (*saṃbodha*);
4. Leaving out five meals (*chaṭṭha-bhakta*);
- x<sub>2</sub>. Veneration, anointment, ablution, clothing, and adornment by the gods;
5. Going forth (*niṣkramaṇa*): Procession in a palanquin to the outskirts of the town in the manner of a king;
6. Single-handed removal of jewels and ornaments;
- x<sub>3</sub>. Collection of the jewels and ornaments by the god Vaiśramaṇa;
7. Single-handed plucking of the hair in 2 x 5 handfuls (*pañca-muṣṭi loca*);
- x<sub>4</sub>. Collection and immersion of the hair in the milk ocean by the god Śakra
- c. Dressing in “divine clothes” (*deva-dūṣya*);
- x<sub>5</sub>. Veneration of the liberated souls (*siddha-namaskāra*);
- x<sub>6</sub>. Avowal of the right conduct (*caritra*) according to the convention of monastic life by saying ‘all evil deed is to be avoided by me’ (*pāpa-karma-akaraṇīya*);
- d. Entering houselessness (*anaḡārikā*).

Comparison of the Plot-Structures of ĀvN 458, Āyāra 2.15 and Jīnacariya 94 and 110–116

The main criterion for presenting the plot-structures of the old biographies of Mahāvīra that include descriptions of his *nikkhamāṇa* (see the table below), in the sequence ĀvN-Āyāra-JC is here the extent to which the entire life-span of Mahāvīra is represented in them. The thirteen key episodes highlighted by the ĀvN end with the *nikkhamāṇa*. Āyāra 2.15 covers Mahāvīra’s life until his omniscience, and the JC concluded with Mahāvīra’s death. His funeral is only depicted in later universal historical texts such as the *Ādipurāṇa* and the TŚPC. It is clear that the historical development of the Mahāvīra biography was starting from the pivotal event of the *nikkhamāṇa*, step by step expanded backwards, incorporating pre-birth events, and forwards, first to the event of omniscience, death and final funeral rites.

During this process, the *nikkhamāṇa* episode was enriched with new elements and further detail and thus in different ways transformed as well. The foci were placed on different details in different accounts. This is illustrated in this table offering an overview of key episodes. It is difficult to say which episode first presented or was borrowed since all versions which must have been written down at the last council in Vallabhī, apart from a few later interpolations.

ĀvN 458	Āyāra 2.15.2-29	Translation	Jīnacariya 94 and 110–116
sumiṇa			
avahāra			
<b>abhiggaha</b>			abhiggaha
jammaṇa			
abhisesa			
vuḡḡhi			
saraṇaṃ			
bhesaṇa			
vivāha			permission of brothers and social authorities

avecca	abhinikkhamaṇa- abhippāya	intention to renounce	ābhoiya
dāna	dāna	giving	dāna
saṃboha	devā: bohi	awakening insight	
nikkhamaṇa	śakra: deva-camaṇdaya	heavenly pavilion	
	śakra: tikkhutto	threefold circumambu- lation	
	śakra:	anointing	
	śakra:	bathing	
	śakra:	anointing (sandalwood)	
	śakra:	clothing	
	devā:	jewels and shawls	
	śakra: siviya	palanquin	
	śakra: sīhāsaṇa and pāya-pīḍha	lion-throne and foot- stool	
	chaṭṭha-bhatta	fast	
		single dress	
		procession	procession
		removing ornaments	removal of ornaments
	vaiśramaṇa:	collecting ornaments	
	loya	hair-plucking	paṃca-muttha-loyana
	śakra:	hair immersed in milk- ocean	
	siddha namaskāra	veneration of the siddhas	chaṭṭha-bhatta
	sāmāyaṃ caritta	good conduct according to convention	deva-dūsa
	thavei		shaven (muṃḍa) entered anagāriya

### Conclusions

On the basis of these brief observations on varying degrees of completeness, variations in elements and plot sequences, and interpolations into the early biographies of Mahāvīra and other descriptions in the Śvetāmbara canon of the procedures and ceremonies of world-renunciation the following conclusions cum hypotheses:

1. The oldest narratives on Mahāvīra's *nikkhamaṇa* in their present form appear to be altogether retrospective constructions of late-canonical origin based on fluid legendary accounts rather than on corroborated facts. This confirms earlier findings of Bruhn et alii.
2. Schubring 1935 § 17: 31 writes: "For our knowledge of Mahāvīra's personality we have as ancient coherent sources the Uvahānasuya Āyār. I 9, then Āyār. II 15 (the Bhāvaṇā) and basing upon it Jinac. 1-148, finally Āv. 458ff. A number of detailed traits is rendered by Viy." In regard to the degree of completeness of the life-story a rearrangement of the hypothetical sequence of the three main accounts of Mahāvīra's in the form ĀvN, Āyāra, and Jinacariya is justified as, for other

reasons, was argued by Bhatt. A full life-story of Mahāvīra, including the arrangements of his funeral, can only be found in much later texts, such as Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭīśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, a fact which seems to support the hypothesis.

3. Variations in plot sequence could be interpreted as evidence for a degree of parallel development, despite the frequent linguistic overlap, which could be regarded as evidence of direct influences of one text on another.
4. Through comparison of the three principal accounts, shared core elements can be identified which are likely to be based on historical precedent, whether directly related to Mahāvīra or not. Of the four common elements of the description of the procedures of renunciation, *dāna*, *nikkhamaṇa*, *chaṭṭha-bhatta*, *pañca-muṭṭhiya loya*, only two are invariably mentioned and can be regarded as essential to the plot structure, and possibly historical: *nikkhamaṇa* and *pañca-muṭṭhiya loya*.
5. The essential acts do not circumscribe some kind of initiation ceremony, but the going forth of a householder to become an itinerant ascetic.
6. The key act of self-transformation depicted in the texts is the renunciant's act of pulling out of his own hair by the root, which was also practiced by the Ājīvikas, albeit by with the help of others, only once, at the point of initiation.<sup>35</sup> This contrasts with the practice of shaving head and beard in the description of the renunciation of the Buddha.
7. The roles allocated to the gods and human beings are secondary and the respective passages can be regarded as late additions.
8. The JS conveys more importance to family and local authorities and less to the gods compared to Āyāra 2.15. The relevant passages can also be regarded as secondary.
9. Ṭhāṇa 6.104 tries to resolve the ambiguity as regards the time of the fast, by placing the other important ceremonial elements such as the plucking of the hair into the period of fasting.
10. A first change of clothes immediately before entering the houselessness is mentioned only in the JC. The presentation in the Āyāra gives the impression that Mahāvīra changed dresses before leaving the house and kept the same dress after removing all ornaments.
11. The strange doubling at the end of JC 116 "leaving the house [he] entered the state of houselessness" (Jacobi 1884: 259), and of *loya* and *muṇḍa*, points to a combination of leaving the house with a symbolical removal of the hair which is also known from accounts of Ājīvika practices. Schubring 1935 1935 § 137: 159, with reference to Ṭhāṇa 334b. 496a, remarks that the somewhat opaque term *muṇḍa* is "a word which is also used to describe the condition of the suppression of five senses and of the four passions." Jaini 1979: 12 does not consider Āyāra 2.15 and in his summary of JC 116 reverses the sequence of changing clothes and plucking of hair.
12. All descriptions of the ceremonies before and after the *nikkhamaṇa* or *pavajjā* must have been inserted later into the essential plot structure of Āyāra 2.15 and the JC.
13. The paradigmatic biography of Mahāvīra depicts the Jina as going forth on his own, even though the Jaina mendicant tradition of Pāsa already existed according to Āyāra 2.15.

This raises a number of questions:

- a. Why does the standard account of Mahāvīra's adoption of the mendicant life refer to existing "conventions", using the term *sāmāyika*? What conventions could have been implied?
- b. Did other Jaina mendicant orders exist at the time of Mahāvīra or not? If they did exist —

<sup>35</sup> Basham 1951: 106, 110.

- and Mahāvīra's parents are depicted as followers of the mendicants of the Pārśva tradition — why is Mahāvīra depicted as a “*sayambhū*”, so to speak?
14. Many key elements of traditional Jaina initiation ceremonies today, particularly the legal elements connected with the admission into a Jaina mendicant group are neither found or only in rudimentary form in the accounts of Mahāvīra's world-renunciation, nor in other early canonical narratives of ordinary initiations of Jaina mendicants, for instance the bestowal of monastic paraphernalia, the plucking of hair by the initiating guru, etc.
  15. The permission of relatives and authorities is only mentioned in the Jīṇacariya, and the permission of the initiating monk of course only in the account of Mehā Kumāra parents and of the initiating monk
  16. The current threefold structure represents a further development:
    - a. Going forth (*nikkhamāṇa*),
    - b. Entering into mendicancy by adoption of the vow of non-violence (*sāmāiya*) in the standardised 3x3 formulation of the Āvassaya-sutta during the *sāmāiya-caritta-dikkhā*.
    - c. Acceptance of the five great vows (*mahāvaya*) at the time of the *cheōvatṭhāvāṇiya-caritta-dikkhā*.
  17. The development becomes instantly visible in two *sāmāiya*-vows evident in the Śvetāmbara-Āgama:
 

Āyāra 12.15: Mahāvīra  
 “*savvaṃ me akāraṇijjaṃ pāvaṃ kammaṃ*”  
 Āvassaya I: Jaina Sādhus  
 “*kareṇi bhaṃte! sāmāiyaṃ*  
*savvaṃ sāvajjaṃ joggaṃ paccakkhāmi jāvaj-jīvāe tivivaṃ tiviveṇaṃ - maṇasā, vayasā, kāyasā, na kareṇi,*  
*na kāravemi, kareṇṭaṃ-pi aṇṇaṃ na samaṇujāṇāmi tassa bhaṃte! paḍikkamāmi niṃḍāmi garihāmi*  
*appāṇaṃ vosirāmi*”

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