

Jainism

What is the relationship between man as individual and human society? What can man do for all the creatures of the world? These are the questions Jaina saints have been probing deep into for the welfare of the society on the basis of introspection and meditation. The process of penance has led them to self-realization, Jaina religion, primarily, was to analyze the form and the function of the universe as a whole and as parts, the relationship between the soul and action (Karma) and to establish the way to penance by preaching self-control to release the soul from the bindings of the actions. With the development of human civilization social and moral problems came on the surface. Jaina religion had its say on moral values also with the spiritual values as and when the necessity was felt. Jaina religion, basically a religion of the monks, included the code of the religious and moral life for the layman also. The saints of Jaina religion presented the solutions for various problems of the world. In this way the basic principles of Jaina religion may be called the roots of spiritual and moral values.

The Antiquity of Jainism

Jaina religion is the oldest religion of India, It began as a spiritual discipline for Samanas, Arhatas, Tirthankaras, Nigghanthas, and Jainas. They were called Samanas (Monks) because they believed in the equality of all beings and practiced nonviolence. They were called Arhatas (worthy of Worship) because they lived virtuous lives, As the originators of the spiritual path, they were known as Tirthankaras (Fordmakers). Being free from passions, they were called Nigghanthas (detached). And because they had conquered all of their desires, they were identified as Jinas (Victors). Hence, the religion propounded by such conquerors is fittingly called the Jaina religion.

There are references to the Jaina Tirthankaras, Samanas, and Arhatas, and to the ethical principles they espoused in the Rigveda, Yajurveda, and in the Puranas. Scholars have examined these sources and have concluded that these personalities must be pre- Vedic and that the religion they preached must have preceded the Vedic religion. According to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan : “Jaina tradition ascribes the origin of the system to Rsabhadeva who lived many millennia back. There is evidence to show that so far back as the first century B.C. there were people who were worshipping Rsabhadeva, the first Tirthankara. There is no doubt that Jainism prevailed even before Vardhamana or Parsvanatha. The Yajurveda mentions the names of three Tirthankaras—Rsabha, Ajita, and Aristanemi. The Bhagvata-Purana endorses the view that Rsabhadeva was the founder of Jainism.” Like wise, J. P. Jain declares : `It is now no more necessary to prove that Jainism is an absolutely independent, highly developed, very comprehensive and ancient system, not unreasonably described as `the oldest living religion`, or the earliest `home religion of India.` Its is, indeed, found to have been in existence, in one form of the other, or under one name or the other, since the very dawn of human civilization, continuing without break throughout the prehistorical, proto-historical and historical times.” The images, seals, and other findings amongst the discoveries at

Harappa and Mohenjodara, and some earlier inscriptions of ancient India also lend support to the view that Rsabhadeva was the founder of Jainism, which was non-Vedic in origin and probably pre-Aryan.

Jain Heroes

The tradition states that time is infinite and follows repetitive cycles of ascents and descents. During the phase of ascent there is a gradual increase of truth and goodness, and during the period of descent there is a decrease of happiness and righteousness. It is held that at the end of the third division of the period of descent fourteen propounders of the faith appeared and that during the fourth division of decline, sixty-three heroes arrived of whom there were twenty-four Tirthankaras.

The fourteen propounders are credited for their progressive work. The Manu Nabhi, the last member of this ground had a wife named Marudevi, who gave birth to a son named Rsabha who is generally credited with being the first Tirthankara. Tradition calls him the “harbinger of civilization.” Having performed his role of educating the people in all aspects of culture, Rsabha renounced the world he had civilized and retired to the forest where he attained supreme knowledge (Kaival-Jnana) and became a Jina. He then spent his time preaching his creed of love. In the end he attained nirvana at Mt. Kailasa.

Rsabha was succeeded by twenty-three other Tirthankaras, The historical character of these heroes is not clear; even so historian J. P. Jain has been able to link these personalities to pivotal milestones of ancient Indian history. All of them preached the Jaina values of nonviolence, truth, nonstealing, nonpossessiveness, and dedicated their lives to the service of suffering humanity. Parsva, the twenty-third Tirthankara, was exceptional, his influence extended to Central Asia and Greece. Under the impact of his teachings, Vedic sacrifice diminished and the spiritualistic philosophy of the Upanishads began to rise. Lord Parsva is often described as the real founder of Jainism.

The last of the twenty-four Tirthankaras was Vardhamana Mahavira (the Great Hero), a contemporary of Lord Buddha, born of royal parents in the year 599 B.C. His boyhood became the stuff of legends because of his expansive compassion toward all creatures. At the age of thirty, he renounced the world and became a monk. After twelve years of deep meditation and severe austerities, Mahavira attained the state of supreme knowledge. At the age of forty-two he became an Arhat, a Jina, a Tirthankara. From then on he preached the tenets of the Sramana cult in the popular language of the masses (Prakrit). He also introduced several innovations such as the vow of Brahmacharya (celibacy) and the constitution of the community into a four-fold order consisting of monks, nuns, male householders, and female householders. His religion is aptly described as Sarvodayatirtha (an order for the upliftment of all). The doctrine of Sarvodaya characterizes Mahavira’s order as one in which everyone has an equal opportunity to rise; everyone may attain the highest position; everyone has the full right to knowledge and happiness. Having spent his entire ministry spreading the principle of Ahimsa and self-realisation, Mahavira attained nirvana (salvation) at the age of seventy-two in the year 527 B.C. The event was celebrated with lights, signifying his friendship

for all living beings. The celebration is continued today through the famous festival of Dipavali.

Jaina Order and Literature

The history of Jainism after Lord Mahavira is recorded in the Jaina literature preserved in various Indian languages. The most momentous event, which occurred about 80 A.D. was the division of the Jain community into two sects: Svetambara (white-robed) and Digambara (sky robed). The split did not incur doctrinal or moral differences but only dissent on the basis of religious practices.

In the year 453 A.D. a major council was held at Vailabhi in order to establish Mahavira's teaching which had been preserved through oral traditions. The outcome of this council was the writing of the Jaina canon. The Svetambara sect granted it fully validity but the Digambara questioned its authenticity. Instead, the latter canonized the literature of Acarya Kundakunda and his followers, The modern scholar must draw on both traditions to glean the truth of the original teachings of Lord Mahavira.

The Jaina literature is a rich compendium of diverse interests and is written in several Indian languages so as to reach all people. The writings of these Acaryas as having "manifold attractions" not only for those in Jaina studies but for lovers of literature, history, culture, philosophy, and comparative religion. It is to this vast source that we now turn for an understanding of Jaina beliefs of the universe, religion and morality.

Fundamental Beliefs

THE UNIVERSE

Jainism has a unique view of the universe. It believes the universe is uncreated, self-existent, beginningless, eternal, and infinite. It is an aggregation of six substances (Dravyas):

Soul (Jiva), Matter (Pudgala), Principle of Motion (Dharma), principle of Rest (Adharma), Space (Akasa), Time (Kala). Substance consists of attributes and modes. Attributes are the essential features of the substance and always occupy the substance, whereas modes are the changing features of the substance. If substance is characterized in terms of its attributes, it is nonchanging and eternal. But if viewed from the perspective of its modes, it is regarded as changing and transitory.

Jain cosmology refers to our limited world as Loka. Beyond this there is the unlimited world of Aloka. The principles of Dharma and adharma only operate in Loka where the Soul and Matter are located. Loka is divided into three parts; the upper universe where celestial beings dwell, the middle universe occupied by humans and animals, and the lower universe in which the wicked reside.

The fundamental substance of Soul and Matter are thought of as interdependent. This connection eventuates in the creation of pleasure and pain for the soul as a result of its involvement in Karmic matter. This can be clarified by describing the human predicament and the role of Karma.

THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

Man's life in this world comprises many stages that he must pass through because of his bondage to Karma. Salvation is achieved when he becomes enlightened sufficiently and is able to shed the weight of Karma. The elements involved in the process are:

Soul (Jiva), Matter (Ajiva), the inflow of fresh Karmic matter (Asrava), Karmic bondage (Bandha), the checking of Karmic matter (Samvara), the shedding of Karmic matter (Nirjara), and Liberation (Moksha) In addition to the seven elements listed, there are two more elements that are fundamental to the Jain view of worldly existence: sin and virtue or Papa and Punya, The proper content of Jaina ethics centers upon the two elements of checking and shedding Karmic matter. It covets the conduct both of the monk and the layman. The whole purpose of ethics and religious exercises is the attainment of salvation. This summum bonum is captured in the following adage: "Asrava (inflow of Karmic matter causing misery) is the cause of mundane existence and Samvara (stoppage of that inflow) is the cause of liberation. This is the Jain view; everything else is only its amplification."

THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA

The role of cause and effect in the physical world corresponds to the role of Karma in Jaina ethics. Every person is deemed responsible for bearing the fruit of his own deeds. It is also the rule of nature in practical life that the quality of the seed determines that of the fruit. Jaina philosophy theorizes that one achieves happiness by doing good deeds, and sorrow by doing evil deeds, hence the need to perform noble works that are at all times well intentioned. The self is free and fully competent to act as such. The self is the real cause of sorrow and joy. It is clearly pointed out in Uttaradhyayana-Sutra, "My own self is the doer and undoer of misery and happiness; my own self is friend and foe, as I act well or badly."

Jaina philosophy has described the details of the process of the bondage of Karma and its view must be distinguished from other formulations of the same. The principle, "As a man gives, so he receives," is present in many philosophies. Often such types of Karma theories are fatalistic because the past is seen as determining the present. In this way the Karmic explanation of one's deeds delivers the doer from the bondage of some superintending divinity, but it only exchanges bondage to the supernatural for bondage to the unrelenting grasp of Karma. This tells us why there have been so many popular views on the cause of happiness and sorrow in Indian philosophies. Time, Fate, Nature, Chance, Maiter, Purusa, and combinations of all these, have been taken as the cause of

joy and sorrow. In all these the individual is stripped of his capacities to free himself from the force that holds him captive.

Jaina philosophy differ from such fatalistic renderings of Karma. According to Jain ethics, man can increase or reduce the period of his Karmas by his own effort and can reduce or increase their power of bearing fruit. It has been called Udirana: the energy that makes possible the premature fruition of Karmas. Similarly, a person can convert his Punyas (virtues) into sins because of his evil deeds (asat Karmas) and he can convert his sins into Punyas (virtues) because of his virtuous activities (sat Karmas). Udirana is called the energy that contributes to differentiation of Karmas (samkramana).

The conversion is possible in a positive sense, through right knowledge and self-control. The process is called Upasaynana. It is described in the Karma-Siddhant of Jainism. It saves a person from becoming a fatalist and imparts confidence to change the direction of one's life through actions (Sadacarana). Thus the role of self awakening and human effort within the framework of the doctrine of Karma invests Jaina ethics with originality. Its optimistic attitude toward the success of human efforts to cancel the effects of previous actions and to block the inflow of fresh Karmic matter makes ethics a force for good.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

The discussion of Karma theory has made it plain that the human self is the center of ethical existence and that, by virtue of its knowledge and consciousness, it has infinite powers. However, these superior qualities are concealed for the developing individual due to the overlay of Karma. It therefore becomes the ultimate goal of the individual to achieve the pure form of the self and to attain absolute being. Though difficult, this goal is possible because human nature is rational and voluntaristic. Only human beings can achieve this goal, hence the importance of human birth. The Jaina Agamas state that even deities bow down to the person whose mind has reached the highest bliss characterized by noninjury and self-restraint. The individual is capable of reaching divine heights because the pure form of the self is itself divine and therefore the self relies on its own efforts.

THE DENIAL OF GOD

The Jaina views of the nature of man and the universe render the notion of God unnecessary. All of nature is autonomous and is governed by its own laws. Man makes his own world for better or for worse, Jaina ethics is thus nontheocentric, unlike Judaism, Christianity, Islam and some forms of Hinduism. In all of these religions, God functions as Maker, Ruler, Rewarder, and Judge. But for the Jainas "It is not necessary to surrender to any higher being nor to ask for any divine favor for the individual to reach the highest goal of perfection. There is no place for divine grace, nor is one to depend on the capricious whims of a superior deity for the sake of attaining the highest ideal.

According to Jainism each individual soul is to be considered as God, as he is essentially divine in nature.”

Though Jainism rejects the notion of a creator God, it does have a sort of “ethical heaven” inhabited by enlightened souls called Arhats and Siddhas. These pure beings are ones who have realized the true form of the self by conquering their senses. In the words of D. N. Bhargava: “These Siddhas are far more above gods or deities. They neither create nor destroy anything. They have conquered, once and for all, their nescience and passion, and cannot be molested by them again.”

Jainism permits the worship of the Arhats and Siddhas but not in the conventional sense of seeking rewards. Instead, worship is ethically oriented for the sake of attaining their high qualities. It begins with penance. It continues with progressive purification of one’s actions. Jaina ethics specifies three grades of Self. First, there is the Outer-Self, involved in worldly affairs, taking the body to be the soul. Second, there is the inner-Self that understands the difference between body and soul and aims at the perfection of the latter. Third, there is the Enlightened Soul (Paramatman) that has realized its true form. It possesses infinite knowledge and joy unspeakable. In the practice of Jaina worship, one must renounce the Outer-Self and, through the conversion of the Inner- Self, move toward the Paramatman, which is the true goal of the mystic quest. This journey is traversed through the medium of moral and intellectual preparations, which purge everything obstructing the emergence of potential divinity. The spirit in which the Jaina devotee worships the Paramatmans is reflected in this verse, “Him who is the leader of the path to Liberation, who is the crusher of mountains of Karmas, and who is the Knower of all reality, Him I worship in order that I may realize those very qualities of him.”

Thus the purpose of Jaina worship is not the deification of some savior figure, but the veneration and adoration of the ideals that figure represents.

JAINA ETHICS AND MORALITY

Jaina ethics is directed toward the liberation of the individual. Its orientation is therefore religious. Its end is the spiritualization of all areas of life in order to fit the individual for his final goal, Its primary precept applicable to kind and commoner alike is, Do your duty and do it as humanly as you can.

Jainism permits no separation between religion (Dharma) and morality because both are concerned with the well-being of the individual in the world in keeping with his own nature. The word Dharma signifies the nature of things (vatthu sahavo dhammo). It is the law which “leads, binds, or takes back a being to its essential nature; enables it to realize the divinity inherent in itself; helps it to extricate itself from the misery of mundane existences and reach the state of supreme beatitude.” All beings seek happiness and try to avoid pain and loss. The practice of Dharma enables them to achieve this end. In the words of the well-known Acarya Samanta Bhadra, “Religion is something which

takes the living beings out of the worldly misery and establishes them in the highest bliss.”

This interconnection between religion and morality imparts to Jainism its distinctive feature. H. S. Bhattacharya finds the insistence of Jainism on spiritual motivation “the foundation” of all true religion and ethics and thinks it may well serve as “the basis of a universal code of moral and religious acts.” The uniqueness of Jainism “Lies not only in emphasizing this all important condition of all religious and moral activities but in justifying their position by looking upon morality, not as an adjunct to human nature, but as part and parcel of it.”

The connection between religion and morality is often missed because Jainism delineates the pathway to spiritual perfection through the practice of yoga and demarcates stages of self-realization, but the roots of that perfection are in the soul of everyday life. We have first to learn to live a good life in this world and then we can go higher to spiritual perfection. In order to exclude none from the need for moral discipline, Jainism has formulated two levels of religious existence: one which sets moral standards for laymen, and one for monks.

For one who sets out on the path toward perfection, Jainism presents the practice of ten great virtues. They are: Supreme Forbearance, Humility, Straightforwardness, Perfect Truthfulness, Purity, perfect Self-restraint, Austerity, Complete Renunciation, Nonattachment, and Celibacy. These virtues are to regulate thought, speech, and action. They are an essential part of Jaina ethics, and are like “ten inextinguishable lamps” which illuminate the path of the beginner.

THREE SPIRITUAL PATHS

Jaina religion encompasses a threefold path of spiritual practice. It includes right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. The three components are interrelated and interdependent and are known as “The Three Jewels”, because of their value for salvation.

Right faith is primary. It signifies belief in the omniscience of the spiritual teachers. It assumes a life of principled morality on the part of the householder. The scriptures describe the eight organs of right faith. Yasastilakacampu states that right faith is the “prime cause of salvation.”

Right knowledge follows from faith. It is obtained by studying the teachings of the Tirthankaras. Because it is the basis of right conduct, Jaina philosophy explains it minutely. It ranges all the way from sense knowledge to reasoning, clairvoyance, direct awareness of the thought forms of others and infinite knowledge (Kevalajnana). These represent progressive stages.

Right knowledge includes the nature of things in this world. In discussing the qualities of material particles, Jainism finds they are of infinite number and that some of these are apparently contradictory. Simply stated, the qualities of a thing are not exhausted by our comprehension of it, and there is more than meets the eye. Philosophically, this is known

as the theory of nonabsolutism (Anekantavada) and calls for an attitude of openness. Our limitations of knowledge dictate a style of relativity. The linguistic manner of expressing various qualities of matter is called Syadvada (the doctrine of qualified assertion). The style of Syadvada allows no room for assertions. This Jaina theory of knowledge, incorporating the two principles of nonabsolutism and relativity, has made an esteemed contribution toward liberalizing the mind of man. It elevates the mystery of life and denigrates dogmatism.

The third jewel is right conduct. Jaina scriptures approach this in progressive succession—conduct for householders and for monks. For the former, the goal sought is the development of the individual and society; for the latter, it is self-realization. All aspirants dedicate themselves to proper conduct through vows (Vratas) and subvows. Vows are at the heart of Jaina morality and are undertaken with a full knowledge of their nature and a determination to carry them through.

Principally, Jaina ethics specifies Five Minor Vows (Anuvratas), Three Social Vows (Gunavratas), and Four Spiritual Vows (Siksavratas) to be carried out by the householder. Being twelve in number, the texts speak of them as Duvalasaviha Agaradhamma.

The Minor Vows are: nonviolence, truth, nonstealing, celibacy, and nonpossession. They are called “Minor” (anuvrata) because the householder observes them in a modified way. In their full observance by monks, they are called Mahavratas.

Nonviolence is the foundation of Jaina ethics. Mahavira called it pure, universal, everlasting. It says: “one should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture or kill any animal, living being, organism or sentient being. This is the essence of religion. It embraces the welfare of all animals, visible and invisible. It is the basis of all stages of knowledge and the source of all rules of conduct. The scriptures analyze the spiritual and practical aspects of nonviolence and discuss the subject negatively and positively.

Four stages of violence are described: Premeditated Violence
--to attack someone knowingly, Defensive Violence—to commit
intentional violence in defense of one’s own life, Vocational
Violence—to incur violence in the execution of one’s means of
livelihood, Common Violence—committed in the performance of
daily activities,

Premeditated violence is prohibited for all. A householder is permitted to incur violence defensively and vocationally provided he maintains complete detachment. Common violence is accepted for all in the business of remaining alive, but even here, one should be careful in preparing food, cleaning house, etc. This explains the Jain’s practices of filtering drinking water, vegetarianism, not eating meals at night, and abstinence from alcohol.

The primacy given to Ahimsa by the Indian people has nobly contributed to their character, most dramatically by Mahatma Gandhi. “In the hands of Mahatma Gandhi, Ahimsa—the sword of self-suffering—became a mighty instrument” that wielded enormous social and political power with utmost significance for the future of man kind.

Jaina literature is a treasury of many such characters who exemplify the human potential for living nonviolently in this world.

The second of the five minor vows is Truth. It is more than abstaining from falsehood; it is seeing the world in its real form and adapting to that reality. The vow of truth puts a person in touch with his inner strength and inner capacities. He becomes secure and fearless. There is then no need to steal—the third vow.

Celibacy is the fourth vow, applicable to monks and householders in differing degrees. Its basic intent is to conquer passion and to prevent the waste of energy. Positively stated, the vow is meant to impart the sense of serenity to the soul. The householder fulfills this vow when he is content with his own wife and is completely faithful to her.

Nonpossession is the fifth minor vow. As long as a person does not know the richness of joy and peace that comes from a consciousness of the soul, he tries to fill his empty and insecure existence with the clutter of material acquisitions. But, as Lord Mahavira said, security born of things is a delusion and must come to nought. To remove this delusion, one takes the vow of nonpossession and realizes the perfection of the soul. Nonpossession, like nonviolence, affirms the oneness of all life and is beneficial both in the spiritual and social spheres.

In addition to the Five Minor Vows, the householder observes three Social Vows that govern his external conduct in the world. Then there are four Spiritual vows that reflect the purity of his heart. They govern his internal life and are expressed in a life that is marked by charity (dana).

The Jaina householder who observes twelve vows progresses upon the spiritual path until he comes to the place where he must decide whether to observe the discipline of the monk's life. To enter this higher domain, he must pass through eleven successive stages called Pratimas, Where the eleventh stage is reached, he can begin the conduct of a monk.

In order to preserve the integrity of the principal vows listed above, Jain thinkers have prescribed sub-vows as precautionary means. First, there is reference to the Salyas or disturbing factors such as ignorance, deceit, and self-interest, from, which a person should free himself. The salyas represent the negative requirements for the perfect practice of the vratas. In addition, there are the four Bhavanas (virtues) that represent the positive means of supporting the Vratas. These qualities, which a votary of nonviolence must possess, are maitri (love, friendship), pramoda (joy and respect), karunya (compassion), and madhyastha (tolerance toward living beings). Third, there are the twelve sub-vows known as anupreksas (reflections). Broadly stated, they are twelve topics of meditation that cover a wide field of teaching. They are designed to serve as aids to spiritual progress, produce detachment, and lead the devotee from the realm of desire to the path of renunciation. They are reflections upon the fundamental facts of life, intended to develop purity of thought and sincerity in the practice of religion.

In this way Jaina ethics prescribes thirty-five rules of conduct for the householder. They are meant for the good of his entire personality. By observing these rules, he comes to possess all of the twenty-one qualities that a fully developed individual must manifest.

Having observed all the rules of conduct and having passed through the eleven religious stages (pratimas, the householder is now qualified to become an ascetic. The life of a monk is marked by the spirit of detachment. Through the practice of yoga and meditation, he finally attains the highest knowledge and becomes an enlightened soul. This is the ultimate end of Jaina ethics.

Viewed from the level of the life of a monk, Jaina ethics appears to be a rigorous discipline for the individual, aimed at cultivating his detachment from the world. From a broader view, including the life of the householder, Jaina ethics is not just individual and spiritual, but inclusive of all forms of life for the total upliftment of existence. The person who subjects himself to this form of ethics will be serious, good tempered, merciful, straightforward, wise, and modest. he will be sociable, careful in speech, reverent to age and custom. Renouncing ego and possessions, he will endure all manner of hardships until he attains the highest ideal of perfection.

RESPONSE TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUE

Science and technology have created a new world of prosperity, but material gain has been purchased with a spiritual loss that has global consequences not only for human life upon this planet but for the planet itself. As a result, there seems to be a trend, often politicized, for people to return to their spiritual roots. Jaina ethics is relevant to the quest of modern man for they satisfy not only the value orientation of the individual, but of society. They find the basis of these values in a spirituality that is as deep as it is open and tolerant.

The Jaina scriptures indeed show us the way to escape material bondage within this world, but the ethical path they prescribe takes us through all the highways and byways of this mortal life. Society is never overlooked. Human welfare is all times taken seriously. The Tirthankaras whom Jaina worship are known to have led full social lives before attaining salvation. Contemporary Jains are a prosperous community. There is therefore no modern custom or usage from which the Jain must abstain, as long as it does not conflict with the ethical principles of the Jaina faith.

We turn now to the ethical issues of our own day. Eminent scholars of different religious traditions have addressed these problems with deep insights, but the problems persist. We shall therefore make a modest attempt to find some solution to these problems in the light of the principles of Jainism.

SOCIAL ISSUES

The Jain Acaryas have discussed some of the social issues that confront us today such as sexual relationships, marriage and family and the role and status of women. Modern scholars also provide us with updated interpretations of ancient principles.

On the matter of sexual relationships, Jainism sets celibacy (Bramacharya) as the norm. For the monk, the vow is defined as total abstinence, but for the layman it means inner purity. The householder must be content with his own wife and must consider all other women as his sisters, mothers and daughters. The Acaryas had a realistic understanding of the power of sex and counselled against its indulgence through suggestive literature, sexual fantasies and intimacy. Sexual deviations were to be avoided, including contact with lower animals and inanimate objects. The scriptures provide many examples of positive sexual relationships that are applicable to the present situation.

Unlike the Hindus who look upon marriage as a sacrament, Jains treat the institution as a contract. Its purpose is to make sex licit within a family. The role of sex between husband and wife is strictly procreational, so that its engagement is limited to the ovulation period. Notwithstanding many of its own unique features, the Jain concept of the family is strongly influenced by the prevailing Hindu culture.

Women have been accorded equal status to men within the Jain religion. As a matter of fact, there were more women in the order of Lord Mahavira than men. The scriptures record many tributes to exceptional women. The care of women, especially in critical situations, is given a higher priority than that of men. Mothers of the Tirthankaras are given special honor through communal worship. Legends abound in which heroines such as Brahmi, Sundari, Mallikumari, and Rajimati have come to the aid of men. Women have also been celebrated for their learning and have been recognized for their exceptional contributions in the field of education, culture and religion. So far as their legal and social status within the community is concerned, Jaina women are on a par with their Hindu sisters.

Jain egalitarianism rejects the Hindu division of society into higher and lower castes. It finds no basis for the idea that makes one caste superior to the other. On the contrary, it finds castism an evil based on hatred, pride, and deluded vision. Lord Mahavira gave no ground for the supremacy of any caste by reason of birth. This explains why many slaves, untouchables, and low-caste people entered the Jaina fold, and some were able to prove their personal merit by rising to the level of saints. Mahavira showed his feelings for the dignity of his fellows by eliminating the convention of caste distinctions in mutual address. He says, "Worthy beings! Take it as my command that henceforth no monk address another by the latter's caste." He was very conscious that pride of caste is destructive of communal solidarity.

The eighth and ninth sermons contained in the Uttaradhasana Sutra ethicize the notion of caste so that virtue, not birth, is the hallmark of a person's standing. It is said, "One becomes a Sramana by equanimity, a Brahmana by chastity, a Muni by knowledge and a Tapasa by penance. By one's action one becomes a Brahmana or a Ksatriya or a Vaisya or a Sudra."

In a similar vein, Acarya Amitagati said that, "Good people should not have pride in any class as it leads to degradation, but they should observe good conduct which might give them high position."

It is clear that there is no religious support for castism in the Jaina tradition. However, in the course of history, because of certain social factors, the Jaina did form a large number of castes and subcastes. Even so, the Jaina community has been foremost in social

services that cross all caste barriers and it has served as a cohesive force for national unity.

Social service is a prominent outcome of Jaina ethics. It prescribes six daily duties for every householder. These duties are, adoration of deity (Jina), veneration of the Gurus, study of literature and scriptures, practice of self discipline, observance of fasts and curbing appetites, and charity. All of these daily duties are related to the performance of social service for mankind.

The duty of charity (dana) sets the mood and manner of the layman's daily life. One performs charity, not on a cloud of sentiment, but following the details of scripture so that it is all done wisely, equitably, politely, and in a spirit of gratitude and humility.

One vow of spiritual discipline (siksavrata) that the householder takes is that of hospitality to monks, (Atithi Samvibhaga Vrata). This involves the supply of food, books, medicine, etc. Acarya Samantabhadra calls the vow of hospitality physical service (Vaiyavṛtya). It makes the householder into the parent of the monk. Sick, aged, and helpless monks are thus taken care of in their time of need. The practice of such physical service developed particularly in the area of medical charities (Ausadhi-Dana). Its effect was the creation of a communal sense of fearlessness (Abhaya-Dana).

Jaina ethics also makes the study of scriptures (Svadhyaya) an important service for monk and layman. This endeavor is known as Sastra-Dana. Its purpose is to advance knowledge, eliminate error, and to bring many others into its orbit of enlightenment, By following the duty of scriptural charity, Jain laymen have erected prestigious libraries containing numerous literary treasures. These Grantha-Bhandaras are not confined to Jaina works but contain collections which are of value for Indian culture at large.

This brief listing of social services should make it plain that there is no conflict in Jaina ethics between individual piety and social outreach. The six daily duties of the householder are personal, but not private; they extend into the community of which the individual is a part. Spirituality and practicality go hand-in-hand.

In addition to medical care for humans, Jainism is a leader among religions in providing hospitals for animals and birds. Its epitome of true spirituality is when a monk, wrapped in contemplation, takes time to mend the broken wing of a little sparrow. His holy mission is to all creatures great and small.

THE ECONOMIC ORDER

A global problem that threatens the welfare of all people is the conflict between Communism and Capitalism. Though totally different, they have these things in common - an insatiable appetite for material consumption and a corresponding disregard for moral principles. The result is mass exploitation on both sides. The only way this materialistic tide can turn is by the introduction of moral consideration into global economics that can bring both peace and prosperity to all; it must have a moral base.

Jaina ethics enjoins upon the householder certain vows which are economically oriented: Truth, Nonstealing, Nonpossession, to mention only some. The vow of truthfulness

requires a man to abstain from duplicity in his business and to conduct its affairs on the lines of honesty. Nonstealing permits no occasions for falsehood, All deceptions (maya) are prohibited, including dishonest gain through smuggling, bribery, and any sort of disreputable financial practice (adattadana). In this way truthfulness and honesty are prerequisites for the practice of the vow of Aparigraha (nonattachment).

The essence of the economic virtue of Aparigraha is that one should set a limit to one's own needs and whatever surplus one may accumulate beyond these needs should be disposed of through charities. By limiting one's property, the vow keeps in check the concentration of wealth and paves the way for its wide and more even distribution. Aparigraha is the only means whereby the growing gulf between the rich and the poor can be peacefully bridged. Its message is that we live in a society from which we profit and that, for the economic health of that society, the fair distribution of wealth is essential. Therefore, business dealings must be conducted in the nonacquisitive spirit of aparigraha.

THE IDEA OF AHIMSA AND VEGETARIANISM

One of the distinctive marks of Jainism has been its long tradition of nonviolence. Living as we do in an era of unparalleled violence, this feature of the Jaina ethics should stimulate contemporary interest for finding solutions to our global problems.

Ahimsa is a way of living that proceeds from the recognition of the spiritual value of man as man. It is supported by the values of aparigraha and anekantavada that develop an outlook of non possessiveness and nondogmatism. Greed, hatred, attachment and intolerance give way to mind and spirit that is sensitive to life, compassionate, benevolent, and open. It is never supposed that the practice of Ahimsa is easy, for a person must go through many stages of purification. But once the discipline is mastered, Ahimsa is the only way of ending all conflicts.

The Jaina literature is full of stories, historical and legendary, that demonstrate that Ahimsa can serve as a power for peace. For instance, there is the account of two kings, Bahubali and Bharata who were about to engage in bloody war with large armies. At the critical moment Bahubali suggested that instead of allowing this conflict to entail the lives of many soldiers, he and Bharata themselves engage in a show of strength to settle accounts. Thus a battle was fought without the shedding of blood. Such stories have kept alive the option of nonviolence as a way of resolving conflicts.

The Jaina Tirthankaras and monks have been in the forefront of creating a world devoid of violence. Numerous episodes in the life of Parsvanatha record his strong opposition to violence. He was in the habit of countering hostile attempts upon his life with the response of Ahimsa. It is said that he once saved a snake from being burnt by a mendicant in a sacrificial fire. The incident shows that he would not even permit violence for a religious purpose against any living creature. Similarly, several events in the life of Lord Mahavira also serve to establish Ahimsa as the highest perfection of human life. Through his many acts of forgiveness and his firm faith in spiritual values,

Mahavira demonstrated that violence cannot permanently resist nonviolence. If truly observed, Ahimsa ultimately triumphs.

A few years ago, the prominence given to Ahimsa by Jainism would have sounded idealistic; today it is not just nice but necessary. The old, practical ethics of justified killing belies the true conditions of human fulfillment and overestimates the power of violence against nonviolence. Thus the principle of pacifism, which has surfaced on and off in the ethical consciousness of the human race is found to be deeply rooted in the Jaina religion both in principle and in practice.

In its fullest ramifications, Ahimsa is more than pacifism as it is known in the Western world. Nonviolence is a principle of life that goes beyond human life to include birds, animals and all living beings. Jaina laymen are obligated to the daily practice of *Jivadaya*—showing mercy to all creatures. It was this vow that brought the Jaina saints into conflict with the Vedic practice of animal sacrifices. Acarya Somadeva says to the royalty who often paid for these elaborate sacrifices. “A king who constantly desires longevity, strength, and health must not cause injury to living creatures himself, nor allow it to take place when planned by others. One may give away the Meru mountain of gold as well as the entire earth. The result will not be equal to that of saving the life of a single sentient being.” It does not take much sensitivity to see that all living beings wish to live and are in fear of death. Therefore it is immoral to take away life for selfish ends.

Jaina literature has many examples of animal rescue. It is said that Neminatha, the twenty second Tirthankara staged a nonviolent demonstration by sacrificing his nuptial pleasure in order to save the helpless animals that were kept in cages for the occasion of his marriage.

Other stories make the point that, ironically, dumb animals better understand the meaning of Ahimsa than intelligent man. There is the narrative of Meruprabha the elephant who was caught in a raging forest fire. All the animals and birds assemble in a field to escape the flames. The area was so packed that a small rabbit was unable to find a vacant space to lodge itself. Suddenly, Meruprabha lifted its leg to scratch its body. Immediately the rabbit occupied the spot vacated by the elephant’s foot. Knowing the move, the elephant kept its leg elevated so as not to allow it to come down on the rabbit. At the end of three days, the fire subsided and all the animals departed. But the elephant died in that place because of injury sustained in standing on three legs for three days.

The story of Meruprabha the elephant is a literary gem because it illustrates the beneficent law of the jungle. To be sure, animals feed on one another but the carnage is not indiscriminate; fights are not to the death, and they do protect their young with their own lives. Man, to whom intelligence is given, is thereby placed in a position of greater ethical responsibility. He is Nature’s eldest son who must use his superior powers to care for and protect beings who are less endowed. He must not act as though the world was made only for him and that animals were placed here as objects for human food or sport. The saints have understood better. Ahimsa is not just a social value but a natural value. “Nonviolence is for the welfare of all kinds of animals, visible and nonvisible.”

Vegetarianism is another important correlate of Ahimsa. It is “an attitude of life which refuses to enjoy any pleasure at the cost of another’s pain. It is the policy of living at peace with all beings as far as possible. It is a more radical innovation than any of the

modern sciences to raise the cultural level of man. The rational conclusion of vegetarianism is that one should refuse any thing for any purpose in which animals are slaughtered, even medicine and leather goods.”

Since the Jaina ethical code is based on non violence, the people are very particular about matters of food and drink. Every layman is required to possess Asta-Mulagunas that comprise the five Anuvratas plus abstinence from the consumption of flesh, wine, and honey. Numerous stories describe some of the mulagunus, and it is claimed that “flesh-eaters have no kindness, drunkards never speak the truth, and people who take honey and the Udumbara fruit feel no pity.”

Jainism’s ancient advocacy of vegetarianism is receiving global attention due to severe food shortages and to the researches of the scientific community. Vegetarianism is the only viable answer to world hunger, given the scarcity of resources. This is not tantamount to the taking of a backward step out of necessity, for it is now a fairly well established fact that “there is nothing necessary or desirable for human nutrition to be found in meats or flesh foods which is not found in and derived from vegetable products.”

CONCLUSION

Thus Jainism comprises right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. It is manifest as nonpossession, nonabsolutism, and nonviolence. Through faith one discerns the nature of body and soul, and this awareness produces an attitude of detachment and nonpossession. Right knowledge frees one from absolutism and enables one to see things with a liberal and open mind, The discovery of the oneness of all living beings leads to nonviolent conduct. The centrality of Ahimsa to Jaina ethics makes it truly global, its practitioners are world citizens.

Its message of good will is for the whole of humanity:

May all people thrive in happiness. May the ruler be of religious bent of mind. May there be timely rains. Let all diseases disappear. Let there be no famine, theft or epidemic in this world even for a moment. May this wheel of religion (Dharma-cakra) move ever and anon, and bring about universal happiness and peace.

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