



FACETS OF JAIN PHILOSOPHY – AN OVERVIEW

KEY WORDS: Jainism, Anekantavada, Aparigraha

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ABSTRACT

Jainism is an ancient religion that is rooted in the philosophy that teaches the way to liberation and a path to spiritual purity and enlightenment through disciplined nonviolence to all living creatures. It came into prominence in sixth century BCE, when Lord Mahavira propagated the religion. The main religious premises of the Jain dharma are Ahimsa (non-violence), Anekantavada (many-sidedness), Aparigraha (non-attachment) and asceticism (abstinence from sensual pleasure). Devout Jains take five main vows: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (sexual continence) and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness). These principles have affected Jain culture in many ways, such as leading to a predominantly vegetarian lifestyle. Parasparopagraho jivanam (the function of souls is to help one another) is its motto and the Namokara mantra is its most common and basic prayer.

INTRODUCTION

Jainism is one of the oldest religion in India, dating back to sixth century BCE. According to 2011 census Jains constitute 4% of total Indian population. Maharashtra has maximum number of Jains (1.3%) followed by Rajasthan(1.2%), Delhi(1.1%) and Gujarat(1%) in south India Karnataka has 0.72% and Tamil Nadu has 0.12% Jains. In spite of the small numbers their present day contribution to trade and culture is remarkable. Their contribution to welfare of the marginalized society, in the way of munificent charities especially for the founding and upkeep of educational and health care institution is well known.

ORIGIN AND SPREAD

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion of obscure origins. Jains claim it to be eternal, and consider the first tirthankar Rishabhanatha as the reinforcer of Jain Dharma in the current time cycle. The historicity of first 22 tirthankars is not traced yet. The 23rd tirthankar Parshvanatha, was a historical being, possibly of 8th century BCE. Mahavira, the 24th tirthankar is considered as a contemporary of the Budha, in around 6th century BCE.

Jain consider the kings Bimbisara (c.558-491 BCE), Ajathashatru (c.492-400 BCE) and Udayin (c.460-440BCE) of the Haryanka dyanasty as patrons of Jainism. Jain tradition states that Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 BCE), the founder of Mauryan empire and grandfather of Ashoka, became a monk and disciple of Jain ascetic Bhadrabahu in the later part of his life. Jains faced persecution during and after the Muslim conquest on Indian subcontinent. Muslim rulers except Akbar oppressed Jain community. The British colonial government and Indian princely states promoted religious tolerance; however laws were passed that made roaming naked by anyone an arrestable crime. The laws were abolished by Indian government after independence.

TRADITION AND SECTS

The Jain community is divided in to two major denominations, Digambaras and Svetambaras. Jain tradition states that during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, Acharya Bhadrabahu predicted twelve year famine and moved to Karnataka, with his disciples. Sthulabhadr, a pupil of Bhadrabahu is believed to have stayed in Magadha.

During the time of famine the group in south India sticks to the strict practices while the group in Magadha adopted more lax attitude. After the end of famine, when the southern group came back to Magadha, the changed practices led to the division of Jainism in to two sects.

Digambaras

- Monks believe in complete nudity
- Follow all five vows(Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya

and Aparigraha)

- Believe women cannot achieve liberation
- Bhadrabahu was the exponent of this sect

Svetambaras

- Monks wear white cloths
- Follow only four vows (except Brahmacharya)
- Believe women can achieve liberation
- Sthulabhahu was the exponent of this sect

TENETS OF JAINISM

Cosmology:

The Jain cosmic universe has 3 parts the upper, middle and lower worlds (Urdwaloka, Madhyaloka and Adholoka). The cosmic wheel of time, kalachakra rotates ceaselessly. In this part of the universe, it explains, there are 6 periods of time within two eons (Ara) and in the first eon the universe generates and in the second eon the universe degenerates. Thus it divided the worldly cycle of time in to two half cycles, Utsarpini (ascending, progressive prosperity and happiness) and Avasarpini (descending increasing sorrow and immorality). It states that the world is currently in the 5th ara of Avasarpini, full of sorrow and religious decline, where the height of living beings shrink. According to Jainism after the 6th Ara, the universe will be reawakened in a new cycle.

Gods:

Jainism is a transtheistic religion, holding that the universe was not created and will exist forever. However Jainism believe in the world of heavenly and hell beings who are born, die and reborn like earthly beings. In Jainism perfect souls with a body are called arhants (victors) and perfect souls without a body are called Sidhas.

Samsara:

Samsara in Jainism refers to the worldly life characterized by continuous rebirths and reincarnations in various realms of existence. Samsara is described as mundane existence, full of suffering and misery and hence considered undesirable and worth renunciation. Jainism asserts that each soul passes through 8,400,000 birth situations as they circle through samsara, going through 5 types of bodies' like earthly bodies, water bodies, fire bodies, air bodies and vegetable lives constantly changing with all human and non-human activities from rainfall to breathing. Moksha is the only way to be liberated from Samsara. Sidha (liberated soul) has gone beyond Samsara, is at the apex, is omniscient, and remains there eternally.

Dravya:

Dravya means substance or entity in Sanskrit. According to Jain philosophy substance has infinite characters and is subject to production, destruction and permanence. The whole universe can be divided into two everlasting,

uncreated, eternal and co existing categories called *Jeeva* and *Ajeeva*. *Jeeva* is the conscious spirit, *Ajeeva* includes matter (*Pudgala*), space (*Akasha*), motion (*Dharma*), rest (*Adharma*) and time (*Kala*).

Tattva (Reality):

Tattva connotes reality or truth in Jain philosophy and is in the frame work for salvation. According to *Digambara* Jains there are seven *Tattvas*, *Jiva* (the sentient), *Ajiva* (insentient), *Asrava* (the karmic influx to the soul), *bandha* (bondage of karmic particles to the soul), *Samvara* (stoppage of karmic particles), *Nirjara* (karmic particles), *Moksha* (liberation). *Svetambaras* added two further *tattvas* namely, *Punya* (good karma) and *Paap* (bad karma). The true insight in Jain philosophy is considered as faith in *tattvas*.

ETHICS OF JAINISM

Jain ethical code prescribes 2 *Dharmas* or rules of conduct. One for those who wish to become ascetic and the other for the *Sravakas* (house holders). Five fundamental vows are prescribed for both votaries. These vows are observed by *Sravakas* partially and are termed as *Anuvratas* (small vows). Ascetics or monastic's observe these five vows more strictly and therefore is called *Maha vratas* (major vows). These vows are: *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truth), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (chastity), *Aparigraha* (non possession).

Apart from the five fundamental vows, seven supplementary vows are prescribed for a *Sravaka*. These include three *Guna vratas* (merit vows) and four *Siksa vratas* (disciplinary vows). The vow of *Sallekhana* is observed by the votaries at the end of his life. It is prescribed for both ascetics and *Sravakas*.

Moksha:

It refers to the liberation or salvation of soul from *Samsara* (the cycle of birth and death. it is a blissful state of existence of a soul, attained after destruction of all karmic bondage. In Jainism, *Moksha* is the highest and the noblest objective that a soul should strive to achieve. Souls can achieve *Moksha* through right view, knowledge and conduct. And hence Jainism is also called *Mokshamargam* (path to liberation).

Moksha margam (Path of liberation):

According to Jainism purification of soul and liberation can be achieved through *Ratna traya* (three jewels), that is, *Samyaktarsanam* (rational perception), *Samyak jnanam* (rational knowledge) and *Samyak charitam* (rational conduct).

Jain text often add *Samyak tap* (correct ascetism) as a fourth jewel. These four jewels are called *Moksha margam*. Jainism also describes fourteen stages on the path of liberation known as *Gunasthana*.

Anekanta vada (Relativistic pluralism):

it is considered as one of the main principle of Jainism. The doctrine states that truth and reality is complex and always has multiple aspects. According to it, one can experience the taste of truth, but cannot fully express that taste through language. All statement can be judged as true or not true and thus inexpressible, depending on the point of view. The theory of relativity of knowledge is known as *Syad vada* (relativism) and states that all judgements are conditional expressed by the word *Syad* which literally means 'may be'. The combination of these possibilities can be stated in seven logical alternatives called *Saptabhangi*.

CONCLUSION

Followers of Jainism are called Jains a word derived from the Sanskrit word *Jina* (victors) which means an omniscient person who teaches the path of salvation. The main principles of Jainism are *Ahimsa*, *Anekanta vada* and *Aparigraha*. These principles played great role in uplifting the religious morality in our society. According to Mahatma Gandhi no Indian religion has described *Ahimsa* so deeply as in Jainism. A

religion with such remote antiquity and rich heritage had its natural influence on the culture of Indian sub-continent. The majority of Jains currently reside in India, with four to five million followers worldwide. Outside India Jain communities can be found in United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and Kenya. Jainism is also spreading rapidly in Japan. According to national family and health survey conducted in 2015-16, Jain forms the wealthiest community in India and have high literacy rate (87%).

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