

JAIN ECOLOGY AND JAIN LIFESTYLE

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Jain Ecologic Ethics

Jainism is now known the world over as an environment friendly religion on account of its basic principles which enjoin its followers to minimize their needs, restrain the activities of their mind, body and speech to enable them to refrain from inessential violence and have reverence for all life forms which are independent sentient entities endowed with souls. According to Jainism each sentient entity is an independent *jiva* which may be born again even as a human being and is likely to be liberated if the *jiva* of the human body lives a good life embedded in *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and annihilates his karmic bondage by exercising restraint on the activities of his mind, body and speech.

Omniscient Lord Mahavira realized that the entire earth consists of two kinds of substances – *jiva* (those entities which are endowed with souls) and *ajiva* (those that have no souls i.e. matter). Worldly life results from the interaction between the soul and matter. Whatever a soul possesses, whether speech organ, respiratory system, brain etc. is a result of its interaction with matter. Thus *ajiva* (matter) helps a *jiva* and the cycle of life continues on this planet. Mahavira explains that sentient entities or souls are of two kinds – those that have mind and those that are without mind. The worldly souls are further categorized as mobile and immobile beings. Immobile being include the earth-bodied, water-bodied, fire-bodied, air-bodied and plant-bodied beings. By immobile beings Jainism means those sentient entities which have life and which grow, ripen and die but are not able to move voluntarily. It is they that

constitute nature. They are identified as trees, plants, hills, rivers which sustain not only human life but all other forms of mobile creatures such as microbes, insects, animals and birds. Mahavira further states that all forms of life want to live – no one wants to die – even an insect wants to live so one should be careful lest any of these mobile beings should be killed. But a worldly embodied soul has to commit violence in some or the other form to survive. So Mahavira enjoins his followers to refrain from inessential violence like hunting, felling green trees, using water, earth, fire indiscriminately and wantonly. The ideal is to let every living being live but since a house holder needs water, fire, plants for his sustenance, living beings with one sense are inevitably killed. This is the way of the world. A house holder cannot refrain from violence completely but he can minimize it.

Interconnectedness of *jivas* – the core of Jaina ecology

There is interconnectedness among all *jivas*. A house holder should, at least, try to refrain from inessential violence. He says, “one who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them”. Jainism recognizes the fundamental natural phenomenon of mutual dependence. The modern science of ecology also makes it clear that each life form is connected with the other. It is this relationship of a *jiva* with other *jivas* that matters. Mahavira asserts that all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence (*parasparopagraho jivanama*) Life is a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance in a universe teeming with independent constituents. In order to minimize violence in our life Mahavira gives an important *sutra*. Taking life away out of passion is violence. Passion includes powerful emotions of anger, pride, deceit and greed. It is the passion (*kasaya*) which is responsible for all

forms of violence towards fellow beings, towards nature. It is a person's deliberate, wanton and passionate act that destroys both human beings and non-human beings. Ecological harmony and environmental protection result from our controlled behaviour free from impulsive impetuosity and passionateness.

Modern Science of Ecology and Jaina Principles

Jainism, as a matter of fact, is 'deep ecology' propounded by the modern eco-philosophy Arne Naess who gives eight points of his 'deep ecology'. They are (i) the flourishing of human and non-human life on earth is inherently valuable; (ii) richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the flourishing of both human and non-human life on earth; (iii) humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs; (iv) substantial decrease of the human population will help flourishing of non-human life; (v) present human interference with non-human world is excessive; (vi) changes in policies are necessary in basic economic, technological and ideological structures. If it is done, it will result in a more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things; (vii) ideological change means appreciating life quality rather than an increase in higher standard of living. It means awareness of the difference between big and great; (viii) those who believe in the above points must participate in an attempt to implement the necessary changes.

Naess's ecology of wisdom is nothing but a reiteration of what Lord Mahavira has said. For the Jains nothing is new since the lifestyle of true Jains is embedded in the values highlighted in the above eight-points.

Another modern philosopher Henry David Thoreau also endorses Jain ecology when he says, I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately he wrote, "to front only the essential facts of life and see if I couldn't learn what

it (woods) had to teach, and not, when, I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Both these philosophers tried to live ecologically to experience real joy of life which comes not from ‘excess’ but from ‘minimum’.

The Jaina Model of Nonviolent Lifestyle that I am going to present today is based on the above values. The modern lifestyle is characterized by rivalry, lack of self-restraint. Late His Holiness Acharya Tulsi once gave a sutra – “*nij par shashan, fir anushashan* – first control the self and then talk of discipline.” This statement is an epitome of the model of nonviolent lifestyle. Discipline stems from self-restraint. Without restraining the self if one expects discipline in social life, it will only disappoint us.

One of the most celebrated philosophers and the leading Jaina spiritual leader His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya has chosen educating people in *ahimsa* as the main mission of his life. At the age of 89 years he is moving from village to village and city to city spreading ecological ethic and creating *ahimsa* awareness among the people. He says, “Emotional impetuosity gives rise not only to *himsa* (violence) but it also weakens the body. Both *bhava* (emotion) and *roga* (disease) are intimately connected. Many experiments have been made in this area. If a person has a feeling of jealousy towards another person, he runs the risk of being gripped by peptic ulcer. He will think that he has been careful enough in eating then how is it that he is a victim of peptic ulcer? It has now been proved beyond doubt that man’s diseases have much to do with his powerful emotional drives.

Jaina Model of Nonviolent Lifestyle

After a careful study of the Jaina values, their impact on life and relationship with our environment, a Jaina model of nonviolent lifestyle has been developed. It consists of the following nine components.

1. *samyak darshan* (right faith or true spiritual insight).
2. *anekant* (the doctrine of non-absolutism)
3. *ahimsa* (nonviolence)
4. *saman sanskriti* – *sam, sham, shram* (the mendicant or ascetic culture – equanimity, continence and laboriousness)
5. *ichchha pariman* (limiting desire)
6. *samyak ajivika* (right means of livelihood)
7. *samyak samskar* (right formative influence)
8. *aharshuddhi aur vyasan mukti* (purity of food and freedom from addictions)
9. *sadharmik vatsalya* (affection for the followers of the same faith and extending it to the followers of other faiths)

1. **Right Faith (*samyak darshan*)**

The life of a householder is enmeshed in attachment and it is also not undesirable. But if there is no control over one's passions, life becomes unbalanced. To live a balanced life is a basic characteristic of the Jain lifestyle. He believes the *Arhat* (he who has attained absolute knowledge and is free from passions) is my deity.

Sadhus (ascetics) are my teachers, those who endeavor with dedication to rid themselves of passions.

The truth propounded by the *arhat* (omniscient being) is my religion. It is the path that leads to freedom from passions. Faith in *arhats* (the adorable ones), the *guru* (preceptor) and *dharma* (path of righteousness) constitutes true spiritual insight. Its results are:

- (a) the development of right faith (*samyak darshan*);
- (b) the development of a creative outlook;
- (c) the subduing of anger, pride, deceit and greed.

False perception of reality hinders the growth of peaceful coexistence, humility, fraternity, friendship, straight forward dealing and business integrity. All obstacles disappear and life becomes enlightened once one follows a lifestyle dictated by right faith.

2. **Non-absolutist Attitude (*anekanta*)**

Living in a society requires adherence to relativism, harmony and peaceful coexistence. Life is relative. Therefore without treating one's own view as unimportant, we should try to understand the viewpoints of others as well. He alone can lead a healthy social life who follows relativism and open-mindedness in his day today social interaction. If I ascribe some element of truth to my thoughts, how can I deny the same to someone else's thoughts? He alone can have harmonious relationships who can reconcile the opposite views and develop a non-absolutist attitude. Partiality and dogmatic insistence on a viewpoint make life dry, bitter and sad. The outlook of a follower of *anekant* lifestyle is characterized by humility. It automatically resolves disputes and strife. Domestic life becomes pleasant, happy and sweet. In the absence of a universal feeling of relativism, it is idle to hope for any improvement in human

relations. We must realize that all standpoints are partially true hence we should respect opposite views.

The results of living according to the *anekanta* style are

- (a) development of a relativistic outlook;
- (b) development of an attitude of harmony;
- (c) development of an attitude capable of harmonizing the opposites and controversial views.

3. **Nonviolence (*ahimsa*)**

Ordinary men cannot avoid violence altogether in their daily life. Even those endowed with right faith undertake discussions with a view to finding ways of minimizing violence. Dialogues become important starting points on the road to the development of nonviolence. The first principle underlying the above process of minimization requires the abandonment of inessential violence. Due to negligence, attachment and strong desires people indulge in a lot of violence. Therefore those who want to adopt a nonviolent lifestyle should always remember the precept: 'Minimize violence. Avoid inessential violence.'

Cruelty causes inessential violence. Murders and feticide are clear illustrations of violence. Suicide is an example of a flurry of excitement. The apparent motive behind cosmetic goods is the desire for make-up and beautiful looks, but at the back of it is cruelty.

One who avoids inessential violence does not overuse soil, water and vegetation. In using them he practices restraint and discrimination.

The results of a nonviolent lifestyle are

- (a) the development of sensitivity;

- (b) control of ecological pollution;
- (c) continual growth of friendship with living beings.

4. **The Ascetic Culture (*shramaan sanskriti*)**

The most vital force of the Jain lifestyle is *shramana* culture. ‘*shramana*’ is a Prakrit word which is variably called in Sanskrit as *saman*, *shaman* and *shramana*.

A *saman* is he whose heart is pure and who treats all sentient beings like himself.

A *shaman* is he who knows how to subdue his passions and excitement.

A *shramana* is a *tapasvi* who undergoes religious austerities like fasting and mortification of the self and is given to doing hard work and self-reliance.

Will you like to be treated as inferior or subjected to wild anger and ill-treatment or to be exploited by others? If not, you will have to change your lifestyle. You will have to mete out equal treatment to all others and consider no one as inferior. You must learn to curb your excitement and impulses. You must not create obstructions in the way of someone’s earning his living.

The results of the lifestyle based on ascetic culture are

- (a) human unity;
- (b) putting an end to racial and caste hatred as well as untouchability;
- (c) peaceful coexistence;
- (d) balanced behavior;
- (e) development of self-reliance.

5. **Limiting or Restraining Desires (*ichha pariman*)**

Material objects and services are limited, but consumers are too many. The desires too keep growing. As a solution to this problem Lord Mahavira propounded the principle of limiting or restraining one's desires. Absence of individual ownership gives rise to conflicts; unlimited ownership runs counter to the creation of a harmonious socio-political world order. So there is a middle way - limit your desires; limit individual ownership and acquisition; limit individual consumption.

The experiment in limiting desires is a challenge to the present economic competitiveness and a rat race of development. The experiment is difficult but in it alone lies the solution to the problem.

The results of the lifestyle of limited desires are

- (a) sharing, parting with a part of the resources one acquires;
- (b) building a healthy society.

6. **The Right Means of Livelihood (*samyak ajivika*)**

Man cannot live without bread. Begging is a crime. Earning livelihood is the only way out. Therefore every head of the family resorts to it. The consciousness of the purity of means awakens in a person faith in nonviolence and limitation of desires. He refrains from earning a living by dishonest means. He undertakes only such activities as do not tarnish either his character or that of society.

The results of right means of livelihood are

- (a) clean business and integrity;
- (b) refraining from trade and business related to intoxicants, meat, fish, eggs and similar items undesirable for eating;

- (c) refraining from activities that involve smuggling;
- (d) refraining from adulteration of food stuffs;
- (e) refraining from trading in arms;
- (f) refraining from felling trees and destroying forests.

7. Exposing Children to Right Formative Influences (*samyak samskara*)

Life without direction leads nowhere. The right direction is one that leads to one's destination or goal. And our destination is the realm where there is equity, balance and self-conquest. It is therefore essential that from the very beginning such education is imparted as may lead to that destination. Birth, christening, marriage, festivals and death are special occasions which lend an identity to the individual and this identity is made possible by sanctifying ceremonies. The Jain sanctifying ceremonies should be such as are not contrary to the spirit of the age, are not fettered by wasteful rituals, are not tainted by blind imitation or unhealthy entertainment and do not sow the seeds of agitation and violence in society.

8. Purity of Food and Freedom from Addiction (*aharshuddhi aur vyasan mukti*)

Purity of food is a requirement, not merely of religious texts but also of Health Science and Practical Psychology. There is an ancient saying which states that 'as you eat so you think.' Science has further enlarged this concept by stating that there is a causal chain of food, neurotransmitters and behavior.

Eating meat and animals fats in general may result in the construction of the blood vessels which in turn enhances the chances of coronary and heart diseases.

Use of alcoholic drinks affects the liver and other organs. Likewise nicotine contained in tobacco poisons the system of smokers and chewers of areca nuts mixed with tobacco. This again leads to the constriction of blood vessels and enhances the chances of contracting cardiac ailments, cancer and other deadly diseases. The most obvious result of tobacco tar is cancer.

Gambling and similar addictions also cause mental afflictions and thus prove a curse for those seeking mental peace and happiness. It is vitally important to keep away from them.

The results of using pure foods and freedom from addiction are

- (a) healthy and balanced life;
- (b) improvement in physical, mental and emotional health;
- (c) protection from criminal instincts.

9. Affection for the Followers of the Same Faith (Jains) and Extending it to the Members of Other Faiths (*sadharmik vatsalya*)

There are many units responsible for the composition of a society. Those who subscribe to the canons of the same sect develop a feeling of fraternity among themselves. The principle that one who has been initiated into the *namaskar mantra* is my dear brother, reinforces the above formulation. Followers of the same faith should remain steadfast in their faith. This steadfastness is an important dimension of affectionate feelings for those who follow the spirit embodied in Namaskar Mantra.

Those who are not Jains (by birth) may become Jains on the basis of their conduct and lead their lives on the basis of their faith in purity of food, freedom from addictions and true spiritual insight. This is yet another dimension of

expressing a feeling of affection. The benevolent practice i.e. imparting education, arranging for health care, ensuring a living and creating an atmosphere free from fear, were responsible for making Jainism widely popular in the south. Though affection for all living beings is the fundamental principle of Jainism, let us begin it by showing affection at least towards those who follow the same path and develop it further.

The results of the lifestyle based on a tender feeling of affection for fellow believers are

- (a) popular attraction towards nonviolence;
- (b) inter-caste goodwill;
- (c) interfaith goodwill.

I am of the view that the Jaina Model of Nonviolent Lifestyle can become a universal model for emulation by all those who believe in ecologically ethic. It does not have any sectarian component in it and can become a useful instrument to save the planet from destruction and ensure survival into the third millennium.

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