

# **Shrishti Chakra – The Cycle of Creation and Suffering from a Samana Suttam Perspective**

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## **Samsara Chakra and Suffering**

Saman Suttam is a collection of the quintessential axioms of the Jaina philosophy. Out of the total 756 *gathas* (verses) it uses only eleven *gathas* to delineate the nature of the cycle of *samsara*. At the outset in the very first verse of *samsara chakra sutra*, a seeker of truth describes the world as *adhruva* (impermanent) *ashashvata* (perishable) and full of suffering and seeks guidance as to which *karma* he should avoid so that he may not be born in a *yoni* (a form of existence) which is miserable. The second *gatha* is an answer to the question raised in the 45<sup>th</sup> *gatha*. It says that the sensual enjoyments (*kama bhoga*) give ephemeral joy and cause prolonged suffering. They bring immense misery and very little joy. They are impediments in his path of liberation from the cycle of creation and are a mine of misfortunes and calamities. The essence of all the *gathas* from 45 to 55 is that this *samsara* (world) is *asara* (vain) and full of disasters and ordeals. Man can, however, redeem the world by overcoming or conquering his passions of attachment and hatred.

Even the joys which gods experience in heaven are, as a matter of fact, nothing but suffering. Ignorant, foolish and stupefied people who exult in the sensual enjoyments and sully their souls get stuck to *karmas* just as flies stick in phlegm. The irony is that man knows the futility of worldly pleasures and even thinks about the suffering likely to be caused by old age and death but is not able to refrain from them. His knot of delusion becomes so strong that he is deeply infatuated with *samsara*. A worldly *jiva* has a propensity for *raga* (attachment) and *dvesha* (hatred). On account of his being gripped by *raga* and *dvesha* he generates *karmic* bondages. As a result he transmigrates into four types of *gatis* (places of birth) viz infernal,

subhuman, human and celestial. If his passions persist he has to pass through 8.4 million yonis. When he is born in any *gati* he gets a body and sense-organs which he uses to satisfy his lust for sensual pleasures. It causes *raga* and *dvesha* again. In this way a *jiva* remains entangled in a transmigratory cycle of birth and death. This cycle can be broken if a *jiva* develops right faith or enlightened worldview and it becomes endless if he fails to destroy the heterodoxy and layers of inauspicious karmas that wrap his soul through righteous conduct and *tapa* (self-mortification). The indications of *samyakatva* (right faith) in a person's life include calmness, fear of death and distaste for worldly life, compassion and belief in transmigration of the soul.

### **The Thoery of Shrishti (Creation) in Jainism**

Jainism doesn't believe in monotheism. It rejects the theory that the universe is controlled and directed by only one supreme soul called God. It explains the mystery of the world not on the basis of its controller i.e. God but on the basis of the cosmic laws which regulate our life on the planet. The *samsara* (*shrishti*) is the result of the two entities or substances called *jiva* (soul) and *pudgal* (matter). According to Jainism it is imperative for us to understand both *loka* (inhabited place of the cosmic space) and *shrishti* (creation).

What is a *loka*? The answer is that it is the result of the coming together of the two fundamental substances i.e. soul and matter. The diversity created by the combination of soul and matter is what we call *shrishti*. It consists of *jiva* (animate or sentient entities) and *ajiva* (inanimate or insentient entities). *Jivas* are the endless embodied souls gifted with consciousness. The souls lose their qualities of perfection under the influence of the inanimate, viz material objects and get a number of new qualities which are alien to their true nature. Souls are uncreated, imperishable, immaterial, knowing, active and acceptable entities and are present in an infinite number. A *loka* (world) means the co-existence of the

created entities. Creation means the transformation of *jivas* (souls) and *pudgal* (matter) into different forms. Thus the concept of a *loka* in Jainism means an inhabited region in the cosmos. *Ajiva* consists of *dharmastikaya* (medium of motion), *adharmastikaya* (medium of rest), *akash* (space), *pudgal* (matter) and *kala* (time) of which a *jiva* makes use for the expansion of his activities in the world. The human body is the result of the coming together of *jiva* and *pudgal*. *Jivas* take in material particles according to their *karmas* and create their bodies which are classified into *shatakaya* (six types of embodied souls) i.e. the earth-bodied beings, water-bodied beings, the fire-bodied beings, the air-bodied beings, the plant-bodied beings and the mobile beings endowed with one-sense, two senses, three senses, four senses and five senses. The entire earth is a mass of *jivas*, each of which is an independent entity. Thus *shristhi* is created by all the six classes of *jivas* mentioned above. The bodies of some *jivas* create the earth, the bodies of some *jivas* create water. The fire consists of the bodies of *tejaskayik jivas*, air consists of the bodies of *vayukayuk jivas*, vegetation consists of the bodies of *vanaspatikayik jivas* and the rest consist of *traskayika jivas* (mobile beings).

The relationship between *jiva* and *ajiva* remains unbroken till *pudgal* (matter) and *jiva* impact each other. Once a *jiva* takes its body, it is ruled and controlled by the *karmic* body that accompanies it till its liberation. It is also the intrinsic cause of a *jiva*'s decline or fall. It is affected by external conditions. These material particles (*varganas*) are infinitely infinite and they pervade the entire *loka* (inhabited cosmic space). They are of eight classes – (i) *audarika varganas* (the gross material particles), (ii) *vaikriya varganas* (protean or metamorphic material particles), (iii) *aharaka varganas* (conveyance material particles), (iv) *tejas varganas* (fiery material particles), (v) *shvasouchhvas varganas* (respiration), (vi) *bhasha varganas* (speech), (vii) *mana varganas* (mind) and (viii) *karmic varganas* (suitable *karmic* material clusters). The number of material particles in each body

increases as we proceed from the gross to the *karmic* bodies but with the increase of the mass of clusters, their volumes do not increase but become more and more condensed. In other words they become progressively subtler and subtler.

The first four (gross, protean, conveyance, fiery material particles) and the last i.e. (the material particles of the mind) create bodies. The remaining three *varganas* (material particles) direct the functions of respiration, speech and the mind. These material particles (*varganas*) become organized by the activities of the mind, speech and body of the living beings in *loka* (world). It is believed that *jivas* have been wrapped by *karmic* particles from time immemorial. The *nigodas* (the subtlest one-sensed *jivas* that lie dormant in the earth) are the most under-developed forms of *jivas*. One cell of *nigoda* is believed to contain infinite *jivas*. It is an inexhaustible storehouse of *jivas* and is considered the original place of us all. Many of these *nigodas* which remain buried in the earth have indifferent heterodoxy in which they are neither inclined towards the good nor towards the bad. Their sentience remains unmanifest. Only when they are rattled by some accidental circumstances from their indifference, their heterodoxy assumes a definite form. But this creates a precondition for spiritual development. When a *jiva* comes out of its *nigodic* existence, it expresses its potential for development. Thus the cycle of creation goes on. Some *jivas* make progress while others trail behind. They are born in different *yonis* so the biodiversity of the universe is maintained. The final stage of a *jiva*'s development is its ability to annihilate the *karmic* layers that bind it. A *jiva*'s gross body is abandoned when it dies but its subtle body still accompanies it. As a result it has to create a gross body again but when both its subtle body and gross body are abandoned after all its *karmas* are destroyed, then it doesn't assume a body. It is called a *jiva*'s final redemption.

When *kashayas* (passions) envelop a *jiva*, its worldview is deluded and its transmigratory cycle continues. It is now clear that *jivas*, on account of their being bound by *karmas*, create different bodies which in turn create many material components. It is the *jivas* that change the subtle material particles into the gross ones and this gross world alone is our visible world or what we call *shrishti* (creation). It is all a natural phenomenon which is governed by the laws of *karma*.

### **The Enigma of the Universe**

Notwithstanding the scientific theories about the evolution of life on this planet and the efforts being made by the community of scientists and spiritual leaders to unravel the mystery of the universe from time to time it still remains an enigma. The scriptural explanations about the origin and nature of the universe provided by seers, prophets and enlightened and self-illuminated sages are contradictory and highly exaggerated. They cannot be verified from a scientific standpoint. Many of the religious beliefs about the origin of the world (*samsara*) have already been proved false and wrong by science. Before the advent of the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus in the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was believed that the earth was flat and was the centre of the universe. He discovered that the sun and not the earth is at the centre of the solar system. It was he who first found out that the rotation and orbital motion of the earth cause days and nights. The Italian astronomer Galileo's invention of telescope in the 17<sup>th</sup> century enabled the latter scientists to get an idea into the infiniteness of the universe. Issac Newton's law of gravitation, which he invented in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, paved the way for the extensive and intensive exploration of the universe. According to the scientists the Big Bang – the hypothetical explosive event-marked the origin of the universe. At the time it happened the entire universe was squeezed into a hot suspended state. However, scientists are not able to tell us as to what was the cause of the explosion. They calculate that the Big Bang took place about 12 billion years ago. They still can't answer the question as to

whence the squeezed universe came. Science studies the visible world and it has found out that the cosmos is dotted with infinite number of galaxies spanning thousands of light years. The most celebrated scientist of the modern age Stephen Hawking doesn't rule out the existence of life on planets other than the earth but he rejects the belief that the universe is God's creation and that nothing moves in it without his will. The cosmological beliefs of the most of the religious traditions of the world contradict one another though most of them believe that God not only controls the universe but also regulates the lives of all living beings that inhabit it.

### **The Jain View of the Universe**

Lord Mahavira, while answering questions raised by one of his disciples said – “This *loka* (universe) has existed from time immemorial. No one has created it. It has neither a beginning, nor an end. It undergoes a change through a natural process. It is filled with two substances called ‘*jiva*’ (souls) and *ajiva*, which consists of *dharmastikaya* (medium of motion), *adharmastikaya* (medium of rest), *akashastikaya* (space) and *pudgalastikaya* (matter). A *loka* is an inhabited part of the entire space. It is eternal.” In reply to a question Lord Mahavira said, “This *samsara* is made of the *pariyayas* (alternative conditions in substances). Some people believe that *shrishti* is a divine creation. It is their view but it is not correct. It is also not true to say that there was a time when *loka* didn't exist. It has existed eternally.”

For the Jaina thinkers the space (*akash*) is an independent substance. It is devoid of colour, odour, taste. It is infinite in extent. It is present everywhere. It stretches not only over the world but also far beyond it over the non-universe. Thus the space is divided into two parts, the inhabited cosmic space (*lokakash*) and transc cosmic space (*alokakash*). The inhabited cosmic space is that part which is occupied by embodied souls and matter and which is coextensive with the media of motion and rest. There are

innumerable space units in cosmic inhabited space. There are embodied souls in all these space units. Only an innumerable part of the inhabited cosmic space is occupied by embodied souls, which are endowed with right faith or enlightened worldview. Only an innumerable part of the inhabited cosmic space is touched by an ordinary embodied soul endowed with right faith or enlightened worldview. The transc cosmic space stretches beyond the inhabited cosmic space. As already stated it is only with the assistance of these two substances that the embodied souls and material objects move from place to place and rest. The souls that are liberated move up to the top of the cosmic space (*siddhachal*) which is the plane where all liberated souls rest. Beyond this region lies the transc cosmic space. It is pure space and empty of embodied souls and matter. The inhabited cosmic space consists of innumerable planets, galaxies including twelve heavens and seven hells.

Lord Mahavira explains the enigma of *loka* and *aloka* in the following words :

“Some people think that the inhabited cosmic space (*loka*) is permanent, eternal and imperishable hence it is infinite. But the omniscient beings see that though a *loka* is permanent, it also has an end. From the viewpoint of substance and area a *loka* has an end and from the viewpoint of *kala* (time) and *bhava* (psychic state) it is infinite. That which contains both *jiva* and *ajiva* is called *loka* (inhabited cosmic space) and that which contains just one component of *ajiva* i.e. *akasha* (space) is called *aloka* (trans cosmic space). There are six substances that pervade the inhabited cosmic space and a *loka* constitutes the extension of these six substances.”

On being further asked by Gautam if the number of *jivas* in the inhabited cosmic space increases or decreases Lord Mahavira said, “Gautam! *jivas* neither increase, nor decrease. They always remain the same. But the number of liberated souls (*siddha*) does increase. A *jiva* never changes into *ajiva* or *ajiva* never changes into *jiva*. It has never happened,

nor it is happening, nor it will happen that mobile beings disappear completely or all of them become immobile.

### **The cycle of Transmigration and *moksha* (Liberation)**

The Jains believe that God has no role either in the operation, origination and destruction of *shrishti* or in regulating the lives of living beings that constitute it. The world we live in is full of suffering. The oft-quoted Jain aphorism '*asarah samsara*' makes it clear that the life in this world is vain, empty and senseless. The innumerable *jivas* that constitute as well as inhabit the universe pass through a cycle of births and deaths directed by the various processes of their *karma*. They transmigrate from one birth into another in the four realms which are the respective habitats of the infernal beings (those that dwell in hells), subhumans – plants and animals – and human beings that dwell in Jambu Dweep and gods that dwell in heavens. Their births in the aforesaid realms are determined by the states of their souls which either suppress their deluded *karmas* or eliminate the eight types of *karmas* or eliminate and suppress the four destructive *karmas* partially. Each *jiva* is bound by *karmas* and is independent. The *jivas* (souls) are divided into two classes – worldly souls and liberated souls. The worldly souls are again divided into two categories i.e. those which will be liberated ultimately and those which will wander eternally in the *samsara*. The transmigratory journey of the soul that will be liberated ultimately has no beginning and but its end can come if it is freed from all the eight types of *karmas* that bind it.

A *jiva* can redeem itself from the immense suffering of this *samsara* if it can restrain the activities of its mind, body and speech with the help of *samyak jnana* (right knowledge), *samyak darshan* (right faith) and *samyak charitra* (right conduct) and can get rid of the cycle of transmigration by eliminating all the eight types of *karmas* that generate changes in its nature which constitute its worldly career. Very few souls are able to withstand the worldly temptations and follow the path of *samyaktva*, so *samsara* goes on



and will go on eternally. The soul itself is the doer of the suffering. Lord Mahavira has said, “*appa katta vikatta ya, duhan ya suhan ya, appa mittmittam cha, dupathiya supatthio* – the soul itself is the doer or undoer of its suffering, it itself is its friend or enemy. Of course, there is immense suffering in this world and the *jiva* that doesn’t endeavour to remain equanimous in the midst of worldly sins, indulges in evil activities wantonly under the influence of the deluded worldview and the four passions of sexual lust, anger, pride and deceit is doomed to land in hells and has to complete the cycle of 8.4 million forms of existences (*yonis*). Just as one finds nothing but the layers of the bark in the trunk of a banyan tree, similarly one doesn’t derive happiness from sensual pleasures even if one indulges in them repeatedly. The *jiva* which has perverted mind, is mired in ignorance and behaves contrary to its well-being and good, remains immersed in the sensual pleasures that pollute its soul gets bound to inauspicious *karmas*.

According to Saman Sutta the main cause of a worldly *jiva*’s suffering lies in its *raga* (attachment) and *dvesha* (hatred) which grip it and blind it to the *kashayas* of life. On account of these propensities its soul attracts the inauspicious karmic dust which sticks to it and eclipses its true nature. It is the karmic bondage which is responsible for its endless wanderings in this *samsara*.

The path to liberation as explained by Saman Sutta lies in the abstinence from inauspicious activities and in subjecting oneself to rigorous austerities and self-mortification. Every *jiva* has to make efforts for it. No one can help it to attain *moksha*. It has to practise austerities with a view to dissociating itself from the bound *karmas*. It has to cleanse its mind of all forms of inauspicious and sinful tendencies which incline it towards violence and hatred. A thirteen-fold path has been laid down by Lord Mahavira which can emancipate a *jiva* from the karmic bondage and the cycle of transmigration. It consists of five great vows, five *samitis* (careful

activities inspired by a sense of discretion) and three *guptis* (spiritually beneficial control of the activities of the mind) :–

- (a) Five *mahavrata*s (great vows)
  - (i) *ahimsa* (nonviolence) : complete abstinence from violence in thought, word and deed
  - (ii) *satya* (truth) : complete abstinence from all forms of falsehood
  - (iii) *asteya* (non-stealing) : complete abstinence from all forms of stealing
  - (iv) *brahamcharya* (celibacy) : complete abstinence from sexual lust;
  - (v) *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) : complete abstinence from possessiveness which means owning nothing, not even clothes
- (b) Five *samitis* (careful activities inspired by a sense of discretion)
  - (i) *lrya* : careful movement
  - (ii) *bhasha* : careful use of words while talking with others
  - (iii) *aishana* : careful and discreet way of obtaining alms and eating
  - (iv) *adaan nikshap* : careful handling of utensils
  - (v) *utsarga* : careful way of responding to the call of nature
- (c) Three *guptis* (spiritually beneficial control of the activities of the mind, speech and body)
  - (i) restraint of the mind : controlling thoughts
  - (ii) restraint of speech : controlling speech
  - (iii) restraint of the body : keeping it steady

I conclude my paper by saying that no doubt, according to Saman Sutta there is immense suffering in this *samsara* but there is a way to extricate oneself from it by following the thirteen-fold path shown by

Mahavira. It is the state of the equanimity of mind which may help individuals to attain *moksha*.

