

# JAINISM – HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY AND TRADITIONS

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## History of Jain Dharma

**The Jain dharma or Jainism is one of the oldest religion of the world.** According to Dr. K.C. Sogani, “It represents the continuation of indigenous shramanic culture which is as old as Vedas themselves, so far as literary evidence goes, through the archeological evidence takes shamanism far back to harapall civilization, which is regarded as non-vedic in origin and outlook.”

In the Jain canonical texts(called Agamas), the adjective ‘Arhat’ is appended with Lord Rishabh. The religion propounded by ‘Arhat’ is known as ‘Arhat dharma’. This is the ancient name of Jain religion. In ancient Vaidika literature such as Padmapurana, Matsyapurana, Shiv purana etc., we find the allusion to Arhat dharma. The term ‘Arhat’ continued to be in vogue till Lord Parshvanath. Lord Mahavir was more popularly known as ‘Shraman Bhagwan’. During the time of Mahavir the word ‘Nirgranth Pravachan’ was in vogue in Jain religion. In the period of Mahavir and for two centuries after his emancipation ‘Nirgrantha Pravachan’ remained prevalent. Later on in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, the name ‘Jain Religion’ came into existence. Mahavir being the last of 24 Tirthankars, a new pattern seemed to have set in and its followers there after called Jains. At present, the word ‘Jain Religion’ denotes the complete tradition and teachings of Tirthankars.

The preaching’s of ‘Jin’ is the foundation of ‘Jain Religion’. **One who has faith in preachings of ‘Jin’ and who practises it, is called Jain.** As the Buddhist religion was sponsored by Buddha and the Christianity was sponsored by Jesus, so also the religion sponsored by Jin (Arhat) is called Jain Religion. As the follower of Shiva are called ‘Shaivs’, the follower of Vishnu are called Vaishnav, so also the follower of ‘Jin’ are called Jains. Christ, Shiva and Vishnu are personal names. But the term ‘Jin’ donot relate to any person. **Jain religion does not believe in worshipping an individual. It worships the real qualities of a soul who has attained the state of ‘Jin’ i.e., who has destroyed the veils of Karmas on knowledge, intuition and power of soul.**

Jains have 24 Tirthankars. The Jains trace their history through the lives of 24 Tirthankars. According to Jain tradition, Lord Rishabh was the first interpreter of Ahinsa (Non-violence). Lord Mahavir, popularly regarded as the founder of Jainism, was the last of the Tirthankars who flourished from 599 to 527 B.C. So he could be called a reformer of the Jain Religion or rejuvenator of the faith which was already and had a long tradition.

The contribution of the first Jain Tirthankar Rishabhadev is strengthening the Indian way can be apparant on four aspects. And the first among them is that being a great and wise cultivator he trained Indians in systematic agricultural work. Bringing the society in the range of simplicity was Rishbhdev’s second major contribution.

Rishabh the first Tirthankara, laid the foundation of simple dharma. The third and ever memorable contribution of Rishabh towards the Indian way had been in his work and teachings of developing the art of cottage industries and that too according to demand of time and space. In his connection too, he trained the people. His fourth contribution had been in his exemplary teachings of realistic honesty particularly for those who were involved in business for their livelihood. All the above four contributions of Rishabhadev, in spite of being extra ordinary in his own time, are worth giving a thought until today. Tirthankar Rishabhadev is ideal for those who think about the Indian way, who are concerned of making this way firm and broad in prevailing conditions of India and the whole world. Doubtlessly, in this regard, Rishabhadev goes beyond the limits set by any particular religious community.

Being a great guide, elucidator and defender, Mahavir the 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankar took the Indian ways to heights. The Ratna-traya system established by him is one of the living examples of it. Through Ratna-traya system – Samyak darshan –samyak jnana and samyak charitra – he inspired the people to go forward to attain the highest stage of humanity.

## **Jain Philosophy**

The Jain system, like the Buddhist, is non-theistic. **It does not acknowledge the existence of creator of God. Another important feature is that it is pluralistic system. The souls are many, infinite in number. Moksha is not absorption into the supreme but the attainment of a perfect, luminous and blissed soul which is without body and without actions.**

The religious philosophy of Jainism teaches that there are nine truths or realities (Nav-tattva) They are : (1) soul (jiva) (2) non-soul (ajiva) (3) merit (punya) (4) sin or demerit (papa) (5) influx of Karma (asrava) (6) stoppage of karmic matter (Samvara) (7) bondage (bandha) (8) shedding of karmic matter (nirjara) and (9) liberation (moksha).

- 1. Jiva (soul) :** The principle of Jiva is a conscious substance which is different in different individuals. The number of Jivas (souls) are infinite. The soul is not only the enjoyer of the fruits of karma (bhokta), but also the actor, deeply engaged in worldly affairs and responsible for his act (karma), good or bad. It transmigrates i.e., it takes successive births according to the nature of stock of its deeds. It can attain emancipation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death by freeing itself from all that is non-soul (ajiva), by destroying accumulated karmas and by stopping their further influx into it.
- 2. Ajiva (non-soul) :** Ajiva is the opposite of jiva comprising of dharma, adharma, akash, pudgala and kala substances, of these, the first three (medium of motion, medium of rest, space or medium of accommodation are formless (amurta) and indivisible wholes. The fourth substance matter is defined as what is possessed of the qualities of touch, taste, colour and smell. Time is atomic in dimension and the kala atoms pervade the whole cosmic space.
- 3. Punya (merit) :** Punya is the consequence of good and religious deeds. There are nine ways to it. They are, in fact, different forms of practicing charity.

4. **Papa (sin or demerit)** : It is called sin or evil , is a major factor in the bondage of jiva. Injury to and killing of living-beings is a heinous sin and results in terrible punishment.
5. **Asrava (influx of karma)** : Asrava denotes the inflow of karmic matter by the soul. Just as water flows into a boat through a hole, so the karmic matter flows through asrava into the soul. The nature of activity is shubha (meritorious) or ashubha (demeritorious). The principle “like causes produce like results” is accepted as a determining feature of the Jain doctrine of karma.
6. **Samvara (stoppage of karmic matter)** : Samvara means stopping, controlling or ceasing of inflow of karmic matter into the soul, smavara is effected through self control (gupti), restrained movement (samiti), virtues (dharma), contemplation (anupreksha), conquest of hardship and monastic conduct.
7. **Bandha (bondage)** : Bandha is the union of jiva with pudgala (matter) or soul with non-soul particles. The matter is determined by five causes, namely wrong belief, attachment, carelessness, passions and activity.
8. **Nirjara (shedding the karmic matter)** : Nirjara means shedding off, drying up or destruction. Nirjara is to destroy and burnup accumulated karma. Take the example of a tank. By stopping the inflow of water into the tank, we arrest the increase of water in the tank. That is samvara, but there is already some water in the tank. In order to dry up this water, it may be exposed to the heat of the sun for some time. This is nirjara.
9. **Moksha (liberation)** : Moksha is the supreme stage of spiritual attainment when all causes of bondage having been uprooted, the soul is freed from karmic matter. It is a stage of peace, perfect faith, perfect knowledge, and a stage of having achieved siddhi. Moksha is attained through right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. For the perfection of right conduct, five kind of vows recommended : Non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-stealing (asteya), chastity (brahmacharya) and no greed (aparigraha).

## **Karma Philosophy**

The word has two meanings, one is ‘any activity’ and other is fine particles that get attracted and stick to the soul on account of its activity. That which is being done is ‘karma’ is the etymology of the term karma. Both these meanings are appropriate in the context. The whole universe is packed with fine karmic particles. But when these particles get attracted to the soul and stick to it and bind it through its activity, then only they are designated by the term karma.

The karmic particles bound with the soul are called, “dravya karma” or physical karma while internal states of attachment, aversion are called ‘bhava karma’ or mental karma. In other words Jains distinguish between mental and spiritual karma. The soul (mundane soul) is the doer of both these karmas. They are mutually related as cause and effect, just as a seed and a tree. It can be said when I am attached to something I would do inauspicious karmas, the karmic particles associated with the karma would then get bound with my soul and make me experience the fruits of my

actions later. In non-Jain system of philosophy the following words are employed for karma : In vedanta it is maya, avidya and prakriti, in Mimansa it is apurva, in Buddhist and Yoga it is vasna, in Sankhya and Yoga it is asaya, in Nayaya and Vaishesika it is dharmadharam, adrsta and sanskar.

- (i) **Cause of bondage** : The karmic material particles are first attracted to the soul and then bound by it. The function of attracting them to the soul is performed by the activity of mind, speech and body. So the activity is called asrava (influx), rather cause of influx and the function of binding the karmic particles with the soul is performed by mithyatva (unwholesome inclination or faith or conviction), avirti (non-restrain), pramada (lethargy) and kasaya (passion). So they are called the cause way of bondage. Every activity that is there with these four acts as a cause of bondage. Yoga or activity alone is called asrava, the remaining four like kasaya or not asrava or influx but the causes of asrava. From this we can understand that yoga (activity) is the cause of both the influx and the bondage.
- (ii) **Philosophy of rebirth** : Every birth of a soul is rebirth in view of its previous birth. There can never be any birth which is not connected with the previous birth. The series of soul's birth has no beginning. If we were to assume that a soul is borne for the first time, then it would lead us to believe that it is possible that even a pure soul that has freed itself from the birth-cycle on account of its attainment of purity will have to take birth sometime. This would render eternal, absolute and perfect liberation impossible. It would be quite illogical to believe that the soul remains free from birth for sometime starts to assume birth again. It is logical to hold that the series of birth continues, if it continues at all, without interruption and that once it is snapped, it is snapped for ever.

As per belief of Jain religion emancipation is defined as, "Just as the oil mill is operated to separate oil from sesamum seeds, churning is undertaken to separate ghee from butter milk and fire is used to separate ore from metal, so also the soul attains emancipation penance through and self control."

## **Jain Traditions**

Indian culture can be categorized into two broad groups – (1) Brahman (Vedic) culture (2) Shraman culture. The philosophical school of Mimansa, Vedanta, Nyaya and Vaishesika fall into first category. The philosophical schools of Jain, Buddhist and Sankhya belong to the Shraman culture.

The tradition of Jain philosophy and Tirthankars is very old. I am particularly of the view that Jain philosophy is Sanatan, proofs of existence of Tirthankar Rishabhdev have been found in digging work of sites of the Indus valley civilization. Not only was this, as per the mention in the Jain treatises, Rishbhdev, the first Tirthankar, was the son of Nabhi and Marudevi, the king and queen of Ayodhya. In the Rig-veda itself he has been mentioned as one of the Avatars-incarnations. In treatises of Hindus and Jains both it has also been mentioned that Rishbhadev was from Ikshvasu family. Particularly Jain treatises describe that Hindustan (India) was known as Bharat due to Bharat, the eldest son of Rishbhadev and who was a great

king. Undoubtedly, the Jain tradition is quite old. Like Hinduism, the history of Jainism is ancient. Thus, from ancient times and particularly from the time of Tirthankar Rishabhdev, Jainism has contributed greatly towards strengthening and developing the Indian way.

## **Jain Ethics and Literature**

- (i) **Non Violence :** The Jaines have laid great emphasis on Ahimsa vrata. **The doctrine of Ahimsa (Non-violence) is a cardinal principle of Jain Religion. It is so central in Jain faith that it may be called the beginning and the end of Jain Religion.** The first and foremost principle of Jain philosophy is Non-violence (ahimsa). Non-violence means not to kill or hurt any living being by the body, speech or mind. It is possible only for those persons who dedicate their whole life on the basis of Mahavratas and who have renounced their household life. First of all one should shun all thoughts leading to 'Sankalpja Hinsa' (The violence perpetrated by intention and activities premeditated) coming to his mind out of attachment and aversion. The minor vow called "Ahimsa Anuvrata" prescribed by Lord Mahavir is an effective step in the direction of creating a healthy society.
- (ii) **Non-possession :** A person perpetrates violence due to desire of possession. It is the main requirement of life. A man cannot sustain his life without it. The craving of more possessions make people indulge in violence. The greed for money, land etc. and craze for acquiring more things are the root causes of violence. So Non-violence is secondary whereas Non-possession is the main principle of Jain philosophy. One cannot understand Lord Mahavir's conception of Non-violence until and unless he comprehends his principle of Non-possession. Violence and acquisitiveness go hand in hand.
- (iii) **Anekantavad :** Philosophically an important contribution of Jainism is the doctrine of Anekantavad. The Jain thinkers thought that reality can be examined from many (aneka) standpoints (anta). The thing can be described from at least seven standpoints (saptabhangi) and all can be equally true. This doctrine has contributed to the tolerance of contrary opinions among theologians and philosophers. In modern times, when exclusive claims of religion are under strain, this doctrine has a special relevance and meaning.

**The Jain doctrine of Anekantvad (Non-absolutism) which is so relevant today that if propagated properly, it can solve many of the burning problems of modern times. Jain dharma has the capacity to become Vishva dharma (Universal Religion). Its principles are certainly beneficial for the humanity at large.**

- (iv) **Jain literature :** The sacred books of Jainism are called Agamas. The Jain agamas or scriptures are works of the immediate disciples of Mahavir. The first sacred books of the Jain are in Prakrit or Ardhamagadhi language. They were given their written form in the 5<sup>th</sup> century at Vallabhi, in Gujrat. Dr. L.M. Joshi is of the opinion that the literature of Jainism is vast and varied. Its subject matter includes not only ascetic culture, morality, religion and philosophy, but also fable fairy-tales, legendary romances, history,

hagiography, mythology and cosmology. Literature known as Agamas includes a large number of texts. These are divided into two classes. Anga Agamas or the original twelve books and Angabahya Agamas or the texts outside the original twelve books.

The Jain scriptures are the sources books of Jain ethics, yoga, religion, philosophy and mythology. The Tattvarthasutra is a famous book which summarizes Jain teachings. The Achangasutra deals chiefly with the ethical conduct and discipline of monks. The Kulpasutra describes in detail the life-story of Mahavir. A most remarkable description of hells is given in Sutrakritanga. The Sthanga discusses dogmatic topics. The Upasakadasha deals with pious men of the time of Mahavir. The contents of other book are mixed and varied. They deal with myths and legends, ethical and monastic discipline, hells and heavens, cosmology and astrology.

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