

ROLE OF JAINA ETHICS IN PEACE AND HARMONY OF GLOBAL CIVILIZATION

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Principle of Jaina Ethics

Ethical discipline (*ācāra-dharma*) is an important aspect of Jainism. It has a two fold objective. First it brings about spiritual purification and secondly makes an individual a worthy social being who can live as a responsible and well behaved neighbour. The ethical discipline is well graded in Jainism to suit the ability and environment of an individual. It is prescribed to him according to his will to carry it out sincerely, without any negligence either in its understanding or in its practice. **Jaina ethics is based neither on oneness of life as in Vedānta, nor on momentary nature of soul as in Buddhism. It is based on equality of life. Basically all souls are equal. Therefore, no wonder that such percepts as non-violence in Jainism take into account not only the human beings or animals or insects but even plant life or one sensed living organism life, like–earth, water, fire and air etc.** The social organizations as anticipated by Jaina ethics, do not make any distinction on the basis of caste, creed or colour. At present, however the Jaina society has borrowed caste system from Hinduism and observes it as strictly as the later.

The metaphysical Reality or Truth of logical coherence must remain merely a theoretical possibility unless it is translated into good of life through right-living. In fact, the Reality or Truth is supra-logical and can be better realized by living it practically than by speculating on it intellectually. Indian philosophy in general and Jainism in particular, therefore, ascribes the supreme place of all the branches of philosophy to ethics. *Śīlāṅka*, a great commentator on Jaina Āgamas, considers all the branches of philosophy only subsidiary to and meant for ethics. The foundation of the ethical discipline is the doctrine of *Ahimsā*. If we correctly comprehend it, it will be seen that it is the recognition of the inherent right of an individual to live so universally expressed that **every one wants to live and no body likes to die. Thus, therefore, no one has any right to destroy or harm any other living being.** Viewed as such *Ahimsā* is the fundamental law of civilized life and rational living; and thus forms the basis of all moral instructions in Jainism. The laying down of the commandment not to kill and not to damage is one of the greatest events in the spiritual history of mankind.¹

Present day problem of global civilization and their solutions by Jaina ethics

It is believed that this is in keeping with the tradition Jaina way of looking at problems. ***Syādvāda*, which has become almost a synonym for Jainism, teaches us that the same truth could be differently expressed without involving us in any real contradiction.** Jainism has always kept the problems of global civilization in view, and shown the utility of Jaina ethical concepts for humanity in general. Jaina ācāryas have always stood for the dignity of man, and equality of all, advocated the birth-right of independence of all individuals and have preached the elevated ideal of **non-violence**. When there is a feeling-realization of the true nature of the self and when one is completely lost in the bliss of self-meditation, the observance of all the moral rules become spontaneous, coming from within and not being on imposition from without. No ethical study could be useful unless it provides an answer to the problems with which our lives are beset. The problems of global civilization arise out of various factors, which can be classified under the following broad heads :

- (i) Selfishness
- (ii) Ignorance
- (iii) Scarcity
- (iv) Injustice

(i) Selfishness—Selfishness lies at the root of all global problems. All immoral practices of global civilization arise out of selfish nature of man. Selfishness can be overcome by realizing the true nature of the soul. According to Vedānta, the individual soul (*ātmā*) is identical with the universal soul (*brāhma*) : and the Summum bonum of life is to realize this identity. This broadens our outlook and lifts us above selfishness. Buddhism, on the other hand, asks us not only to destroy our ego but also to believe that the soul, for which we struggle so much, is a non-entity. Both of these views represent idealism, whereas Jainism is a realistic system. It propounds that the soul is a real, permanent entity and that each soul has a distinct existence. What Jainism lays down is neither a belief in the unity of life nor in the non-entity of the soul, but a distinction between the soul (*jīva*) and the non-soul (*ajīva*) and a victory over passions, which are based on a false conception of the identity of the two.

An ordinary Jaina (*samyagr̥ṣṭi*) is not allowed to indulge in feelings of anger, pride, hypocrisy and greed continuously for more than a year, a householder at an advanced stage (*śrāvaka*) for more than four months, and a

monk for more than fifteen days. Perfection or liberation is attained when these feelings are completely overcome. **The above ethical idea, which Jainism gave with reference to individual *Sādhanā*, could be interpreted afresh in the context of modern day global problems to suggest that all nations of globe could also maintain their individuality, and yet live in peace and harmony if negative ideas of anger, pride, hypocrisy and greed could be renounced.** It could, thus, teach the possibility and utility of co-existence in modern times and bring the hope of a brighter future for war-ridden global civilization of today. If Jaina ethics could bring home to us that alone, its purpose will be more than achieved.

(ii) Ignorance—In spite of spread of education in modern times, the problems of life seem to multiply rather than decrease of what use is knowledge, which binds us rather than liberate? Jainism teaches us that all knowledge is relative and co-related. Let us be receptive to every thought. One sided attitude only complicates global problems rather than solve them. It does not give us any solution to such ethical questions as 'determinism' and 'freedom of will'. Non-absolutism shows us the path of synthesis among fate and human effort; faith, knowledge and action; and supra-moral plane of life and practical code of morality. **The answer of Jainism to the problem of knowledge is represented in its doctrine of non-absolutism.** Much of misunderstanding between one nation and the other of globe could be solved if we could adopt the attitude of non-absolutism on political problems.

(iii) Scarcity—"The greater the possessions, the greater the happiness" is the motto of many. Jainism teaches us quite the opposite : "the lesser the possessions the greater the happiness". Happiness comes from what we are and not from what we possess. We should realize the blissful nature of the soul, becomes free and be not the slaves of worldly objects. This puts an end to the struggle for wealth and other possessions. For those who can reach the highest stage of monkhood, scarcity becomes a self imposed virtue followed voluntarily in pursuance of complete freedom from bondage; for those who cannot attain that height, limitations of possessions, coupled with a sense of detachment towards what one has, is recommended. The idea behind the vow of non-possession is not a morbid feeling of self-mortification but a sense of, and belief in, the inherent bliss of the self. **The answer of Jainism to the problem of scarcity is : Be not attached to the worldly objects; be not their slaves : turn to the self within where from comes the true happiness.** This does not imply a life of inertia, but that of contemplation and contentment.

(iv) **Injustice**—The bigger fish swallows the smaller ones. The mighty and the aggressive prosper, the humble and the meek suffer. The result is the rule of jungle. In the sphere of politics we kill and crush in the name of caste, creed and colour. The result is war and bloodshed. Jainism brings us hope of justice in the form of doctrine of *karma*. **As we sow, so shall we reap. Though there is no God who sits upon judgement on us, there is a law, based on theory of cause and effect, which works automatically and unfailingly.** All lives are equal and the stronger have no right to do any injustice to the weaker : and if they do, they don't harm anybody but themselves. Ill filling vitiates our moral structure first; it harms anybody else afterwards. To kill a man with a hot rod of iron, the killer will burn his own hands first before he can kill the other. It is not so much out of regard for the life of others that we are forbidden to kill, as out of regard for our own selves.

We should meet on injustice not with force but with forbearance. **Violence begets violence, enmity leads to enmity** : but if we don't retaliate it, it subsides. The attitude of equanimity of Pārśva to Dharaṇendra and Kamatha, when the former tried to save him from the later who tried to kill, beautifully illustrates the Jaina attitude. Jainism has also opposed from the beginning any social injustice arising out of casteism or racialism. "Mankind is one community" says Jinsenācārya² Mahātmā Gāndhī successfully applied the creed of non-violence to redress the injustice of one nation against another. The creed of non-violence, if applied to the global problems, has the potentiality of wiping out the institution of war from the surface of global civilization. **Thus the answer of Jainism to the problem of injustice is four fold : doctrine of *karma*, equality of life, non-violence and equanimity.**

Jaina ethical discipline—Non-violence and its role in peace and harmony of global civilization

At the outset we have to acknowledge that the man of today is living in a world, which is much more complex than that of an ancient or mediaeval man. Independence among nations has increased; and this has brought an ever widening and deepening impact on the economic, intellectual and social conditions of our existence. The scientific advancement has made countries one another's neighbours. Divergent races, divergent cultures and divergent outlooks have come in close relations. Jaina ethics has both the eyes of the individual as well as the social betterment. Social dependence cannot rob the individual of his freedom to achieve his spiritual individuality. Thus the true

view recognizes that the individual and society influence each other. The individual moulds and is moulded by society.

Ahimsā with the Jaina doctrine of *nayavāda* can very well serve as the supreme principle of morality. **Hence there is nothing in the world or even out of it that can be called good except the principle of *Ahimsā* of all beings.** It is a form and can be validity applied to all the particular cases. It is said in the Jaina ethics that both the indulgence in *himsā* and the negation of abstinence form *himsā* constitute *himsā*.³ In other words, he who has not abandoned *himsā*, though he is not factually indulging in it, commits *himsā* on account of having the subconscious frame of mind for its perpetration. Again, he who employs his mind, body and speech in injuring others also commits *himsā* on account of actually indulging in it. Thus, wherever there is inadvertence of mind, body or speech *himsā* is inevitable.⁴

The establishment of international organization and the tendency towards disarmament are the symptoms of the inefficacy of force, war and violence to act as arbiters among international disputes. The easing of tensions and cessations of conflicts among states, the maintenance of universal peace and the promotion of human welfare can only be effected by suffusing world's atmosphere with the **spirit of non-violence**. "Thus the principle of non-violence really implies that life should be elevated altogether from the plane of force to that of reason, persuasion, accommodation, tolerance and mutual service."⁵ The virtues of non-violence and *Aparigraha* are capable of establishing universal peace. **Jaina ethics believe *Ahimsā* means universal love.** Non-violence cannot be materialized in the life of the country without extirpating the passion of greed. **The root cause of violence is material goods.** If the importance of the virtue of *Aparigraha* is understood at the international level, the attitude of non-violence will synchronize.

National and international activities of a country should be guided by the principle of non-violence and *Anekānta*. In order that country may function properly without encroaching upon the inherent spiritual nature of man, it must identify itself with *samyagdarśana*, *samyagjñāna* and *samyagcāritra*. The policy of the country must exhibit unflinching faith in, and tenacious adherence to the principle of non-violence. This will crown the country with *samyagdarśana* which will ispo facto bring enlightenment to it, and result will be the emergence of *samyagjñāna*. In other words, the adoption and assimilation of *Anekānta* is *samyagjñāna*. The resolute and astute application of the policy of non-violence and *Anekānta* in the national and international spheres for solving all sorts of problems will credit the country with *samyagcāritra*. The passions of fear, hatred towards any other country, the

passions of deception, greed to expand its territory and to usurp other country's wealth and freedom, the passions of pride of wealth, power, achievement and heritage—all these should be banished from the country, because they are corruptive of the veritable spirit of progress. **On the positive side, the country should pursue the discipline which flows from *samyagdarśana*, *samyagjñāna* and *samyagcāritra*.**

Moral ideals of Jaina Ethics

The attainment of bliss is the objective of Jaina ethics to be aimed at. *Brahma* is the delight of life and mind, the fullness of peace and eternity.⁶ The *Taittiriyaopaniṣad* compares *Brahmanic* bliss with other types of physical blisses and after enumerating a number of blisses enjoyed by men, Gods etc. concludes that hundred blisses of *Prajāpati* constitute the bliss of *Brahma*. Such an *Ānanda* is experienced by the sage who is free from all desires.⁷ It may be pointed out here that the spiritual bliss is a type of its own and no physical bliss can stand comparison with it. Kundakunda a prominent Jainācārya recognizes that the highest happiness is beyond any *Upmā*.⁸ If this motto is aimed by any citizen of global civilization there shall be absolute peace and harmony in that particular society. This is highest aim of human life to attain eternal bliss.

Jaina ethical ideal may be expressed in terms of action. The *Īsopaniṣad* tells us that "a man should try to spend his life span of a hundred years only in the constant performance of actions. It is thus only that he can hope not to be contaminated by actions."⁹ According to *Bhagavad Gītā*, *karma-yoga* or the life of activism constitutes the supreme end to be aimed at. It is no doubt true that we can find passages in the *Gītā* where *Jñāna* is superior to *karma*,¹⁰ where *karma* is superior to *Jñāna*¹¹ and where they are at par.¹² But the law of body,¹³ the law of society¹⁴ and the law of universe¹⁵ indicate and even vindicate activism.¹⁶ The *Gītā* tells us that the actions should be performed after brushing aside all attachment to and the desire for, the fruit.¹⁷ Besides their performance is to be effected by dint of wisdom¹⁸ and equanimity.¹⁹ Thus the life of activism, according to Jainism cannot be the universal rule of life, though in case of some souls it accompanies spiritual experience without being incapable. But this does not negate *Puṇya* engendering activities of saints for the benefit of global civilization.

Jaina asceticism embraces social goodness within its fold along with individual goodness. The Jaina concept of *Aṇuvratas* is a mean between asceticism and sensualism. It completely makes possible the achievement of social goodness and brings about individual goodness at social level. Jainism

looks at casteism with an eye of contempt. The superiority of one caste over the other is foreign to Jaina ethics. Casteism is an evil and is based on the passions of hatred and pride. These two are intense passions, hence they bring about sin to their victims. We find references in the Jaina scriptures, which go to prove that merit and not mere birth should be regarded as real judge of castes. The caste has nothing to do with the realization of spirit. The *Uttarādhyayana* says that Harikeśa, who was born in the family of untouchables attained saintly character owing to the performance of austerities. Good conduct and not caste is the object of reverence. Casteism is grounded in falsity and is purely imaginary. Ācārya Amitagati expresses that mere caste is incapable of leading us to any meritorious attainment. Merit accrues from the pursuance of the virtues of truth, purity, austerity, *śīla*, meditation and spiritual study. Differences in conduct have resulted in the distinctions of caste. **There is only one caste, namely manhood.** Merit is the basis of caste and the pride of caste destroys right living. If the modern democratic set up is to be made successful, casteism must go. Casteism and democracy are a contradiction in terms.

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- ⁴ *Ibid*, 48.
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- ¹² *Ibid*-VI, 2; V-5.
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- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, III.20.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, III.16.
- ¹⁶ *The Bhagavad Gītā as a philosophy of God-realization*, pp. 196-97.

¹⁷ *Bhagvad Gītā*.

¹⁸ Ibid, II.50.

¹⁹ Ibid, II.48.