

# JAINISM AND ECOLOGY

R. B. Patil♦

## 1. Introduction

“The Natural resources of the Earth, including the air, water, lands, flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems, must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate.”<sup>1</sup> To this effect, the report of World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission Report), in its “Our Common Future 1987,” suggested twenty two legal principles for environmental protection and sustainable development. Some of these are addressed in a holistic manner by the religious tenets of Jainism. This essay is an attempt to unravel these dynamics.

## 2. ‘Jainism’ and Jainology

‘Jainism’ is the religion professed by the Jains, who follow the path practised and preached by the Jinas (conquerors of self). Jainism is an important, fully developed and well established religious and cultural system, which is purely indigenous to India. It is the oldest living representative of ancient *Sraman* current of Indian culture.<sup>2</sup> Jaina system of religion and culture is studied intensively and extensively. The literature, art and architecture, archaeological remains, tenants, practices, history and traditions of Jainism has become subjects of specialized studies. Thus, Jainology has become an important branch of Indology and Oriental Studies.<sup>3</sup>

## 3. Ecology and Informal Laws of Ecology

The term ‘ecology’ is derived from the Greek word *Oikas*, meaning ‘a place to live’. Popularly, it is known as the study of relationship of an organism or group of organisms to their environment. According to Radhakamal Mukerjee, ecology being a comprehensive science of the

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♦Dr. R. B. Patil is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Shivaji University, Kolhapur, India.

<sup>1</sup>The Stockholm Declaration of 1972, Principle 2.

<sup>2</sup>Jyoti Prasad Jain, *Religion and Culture of the Jains*, New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1999, 1.

<sup>3</sup>Jain, *Religion and Culture of the Jains*, 8-9.

balance of the human species opens out many approaches to the study of man's social orientation and behaviour.<sup>4</sup> The present day increasing tirade against environmental pollution and eco-imbalances proved a growing consciousness about ecology, economics, energy, employment and equity (they are known as 'Five Es'). Most important of these is ecology as it deals with basic life-supporting systems – land, water, flora, fauna, and the atmosphere.<sup>5</sup> There are the following Informal Laws of Ecology: 1) Everything is connected to everything else (i.e., interdependence and interrelatedness of the natural world). 2) Everything must go somewhere (by systems of production and manufacturing human beings merely transform the matter in terms of shape and form, e.g., solid, liquid, and gas for consumption, generating colossal wastes that are environmentally hazardous). 3) Nature knows the best (maintaining the organic link between human being and nature, by which the nature continues to regenerate the support life. 4) There is no such thing as free lunch (resource intensive consumption and economic development experienced by human beings have an environmental/ecological cost).<sup>6</sup> All these indicate that if we disturb Nature in excess, it damages us irreparably.

So, we have to know how to behave with various components of Nature. The principles of Jainism, in this context, guide us as to how to behave with Nature which consists chiefly in moral behaviour towards Nature.

#### 4. Jainism and Ecology

The relation of Jainism and ecology has been explained by Longkumer.<sup>7</sup> Jainism includes all living beings, including plants, contending that all living beings have souls and are of infinite value. For the Jains, this earth is the place of dreams, of actions, of moral and aesthetic culmination. They call it *Jivanmukta*, the divine on the earth. Jains pursue the path of *Ahimsa* in their relation to each and every living being. *Ahimsa* means non-killing, non-violence, and harmlessness. It is based on the unity of all life, human, animal, plant, and even atoms of matter, whereby Jains forbid occupations

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<sup>4</sup>Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Man and His Habitation*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1968, ix.

<sup>5</sup>S. C. Shastri, *Environmental Law*, Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 2002, 3.

<sup>6</sup>Binay Kumar Patnaik, "Ecological Bases of Indian Traditions: Search for an Indigenous Vision," *The Eastern Anthropologist* 58, 3-4 (July-December 2005), 420.

<sup>7</sup>Imti Samuel Longkumer, "Ecological Sensitivity in Indian Religions," *Theology of Our Times* 6 (August 1999).

to their followers that would involve taking life, not only hunting and butchery, but also agriculture, lest in digging the ground some animal or insect life be taken. Jain ecology is a process of focusing on nature through the practices of restraint, meditation, and action. This inner attentiveness, then, blossoms into an embrace of the life principle which is earth and all of its inter-relational beings. For the Jains, inherited or not, it is our responsibility as feeling and thinking beings to make loving the preferred medium of exchange on the earth. The heart of Jainism is, thus, of stewardship, requiring human diligence, human conscience, and human love. Jain ecology is nothing more than universal love. The attempt has been made in the essay to present views on ecology expressed in Jainism.

### **5. Jaina Religion, Bhagwan Mahavir, and Environment**

There are many independent living organisms in *Pruthvi*, *Aap*, *Teja*, *Vayu*, and *Vanaspati* and these are leading their life accordingly. This was taught by Bhagwan Mahavir. The attempt was made to curb pollution at the individual, family, and societal levels. The rules of conduct for the Jain laymen and *munis* are not only for individual way of life; instead it tries to control the external environment as well.

Today every country is suspicious that other countries will attack for oil, wealth, forests, water, etc. This suspicious and frightening atmosphere leads to conflicts and even to wars. The global climate is changing. The effects of pollution are seen not only on human beings but also on the *Panchmahabhutas*.

The environmental pollution is due to the disrupted relationship between nature and human beings. The natural pollution is compensated by its own ways. However, when human beings pollute, resulting from *krodh*, *man*, *maya*, and *lobh*, it is not being naturally compensated, hence, the resulting environmental problems.<sup>8</sup>

### **6. Jaina Ethics: Rules of Conduct**

The rules of conduct have been classified and explained by V. A. Sangave.<sup>9</sup> These are the following: Two categories: 1) householders 2) ascetics. The ethical code for householders is divided into the observance

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<sup>8</sup>Arhadas Dige, “Jaina Religion and Environmental View,” *Pragati ani Jinavijay* (Marathi Weekly), January 1, 1999.

<sup>9</sup>Vilas A. Sangave, *Aspects of Jain Religion*, New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1999, 66-78.

of 12 *vratas* or vows, 11 *pratimas* or stage in householder's life, 6 *avasykas* or daily duties and general principles of appropriate conduct.

The twelve *vratas* or vows are divided into the following three categories: 1) Five *anuvratas* or small vows: i) *ahimsa*, ii) *Satya*, iii) *asteya*, iv) *brahmacharya*, and v) *aparigraha*. 2) Three *gunavrata* or multiplicative vows: i) *digvrata* (limit one's worldly activity to fixed points), ii) *desavrata*, and iii) *anarthadanda vrata* (not to commit purposeless sinful actions). 3) Four *Sikshavrata* (disciplinary vows): i) *Samayika*, ii) *prosadhopavasa* (fast on four days in a month), iii) *Upabhog-paribhog-parimana* (limiting one's enjoyment of consumable and non-consumable things), and iv) *Atithi-samvibhaga* (taking food only after feeding ascetics).

The eleven *Pratimas* or stages are the following: 1) *Darsana* (sound knowledge of doctrine and their application in life), 2) *Vrata* (observing the 12 *vratas*), 3) *Samayika* (self-contemplation and purification), 4) *Prosadhopavasa*, 5) *Sachitta-tyaga* (not trample upon any growing plant or pluck fruits from a tree) 6) *Ratri-bhojana tyag*, 7) *Brahmacharya*, 8) *Arambha-tyaga* (refrain from all activities), 9) *Parigraha-tyag* (abandonment of all kinds of attachment) 10) *Anumati-tyag* (increase vigour for asceticism), and 11) *Uddista-tyag* (abandoning family life).

The six *Avasyakas* are the following: 1) worship of God, 2) worship of preceptor, 3) study of scriptures, 4) self-control, 5) austerities, and 6) giving gifts. There are also *thirty-five* General Principles of appropriate conduct as guidance for putting them into actual practice by the householders during their entire career.

## 7. The Jain Declaration on Nature

It was presented to His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh (Prince Philip), Buckingham Palace, London, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1990, by a Jain Delegation of International Community. Sangave, one of the members of delegation, has explained this declaration in detail.<sup>10</sup> It was the first occasion to present such a Declaration in the name of the traditional and distinctive religion of Jainism to an international organisation World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature founded by His Royal Highness Prince Philip. WWF strives for conservation of nature and protection of wildlife. It was

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<sup>10</sup>V. A. Sangave, "The Jain Declaration on Nature: A Historic Document in Development in India," *Alternative Paradigms: Essays in Honour of Prof. S. N. Pawar*, eds., Patil R. B., Salunkhe S. A., Jadhav R. B., Subhedar I. S., and S. N. Kolhapur: Pawar Felicitation Committee, 2004, 203-209.

felt to secure involvement of the important religions concerned actively with the objective of preservation of nature and maintenance of ecological balance. Apart from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Bahai, and Sikh, the Jain religion became the eighth in this International Network on Conservation and Religion. In this connection, it was decided to undertake the translation work of the text *Tattvartha-Sutra* by Acarya Umasvati.

The Jain Declaration on Nature begins by highlighting the gist of Jainism, *Parasparopargraho Jivanam* (meaning, “all Life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence”). It is a *sutra*, an aphorism, from *Tattvartha-Sutra*. This has been made very popular by Acharya Vidyanand Maharaj. It stresses the philosophy of ecological harmony and non-violence on which the doctrines and ethics of Jainism are based. The Declaration on Nature is divided into three parts: Jain teachings, Jain cosmology, and Jain code of conduct.

### **7.1. Jain Teachings**

1) The most prominent place has been given to the principle of *Ahimsa*. It is directed to human beings and nature so that everyone avoids any chance of violence in heart and mind of human beings; it is believed that without violent thoughts, there can be no violent actions. 2) The *sutra*, *Parasparopargraho Jivanam*, i.e., all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence, is accepted as a central teaching. It defines the scope of modern ecology as it stresses the fundamental principle that all aspects of nature belong together and are bound in physical and metaphysical relationship. 3) The doctrine of manifold aspects (*Anekantvada*) emphasizes the concept of universal independence and recommends that one should take into account the viewpoints of other species, communities, nations, and human beings. 4) *Samyaktva* (equanimity towards *Jiva* and *Ajiva*). 5) Compassion towards all human beings (*Jivadaya*) leads to actions which have great relevance to contemporary environmental concerns.

### **7.2. Jain Cosmology**

The universe consists of *Jiva* and *Ajiva* things, the two everlasting, uncreated, independent, and coexisting categories. Human beings have a great moral responsibility in their mutual dealings with rest of the universe. The human beings have a moral responsibility which has made

Jain tradition a cradle for the creed of environmental protection and harmony.

### 7.3. Jain Code of Conduct

The code of conduct for the Jain householder consists in the following: 1) the five *vratas*, 2) kindness to animals, 3) vegetarianism, 4) self-restraint and the avoidance of waste, and 5) charity. The code is profoundly ecological in its practical consequences and it aims to achieve a holistic environmental protection, peace and harmony in the universe. The observance of principle of *ahimsa* will go a long way in solving the present-day problems of pollution, degradation, deterioration, and destruction of nature.

### 8. Environmental Awareness in Jainism

Environmental awareness is a non-violent approach to life which reflects a concern for living and non-living. Jainism teaches that you should not do to others what you would not have done to yourself. So, if you don't want to be harmed, you should refrain from harming others, geographically, economically, socially, or spiritually.

In Jainism, there is no scope for a human being to seek salvation by getting dissociated from the environment. The 'natural-human-economic' resources, if exploited for the satisfaction of selfish comforts and self-centred pleasures, it is certain to result in Karma, which is nothing other than suffering. Jainism inducts its members to a life of environmental awareness early in life. This has been discussed by Ramanujam Geetha by explaining the following concepts, either in the form of virtues or vices.<sup>11</sup>

*Anuvratas*: It refers to the spiritual mission of environment of common man, as a solution to the ecological crises contributed by the individual. What we interpret as do's and don'ts of environmental management philosophy are the quintessence of *anuvrata*. *Ahimsa* is very comprehensive and takes into consideration the welfare of all beings on the earth ("*Ahimsa paramo Dharma*"). We must live in harmony with nature. We will have to be non-violent towards human beings, trees, birds, and animals. Jainism is a way of life with non-violence and co-existence as its mission. If *ahimsanuvrata* is taken by every householder at an individual level, environmental crisis will be resolved by itself.

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<sup>11</sup>Geetha Ramanujam, *Environmental Awareness in Jainism*, Chennai: Dept. of Jainism, University of Madras, 2006, 3-113.

*Chedana* pertains to deforestation, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, etc. It involves in torturing the plants, animals and the five elements of the pleasure and comfort of man. Chopping of any of the parts of a living entity – including cruel attack on flora, fauna, and matter – by sharp or destructive instruments out of anger, for sport or with no purpose, is a destructive approach that finally results in endangering the nature.

*Bandhan* refers to keeping anything under captivity without any consideration for its freedom to exist or live. Rearing animals without adequate shelter, air, light, space, and food is considered to be *aticara*.

*Aharavarna* includes problems related to food distribution and deliberate deprivation of basic rights of another being. Causing starvation of another being through negligence, indifference, deliberation, or bad governance forms part of *aharavarna*. If you buy a plant, but fail to nurture it by watering it, it is an *aticara*. Neglecting to nurture animals or fellow beings when you know they are hungry is also a sin.

*Acaurya* or non-stealing is a precept for all Jains. “Only when a person falls prey to greed, he is tempted to steal others property.” Greed is the root cause of all corruption and exploitation of natural resources.

*Aparigrah*, that is, desire for possession is a vice, for a discontented human being can never radiate peace and happiness to his fellow beings and the environment. As M. K. Gandhi said, the wealth of the world can meet the need of every single man and not a single man’s greed. Mahavir and Gandhi stood by *Anuvratas*, not only preaching about them, but also following them in their own lives. We see the enormous devastation caused to environment by human quest for *parigrah* of natural resources. In fact, we have overexploited the renewable and non-renewable resources to satisfy the greed, and not the need. Jainism provides a sustainable solution to ecological crisis as it is a practical, positive and rational way of life. It teaches how a man can live in coexistence with his surroundings.

Jain environmental awareness involves balancing human needs and protecting natural and cultural heritage for the future generations through the process of self-restraint. The principle *paraspropgrahojivanam* calls for ‘living with others, and living for others’.

By avoiding *Chedana* or inflicting deliberate *himsa* in a small way on flora, fauna or matter, we can reduce deforestation and soil erosion to a great extent. This, in turn, will stop the extinction of many animals, birds, etc., that require forest cover for shelter and food. By avoiding *atibharropana*, which in this case involves putting excess pressure on

ecosystem and ecology, we can definitely reduce destruction and degradation of resources.

Mahavir lived a harsh and austere life in the forests for twelve and half years. He studied nature closely and analysed man in relation to nature. He comprehended true ecology and ecosophy; he practically lived in coexistence with nature before he advocated *Anuvratas* and *Mahavratas*. What he preached to his disciples was what he lived and experienced. The whole message of Mahavir in relation to the preset eco-crisis can be summed up as follows: human being is responsible for the environment. If we face crises today, we are responsible. Human beings alone can solve it through each one's self-imposition of *Anuvratas*, and by avoiding the *aticaras*.

As regards social ecology, Jainism teaches a self-imposed discipline, with due regard to one's own capacities and surroundings. Jainism does not inculcate fatalism of the idle do-nothing-fellow as far as the environment is concerned. It characterizes labour as a process in which human being starts, regulates, and controls the material reaction with the nature.

## 9. Conclusion

Jaina ecological consciousness is grounded in a judicial blend of divine holism and vision of non-exploitative science and technology. Religion and science must go hand in hand and chart a single path to guide human spirituality in the direction of our planet and conservation of its resources. The scientific approach, reasoning, and practices prescribed by Jainism are highly relevant today when environmental concerns are on the top of human agenda.

Attempts are being made in the Jain religion to curb pollution at the individual, family and society levels. Jain code of conduct controls individual way of life and also external environment. In the present era, the conferences/summits are being held at the national and international levels on this issue. Importance is given to the concepts of conservation of natural resources, control of pollution, and sustainable development with which we would equip ourselves to conserve the nature for the future generations.