

# SIGNIFICANCE OF JAIN PHILOSOPHY FOR PRESERVING LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT

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## 1. Introduction

A few years ago, a question was put to a few Jain scholars across the country: what sort of society does Jainism want to project? The answer was more or less unanimous: a non-violent society! They went on to add that their religion preached *ahimsa*, non-violence, more than any other thing and non-violence was the need of the hour to protect life and environment. A proper understanding of the principle of *ahimsa* and its honest practice by humans can immensely ameliorate the health of environment. The eco-spirituality and ecosophy of Jainism ultimately consist in upholding this principle and realizing it in life. *Ahimsa*, for Jains, is not just a social virtue and a religious rule; it is the very criterion and norm of spirituality and religiosity.

Ultimately, all our academic reflections boil down to the question of ethics, which demands a radical change in our conduct and way of life. It presumes that we have a rich resource of beliefs and values corresponding to the way we want to conduct ourselves. Jain way of life suggests that we have a rich tradition of a life of renunciation and non-violent culture. Based on the animistic belief, the Jain system develops a way of seeing the reality and a way of knowing its nature and function. The system lays much emphasis on the sanctity of life, especially of human birth<sup>1</sup>. The humans have a capacity for *sva-prakasa* and *para-prakasa*, glowing in oneself and glowing at the same time the external world. And hence the humans can change themselves together with the environment whenever needed. Such power and divinity rests in a human person as to realize one's full capacity, a realization of God within and outside, to put it in theistic terms.

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<sup>1</sup>Four things of paramount value are difficult to obtain here (in this world) by a living being: human birth, religious instruction, faith in the (true) religion and energy to practice self-control (*Uttaradhyayana Sutra*, 3.1).

Jainism, in other words, is known as the 'religion of self-help'. One has to re-incarnate into that sort of a being in order to effect a change in and around oneself. The supreme power of being human and, at the same time, divine can be realized in oneself, provided one is able to see the perfect vision of oneself as the divine and conduct oneself correspondingly. This vision of faith in oneself leads one to a similar understanding of the surrounding which, in turn, evokes an attitude of equanimity and sentiments of compassion, etc.

The vision and knowledge of reality, including oneself, and the conduct that sets our existence in a smooth sail have to appear again and again in all our discussions about the challenges we face today in the wake of current problems and issues. Our basic beliefs should address our reflections on globalization or modernity, communalism or ecological crisis, hegemony of culture or marginalization of the poor, etc. In all these debates and deliberations one could ask this question: what do we have to give to the world as believers? It is only in this background that this paper attempts to examine some of the salient features in Jain philosophy and culture, to provide a foundation to life and the safety of the environment. Jain philosophy and culture acquire richer meaning and significance as they are being lived by its community of believers.

## 2. Jaina Path of Purification

*Jaina sadhana* insists on the triple-jewel called Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct for total liberation.<sup>2</sup> The foremost condition for liberation is faith in the propounders of the Jaina way of life who stand as guarantee for the 'rightness' of belief, knowledge and action. They understood the nature of reality by their supreme power of intuition. They knew the nature of the living and the non-living, their birth, sustenance, death, their new beginning, the awareness of their existential situation especially pain and suffering which motivate their ethics of behaviour, namely, protection of life at all cost, the cause of bondage and

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<sup>2</sup>*Samyag-darsana-jnana-caritrani moksa-margah*: Right belief, right knowledge, right conduct, and three together constitute the path to liberation (*Tattvartha Sutra*, 1.1).

the path of liberation, etc. These are the principles and foundations<sup>3</sup> of Jaina life.

Right knowledge implies knowledge about the living and the non living in its entirety. It is not merely sense knowledge, not even inferential knowledge, but the intuitive and direct knowledge<sup>4</sup> of the whole of reality, of the cosmos, the nature of existence, the means of liberation from the cycle of births and deaths (*samsara*). Right conduct presumes that a person believes in Jina's words regarding the nature of reality and the correct knowledge about it. Conduct bereft of right faith and right knowledge is like a limping child<sup>5</sup>.

### 3. Religion, Founded on Life-experiences

This profound truth about life and existence is based on experience. This can be summarized briefly in the very words of the Jina: The living world is afflicted, miserable, difficult to instruct and without discrimination. In this world full of pain, suffering by their different acts, see the benighted ones cause great pain<sup>6</sup>. It is this awareness of the pain and suffering of living beings that gives meaning to non-violence, the supreme code of a Jain's life:

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<sup>3</sup>For a thorough knowledge of the basics of Jain understanding of reality, refer Helmuth von Glasenapp: *Jainism – An Indian Religion of Salvation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999 and *Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, an English translation of *Jaina Darsana* of Muni Shri Nyayavijayaji by Nagin J. Shah, jointly published by Motilal Banarsidass and Bhogilal Lehar Chand Institute of Indology, Delhi: Paperback Edition, 2000

<sup>4</sup>The Jain Agamic literature offers substantial contribution to the development of the theory of knowledge. The Jains have stated that a living entity apprehends everything with 'upayoga', defined as energy and a drive characteristic of a soul. *Vatthunittam bhavo jadvivassa jodu uvajogo (Gommatasara, Jivakanda, 20.672)*.

<sup>5</sup>It is true that right conduct is the direct means of liberation (*Pujyapada on Tattvartha Sutra, 9.18*), but right conduct with right faith and right knowledge only can lead to liberation (*ibid. 1.1*). *Samayasara* exhorts the necessity of combining the three: Just as a person knowing a man to be king, and having faith in him, follows him for money, similarly a person knowing the real path and having faith therein should follow it for liberation (*Samayasara, 17-18*).

<sup>6</sup>*Acaranga Sutra, 1.1.2.1.*

The very first principle of religion laid down by Lord Mahavira is *Ahimsa* - non-injury to living beings - which must be observed very scrupulously and thoroughly, and behaving towards all living beings with proper restraint and control<sup>7</sup>.

Religion is the most auspicious thing (in the world); and religion consists of *ahimsa* - non-injury to all living beings, *samyama* - self-control, and *tapas*-austerities. Even the gods bow down to him whose mind is always fixed (engaged) in religion<sup>8</sup>.

All living creatures (that are in the world) desire to live. Nobody wishes to die. And hence it is that the Jain monks avoid the terrible (sin of) injury to living beings<sup>9</sup>.

All living beings love their (own) life; desire (crave for) pleasures, and are averse to pain; they dislike any injury to themselves; everybody is desirous of life, and to every living being, his own life is very dear<sup>10</sup>.

The *arhats* and *bhagavats* of the past, present and future, all say thus, speak thus, declare thus, explain thus: all breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away<sup>11</sup>.

Knowing that all the evils and sorrows arise from injury to living beings, and (knowing further) that it leads to unending enmity and hatred, and is the (root) cause of great fear, a wise man, who has become awakened, should refrain from all sinful (harmful) activities<sup>12</sup>.

If a man kills living beings himself, or causes others to kill them, or (even if he) merely consents to killing them, (by all these three types

<sup>7</sup>*Dasavaikalika Sutra*, 6.9.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.11.

<sup>10</sup>*Acaranga Sutra*, 1.2.3.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.4.1.1.

<sup>12</sup>*Sutrakrtanga*, 1.10.21.

of *himsa*), he increases his enmity (hatred) towards living beings<sup>13</sup>.

This is the quintessence of wisdom: not to kill anything. Know this to be the legitimate conclusion from the principle of the reciprocity with regard to non-killing. He should cease to injure living beings whether they move or not, on high, below, and on earth. For this has been considered *nirvana*, which consists in peace<sup>14</sup>.

As it would be unto thee, so it is with him thou intendest to kill... In the same way (it is with him) whom thou intendest to punish and to drive away<sup>15</sup>.

Earth, water, fire, wind, grass, trees and corn; the mobile beings (viz.) the oviparous, viviparous, those generated from dirt (sweat), and those generated from fluids, all these have been declared (by the Jinās) as the classes of living beings. Know and realize that they all desire happiness. By hurting these beings, you harm your own soul, and will again and again be born as one of them<sup>16</sup>.

A Jaina sage became a shelter for all sorts of afflicted creatures like an island which is never covered with water<sup>17</sup>.

#### 4. Jain Monastic Model

It is for this very reason that a Jain monk/nun retreats from wandering<sup>18</sup> during the rainy seasons lest he/she causes injury to the living beings. They walk barefooted in order not to trample upon the small insects. Some use cotton and peacock feathers in order to clean the ground before sitting or lying down. A band of Jain monks and nuns use a piece

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.1.13.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.11.10-11.

<sup>15</sup>*Acaranga Sutra*, 1.5.3.4.

<sup>16</sup>*Sutrakrtanga*, 1.7.1-2.

<sup>17</sup>*Acaranga Sutra*, 1.6.5.4.

<sup>18</sup>Life germinates especially at the time of rainy season and hence this precaution. Violence is defined also as the destruction of life due to negligence: *Pramattayogat pranavyaparopanam himsa*. (*Tattvartha Sutra*: 7.8) Hence one has to be careful in one's activity, whether mental or physical.

of cloth to cover their mouth, which prevents them from injuring the bacteria in the air by inhaling them. Any adherent of Jain dharma is not only not allowed to injure life, but also not allowed injury to happen or be the cause for such injury. Thus Jain monks and nuns do not travel by locomotives, by air, etc. in order not to be a distant cause for injury to living beings that get suck by the smoke pipes, propellers of the engine, or get caught under the wheels, etc.

Jaina monastic jurisprudence is an inspiring model of an alternate life-style worth following. It is based on right attitude to life, self-control, and carefulness free of passions. What is much insisted upon is vigilance in behaviour<sup>19</sup>. Today there is talk about people's movement and people's watch, etc. Both the governments and the NGOs strive to create an environmental system to face the challenges of the third millennium. A recent article in the daily newspaper *The Hindu*<sup>20</sup> points out that majority of the general public are themselves guilty of environmental neglect and the offenders include even those who are aware of the impending dangers posed by environmental pollution. Negligence lies at the root of all sins and therefore, constant vigilance is necessary to avoid them. Proper education and even strict enforcement in this regard are a must.

A Jain monk's life may serve as a distant model for the environmental awareness and care shown to its protection. For instance, a monk should traverse only that path which is free from ants, seed, green vegetables, mud, etc. He should move about only in daylight should give full attention towards his steps while moving. He should not move about for purposes other than religious. He should avoid superfluous and hard speech. He does not cook for himself and hence he begs from others. He should be careful in lifting or putting down his articles. He should properly scrutinize the place before answering the call of nature, etc.

All these and other such practices have implications for *ahimsa*. Such a life-style, though full of hardships<sup>21</sup>, frees one from violence, from

<sup>19</sup>D. N. Bhargava: *Jaina Ethics*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1968, pp. 160-163.

<sup>20</sup>*The Hindu*, February 15, 2000, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup>The hardships that a monk may have to face are roughly twenty-two in number (*Uttaradhyayana Sutra*, 2.1 and also *Tattvartha Sutra*, 9.9) like hunger,

sense pleasures, from negligence, and helps one to hunger and thirst for righteousness and to strive for the attainment of self-realization. The monastic ethics consists of mental and moral discipline. In addition to many customs and rules, the monks and nuns follow the five vows (the vow of non-violence, non-stealing, speaking the truth, leading a chaste life and non-grabbing or non-possession) in an intense, absolute<sup>22</sup> manner (and hence the monastic vows are known as *mahavrata*, the great vows). The most important of them is the vow of non-violence or non-injury to life and its surroundings.

### 5. The Path of the Householder

Though the five vows are the same in essence for both the monks/nuns and the laity, the practice varies from one another. The practice of these vows of a householder is less intense due to the latter's household and other responsibilities. Thus, while a monk/nun will not be allowed to cook<sup>23</sup>, etc. the lay persons can. They are allowed to use fire, vehicles, etc. although one knows that all these cause injury to the living beings by the acts of their choice of profession, modes of travel, etc. A householder<sup>24</sup> should choose a profession that involves least violence. As the aspirant ascends the steps of spiritual progress, he minimizes all types of violence in his conduct.

Greed and accumulation of wealth imply certain amount of injury to living beings either directly or indirectly. Thus a farmer, for instance, abstains from beating the animals, tying them up for long time, starving them, hurting them with sharp instruments, mercilessly overloading them, etc. Having or using materials made out of leather is considered violence

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thirst, cold, heat, disturbance by animals, abuse, respectful or disrespectful treatment, etc.

<sup>22</sup>This is seen in their meticulous rules and regulations regarding their food habit, travel, clothing, place of stay, use of objects, acts of body, mind and of speech, etc. For details, see D. N. Bhargava: *ibid.*, p. 152 f

<sup>23</sup>Eventually he has to use fire for cooking. Hence to avoid the great loss of life and out of compassion for living beings, a monk does not cook, nor cause others to cook food, etc. (*Uttaradhyayana Sutra*, 35.10).

<sup>24</sup>For a full detail of the conduct of a householder, see D. N. Bhargava: *ibid.*, p. 102 f.



to animal life. Similarly, accumulation of wealth by means of cheating in business or by using false measurements, etc., buying things at a low rate and selling them for higher prices, employing persons for unjust wages, etc. are examples of direct violence to human beings. There are several tales of *ahimsa*, which highlight the Jain way of life.

Thus it is common among the Jain monks/nuns and the lay persons to undertake hardships to avoid violence in their daily life. The lay persons take vows to limit their travels, to make sure that they are content with their reasonable earnings. *Dana* or charity is another virtue that is lauded much among the Jains. Building bird sanctuaries, animal welfare hospitals, running education trusts, constructing beautiful temples, etc. are but a few illustrations of the Jain heritage of gift offering or charity. *Dana* implies that earth's resources (material, physical, moral and spiritual) need to be shared and human beings have the responsibility to save and spend their wealth for noble purposes instead of wasting or destroying them. The life of monks and nuns is much dependent on the generosity of their lay adherents. Running of the Jain churches is a good model for the art of mutual help, interdependence and mutual service among the laity and the clerics.

## 6. Ethics, Founded on the Vision of Reality

Jain epistemology discerns the universe into two fundamental principles or eternal categories known as *Jiva* and *Ajiva*<sup>25</sup>, the living (spiritual self) and the non-living (matter). In the noumenal<sup>26</sup> point of view *Jiva* is pure and immaterial, full of consciousness and vitality. But from the phenomenal or practical point of view, *Jiva* is active due to its contact with *Ajiva*. One of the Digambara religious texts, *Samayasara*<sup>27</sup>, while explaining the nature of reality instructs that both these realities are

<sup>25</sup>*Pancastikayasara*, 38.

<sup>26</sup>Nemichandra describes *Jiva* from the noumenal and phenomenal points of view in *Dravyasangraha*, 2,3: *Jiva* from the noumenal point of view is pure and perfect and from the phenomenal point of view it is the agent, it has the same extent as the body, it is the enjoyer of the fruits of *karma*, it is in *samsara*.

<sup>27</sup>Acarya Kundakunda describes *Jiva* in its 'real' sense as 'absorbed in itself'. (*Samayasara*, 2-3)



autonomous and independent in their real nature, but are mutually dependent while *Jiva* or the self is in the embodied state.

The real nature of *Jiva* is perfection itself with supreme vision, knowledge, strength and bliss. The embodied self in all its variety<sup>28</sup> - the human, the animal, the vegetative and the spirit world - does not realize its real nature due to its bondage with the material world. By false association the self is entangled with all that is external to itself like the body, the mind, the senses, the emotions, etc.<sup>29</sup> The self feels and thinks that it belongs to the material or non-living world<sup>30</sup> and tries to grab and possess it. But in reality, the material world enjoys its own autonomy of existence, growth, death and new beginning.

Hence Jainism stresses non-attachment and non-possession as key principles of conduct for liberation. Passionate attachment and aversion bind the self to the eternal world. Passions<sup>31</sup> drive the living beings to

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<sup>28</sup>The whole world is filled up by living beings; not even a space of breadth of a hair is free. Glassnapp: *ibid.*, pp 250-270.

<sup>29</sup>For Acarya Kundakunda, anything other than the self is material. The real self is devoid of any material characterization or conditioning. It is only in the practical sense the self is 'characterized' by belief, knowledge and conduct (*Samayasara*, 1). The empirical state of a being is characterized by its associates, namely, colour, etc. (*Samayasara*, 70). It is only by association which must not be understood as 'identity'. (for more details, see the author's article "Jain Concept of Person - A Textual Study of Samayasara of Acarya Kundakunda" in *Jain Journal*, Jan. 1991, Vol. 25, No. 3, Jain Bhavan Publication, Calcutta).

<sup>30</sup>*Ajiva* or the non-living substances are of two kinds: with form like *pudgala* or matter, and formless like *dharma* and *adharmā* (principles of motion and of rest), *akasa* (space) and *kala* (time). The Jains, being realists in their approach, have attempted to present the foundational principles of the universe from the points of view of matter and energy. *Sthananga Sutra* gives the metaphysical analysis of the distinction between the living and the non-living substances. (*Sthananga Sutra*: 2.1.57).

<sup>31</sup>The Jains consider the mind and the experience of pleasure and pain to be constituted of fine particles of matter (subtle *karma*) and hence they can easily come in contact with one another. The immaterial soul only creates occasion for such contacts. The passions are responsible for the influx of *karma*. They create mental states, which are intensely affective in nature. Just as a field is ploughed and made ready for the sowing, so also passions prepare the mind-set for the influx of karmic

cling to the material universe, possess it and exploit it in the way they want. Liberation comes with the awareness of the distinction between the two realities, the self and the non-self, and realizing that the nature of the real self as nothing to do with any of the externals, which are the cause of bondage. Domination and exploitation of the earth's resources are mere results of passionate attachment or aversion.

Generally all Indian systems of philosophy, except the *lokayatas* or the materialists, insist on purification of the self (*atma-suddhi*) as the path to attain the goal of life. The internal purification<sup>32</sup> aims at complete detachment of oneself from the external world. Jain theory of reality and the nature of knowledge and of bondage as explained by Jain masters have strong implications for the preservation of the environment.

### 7. Seeing is Liberating

Another important feature in Jain philosophy is that it believes in omniscience or perfect knowledge. Knowledge is the prerequisite for all physical, mental and moral behaviour. It is the ground for the nature of existence and also ushers salvation. A liberated being is known as *sarvajna*, the "all-knower". *Sarvajna* is the state of highest knowledge that one can acquire through a process known as *samvara* and *nirjara*. It is the stoppage of the inflow of *karma* matter into *Jiva* and the annihilation of the already existing *karma* particles. The liberated self or the all-knower is completely freed from the bondage of *karma*. In that liberated state, the *Jiva* enjoys the supreme knowledge and vision of all aspects of life and reality.

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particles (T. G. Kalghadgi: *Jainism*, Dr. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1978, pp. 54-55)

<sup>32</sup>In Jain terms, it is the total annihilation of *karma* that causes obscurations from seeing itself as pure and perfect. Asceticism - besides the observance of precepts, which serve to avert *karma* - causes quick annihilation of *karma*. It burns, according to the general Indian view, the seeds of work. Doing mortification and meditation causes annihilation of *karma*. Hemachandra points out that in the process of the total annihilation of *karma*, the internal austerity such as atonement, veneration, service, study, renunciation and meditation is superior to the external one like mortification (*Yogasastra*: 4.91).

Knowing the ups and downs of the nature of existence, the perfect soul sees all things, living and non-living, with equanimity and compassion. The liberated person looks at the innumerable varieties of living being, their autonomous nature, the intensity and the extent of bondage and their efforts towards liberation. This implies that embodied beings are bound by *karma* in all its variety<sup>33</sup>. Thus they are imperfect in their knowledge and vision about reality, etc. This is the reason why they are attached to the world of creation, enslaving themselves and other creatures in the world.

### 8. *Jina*: the Victorious

A Jain (derived from the word 'Jina', the victorious) is a person who is victorious over oneself and gifted with *samata bhava* or equanimity. The Jains believe that all their spiritual deities, the Tirthankaras, were full of compassion towards all living beings. Looking on them equally they had a sense of harmony in themselves and also built the same in the environment. To them, all living beings were endowed with the same basic life force, which sustained life on earth. The spiritual masters knew that life in all forms was never single and hence were naturally prone to an *anekanta* spirit, a spirit of accommodation. This again sustained life without doing any harm or damage to the living beings. They were sympathetic to note the differences in their nature and function, differences in their existence, sustenance, knowledge and vision, etc. They knew that due to the nature of their embodiment and bondage with *karma* the living beings were not able to see the Reality as such.

Hence any study on a particular aspect of life will have its own reference points, given the limited grasping power of a living being. And from those reference points or points of view their assertions may be true.

<sup>33</sup>The soul is susceptible to *karma* particles, flowing from all the six quarters; the *karma* particles bind the soul in all its parts...in every way. (*Uttaradhyayana Sutra*, 33.18); For, in this world, all living beings suffer individually for their deeds...none can escape the fruit of actions, except by suffering for it (*Sutrakrtanga*, 1.2.1.4); All living beings are fashioned by (i. e. owe their present form of existence to), their own *karma*...(*Sutrakrtanga*, 1.2.3.18). The Jains have worked out the doctrine of *karma*, its divisions and sub-divisions, their severity, etc. to its full.

But looking from a different angle those assertions may be false. Realization of such a truth was a motivating factor for understanding the limited thoughts and actions of a living being which further evokes sympathy, compassion, concern, etc. over all that survives under the cosmos.

### 9. Life-assertion, Life-preservation and Life-promotion

Jain religious philosophy is often said to be too ascetic and world/life-negating. Its dual understanding of reality as material and non-material, their inter-relatedness as the cause of bondage, and hence the goal of life is to pursue after an arduous path of ascetic discipline, etc. lead to the conclusion that Jain philosophy is world/life-negating and hard to follow. But the ethics propounded by their seers and the metaphysical foundations for the same suggest the importance given to life-assertion, life-preservation, and life-promotion.

It is finally the moral conduct that will endorse life and its sanctity. Even the meditation that is prescribed in the Jain traditions emphasizes good thoughts resulting in noble actions. *Sukla-dhyana*, an auspicious form of meditation, leads one to the highest stage of concentration, of self-control resulting in a great deal of psychological acumen thereafter able to bear all kinds of troubles with equanimity. *Ahimsa*, *aparigraha* or non-possession, *dana* and several other ecological dharmas are needed today more than ever before to redeem the world of violence, selfishness and degradation and to preserve this earth with compassion.

This would mean in today's world to organize the individuals and groups committed to life and respect for the earth's rich resources and who would not damage life and environment in the wake of modernity and advanced technological development. They would take the lead in all the issues that affect the life of every creature in the world, not merely human beings. They would entrust the earth's valuable resources into the hands of those that would selflessly preserve them and not just lord over them or damage and destroy them out of self-interest and self-promotion. They would form networks of people and concerned organizations to look into Eco-Watch and bring into public notice the dubious designs of the national

and international governments and private firms, financial agencies and other forces that support such causes of destruction of life and environment. In the process they would struggle in the battle, undertake hardships with determination and live a model unto non-violent resistance with equanimity and compassion.