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Ethical thoughts that is reflected in Jainism

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Jainism - The 'Jains' are the followers of the Jinas. 'Jina' literally means 'Conqueror.' He who has conquered love and hate, pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion, and has thereby freed 'his' soul from the karmas obscuring knowledge, perception, truth, and ability, is a Jina. The Jains refer to the Jina as God. They teach us to reduce vices like rāg (attachment), dvesh (aversion), krodh (anger), mān (pride), māyā (deceit) and lobh (greed).

Jain religion is unique in that, during its existence of over 5000 years, it has never compromised on the concept of nonviolence either in principle or practice. Jainism upholds nonviolence as the supreme religion (Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah) and has insisted upon its observance in thought, word, and deed at the individual as well as social levels. The holy text Tattvartha Sutra sums it up in the phrase 'Parasparopagraho Jivanam' (all life is mutually supportive). Jain religion presents a truly enlightened perspective of equality of souls, irrespective of differing physical forms, ranging from human beings to animals and microscopic living organisms. Humans, alone among living beings, are endowed with all the six senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and thinking; thus humans are expected to act responsibly towards all living beings by being compassionate, non-egoistic, fearless, forgiving, and rational.

Jainism recognizes this fact while analysing the Universe and maintains that the whole Universe can be broadly divided into two categories, viz., Jiva and Ajiva, meaning motivating conscious and unconscious matter thus pervading everything noticed in this Universe. On the basis of this finding, about two thousand five hundred years ago, not with the help of any laboratory testing but by sheer analytical logic, the Jina seers saw the life force not only in plants and vegetables but also in so called inanimate matter such as earth, water and air.

Followers of Jainism are called Jains, and there are about 4 million worldwide. Jain ritual canters around on sacred images and mantras. Mahavira is said to have taught five principles to live by in order to rid oneself of karma and escape the wheel of rebirth:

1. nonviolence (ahimsa)
2. truthfulness (satya)
3. taking only that which is freely given; i.e. not stealing (asteya)
4. non-possessiveness (aparigraha)
5. chastity (brahmacharya)

Jain religion focuses much attention on Aparigraha, non-possessiveness towards material things through self-control, self-imposed penance, abstinence from over-indulgence, voluntary curtailment of one's needs, and the consequent subsiding of the aggressive urge.

The Jains are divided into two major sects, Digambar and Svetambar. The differences between the two sects are minor and relatively obscure. Digambar Jain monks do not wear clothes while Svetambar Jain monks, wear white, seamless clothes.

Nonviolence

"Kill not, cause no pain. Nonviolence is the greatest religion." — Mahavira. The most fundamental value of Jainism is nonviolence, or ahimsa. This word is usually found on the Jain symbol of the open palm (which means "stop"). Ahimsa is the first of the vows taken by both Jain householders and monks. Ahimsa means harming no living being as well as protecting all living beings from harm.

While several religions practice nonviolence and peace as a fundamental principle, Jainism is unique in extending this principle to all jivas (living beings). For Jains, living beings include not only humans and animals, but everything one finds on earth. Ahimsa must therefore be

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extended not only to humans and animals, but also soil, sand, oceans, fires, insects, microbes and plants.

For this reason, most Jains are not just vegetarians but "fruitarians" - they eat only fruit, nuts and milk. These foods are acceptable because they are only the by-products of the living beings and not the living beings themselves. To pull up a carrot or chop a potato would be to do violence to a living being (actually several living beings, as root vegetables are seen as multi-organic and therefore multi-souled).

This unique concept of nonviolence also explains why some Jain monks and nuns wear masks over their mouths and noses or carry whisks with which they brush chairs before sitting. To inhale or squash even a microbe would constitute violence to a living thing, resulting in unwanted karma. According to R. Williams:

“Jainism each aṇuvrata or small vow has a positive side as well as a negative aspect. Ahimsāhas dayāor compassion as its positive side.”^[1]

Truthfulness

‘The ascetic who never thinks of telling a lie out of attachment, aversion or delusion is indeed the practise of the second vrata of truthfulness.’^[2] - Mahavira

Satya is a Sanskrit term meaning truth or correct. But in Jainism it has a more subtle meaning. Jainism defines Satya as harmless truth or we can say those words that are true or correct and importantly, do not harm or hurt any living being. So utmost care must be taken in speaking. The implication of this vow is extended to prohibition of following:

1. Spreading rumours and false doctrines.
2. Betraying confidences.
3. Gossip and backbiting.
4. Falsifying documents.
5. Breach of trust.
6. Denial of the existence of the things, which do exist.
7. Assertion of the existence of non-existent things.
8. Giving false information about the position, time and nature of things.

One's speech should be pleasant, beneficial, true and un hurtful to others. It should aim at moderation rather than exaggeration, esteem rather than denigration, at distinction rather than vulgarity of expression, and should be thoughtful and expressive of sacred truths. All untruths necessarily involve violence.

One should protect the vow of truthfulness by avoiding thoughtless speech, anger, greed, putting others in fear. The idea is to overcome greed, fear, anger, jealousy, ego, frivolity, etc., which are considered breeding grounds of falsehood. Only a person who has controlled these emotions and desires has the moral strength to speak the truth at all times. However, in keeping with the principle of non-violence in speech, if a truth is likely to cause pain, sadness, anger or the death of any living creature, then a Jain is advised to remain silent.

Taking only that which is freely given; i.e. not stealing

A thief feels neither pity nor shame, nor does he possess discipline and faith. There is no evil that he cannot do for wealth.^[3] - Mahavira

Acharya is a Sanskrit word meaning "avoidance of stealing" or "non-stealing". A Jain must not take anything that does not belong to him without the prior permission of its owner. This includes even a blade of grass from another's garden. The implication of this vow is extended to prohibition of following:

1. Taking another's property without his consent, or by unjust or immoral methods.
2. Taking away a thing that may be lying unattended or unclaimed.
3. When taking alms, taking more than what is minimum needed.
4. Accepting things stolen by others.
5. Asking/encouraging or approving others for any of the above mentioned prohibitions.

One should observe this vow very strictly, and should not touch even a worthless thing which does not belong to him. Jain monks and nuns who survive by begging for food from laypersons are advised not to acquire more than a few mouthfuls of food per family.

Non-possessiveness

Non-possessiveness controls the senses in the same way as a hook controls the elephant. As a ditch is useful for the protection of a town, so is non-attachment for the control of the senses.^[4] -Mahavira

Aparigraha is the concept of non-possessiveness. The term usually means to limit possessions to what is necessary or important, which changes with the time period, though sadhus would not have any possessions. This is based on the belief that desire for material wealth can lead a person to commit sin by giving rise to negative emotions like greed, anger and jealousy. Desires are ever-growing and they form a never-ending cycle. A person who wishes to achieve liberation from the cycle of life and death must acquire control over his senses and avoid attachment to material things, places or persons.

Monks and nuns are required to give up attachment to the following:

1. Material things such as wealth, property, house, books, clothes, etc.
2. Relationships such as father, mother, spouse, children, friends, enemies, other monks, disciples, etc.
3. Feelings such as pleasure and pain, feelings towards touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. They have the equanimity towards music and noise, good and bad smells, soft and hard objects for touch, beautiful and dirty sights, etc.

They do not eat food for taste but for survival with the intention to destroy his karma with the help of this body. Non-possession and non-attachment are to be observed in speech, mind, and deed. One should not possess, ask others to do so, or approve of such activities.

Chastity

The soul is the Brahman. Brahmacharya is therefore nothing but spiritual conduct of the ascetic concerning the soul, who has snapped out of relationship with alien body.^[5] -Mahavira

Total abstinence from sensual pleasure is called celibacy. Sensual pleasure is an infatuating force which sets aside all virtues and reason at the time of indulgence. This vow of controlling sensuality is very difficult to observe in its subtle form. One may refrain from physical indulgence but may still think of the pleasures of sensualism, which is prohibited in Jainism. Monks are required to observe this vow strictly and completely. They should not enjoy sensual pleasures, ask others to do the same, nor approve of it. For laypersons, brahmacharya means either confining sex to marriage or complete celibacy and they are required to be chaste in their deeds and thoughts. There are several rules laid down for observing this vow for householders.

Conclusion

Although many people associate the Hindu religion with India, Jainism is another world religion that was established in that historic country. The focus of the Jain faith has communal and individual aspects. Corporately, Jainism's focus is on non-violent relationships with other people. Individually, Jainism emphasizes personal asceticism. Non-violence (Ahimsā) which strengthens autonomy of life everywhere, non-absolutism (Anekāntvād) which strengthens autonomy of thoughts & speech and non-possessiveness (Aparigraha) which strengthens autonomy of interdependence are the three realistic principles which strengthen our belief that every living being has a right of self-existence. These principles translate into three practices: 1) you'll not kill, 2) you will not trample others thoughts and 3) you will not trample nature. If everyone adopts these three ideas then there will be: 1) no acts of war, 2) no economic exploitation and 3) no environmental & ecological destruction. This elevates the soul to a higher spiritual level, ultimately achieving perfect enlightenment, reaching its final destination of eternal bliss, and ending all cycles of birth and death.

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