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VALUES OF JAINISM IN THE PRESENT SOCIETY- A STUDY

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Abstract

Jainism has contributed a lot to enrich the Indian culture and philosophy. The principles of Jainism has been the key factor to enrich and elevate the human society. Mahavira always stressed upon the matter and soul. The former is impermanent and the other is eternal. To lead a pious life, one has to adore the Pancha-Mahavratas and follow the Tri-ratna. These are the ways to liberation and one can get salvation adopting these principles. Along with the monks and the saints, an ordinary man, a lay man can also practice an auspicious life within his capacity to get rid of rebirth. Santhara is also one of the principles adopted by the Jainas to get liberation. It is also known as Sallekhana, samlehna, samadhi marana etc. It is one of the austere principles of Jainism. It is the religious practice of voluntary fasting to death by gradually reducing the intake of food and liquids. It is the process of thinning of human passions and the body and another means of destroying rebirth influencing karma by withdrawing all physical and mental activities. To eradicate the evil effects of our karma everyone has to go through the interior and exterior austerities. With these austerities one can attain the salvation, the ultimate goal of our life. After attaining salvation, a person becomes a Siddha. Jainism is all about the world renunciation.

Keywords: Salvation, Sallekhana, Santhara, Samlehna, Incarnation. Salutation

Introduction

Jainism made manifold contributions to enrich the Indian culture and philosophy. Firstly, Jainism greatly contributed to the popularisation of principles of ahimsa, which is regarded as one of the basic principles of Indian culture. They provided a new vitality to this principle and popularised it. They denounced and reprobated various types of sacrifices and were largely responsible for their discontinuance in afterward centuries. They took it to the highest level and emphasised on non-injury to the conscious as well as to unconscious objects in speech, deed as well as action. Next it creates trouble to the caste system by emphasising upon the equality of everyone. In this process many of the Hindu reformers encouraged to carry out several types of reforms to regain its acceptance and adoration and also, they tried to throw out most of the evils from the Hindu society. [1]

Mahavira believed in dualistic philosophy and held that matter and soul are the only two ever existing elements. A man's personality constitutes of material and spiritual natures. The former is impermanent and destructible and in the other hand the latter is eternal, everlasting, metamorphic and transformative. According to him, on account of karma [the accumulated effect of actions done in the past lives] The soul is bounded with passions and desires collected through the previous birth. It is by means of continued efforts through several lives that the karmic forces binding the soul can be counteracted and the soul itself is rendered passionless. By severe austerities and self-mortification and discipline of the body, the forming of fresh karmas is prevented and the already deposited karmas are lessened and finally shaken away. With the decay of the karmas the soul shines with greatness and glory which represents final liberation of moksha salvation, and the soul becomes the Paramatman the pure soul, with infinite knowledge, power and bliss.[2] The greatest knowledge Jainism has given to us that since the aim of life is to attain salvation, one has to avoid evil karmas, then gradually prevents all kinds of fresh karmas and destroy the existing ones. For this purpose, a house holder is to observe five vows known as Pancha Mahavratas such as; Non injury [Ahimsa] speaking truth [satya], non-stealing [asteya], non-adultery [Brahmacharya] and non-possession [Aparigraha]. Then he has to also follow the three jewels of Jainism Right knowledge [Samyak jnana], Right faith [Samyak darshana] and Right conduct [Samyak charitra].[3]

In Jainism for spiritual development knowledge plays an important role. Spiritual development leads to liberation. Jainism accepts the existence of soul. According to Jainism, the soul has the inherent capacity to know everything. If the purity of soul is higher, then one can understand the things in a better way. The liberation is relateable with the karmas. Total destruction of karmic veils will lead to 'Ananta jnana' [infinite knowledge]. According to the Jainas, knowledge is the soul's intrinsic, inherent, inseparable, and inalienable attribute, without which no soul can exist. For the emancipation of soul in a positive way, the role of knowledge is highly considerable. According to Jaina theory of knowledge, the soul has consciousness [chetana] and understanding and it is the prominent inherent qualities of soul.[4]



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To attain the unity of right knowledge [samyak gyana], Right faith [samyak biswasa], Right conduct [samyak charitra] self-effort is needed. The basic mantra of Jainism is to live and let live, to live a life of understanding, tolerance, systematic co-operation and peaceful existence is necessary.[5]

Right faith means firm and final conviction in the reality of nine fundamental principles or tattvas of Jainism. Here faith does not mean blind faith; one must follow the path with correct understanding, reason and wisdom.[6] Samyagdarshan is that purified state of consciousness which enables it to know the truth as it is. It is the state of freedom from wrong intuition of truth. It is the ground of right knowledge.[7] There are ten sources from which a jiva attains right faith. They are as follows 1. One's own nature [nisarga], 2. Teachings [upadesa] 3. Command[agna] 4. Study of the holy texts[sutras] 5. Suggestions[bija] 6. Understanding the meaning of sacred love[abhigama] 7. Detailed exposition [vistara] 8. Observance [kritya] 9. Brief exposition [samksepa] 10. Law [dharma] [8]

The wrong notions which are the causes of worldly existence can only be eradicated by the possession of right faith. With right faith and right knowledge, one purifies one's self. The Sutakritanga states in a similar way that right faith is like an island to those persons who are carried by the current of mithyatva and suffer its consequences. Right faith is the way to attain liberation. Right faith leads to all kinds of prosperity and ultimately to supreme perfection and final beatitude. After attaining all sorts of prosperity, they who take refuge in right faith must attain liberation, which is the freedom from old age, disease, destruction, grief, fear, doubt and all kinds of karmas.[9]

According to Parsvanatha the cosmos is divided into three parts, a higher world of gods, a middle world of men and a lower world of demons. Also, the universe is filled with infinite number of eternals, indestructible individual souls. In Sanskrit the souls are called jiv meaning 'to live'. The souls are purely spiritual and they have unlimited wisdom, power and goodness but they are bounded with materialism. Actually, the souls are incarnated in the bodies of gods, men, animals, plants and demons, and these are founded in particles of earth, cold water fire and wind. The soul can be free from the involvement of materialism when the eradication of karma is happened in a rigorous way. Parsvanatha suggested four vows which was related to kindness, truth, honesty and poverty. By practicing these four vows we can elevate our life in a respectable way and the soul can be lifted up like an island above the waves of the ocean of samsara. Mahavira accepted Parsvanatha's four vows along with those he added the fifth vow that was chastity. In this way Jaina thought retained its originality and foundations which helped the human society extensively.[10]

Jainism is all about the world renunciation. It is the true religion in which the soul may disentangle itself from attachment to the materialistic world and reach the highest level of universe. To reach the highest level one has to adopt the five vows with great austerity. However, it is possible only for a small number of people to practice ascetism apart from the monks and the nuns. To practice such type of extremity, lay members, both men and women are got admitted to the samghas and religious communities. Still some common people are not able to practice it. In the Purusartha Siddhyupaya, a treatise of high authority for all Jainas, it is described that, the fourth vow, not to own property, is reduced for the householder to this; "if one is unable to wholly renounce cattle, corn, servants, buildings, wealth etc, at least he should limit them; because renunciation is the right principle.[11] Again the Purusartha Siddhyupaya says, "Ratna-Traya, the three jewels [right belief, right knowledge, right conduct] should be followed, even partially, every moment of time without cessation by a householder desirous of everlasting liberation. Even when Ratna-Traya is partially followed, whatever bondage of karma there is, is due to its antithesis, because Ratnatraya is assuredly the way to liberation, and can never be the cause of bondage.[12]

Again, the book says that a lay follower or a house holder should practice an auspicious life, according to one's own status and capacity. Self-possession, praising, bowing, contrition, and renunciation, and detachment for the body are the six daily duties, which should be observed by a house holder. One should have control upon three things, control of body, control of speech and control of mind. There are ten observances to be followed by a lay man such as forgiveness, modesty, straightforwardness, truth, satisfaction, self-control, austerities, charity, non-attachment and chastity. There are twenty-two types of sufferings in this world. If one wants to get rid of all cause for pain, he or she has to endure all the pain without any complain. The sufferings are 1. hunger, 2. thirst, 3. cold, 4. heat, 5. insect bite, 6. nudity, 7. ennui, 8. women, 9. Walking, 10. sitting, 11. resting, 12. abuse, 13. beating, 14. begging, 15. non obtaining, 16. disease, 17. contact with thorny shrubs etc., 18. dirt, 19. respect and dis-respect, 20. conceit of knowledge, 21. lack of knowledge, 22. slack belief.[13] The Jaina philosophy is divided into nine categories. The first category is jiva or soul. All jivas divided into two classes. [1] the perfected Siddhas that live in Ishatpragbhara, and [2] the unperfected jivas of samsara That live in the world. They are called Samsari. They have divided into three groups, 1) male, 2) female 3) neuter. Jivas are classified in four divisions according to the place where they were born. Those are as follows 1) in hell, 2) in a subhuman state as in plants or animals, 3) as human beings, and 4) as spirits(devata), either gods or demons. The second category is Ajiva or non- soul. This is all about the inanimate things, with which jiva is completely connected. They are also divided into two groups, Arupi, without



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form and Rupi, with form. Motion, space and time comes within the form Arupi. All the materialistic things come under the form Rupi. The third category is Punya or merit. To get punya one has to perform nine types of karmas which includes 1) feeding the hungry, 2) giving drink to the thirsty, 3) offering clothes to the poor, 4) providing residence to those who are in need, 5) a seat or a bed for a monk, 6) wishing well being of others, 7) involving ourselves in others service, 8) uttering words without hurting another's feelings, 9) making reverent salutations to religious men. The fourth category is papa or sin. There are eighteen classes of sin are recognised. The major sins are anger, conceit, intrigue and greed. Seen is the cause of every illness and ailment. According to the sin one will born in the next incarnation. The fifth category is Asrava which has to do with the channels for the acquisition of karma. There are forty-two channels through which karma enters a jiva. These include the senses, the emotions and various kinds of activities, all of them are carefully examined. The sixth category is Samvara, meaning methods of impeding karma. There are fifty-seven ways with which we can elevate the level of karma. The seventh category is Bandha or bondage. To get rid of the bondage, everyone should keep themselves away from the materialistic world. The eighth category is Nirjara or destruction of karma. To eradicate the evil effects of our karma everyone has to go through the interior and exterior austerities. The ninth category is Moksha or Salvation. One who attains the salvation he is called a Siddha. He is then, by Jaina definition, "without caste, unaffected by smell, without the sense of taste, without feeling, without form, without hunger without pain, without sorrow, without joy, without birth, without old age, without death, without body, without karma, enjoying an endless and unbroken calm." (14)

Traditions and customs have gradually and continuously interlinked with the society in an unbreakable and in an unseparable way. But sometimes these customs and traditions result in being a social evil for the society. As commonly said, "Time is changing and we should change with the time" is the basic rule of nature. Santhara is also known as Sallekhana, Samlehna, Samadhi Marana or Sanyasana Marana; [15] is a supplementary vow to the ethical code of conduct of Jainism. It is the religious practice of voluntary fasting to death by gradually reducing the intake of food and liquids. It is not considered as a suicide by Jaina scholars because it is not an act of passion, nor does it deploy poisons or weapons. [16] It is the process of thinning of human passions and the body and another means of destroying rebirth- influencing Karma by withdrawing all physical and mental activities [17].

Santhara, also called 'Pandit Maran', and ' Sakham- Maran', finds mention in Agamas [religious texts]. It has been practiced since the advent of Jainism and from time immemorial. The code of conduct for Jainas is named as Pratikramana Sutra. In Shrivakya Anuvrata clearly explains Santhara, saying that when all the needs and purposes of life have been served, or when the body is not capable of serving any more purpose, a person can adopt Santhara. Through Santhara, a person is expected to cause minimum disturbance to others. He or she who has been adopting Santhara is voluntarily deprived himself or herself from all the temptation of life- food, water, emotions, bonds- after knowing that death is the only truth. [18]

According to scholars, to compare Santhara with suicide is a wrong concept. "Suicide is a mental issue". It has many causes such as; anger, depression, loneliness. Nobody is committing suicide with permission or with one's eagerness. Always it happened accidentally and in a short span of time without noticing anyone. Santhara on the other hand is observed amid festivity. The person concerned is treated akin to God. The house becomes a teerthasthana [a place of pilgrimage]. "Other religions show how to live, the Jainas show how beautiful it is to die." [19]

Jaina texts say Santhara is the ultimate route to attaining mokshya and breaking free from the bondage of life and death. Jainas from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka mostly take up this holy vow. Including Jaina monks, ordinary Jaina followers also take up Santhara. There is a misconception is that only people suffering from illness embrace the practice is not true. Santhara is taken up with a view to sacrificing attachments including one's body. The woman-man ratio of Santhara practioners stands at 60 40 perhaps because "women are generally strong willed and have a religious bent of mind." [20] Members of the Terapanthi Svetambara Jain community beliefs that Santhara is a ritual, which is different from suicide. They insist that those who oppose Santhara fail to understand that the ritual is purely a religious practice of giving up food. According to Mangal Chand Chopra, an 80-year-old Jain community leader "It is a chosen act of rational thinking and marks the beginning of a journey of understanding the inherently painful and flawed nature of earthly existence." [21] In Odisha in Cuttack in 2014 Oct31 an 83 years old ailing woman who was performing the Jain ritual Santhara [fasting unto death] died. Her name was Vhicki Devi Sethia, who died after fasting for 56 days. Her last rites were performed at Khannagar. Vhicki Devi announced Santhara on Sep 4 after doctors said they could do little to cure ailing gullet. As swallowing food was extremely painful to her, she adopted Santhara. Her fast had sparked a controversy with a social organisation filing public interest litigation [PIL] equating with suicide. The PIL also alleged that Santhara or a religious fast to death adopted by a Jain or any person violates article 21 of constitution, which guarantees right to life, but not death. [22]

On average, 240 Jainas practice Santhara each year in India. This age-old practice highlighted in 2006, when a 93-year-old lady Keila Devi Hirawat from Jaipur, Rajasthan died observing Santhara. There was a debate in the international media on whether



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there was any place for such rituals in modern world.[23] Advocate Nikhil Soni [Human Activist] filed a PIL in the Hon'ble High court of Rajasthan in order to claim Santhara as an illegal practice and a mode of attempting suicide that is against law of land. The practice of Santhara is punishable under section 306 and 309 of the Indian Penal Code [IPC]. To ban this practice this appeal was lodged. The Rajasthan High Court declared Santhara as an illegal activity.[24] As soon as the judgement was passed, the Jain community started their protests non-violently. They started rallies in the streets of several cities all over India. A special leave petition [SLP] was filed in the Hon'ble Supreme Court by Akhil Bharat Varshiya Digambara Jain Parishad.[25]

There was a debate about the practice from a right to life and a freedom of religion view point. In 2015 the Rajasthan High court banned the practice, considering it suicide. Later that year, the Supreme court of India stayed the decision of the Rajasthan High court and lifted the ban on Santhara.[26]

If we will discuss about the relations of Jainism with other religions of India such as predominately with Hinduism and Buddhism, it has a close relation with both the religion. These three important religions have been surviving side by side for the last so many centuries, in this way it is natural they have influenced one another in many respects. Regarding rebirth and salvation, we find similarities between Jainism and Hinduism because both the religions believe in the consequences of karma. The Hindus believe that Gods alone can attain salvation, the Jainas consider that it is, the right of human beings only. Buddhism and Jainism both the religions believed in rebirth. It is one of the central beliefs of Buddhism. According to Buddhism we the human beings are in an endless cycle of birth, death and re-birth, which can only be broken by attaining Nirvana. Nirvana is the ultimate way to get rid of the suffering of life permanently. According to Jainism also, our karma decides our rebirth and with liberation only we can escape ourselves from the circle of rebirth. Both believed in faith and karma. Both preached Satya, Ahimsa, Brahmacharya and detachment from material comforts. Both the religions believe in the concept of karma which is an attachment of positive and negative forces to the soul based on a person's activities, beliefs and spiritual attachments. Reincarnation carries this force forward and requires effort to purify the soul. Neither religion believes in God as the creator of the universe. They acknowledge all creation as being part of the universe's divinity.

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