



## THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JAINISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ETHICAL VALUES- A STUDY

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### **Abstract**

Jainism traditionally known as Jain Dharma, is an ancient Indian religion. Jainism followers are called "Jains", a word derived from the Sanskrit word jina (victor) and connoting the path of victory in crossing over life's stream of rebirths through an ethical and spiritual life. Jains believe that Jainism is an eternal dharma with the Tirthankaras guiding every cycle of the Jain cosmology. The most important part of Jain philosophy is its Ethics. Metaphysics or epistemology: In fact, knowledge of any kind is useful for the Jaina in so far as it helps him to right conduct. The goal of right conduct again is salvation (moksha), which means negatively removal of all bondage of the soul and positively the attainment of perfection.

**Keywords:** Jain principles, Spirituality, Moksha, Morality, Path of Life, Moral Norms.

### **Introduction**

Moral Values in Jainism are directed towards the deliverance of the person. Thus its orientation is religious. All beings seek bliss and try to avoid pain and loss. The practice of Dharma enables them to attain this end. The distinct feature of Jainism is the interconnection between religion and morality. Jain Philosophy means a follower of Jina, which is applied to those persons who have conquered the lower nature, passion, hatred, etc. Jain Philosophy is a dharmic religion and philosophy that originated in ancient India. The word 'Jain' comes from the word 'Jina' which means a conqueror. 'Jina' comes from the root 'Ji'-to conquer'. It means conquering the passions like lust, anger; pride and greed are considered as the major passions, which are considered the enemy of the souls. It does not mean conquering nations Jain Philosophy and Buddhism.

The Jina or the 'conquering saint', who has conquered all worldly desires, is with Jains what Gautama Buddha or the perfectly enlightened saint is with Buddhists. He is also called Jineswara (chief of the Jinas), Arhat, "the venerable", Tirthankara or the saint who has made the passage of the world. The Jains follow the teachings of Tirthankaras. 'Tirtha' literally means a ford, a means of crossing over. It metaphorically denotes a spiritual guide or philosophy, which enables one to cross over the ocean of recurring births in this world. 'Kara' means 'one who makes'. The word Tirthankara means a 'Jain Holy Teacher'. These teachers or Tirthankaras are not creators or rulers of the world. They are pure divine souls, who have attained perfection and can never again take human birth. Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara, is not the founder of Jainism, but the first active propagator who revived the Jain doctrines. 'Maha' means 'great' and 'Vira' means 'a hero'. Jainism is similar and has much in common to the Buddhistic ideas. The idols, which represent the Tirthankaras, are like that of Buddha in a meditative posture. Like those of the Buddha, Mahavira's doctrines were formulated as a reaction to and rejection of the Brahmanism (religion based on the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas and Upanishads) then taking shape.

### **Origin and Development of Jainism**

The origins of Jainism are shrouded in mystery. Many facts regarding its conception are in dispute by modern scholars. Jain believe that their religion is not a human invention, but simply an eternal part of the universe. They believe Jainism a timeless concept, having no origin and no end. On occasion Jainism is forgotten by humanity, to be revived by a succession of exactly twenty-four Tirthankara, divine teachers of the Jain faith. Out of the twenty-four Tirthankara sent to revive Jainism, historians only have enough evidence to conclusively prove that the last two existed. Mahavira, the last Tirthankara, is most likely the most well-known figure in Jainism. While Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism, he was a prominent spreader of Jain ideas. For thirty years Mahavira travelled throughout India teaching the Jain philosophy of the five ethical principles: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity, and non-attachment. Mahavira himself practiced Jainism and attained moksha, freedom from the cycle of rebirth, at the age of seventy-two. It is also important to note that Mahavira was traveling throughout India during the same time period as Gowthama Buddha. There is considerable evidence that Jainism is significantly older than Buddhism. Buddhists maintain that during the time period when Gautama and Mahavira were alive, Jainism was a long established religion in the region. Some even say that Jainism is older than Hinduism. For example, the second president of India, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, believed that Jainism existed long before the Vedas, the most ancient Hindu scriptures, were composed. Many scholars believe that Jainism is an ancient religion of India, not a sect or subset of any other religion.

### **The main Principles of Jainism**

Jain philosophy deals extensively with the problems of metaphysics, reality, cosmology, ontology, epistemology and divinity. Jainism is basically a transtheistic (referring to a system of thought or religious philosophy that transcends theism, and is thus



neither theistic, nor atheistic) religion of ancient India. It is a continuance of the ancient Sramana tradition that co-existed with the Vedic tradition from primeval times. The discerning features of Jain philosophy are its belief on independent existence of soul and matter, denial of creative and omnipresent God, strength of karma, eternal and un-created universe, a strong emphasis on non-violence, stress on relativity and multiple facets of truth, and morality and ethics, based on liberation of soul. Jain philosophy endeavours to explain the principle of being and existence, the nature of the Universe and its constituents, the nature of bondage and the means to attain liberation. It has often been described as an ascetic movement for its strong emphasis on self-control, non-indulgences and renunciation. It has also been referred to as a model of philosophical liberalism for its assertion that truth is relative and multifaceted, and for its willingness to adapt all possible view-points of the rival philosophies. In this respect, it is also compared to Western concepts of subjectivism and moral relativism. Jainism strongly maintains the individualistic nature of soul and personal responsibility for one's decisions; and that self-sufficiency and individual efforts alone are responsible for one's liberation. In this light it is similar to individualism and objectivism.

Jain philosophy remained unified and undivided, though as a religion, Jainism was divided into various sects and traditions. The contribution of Jain philosophy in developing Indian philosophy has been substantial. Jain philosophical concepts like Ahimsa, Karma, Moksa, Samsara and like have been absorbed into the philosophies of other Indian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism in diverse forms. While Jainism traces its philosophy from teachings of Mahavira and other Tirthankaras, numerous Jain philosophers from Kundakunda and Umasvati in ancient times, to Yasovijaya in recent times, have contributed extraordinarily in developing and refining the Jain and Indian philosophical concepts. Jain cosmology denies the existence of a supreme being responsible for creation and operation of universe.

### **Ethics**

Since the very beginning humankind started to live in society, the need to create a series of rules increased to promote living together without killing or destroying among themselves. Those ethic codes and moral were necessary to keep family together. Family is known like the first kind of society found since the human being. Here was born the ethic and moral like inseparable elements in the human life. It is no more than the behaviors of people in the society considering a series of values that guide human behavior. But those ethic codes were created based in the existence of the almighty power, god who is observing our actions. This divine conception of moral is base in wrong and right actions that should be punished by god. Later on the evolution, in the middle age, the religious revolution gave a different perception of ethic and moral. This revolution gives origin to new religion that is not more than different interpretation of the holy bible. The conflict between different interpretations gives origin to new conception of wrong and right. However, ethics and moral kept their essence of the almighty power who rules our life. Then it grows up the need to create a standard of values that let us guide our life and our government to act in the correct way. In the modern age, different currents try to explain ethics and moral dividing them in different categories. All of those currents define ethics like the science that studies moral norms as a standard of behavior that must be permanent in the life of each person.

### **Ethical Values in Jainism**

Morality and ethics amongst the Jainas is based on a common thought that a layman can accomplish, provided he follows in the stated path of fivefold vows. The five vows comprise - non-violence, non-possession, non-stealing, truth and celibacy. In order to differentiate between right and wrong or to have a good conduct, one need not have to fear the Almighty or the community. It is actually for one's own well-being and triumph that austerity is necessary. Jain ethics is considered as the most glorious part of Jainism and it is simplicity itself. Jain believe that liberation comes from the complete conquest of their internal enemies such as desire, attachment, greed, anger, and pride. This can be achieved by adhering to the three main principles of Jainism: non-violence, non-absolutism, non-possessiveness.

Nonviolence is the first principle of Jainism and the most well known; Jain believe that all violence is inherently bad and is a manifestation of internal enemies. Jain believe in not causing any sort of harm, whether through actions, words, or thoughts. Jain practice this everyday when they interact with other humans, and they make the utmost effort not to injure others through words. Jain also do not believe in the consumption of meat or dairy, as the production of meat or dairy could cause harm to an animal. Jain also does not eat plants that come from the ground, such as onions, as small animals like worms could be harmed when the plant is uprooted. Jain believe that all life as value, and so many Jain wear a mask over their mouth as to not accidentally inhale any small life forms, even bacteria. Jain carries a broom to sweep the path before them as they walk in order to prevent stepping on any smaller life forms. Non-absolutism is the second principle of Jainism and can be summed up as having an open mind. This encourages respecting all other cultures, religions, and people. Jain respect differences in belief, and consider the viewpoints of anyone, even those who oppose them. Jain believe in pluralism, the notion that the truth of reality cannot be completely captured from one viewpoint and multiple perceptions of one event can be all true and correct. There is common story in Jainism where an elephant is brought into a dark room and examined by



multiple men with no knowledge of an elephant. The men who feel his trunk believe the elephant to be a water spout, the men who feel his ear believe it to be a fan, the men who feel his leg believe it to be a pillar, and the men who feel his back believe it to be a throne. The story concludes with, "The sensual eye is just like the palm of the hand. The palm has not the means of covering the whole of the beast." Non-possessiveness is the third principle of Jainism. Non-possessiveness is the principle of not allowing oneself to become attached to anything, for attachment leads to greed. Wealth and belongings should be shared as much as possible. The principle of non-attachment also extends to where the Jain reside. Jain often do not reside in one place for more than a week, and are constantly moving just as Mahavira did. In order to master these three principles, Jain take five vows. The first vow, Ahimsa, is to cause as little harm as possible to any living being. The second vow, Satya, is to always speak the truth except when it would violate other vows. The third vow, Asteya, is to not steal anything or pay anything less than a fair price for goods. The fourth vow, Brahmacharya, is to be chaste in all activities which involve control over indulgence in sexual activities. The fifth vow, Aparigraha, is to not be attached to any physical object. Jain believes that in staying true to their vows and following the three principles they can achieve moksha, freedom from the endless cycle of rebirth.

### Conclusion

Thus Jainism comprises right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. It is manifest as non possession, non absolutism, and nonviolence. Through faith one discerns the nature of body and soul, and this awareness produces an attitude of detachment and non possession. Right knowledge frees one from absolutism and enables one to see things with a liberal and open mind, The discovery of the oneness of all living beings leads to nonviolent conduct. The centrality of Ahimsa to Jaina ethics makes it truly global; its practitioners are world citizens. Its message of good will is for the whole of humanity.

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