

## REFLECTIONS ON 'JAINISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION'

\* Dr. Malvika Ranjan

Religion plays a major role- as a harbinger of ethical and moral values. Defining the true nature of Religion, Late Acharya Mahapragya observed-

'I believe in that religion which has moral values at its foundation. Religion has the ability to solve the problems if you believe in pure religion'(1).

As key repositories of enduring civilisational values , religions can have an important role to play in preaching about environmental ethics and projecting persuasive visions of a more sustainable future, as it has been rightly said by Prof Hasn 'environmental crisis is fundamentally a crises of values'.(2)

The Jain religion has its roots over twenty-five hundred years ago in India. It advocates a path of renunciation and purification in order to liberate oneself from the chains of *karma*.. By a careful observance of non violent attitude, this aim could be achieved. Jainism emphasizes nonviolence, or *ahimsa*, as the only true path that leads to liberation and prescribes following scrupulous rules for the protection of life in all forms.(3)

Jainism has been staunch protector of nature since the origin of the faith. Truly, religion of nature, Jainism guides mankind to understanding nature's utility and develop sensitivity towards plants, worms, animals, and all sorts of creatures who also have their own importance for maintaining ecological balance .Ecology is the branch of biology which deals with the relations of organisms to their surroundings and to other organisms. and in the study of ecology The ancient Jain theory of *Parasparopagraho Jivānām* (All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence) has proven to be true . The interdependence of beings suggests that all are equally important.

---

\* Asst. Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University.

It also reflects that no one being can claim superiority over the others as the survival of one depends on the other. all aspects of nature belong together and are bound in a physical as well as a metaphysical relationship.(4)

L. M. singhvi ,renowned Indian Jurist and Jain leader, in his famous 'Jain Declaration of Nature', observed –“Jain cosmology recognized the fundamental natural phenomenon of symbiosis or mutual dependence which forms the basis of the modern day science of ecology. The ancient Jain scriptural aphorism, (all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence) is refreshingly contemporary in its promise and perspective.It defines the scope of modern ecology while extending it further to more spacious home. It means that all aspects of nature belong together and are bound in a physical as well as a metaphysical relationship”(5)

Five vows or anuvratas are the basic principles laid down for all householders in Jainism. These five vows, which inspired and influenced even Mahatma Gandhi, are nonviolence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), not stealing (*asteya*), sexual restraint (*brahmacarya*), and nonpossession (*aparigraha*). *Adherence to these principles make noble human beings who respect and are compassionate towards all beings..* (6).

In Jainism non violence is the pivot on which its whole ethics revolves Nonviolence or Ahimsa implies consciousness free from attachment (love) and aversion (hatred). Hurting Peoples' feelings by discriminations based on religion, race or social status is also a form of violence. Speaking falsely, stealing, intemperance (unchastity) and possessiveness (greed) involve mental and sometimes physical violence of self and others.(7) Thus the virtues of truth, non-stealing, chastity and non-possessiveness are integral parts of nonviolence.

Regarding the relationship between Ahimsa and Karma Christopher Chappel observes- “,For the Jainas , karma is a physical entity, a viscous mass that adheres to the Jiva and causes attachment and suffering. The average person is filled with karma, which obstructs one's true nature of infinite knowledge , bliss and energy. The influx (asrava) of new karma must cease if a person is to achieve the

pinnacle of of all life, the state of liberation, wherein there is no more attachment to passion and impurity. In order to overcome the negative influences of Karma , Jainas take on the series of vows mentioned above, the practice of which aids in the purjng (nirjara) of the residue accumulated during repeated deleterious activity. In the eyes of the Jainas , all karmas must be purged in order for liberation of to be attained.(8). Thus, the belief that hurting beings, result in the thickening of one's karma, leading to sorrow and suffering, is very much engrained in Jaina philosophy.

Jainism lays emphasis on the vitality of all things, including microorganisms and the elements. Quoting, from the Acaranga Sutra, the earliest known Jain text, Christopher Chappel writes – “Thoroughly knowing the earth bodies and the water bodies , and fire bodies and wind bodies, the lichens, seeds, and sprouts, he(Mahavira) comprehended that they are, if narrowly inspected imbued with life(9). Therefore, The idea of oneness of all beings is at the core of the practice of Ahimsa. In the Prasnavyakaran Sutra, the term non-violence is equated with sixty virtuous qualities, namely peace, harmony, welfare, trust, fearlessness.etc..Hence non violence is a wide term, encompassing all good qualities and virtues. (10).

Followers of all religions, including Jainism, rightfully contend that their respective religions promote peace. Every religion propounds universal brotherhood and equality. The first step towards attaining this , is through tolerance and accommodation . Jain thinkers realized this truth and so Jain scriptures present a rather different view of attaining genuine happiness and peace. Acharya Kundkunda has written: 'There are different individuals having different activities and karma. They have different levels of understanding and capacities. So one should not engage in heated discussions with persons belonging to other sects or those belonging to one's own sect'.(11)

**Anekāntavada** is one of the most important and fundamental doctrines of Jainism. It refers to the principles of pluralism and multiplicity of viewpoints, the notion that truth and reality are perceived differently from diverse points of view, and that no single point of view is the complete truth'.(12)

This asks for tolerance towards all viewpoints, individuals , institutions and beings and broadening of one's own horizon about sensitivity about others essentially required for world peace let alone environmental peace. The above stated Jain doctrines have such relevance in modern times not only for ecological peace but also for universal harmony and brotherhood

The interface between Jainism and ecology has been an issue of grave interest and challenge to many scholars. . Michael Tobias has worked for several decades as a writer and filmmaker dedicated to environmental causes. . His book titled *Life Force: The World of Jainism* highlights the basic Jain principle of Ahimsa and Syadvaad and his documentary film “Ahimsa,”, released in 1988 projects Jain religion as the great champion of animal rights .and he contributed the chapter on Jainism to Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim's World views and Ecology (13).

The contribution of Satish Kumar, to the field of Jainism and Ecology has been of immense value. Kumar left the life of a traditional Jain monk to join the land redistribution movement of Vinobha Bhave (1895–1982), and later journeyed as a peace activist on foot from Delhi to Moscow to Paris in an attempt to stop nuclear proliferation in the 1960s (14)

Acharya Tulsi, A Jain Saint, Acharya Tulsi, popularised the Anuvrat principles through The Anuvrata movement in 1950s. The Anuvrata Organisation which operates globally, convened a conference on “Living in harmony with Nature-Survival into the third millennium' in December 1995 in Ladnun , Rajasthan. Acharya Tulsi declared “A person responsible for polluting the environment is in fact endangering his own existence because he is an integral part of the ecological system. (15).

According to Acharya Tulsi “Both peace and war originate in the minds of men , we have paid little or no attention to to the question of transforming the human psyche” and thus emphasised on “Preksha Meditation to compose the human mind and instill it with as a positive mind manifests in positive behavior, be it towards humanity or Nature. (16). The ultimate aim of the Anuvrata movement was to create

a nonviolent socio-political world order with the help of a world wide network of self reformed people.

Acharya Mapragya the tenth Acharya, supreme head of the Jain Swetambara Terapanth Group ran a project called Ahimsa Yatra to promote Ahimsa or non violence.(17). In 1995, he succeeded Acharya Tulsi as the leader of the Terapanth sect and Anuvrata movement(18). Several Jain organisations have taken up the cause of spreading environmental awareness today. The Shrimad Rajchandra Kendra near Ahemdabad started a news service in 1990 to circulate information on the different Jain environmental projects and programmes to Jain community in India as well as abroad. It also initiated a reforestation project at various pilgrimage sites such as Palitana in Gujarat, Ellora in Maharashtra, and Sametshikhar and Pavapuri in Bihar. Jain Vishva Bharti in Rajasthan, has developed department of Ahimsa, which offers a specialisation in Ecology. These endeavours of some Jain institutions and Jain followers are glimpses of valuable relevance of Jain principles today.(19)

L M Singhvi, High Commissioner for India in Great Britain has significantly contributed to the cause of environmental protection. He wrote a book titled 'Jain Declaration Of Nature' in 1990, which analysed the environmental degradation, validating the propagation of Jain principles as one of the remedial ways to mitigate this problem. It lays down Mahavira's preachings concerning respect to the elements of nature with a warning that 'one who neglects and disregards the existence of earth, fire water and vegetation, disregards his own existence which is entwined with them'(20). Singhvi observed- "Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance, in a universe teeming with interdependent constituents".(21). Some modern authors believe that Jain philosophy in general and *anekāntavāda* in particular can provide a solution to many problems facing the world. They claim that 'even the mounting ecological crisis is linked to adversarialism, because it arises from a false division between humanity and "the rest" of nature. Modern judicial systems, democracy, freedom of speech, and secularism all implicitly reflect an attitude of *anekāntavāda*'.(22)

Many authors, such as Kamla Jain, have claimed that the Jain tradition, with its emphasis on *ahimsā* and *anekāntavāda*, is capable of solving religious intolerance, terrorism, wars, the depletion of natural resources, environmental degradation and many other problems (23)

Suchendeavour of the Jain leaders and institutions have contributed immensely to the cause of environmental protection. This also reflects the significance of 'Environmental ethics and Religion, dedicated to the cause of environmental protection and wise use of the resources provided by a bountiful nature.

References-

1. Padmanabh, S. Jaini. The Jaina Path of Purification, (Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass, 1979,Pg23.
2. Mahapragya, Acharya. "Ecological Thoughts in Jain Philosophy" retrieved on 16.2.2010<[www.merineews.com/article/Ecological\\_thoughts\\_in\\_jain\\_philosophy/1582940.shtml](http://www.merineews.com/article/Ecological_thoughts_in_jain_philosophy/1582940.shtml)
3. Nasr,SyedHossein. "Religion and the environmental crises.", retrieved on 22.3.2010<[www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx/article-title=Religion\\_and\\_the\\_Environmental\\_Crises\\_Sayyed\\_Hossein\\_Nasr.pdf](http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx/article-title=Religion_and_the_Environmental_Crises_Sayyed_Hossein_Nasr.pdf).
4. Nagendrasingh(ed)2001. Encyclopedia of Jainism.NewDelhi:Anmol Publications, Pg26-27.
5. Chappel Christopher. K."Jainism and Ecology:Non violence in the web of life." New Delhi:Motilal Benarasidas.Pg217.
6. Chakravarti, Appaswami. "Jainism: Its philosophy and ethics", in Studies in Jainism. Kolkata-Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta, 2002, Pg26.
7. Ibid,Pg47.
8. Chappel, K.Christopher. Non-violence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions.Delhi-SrinSatguru Publications.1995, Pg14.
9. 29Chappel, Christopher.K. "The Living Cosmos of Jainism:Grounded in Environmental Ethics" retrieved on 21 11 2010.<[www.Jstor.org/stable/20027724](http://www.Jstor.org/stable/20027724)>
10. Jain, Sagarmal. "Bramanic and Sramanic Cultures-A

- Comparative Study”in Studies in Jainism. Kolkata: The Ramkrishna Mission of Culture,Pg 45.
11. Jain, Sagar Mal.”The Philosophical Foundation of Religious Tolerance in Jainism” in Studies in Jainism :Reader2.New York-Jain Study Circle ,Pg157-164.
  12. Koller, John M.”Syadvada as the Epistemological ey to the Jaina Middle Way Metaphysics of Anekantvada” in Philosophy East and West. Volume 50, No3, 2007, Pg400-407.
  13. Tucker, Mary Evelyn and John Grim . “World views and Ecology”, Maryknoll, N. Y.:OrbisBooks,1994..
  14. Kumar, Satish, “Path without destination” ,New York: William Morrow, 1999.
  15. Chappel, K.Christopher. “Non-violence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions”.in Jamieson, Dale (ed).A Companion to Environmental Philosophy, Pg54.
  16. Mahapragya, Acharya. “A Handbook of Preksha Meditation for the trainers”retrieved on 10 Nov,2012.
  17. Chappel, K. Christopher. “Non-violence to Animals, Earth and Self in Asian Traditions”.in Jamieson, Dale (ed).A Companion to Environmental Philosophy, Pg54.
  18. Taurus, I.B. Living Religions-An Encyclopedia of World's Faiths.Pgs124-125.
  19. Chappel, Christopher. Towards an Indegenous Indian Environmentalism.Pg 28.
  20. Singhvi, L.M.Jain Declaration of Nature.1990,Pg7.
  21. Chappel, Christopher. “Towards an Indegenous Indian Environmentalism” in.Nelson, Lance.(ed)Purifying The Earthly Body Of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India. edited by Lance E Nelson ,Pg 28.
  22. Jain Kamla Jain, "Anekāntavāda in present day social life". In (ed.) Tara Sethia. Ahimsa, Anekant and Jainism .Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ. pp. 113.
  23. Ibid.