

## **Relevance of Moral Principles in Jaina Philosophy: In Present Situation**



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**ABSTRACT:** The Moral principles of Jaina Philosophy indicate that this philosophy represents the practical application of an ideal life. The systematic moral discipline laid down by Jaina Philosophy lights up one person from the common level and makes him enabled of knowing and practicing truth through a highly moral and spiritual course of conduct. Jainism is said to be based on the three basic principles known as 'Ratnatraye' or the three Gems (right belief, right knowledge and right conduct). Jainism is a system that has taken up the path of non-violence for ages and is still applying this ideal to mankind's practical life in the contemporary age. It lays emphasis on the practice of the principles of non-violence in every individual from which it is evident that its ultimate goal is the well – being of mankind and social improvement. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyse how the ethical principles of Jaina Philosophy is relevant to present time situation in maintaining peace and harmony in the society.

There is no denying the fact India is a Land of spiritualism. The Upanishada, the Gita, the Buddhist Tripitakas and the Jaina Agams – all these regard spiritual realization as the highest object of human life. In these works, ethical utterances are intertwined with spiritual expressions. Ethical knowledge is the base of humanity. It is the root of human value. Today, when the mind set of people has been polluted of illegal activities, the question– what is morality is surprisingly found to be forgotten by the society. The human race has remarkably become crooked, engulfed in unlawful deeds like injustice, enmity, malice etc. Here comes the relevance of the discussion on ethical knowledge most befittingly during this time in the world. The endless treasure of vast knowledge that had once been designed by the ancient Indian monks, enlightened with the incessant worship of wisdom, is considered an invaluable asset in the field of world ethical knowledge through the ages. Through this paper a modest effort is being made to have an insight towards the ethical lessons prescribed in Jaina Philosophy.

*Jainism is one of the important ancient and universal religious and cultural systems of India which originated for the welfare of humanity. There are twenty four Tirthankaras in Jainism. Rishabhanath was the founder of Jainism and was the first Tirthankara and the last Tirthankarawas Vardhamana Mahavira who was also a contemporary to Gautama Buddha. The word Jainism is derived from the word 'Jina' which means conqueror– the one who has successfully conquered his passions and desires. All the twenty four Tirthankaras are known as Jinas as they have conquered all passions (raga and dvesa) and have attained liberation. It is believed that all human beings have the potential to become Jina. Jainism does not believe in the existence of God. In fact it believes that human being is the highest of all who can attain the ultimate goal i.e. Moksha or liberation of soul which depends upon its own karma and purity of effort. In Jain Philosophy Moksha is the highest and the noblest objective that one strives to achieve. This can be achieved by getting rid of the undesirable karma particles and by practising mental and physical discipline. There are five important principles of Jain Philosophy. They are:*

- i) one should follow non violence towards any living being*
- ii) one should always speak the truth*
- iii) one should not commit theft*
- iv) one should not involve in adultery*
- v) one should set himself free from worldly possessions.*

*These are called the vows of ahinsa, satya, asteya, brahmcharya, and aparigraha respectively. Non violence was accorded utmost importance among these vows. Lord Mahavira believed that in this world, every small and minute object has got life and he followed the principle of non violence practically by setting examples to his followers. He emphasized that all living beings of any size, shape or form are equal and we should love and respect them. Therefore in support of the principles of non violence the followers of Lord Mahāvēra observe vegetarianism. The religious Jainas will do every possible thing to prevent hurting any living*

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being. For this reason the Jainas are believed to take professions in banking, trade, commerce and business etc. where there is no any chance of killing any living organism. Jainism is considered the world's most peace loving religion because of its strict practice of non violence. They believe in maintaining peace and harmony among the individual members in the society. Thus the principle of Jain Philosophy stands for protection of environment, vegetarianism, sympathetic understanding and peaceful co existence.

### **Tri ratna in Jaina Philosophy**

Jainism is one of the oldest religions in India. To obtain liberation Jainism follows the three doctrines of Right perception (*samyak darshan*), Right knowledge (*samyak Gyana*) and Right conduct (*samyak charitra*) which were known as three jewels or *tri ratna*. These doctrines are considered as the foundations of Jainism. The three jewels are interdependent to each other. They cannot function alone by avoiding each other. Jainism holds that all the three must co-exist in a person, if he is to walk along the path of salvation. Therefore, they must be understood collectively and interdependently. The three jewels of Jainism are discussed in detail below:

#### **a) Right perception (*samyak darshan*)**

The Jaina's right faith or perception is closely related to eightfold path of Buddhism. It is the foundational element on the part of kevala. In the process of self realization one should avoid superstitious beliefs to exercise a logical attitude in life. According to this doctrine one should first try to realize, follow and appreciate the reality of life, one's own self, aims of religion and its path. Right perception is therefore defined as faith in truth. The absence of that faith or having a wrong faith constitutes the wrong perception. We have remained ignorant of our true self since the time immemorial and have been identifying ourselves with the physical body and other worldly connections that we get as the result of our Karma. Moreover, we also come across wrong beliefs and happen to subscribe to them. That is termed as adopted wrong perception. Cultivation of right perception is a great challenge or task to accept because it requires a great deal of discipline and enthusiasm. In order to have a better perception in the nature of the reality the followers will have to keep a total faith in the preaching of Tirthankaras and their scriptures called Agamas.

#### **b) Right knowledge (*samyak Gyana*)**

In order to differentiate between right knowledge and wrong knowledge, right perception is very important. From right perception comes the right knowledge. Right knowledge can be acquired from six eternal substances and nine principles or nine Tattvas. The six eternal substances are : i) Soul (*jeva*), ii) Matter (*pudgala*), iii) Principle of Motion (*dharma*), iv) Principle of Rest (*adhama*), v) Space (*akasa*) and vi) Time (*kala*). Each of these eternal entities is unbreakable, enduring, and everlasting and continuously goes through countless changes. The nine Tattvas include :

- i) *Jeva* (soul), ii) *Ajeva* (non- living elements), iii) *Punya* (good deeds), iv) *Papa* (bad deeds), v) *Asrava* (influx of karmas), vi) *Sanvara* (stoppage of karmas), vii) *Bandha* (bondage of karmas), viii) *Nirjara* (eradication of karmas), ix) *Moksa* (liberation).

The knowledge of these nine fundamental principles is said to be of great significance for liberation. By acquiring knowledge of these principles a person can progress in his Endeavour of spirituality.

#### **c) Right conduct (*samyak charitra*)**

Right perception leads to right knowledge and right knowledge leads to right conduct. Right conduct aims to inculcate right ethics, values, principles and discipline by which a person can attain his ultimate freedom. Right conduct can be realized by doing what is right. In other words, one should live their lives according to some ethical rules of Jainism. The Jainism followers are expected to not harm any living being and also should not be attached with any worldly possessions. This resolves into taking twelve great vows to attain the right conduct. They are described as follows:

Five main vows of Limited Nature (*Anuvratas*) :

- i) Non-Violence (*ahinsa*), ii) Truthfulness (*satya*), iii) Nonstealing (*asteya*), iv) Chastity (*brahmacharya*), v) Non-attachment (*aparigraha*).

Three Merit vows (*Guna-vratas*):

- i) *Dik Vrata* (self limitation), ii) *Bhogopabhogamana* (self imposed limitations on consumable and non consumable items), iii) *Anartha-danda* (avoidance of unnecessary evils).

Four Disciplinary vows :

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i) *Samayak vrata* (engaging in meditation), ii) *Desavakasika vrata* (restriction on space), iii) *Pausadha Vrata* (ascetic), iv) *Atithi Samvibhaga Vrata* (charity).

By following these twelve vows the Jainism followers may live a life with perfection and would be able to conquer his unwanted desires. Separately the three jewels of Jainism are incomplete and insufficient in nature as they are very much interdependent to each other. Collectively the three jewels of Jainism give rise to peace, harmony, happiness and delight among the souls in the society.

### **Karma**

The doctrine of Karma is a result of a very old and well established sayings that, 'you reap whatever you sow'. In other words, the doctrine of karma is a phenomenon of everyone's day to day life which is observed and experienced by the people that every action has a reaction and one should be ready to pay heavily for its wrong deeds. Jainism believes that good karma (punya) will lead to positive effects like happiness, contentment, love, peace and joy and bad karma (pap) will lead to negative effects like hatred, sadness, sufferings and problems. According to the doctrine of karma the course of life of every living being here and hereafter is determined by his karma or his deeds and a pious life leads to comforts, contentment and general well-being in the present life and re-birth in higher and better forms of existence. Evil actions result in birth in lower forms of existence in future life and unhappiness or misery, in the present existence.

### **Anekantavada**

According to Jainism the nature of truth and reality is complex and it has multiple facets which cannot be perceived or understood by a simple common man. There is no single statement that can describe absolutism of reality in this world. The people perceive the same aspect from different angles and hence indulge in debates and heated arguments to prove their point to be completely true and absolute. Different people look at from different aspects of the same reality and therefore, their partial findings seem to be contradictory to one another. Jain Philosophy came with an exception of introducing a doctrine called *anekantavada* which can wipe out anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, arguments, war and pride. It is considered as one of the fundamental doctrines of Jainism. According to this doctrine one should always try to analyse things from different points of view. All the aspects have many facets which cannot be seen or understood easily because the things may not always be what they seem like. Proper utilisation of this doctrine will help the followers to avoid speech of violence and hatred for others. Respect for the opinions of different people and avoiding negative thoughts would definitely help in solving problems of our present day to day lives. *Anekantavada* teaches us different lessons by which not only individuals but the whole nation can be benefited. Some of its characteristics are :

- i) We should never insist anyone to accept our ideas and opinions,
- ii) Choices of words are necessary
- iii) One should not be proud but humble
- iv) Be a trustworthy person
- v) Creating universal brotherhood and friendship

Such kinds of virtues will definitely help the individuals to promote peace and harmony in the society. It needs to be cultivated and preserved so that we can develop the quality of sensibility and forgiveness among us.

### **Non-violence**

The doctrine of non-violence is the greatest legacy Lord Mahavira left for humanity. *Ahinsa* is based on love and kindness for all living beings. It has been repeatedly pointed out in Jain scriptures that even the thought of evil is as bad as action resulting in injury. It is not only limited in non violence of killing living beings but also refraining oneself from using harsh words and conduct. *Ahinsa* can be practised by not injuring, hurting causing pains in any way to living beings- either animals, insects or human beings. Jainism believes that killing of living beings is counted on bad karma and thus the liberation of soul will be delayed. We can practise non- violence if we hold back ourselves from violence.

The study above on moral principles of Jainism indicates that this philosophy represents the practical application of an ideal to life. The systematic moral discipline laid down by Jaina Philosophy lights up one person from the common level and makes him enable of knowing and practicing truth through a highly moral and spiritual course of conduct. Jainism is said to be based on the three precious principles of right belief, right knowledge and right conduct. Right conduct, on the other hand consists in adopting those in life, which are accepted to be real and fixed. Since Jaina Philosophy recognize bondage and values the great vows as the sole means of attaining Moksha from bondage, the adoption of these great vows or of the atomic vows

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in life is credited as right conduct. To sum up, Jainism is a system that has taken up the path of non-violence for ages and is still applying this ideal to people's practical life in the contemporary age. Notwithstanding Jainism sets down emphasis on the practice of the principles of non-violence in every individual matter, it is evident that its ultimate goal is the well – being of mankind and social improvement.

*Concluding, we may observe here that Jaina ethics is very much useful and important historically and philosophically. This is really regarded to be one of oldest system of thought based on non-violence may be safely regarded to be the central or pivotal among various virtues preached by them and the important of non-violence is well-known in the present world. It is true that our society is going through a horde of problems arising from different sectors. In the present day condition there is violence, communalism, regionalism, murders, rapes, gender discrimination, and lack of solidarity prevailing everywhere. It is the need of the hour to inculcate moral and social values among us to boost our physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects. The moral principles of Jainism with respect to the present time situation are found to be very much relevant. The Jaina has proved time and again the effectiveness of spiritual progress by putting it into the practice in their own lives. With these ethical principles of Jainism we can bring back the peace and harmony in the society and the world.*

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