

# DOCTRINES OF JAINISM : ITS RELEVANCE TO PRESENT TIME SITUATION

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## **Abstract**

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion that teaches the way to live a simple and blissful life with liberation of soul and renunciation of worldly materials. It is traditionally known as *Jain Dharma*. The essence of Jainism is to be kind and generous to every living being for the betterment of the universe in general and for every living being in particular. Nowadays the present world is growing rapidly with lots of violence and hatred among each other. The *Tirthaṅkaras* believed that peace and harmony of the society can be achieved through *Ahiṃsā* or Non-violence which is one of the doctrines of Jainism. According to the *Jains* all its doctrines is ancient and eternal. Therefore, in this paper, an attempt is made to analyse how the doctrines of Jainism is relevant to present time situation in maintaining peace and harmony in the society.

**Key Words** : Doctrines, Jainism, Relevance, Present time situation.

## **Introduction**

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 *Tirthaṅkaras* in Jainism. Rishabanath was the founder of Jainism and was the first *Tirthaṅkara* and the last *Tirthaṅkaras* was *Vardhamāna Mahāvīra* 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.<sup>1</sup> All the twenty four *Tīrthaṅkaras* are known as *Jinas* as they have conquered all passions (*rāga and dveṣa*) 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. *Mokṣa* or liberation of soul which depends upon its own *karma* and purity of effort. In Jainism *Mokṣa* 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. Jainism also follows five important principles. 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 *ahiṃsā, satya, asteya, brahmacaryya, and aparigraha* respectively. Non violence was accorded utmost importance among these vows. Lord *Mahāvīra* 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 *Mahāvīra* observe vegetarianism. The religious *Jainas* will do every possible thing to prevent hurting any living 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 Jainism stands for protection of environment, vegetarianism, sympathetic understanding and peaceful co existence.

Today the world has become a global village due to the advancement in the field of science and technology. But in this modern era it is seen that people tend to ignore each other, exercise self centeredness and refuse to be practical. Life became mechanical and materialistic values have been emphasized. The very reason is unknown to everyone but it is the need of the hour now as to ponder upon what is the real cause behind the deterioration of human values or relationships. Whether it is the deterioration of human values or the ethics that people have faced are some of the vital questions that some of the educated citizens are pondering on. There is no denying that our society is facing a grave crisis of mutual understanding and cooperation among themselves. Violence, dishonesty, self-centeredness and egoism are prevalent everywhere. Therefore, the present study attempts to analyse how the doctrines of Jainism are relevant towards the situations at present time.

### **Doctrines of Jainism**

Before going to analyse the relevance of the doctrines of Jainism in the present day context, some of the main doctrines of Jainism are described below:

- ***Tri ratna* or the three jewels**

Jainism is one of the oldest religions in India. To obtain liberation Jainism follows the three doctrines of Right perception (*samyak darśana*), Right knowledge (*samyak jñāna*) and Right conduct (*samyak chāritra*) 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.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, they must be understood collectively and interdependently. The three jewels of Jainism are discussed in detail below :

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

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.<sup>3</sup>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 *Tīrthaṅkaras* and their scriptures called *Āgamas*.

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

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 (*jīva*), ii) Matter (*pudgala*), iii) Principle of Motion (*dharma*), iv) Principle of Rest (*adharma*), v) Space (*ākāśa*) and vi) Time (*kāla*).

Each of these eternal entities is unbreakable, enduring, and everlasting and continuously goes through countless changes.

The nine *Tattvas* include :

i) *Jīva* (soul), ii) *Ajīva* (non- living elements), iii) *Puṇya* (good deeds), iv) *Pāpa* (bad deeds), v) *Āsrava* (influx of karmas), vi) *Samvara* (stoppage of karmas), vii) *Bandha* (bondage of karmas), viii) *Nirjarā* (eradication of karmas), ix) *Mokṣa* (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 chāritra*)

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 (*ahimsā*), ii) Truthfulness (*satya*), iii) Non-stealing (*asteya*), iv) Chastity (*brahmacaryya*), v) Non-attachment (*aparigraha*).

Three Merit vows (*Guna-vratas*):

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

Four Disciplinary vows :

i) *Sāmāyik vrata* (engaging in meditation), ii) *Deśavakasika vrata* (restriction on space), iii) *Pausadha Vrata* (ascetic), iv) *Atithi Samvibhāga 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 (*puṇya*) will lead to positive effects like happiness, contentment, love, peace and joy and bad karma (*pāpa*) 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.<sup>4</sup>

- ***Anekāntavāda***

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.<sup>5</sup> Lord *Mahāvīra* or *Jain* Philosophy came with an exception of introducing a doctrine called *anekāntavāda* 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. *Anekāntavāda* 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 *Mahāvīra* left for humanity. *Ahiṃsā* 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.<sup>6</sup> It is not only limited in non violence of killing living beings but also refraining oneself from using harsh words and conduct. *Ahiṃsā* can be practised by not injuring, hurting or

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.

According to *Achārya Umāswati*, “Violence is the obstruction of life processes through activities of body, speech and mind tainted with negligence. Violence is of two kinds: Physical violence and mental violence. Obstruction of or injury to physical life processes is physical violence and bringing about untoward thoughts and feelings constitutes mental violence. Jainism propounds that injury to others invariably involves injury to the life processes of self. When we intend to hurt or harm others, we have passions such as anger, pride, deception and greed. Thus we always commit violence of the self in the process”<sup>7</sup>

#### • Renunciation

Renunciation indicates giving up the pursuit of material comforts, to achieve spiritual enlightenment. It is highly practised by the *Jainas*. The preachings of Lord *Mahāvīra* never say that one cannot possess wealth, properties or materials for pleasure but should restrict the requirements to minimum only. This will create peace and satisfaction in the minds of the *Jainas* by which they can live a contented life with the other members of the society. The more people crave for worldly things the more they become selfish and self centered. Instead the precious time can be utilized by spending time with the family members, contributing for the development of the community and society or by helping out the needy people. Therefore, he, who is free from passions, has controlled his senses and is brave, enterprising and afraid of birth and re-birth (is said) to practice happy renunciation.<sup>8</sup>



## **Analysis of the relevance of doctrines of Jainism in the present crisis**

The world is going through a crisis creating lots of chaos and confusion which is leading to uncertainty of our future. Day by day it is witnessing some unwanted situations and circumstances. The world has become a global village due to the advancement in science and technology but it failed to bring closeness in the minds of man who is seen drifting away from each other. The people are growing greedy, selfish, self centered and egoist without having concerns for the society and the community. There is no feeling of brotherhood among people but are ready for the bloodshed or massacre, sometimes in the name of caste or creed or sometimes in the name of religion so on and so forth. With a view of the present scenario all over the world an attempt to analyse on the relevance of doctrines of Jainism in present time situation has been made. Each of the doctrines mentioned above will be discussed respectively in the context of present time situation.

- The violence against women is prevalent not only in India but all over the world. Everywhere there is report of sexual harassment, rape, murder, assault, domestic violence and gender discrimination etc. against women. They are ill treated by the society since time immemorial. They are victimized and considered weak in every sphere of life when compared to male counterparts. The government has also taken right step to promote gender equality by implementing different schemes for women and girls. However, the cause of the situation lies in the degradation of moral and social values in the society. It is disheartening to say that some of the religions are gender centric. But Jainism since time immemorial has been supporting women and its existence. The women not only acquire a very respectable position in the society but are also considered equal with men in every sphere .To obtain liberation Jainism follows the three doctrines of Right faith

(*samyak darśana*), Right knowledge (*samyak jñāna*) and Right conduct (*samyak chāritra*) which are known as three jewels or *tri ratna*. Therefore this doctrine is relevant to the present time situations which can liberate the souls of women along with men from the subjugation to liberty and freedom.

- We are living in a modern world so are trying to accommodate ourselves with the characteristics of modernity. We are making ourselves accustomed with different advanced technological gadgets and equipments to keep pace with the changing time. The people with this new modern life are very busy and forget to have contacts with family, friends and society. But, however modern we might be we should never forget to keep our feet on earth. We should always try to do good things in life. Because it is our *karma* which will decide our fate. It is believed that if we do good *karma*, good things will happen but if we do bad *karma* then bad things will happen and would follow to many generations. Jainism denies the existence of God, and hence they worship the twenty four *Tirthankaras*. The *Jains* believe that man is the designer of his own fate and one can escape the brunt of *karma* by only living a simple life of purity and virtue.
- Nowadays, people are religious fanatics and they are against the faith and beliefs of other religion. Today religious fanaticism is spreading like a forest fire among the individuals. They are ever ready to hurt the religious sentiments of each other. For the present society the most essential thing required is the virtue of tolerance. The doctrines of *anekāntavāda* prohibit being dogmatic and always preach to view the things from different angles to find the truth. Such value of *anekāntavāda* is important to deal with the problems generated due to differences in ideologies and beliefs. In Jainism it is seen that the *Jainas* have tried to maintain religious harmony and avoiding religious conflicts to maintain harmony in the society. Therefore this is the need of the hour to bring religious

tolerance and respect regarding the coexistence among the individuals which is only possible with the flexible attitude of the doctrine of *anekāntavāda*.

- The present world believes in power and money to live a successful and happy life. Every member of the society is after materialistic pleasures to seek contentment and satisfaction. During this process it has been witnessed that there is no feeling of universal brotherhood among the members. Instead they engage in brawls, debate and arguments to prove their respective point's right. People are happier when they are able to pass comment which may not be in favour of his counterpart without realising how much he or she might get hurt. There is no mental peace among the members which have made them vulnerable towards some prominent diseases of today like hyper tensions, diabetes, heart attacks etc. All human beings are equal and everyone has the right to live their lives accordingly. If I believe that no one has the right to do wrong to me, then the same thing implies on me also. There is one old proverb which goes as "Live and let live". If we want to live in peace and harmony in our society than we will have to respect each other's differences and attitudes. We will have to develop a firm faith in the equality of mankind. Non violence of Jainism does not mean only killing living beings but also refraining oneself from mental torture, heated arguments with counterparts or using harsh words and conduct. Therefore with the doctrine of *ahimsā* or non-violence the feeling of brotherhood can be developed among the members and the compassion towards all the living beings even to animals as stated in Jainism.
- Today the world has become very competitive and the people are at rat race to be on top of the other. Everyone wish to rule over others by using all the unfair means and tricks to their best possible ways. In the process of aiming for the top positions and in the desire to possess more power and wealth

people have gone far ways to fulfil those desires without realising its consequences. Jainism is not against of possession of wealth, properties or materials for pleasure but the requirements should be restricted to minimum only. It put stress not to acquire more than what is truly required. In fact the *Jainas* emphasize that it is the duty of individual to contribute amply their possessions, wealth and money to the poor people or needy people of the society or for the development of the welfare of the society and nation. The preachings of *Tirthankaras* is to avoid the greediness at any cost and to remain peaceful and happy by helping out the disadvantaged.

## **Conclusion**

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 doctrines of Jainism with respect to the present time situation are found to be very much relevant. The *Jainas* has proved time and again the effectiveness of spiritual progress by putting it into the practice in their own lives. With these doctrines of Jainism we can bring back the peace and harmony in the society and the world.

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