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**Way of Life as advocated by Jainism and its Relevance Today
(or Jaina way of Life vis-à-vis Life's demands)**

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Abstract

Modern man lives in a soul-less civilization of materialism and consumerism. This materialistic turn has also gradually resulted in man losing faith in 'religion as the harbinger of individual and social harmony'. Now, a question arises to me and that relates to whether man lives for bread alone or if there is something more to him. My enquiry into this question helped me to understand that we lack not the proper philosophy of life, but the lack of practice of the norms laid down by philosophy. Here, it is important to realize the Jaina emphasis on *upayoga* (utility) than *upabhoga* (consumption). We are also reminded of the practices suggested by Jainism, including *ahimsa* (or non-injury to other lives), which reawakens the people to the innate dignity of all life. The above-mentioned principle is the basis of equality and a pre-requisite of global harmony. The method that enables us to tread from mere search to realization is commonly called 'YOGA'. The Jains understood 'yoga' in terms of '*cāritra*' or right conduct which is one of the important teachings of Jainism, namely '*triratnas*' (three jewels involving right vision, right knowledge and right conduct).

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It is nevertheless true that these austerities alone help man in release in the philosophical angle. But practice of these three jewels nevertheless aids man in having a balanced attitude and approach to life that will guard him from unwanted desires or attachment to possessions.

Keywords: Jainism, upayoga, upabhoga, ahimsa, triratnas, philosophy, sacrifice, thought, culture and humanity.

Introduction

Modern man lives in a soul-less civilization of materialism and consumerism. An article in the internetⁱ states that consumerism promotes craving which motivates people to consume more and more whether required or not. It has even been made the **parameter of development today**. This mind-set is the **root cause of all environmental hazards** in modern days. This materialistic turn has resulted in man gradually losing faith in ‘religion’ as the harbinger of individual and social harmony. However, it must be remembered that “man does not live for bread alone, not for mere animal living; nor for the satisfaction of the lower instincts and propagation of species. Man has a moral nature and possesses a soul to save and a conscience as well by the virtue of which he is enabled oftentimes to subdue, nay sacrifice himself for the progress of thought, culture and humanity”ⁱⁱ. The difficulty today is not want of a proper philosophy of life, but the lack of practice of the norms laid down by ancient philosophyⁱⁱⁱ. When reminded of the need for practice, turning back to the contribution of Jainism is imperative. The Jain texts emphasize on **utility (*upayoga*) in place of consumption (*upabhoga*)**. **Moreover, Jainism is not only a religion but also a way of life**. It contains within itself all the ethics required for a healthy and peaceful well-being of ourselves and our surroundings. For the last 2,500 years, the Jainas have contributed so much to the intellectual life of India, be it philosophy, religion, history, literature down to framing the nature and habits of Indian people at large. It is this last contribution that interests one and all for its pragmatic value. In fact, Mahavira’s prescription of *ahimsa* or non-violence reawakened the people to the innate dignity of all life, be it small or big. The interaction with other *Jīvas* (or souls) should be characterized by this principle of *ahimsa*, according to Jainism. This is because harming other *jīvas* is caused either by passions like anger or due to ignorance of one’s own nature. Indian systems of thought generally look into the vicissitudes of the universe with the firm belief that search for truth must culminate in the realization of the truth.

Prescription of Mahavira for the well-being of man

The above-mentioned prescription by Mahavira naturally leads to the basis of equality, which again is the prerequisite for global harmony. The real task of religion is the removal of bitterness between people, between races, between religions and between nations. That nature of religion is reflected in the Jaina teaching of *ahimsa*^{iv} or non-violence. Thus Jainism, while talking of non-violence, makes it clear that exploitation of either another soul or matter is not permissible. Controlled way of life and vegetarianism are the other principles of Jainism which point to preservation of nature.

The other main concerns of this thought that has direct relevance to man's well-being in accordance with nature can be summed up as follows:

- Every living being has a soul
- Regarding every being as oneself, and harming none should be the order of the day since every soul, according to them, is potentially possessed of infinite knowledge, power and bliss (though masked by one's *karmas*)
- Being in soul-consciousness rather than body-consciousness is the foundation of the *triratnas* (the three jewels) prescribed by Jainism.
- Owning an object by itself is not possessiveness; however, attachment to an object is. So, they advised human beings to limit possessions and practice detachment thus leading to a pure life that is useful to one and all.
- Compassion for all life, both human and non-human, is central to Jainism. Human life is valued as a unique, rare opportunity to reach enlightenment.

Generally, Indian systems of thought^v directly look into the vicissitudes and finiteness of the universe with the firm belief that search after truth must culminate in realization of truth. The method that enables us to tread from mere search to realization is commonly called 'YOGA'. In Jaina *āgamic* literature, the material on yogic discipline is found lying scattered. The latter Jaina thinkers have contributed immensely to this field. Mention must be made of Subhacandra, Ācārya Kundakunda and Hemacandra. The Jains understand 'yoga' in terms of 'cāritra'. Everybody is aware of the important teaching of the Jains, namely, the *triratnas* – *Samyag dṛṣṭi* (right vision), *Samyag jñāna* (right knowledge) and *Samyag cāritra* (right conduct). *Yoga*, according to Ācārya Hemacandra, is the cause of final emancipation and consists in following the above-mentioned three jewels. The Jainas have made this path public so that anyone who wishes to tread upon this path might realize the truth. But this *triratna* is fundamentally based on right faith because one would not exert oneself for realization if one does not either have a glimpse of the truth himself or have the faith that it is possible to realize the truth. Moreover, faith plays a crucial role when it is known that Jainism lays special stress on mortification of the flesh for the regeneration of the Self^{vi}. This method of controlling the body and mind for the regeneration of the Self is called 'yoga' in Indian thought.

According to Nathmal Tatia, Jainism understands yoga as an activity^{vii}. The Jainas advocate that Yoga helps in annihilation of whatever accumulates to the soul through its association with the body. That is, the soul, which possesses all infinite qualities, according to Jainism, is corrupted and made finite by the *kārmic* particles, which are alien to it. These *kārmic* particles flow into the soul (*āsrava*) through the threefold activity of the body, organ of speech and mind, according to Jainism. These particles stick to the soul according to the strength of passions, of attachment and aversion. If man has to free himself from the *kārmic* particles, he has to stop the inflow of *karma*, which is known as *samvara*, and also eradicate the existing *karmas*, which is called *nirjara*.

Why should this activity be controlled? When the mind is not held under control, it, in turn, allows the senses to go its way; once the senses are given a free hand, then, passions (*kasayas*) take over. The problem that one may encounter here is manifold when man understands who he really is. In fact, Acarya Kundakunda (in *Moksaprabhṛta*), Pujyapada (in *Samadhitantra*) and Yogindudeva (in *Paramatmaprakasa*) have distinguished three states of the self, viz., the exterior self, the interior

self and the transcendental self. Here, the exterior self is physical, interior self is psychological and the transcendental self is spiritual. Prof A. Chakravarti writes: “*Bhāva* or affective consciousness is of three kinds – *Śubha bhāva*, *Aśubha bhāva* and *Śuddha bhāva* – feeling of pleasant nature, feeling of an unpleasant nature and feeling of pure nature. The last one refers to the enjoyment of Self by self. As such, it may be taken to mean the spiritual experience of the pure Self. The other two kinds of feeling are relevant to the point. These are corresponding to the normal feelings generally recognized by students of psychology. These feelings are generally related to certain objects in the environment to which there may be attraction or aversion in the *Jīva*. Thus, on the one hand, feelings manifest as the result of *karma* or action and on the other hand, they are determined by objects in the environment”^{viii}.

It is the transcendental self that is real and it is this transcendental self that has all the infinite qualities such as *ananta darśanam* (infinite vision), *ananta jñānam* (infinite knowledge), *ananta vīryam* (infinite power) and *ananta sukham* (infinite bliss). So, in order to realize this truth, one must eradicate the exterior self with its passions. If there exists in the mind a single desire that has not been given up, then that desire alone is enough to hamper the progress of the soul. According to the Sacred Traditions, Swami Bahubalji, who had renounced the world, was prevented from attaining omniscience for a whole year because of just one thought, namely, that he stood on his brother Bharata’s land,^{ix}. The Jainas explain that the desires are so very strong because they are all rooted in the love of the body. So, in all our desires there is a definite reference to the bodily “I”. Without this reference, it is impossible for us to say that something is good or that something else is bad. Hence, the *ācāryas* prescribe that we must annihilate the exterior self and then bring in the spiritual vision, namely that the inner self is distinct from the body. Yet, the interior self is encumbered because it is still within the body although dissociated from it and that all qualities that belong to the self originally are regained just as fire regains its luminosity once the ashes that engulf it are blown away. *Yoga* helps the soul to regain its originality. It is also said in Jainism that the three jewels help the self to realize itself and regain its perfection. How is this possible? The worldly existence is bound up with perverse view, perverse knowledge and perverse conduct. Therefore, the world is not conducive for better living. Hence, man’s first task should be destruction of these three perversities. Perverse view or attitude impairs and pollutes knowledge and conduct. If our conduct has to be set right, then purification of attitude has to be taken up, in the first instance. Only when these are purified can the self emancipate itself from the *kārmic* fetters. That is why, Dr Rai Ashwini Kumar says, “these three attributes are nothing but the comprehension of the self in the self by the self on account of the disappearance of the eternal delusion”^x.

Jaina Yoga

Jaina Yoga says that the cycle of rebirth constantly brings together the two *tattvas* – spiritual (*jīva*) and the physical (*ajīva*) – that are connected frequently by two other *tattvas* – *āsrava* (inflow of karma) which results in *bandha* (bondage of soul due to *karma*) and *nirvāṇa* (or Release), which means salvation resulting from discriminatory knowledge (of the Self from not-Self); and the path for salvation is two-fold, which has already been suggested, namely, *samvara* and *nirjara*. This can be explained through an analogy. Supposing a water tank is to be renovated, the first step should be the stoppage of the inflow of water into it and then removal of existing water cum dirt forthwith.

Only then can the tank be renovated. Similarly, the soul can regain its purity and infinity only when all the *kārmic* obstacles are removed from it and also stopping new such particles to come near it. The Jainas prescribe *cāritra* as the method to do this and it comprises of the vows (or *vratas*). The *vratas* prescribed by Jainism are five in number. They are: *Ahimsa*^{xi} (non-injury) – not to cause harm to any being, *Satya* (truthfulness) – to speak the truth always and in a harmless manner, *asteya* (non-stealing) – not to steal others' belongings, *brahmacarya* (celibacy) – not to indulge in sensual pleasures and *aparigraha* (non-attachment to property) – in other words, to detach from people, places and material things. The need for these five vows have been well delineated by Ācārya Tulsi in *Can Intellect Comprehend Religion?* (Churu: Adarsh Sahitya Sangh, 1969, p, 18)^{xii}: “it is true that man’s external powers have increased manifold, but it is no less true that internal strength has considerably reduced. As the inner states of mind grow vicious, situations get complicated. The root of diseases lies in the deterioration in the qualities of the inner self. Man has been dazzled by external glitter. He has not been able to find an answer to the question whether the modern age is one of development or decadence.” It is towards this end that Jainism prescribed the above-mentioned five vows.

In other words, this suggestion points out that these philosophers have always demanded ethical perfection. Ethical perfection does not mean mere cleansing. It also consists of the various rules such as *tapas* and *dhyāna* and so on. The Jainas have not neglected these aspects as it is generally believed; rather they only stressed more on the physical austerities with the belief that “physical austerity is only an index of spiritual development”^{xiii}. If we have to meditate, then the mind should be taken away from the body-consciousness. That is, the mind should be relieved of wants and desires pertaining to the body for which detachment is the best medicine. Detachment results in indifference towards body because practice of detachment is not possible along with identification with bodily wants and desires. It is in this context that the *vratas* assume immense significance. These *vratas* are called *mahāvratas* or *anuvrata* depending upon the rigorousness with which these are pursued. Dr Gopalan, in *Outlines of Jainism*^{xiv}, writes “...the *anuvratas* do not differ from the *mahāvratas*, but laxity is allowed in their observance, keeping in view the limitations of the householder. It is obvious that the prescription of *anuvrata* for observance by the householder is based on the psychological insight of the Jaina philosophers that with the various obligations that a householder owes to others in society – both within and outside his household - it is not possible to observe the *vratas* scrupulously....”^{xv} According to him, the *anuvrata* is based on the necessity to re-orient the thought and behavior of the common man towards the ideal of non-violence and non-possession^{xvi}, which is imperative in man’s dealings with nature today.

Thus, it can be said that practice of these austerities alone helps man in release in the philosophical angle. This nevertheless aids man in having a balanced attitude and approach to life that will guard him from unwanted desires or attachment to possessions. This attachment is also hazardous to his material living. Hence the Jaina way prescribes these austerities resulting in taming the mind. A natural question arises as to why man should trouble himself like this. The answer is very simple. The passions are more powerful and responsible for our state than the *karmas* because it is these that help the mind to dwell on the pleasurable or painful aspects of experiences. But it is very difficult to remove them because they stick to the souls. Remember the earlier pronouncement (in p.4 of the paper) regarding what binds man more – possession of objects or attachment to the object possessed. This attachment can be dealt with properly only by practicing strict austerities. “In Jainism

it is taught that the eradication of desires, that is to say, the preventing of the mind from dwelling on the pleasurable or painful aspects of an experience, is not possible unless a good deal of disciplinary training in other directions is undergone at the same time^{xvii}. Only severe hardship and self-denial will help the mind stop dwelling on the effects of an experience. Hence the need for **Yoga** to control the activities of the body and mind becomes essential. This control will lead to peace. Annie Besant, in her convention lectures delivered in 1897, sums up the idea prescribed by Jainism thus: “one might almost sum up the atmosphere of Jainism in one phrase that we find in the *Sūtra Kṛtanga* (3.20), that man by injuring no living creature reaches the state of *Nirvāṇa* which is peace. That is the phrase that seems to carry with it the whole thought of the Jaina, namely, peace – that is, peace between man and man, peace between man and animal, peace everywhere and in all things, a perfect brotherhood of all that lives. Such is the ideal of the Jaina, such is the thought that he endeavours to realize upon earth (Seven Great Religions, p.83)”.

REFERNCES:

ⁱ “Jainism and Environment” (downloaded from <http://hubpages.com/hub/Jainism-Environment-jain-dadabadi-on-13-03-2010> at 11 am) by JYOTI KOTHARI

ⁱⁱ Puran Chand Nahar and Krishnachandra Ghosh (2002): Jainism: Precepts and Practice, p. 272-3

ⁱⁱⁱ Late speaker of the parliament of India, Hon’ble G.B.Mavalanker’s letter dated 25th of August 1954 as quoted by S.C.Diwaker in Religion and Peace, p.x.

^{iv} “Jainism and Environment” downloaded from <http://hubpages.com/hub/Jainism-Environment-jain-dadabadi-on-13-03-2010> at 11 am, suggests that the five main element sof nature, *prithvi* (land, soil), *jal* (water including clouds), *agni* (fire), *vāyu* (air) and *vanashpati* (vegetation, trees and plants including fungi) are living creatures and must be treated as living beings.

^v they are not merely speculations about the nature and origin of the universe.

^{vi} Nathmal Tatia (2006): Studies in Jaina Philosophy, Jain Publishing Company, California, p.265.

^{vii} Nathmal Tatia in “Jaina Philosophy” (G.S.Talib ed., Ibid, p.27) brings out this aspect clearly in the following words: “the term ‘yoga’ generally means ‘control of the mind’. But in Jainism, it has been used in the sense of the activity of the body, organ of speech and mind”.

^{viii} The Religion of Ahimsa, p.73

^{ix} C.R.Jain (1934): Jainism and World Problems, Part II, The Jaina Parishad, Bijnor, UP, India, p.121.

^x G.S.Talib (1987): “Jaina Yoga and mysticism”, *ibid.*, p.80.

^{xi} This principle includes compassion and forgiveness in thoughts, words and deeds towards all living beings (Wikipedia, downloaded from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jainism> on 13-03-2010 at 10.00 am).

^{xii} As reproduced in Outlines of Jainism by Gopalan.

^{xiii} Nathmal Tatia (2006): *ibid.*, p 267, quotes from Samantabhadra's Brhatsvayambhustotra 83, to substantiate this view:

bahyam tapah param-duscaram acaramstvam
adhyatmikasya tapasah paribrmhanartham
dhyanam nirasya klusadvayam uttarasmin
dhyanadvaye vavrtise 'tisayopapane.

^{xiv} Nathmal Tatia (2006): *Ibid.*, p194.

^{xv} Nathmal Tatia (2006): *Ibid.* He goes on to add that one can find gradation in the *anuvrata* movement too – the distinction drawn between the beginner, the middling and the advanced types of *anuvratīs*, respectively referred to as *praveśika anuvrati*, *anuvrati* and *viśiṣṭa anuvrati*.

^{xvi} Nathmal Tatia (2006): *ibid.*

^{xvii} C.R.Jain (1934): *ibid.*, pp.119-120.
