

Jainism - An Indian Religion

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Abstract: Jainism is one of the world's oldest religion originating in India at least 2500 years ago. The spiritual goal of Jainism is to become liberated from the endless cycle of rebirth and to achieve in all knowledge knowing state called Moksha. Simandh Swami is a living Tirthankar. Radhava Panth a (Sanskrit word 'Bull') the first of the Trithankar (Ford Makers) is the savior of Jainism comes across the series of 14 auspicious dreams that his mother had in which a bull (rishava) appeared before his birth. According to Jaina tradition five Trithankars were born in Ayodhya including Rishava Pant, Ajitanath, Abhinanda, Sumatinath and Ananthastha.

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The Tirthankaras

Tirthankar (Sanskrit Ford Maker) also called Jina (victor) in Jainism a saviour who has succeeded in crossing over lifes stream of rebirths has made a path for others to follow.

There are 24 Tirthankars 1. The term Tirthankar is a combination of 'Teerth' and 'Samsar'. Teerth is a pilgrimage site and samsara is the worldly life. The one who has conquered the Samsara and understood the true nature of the of the self to attain Kevala Jainan is a Tirthankar.

The worshipper contrates on the virtues and other pure souls in order to follow and help them follow their example. So, for the Jainas worship is only a means to an end and not a spiritual end in itself. Mention has been made of the berst woman Tirthankar – Mallinath a swetambari. There is no mention whether there was any Digambar or not.

Jainism Buddhism may be regarded as an offshoot of Hinduism. Of course, both Jainism and Buddhism arose on the Indian soil as a reaction against excessive Vedic ritualism, but none of them could free itself from the essentials of Hinduism. Lord Maharaja, known as Vardhamana in childhood is generally regarded as the founder of Jaina religion although the Jainas believe that there have been 23 religious teachers prior to Mahavir, who have contributed to the foundation and development of Jaina religion. These religious teachers are known as Tirthankara (Perfect soul) or Jin (conqueror or victor) of passion. Rishavapanth is regarded to be the first Jain Tirthankar and persuadeo to be the 23rd and Mahavir the last of the 24 in the chain. (The list of 24th Tirthankararas have been mentioned earlier). However Jainism is most prominently associated with the name of Mahavir and it is he who regarded as the profounder of the essential Jain principles. Mahavir, like Buddha, was a Khastriya by birth and was an elder contemporary of the latter. He lived for sometime the life of a household, but later on renounced everything and become a wandering ascetic inseed of the light of real knowledge. After 14 years of ascetic life he felt that he had gained enlightenment and thenceforth he devoted his life in preaching the message of human enlightenment and liberation.

Mahavira preached a non theistic religion of moral purity and excellence in which man was at the centre and the main aim was to liberate man out of the chain of karma and rebirth in which he has fallen. Of the three major religion of

Indian origin i. e. Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, alike the main objective has been to liberate man out of the pool of continued suffering in which he is fallen. But in the eyes of the latter two this objective can be fulfilled not by worshipping gods and goddesses more by performing various rituals, but simply by following the path of pure ethical conduct. Jainism finds the world externally exiting which does not need any creator God to create and sustain it. The world with all its living beings is a function of six substances and the entire working of the world is self based and self maintained. The moral world is governed by the law of Karma and does not require any divine retributor. Man is the highest being with a most developed soul within him and he is capable of attaining godhead by himself. Jainism lays utmost emphasis upon the moral virtue of Ahimsa (non - violence) and much upholds the life of a monk or a celibate who has renounced the world completely and is engaged in spiritual elevation.

Jainism did not prove to be a missionary religion like Buddhism and therefore it remained confined to India alone. Jain scriptures mainly consist of the teachings attributed to Mahavira. They are consisted by the Angas, Purvas and the five Prakaranas along with other non canonical literature. Besides there is an encyclopedia of Jainism, known as Loka prakashan and compiled by Vinai - Vijai which is also highly esteemed by the Jainis.

Before we discuss further about the Jaina religion it is essential to know about the basic features of Jainism.

- 1) It is an atheistic religion believing in no creator God behind the world. The world, according to it, is eternally existing and works by its own inherent laws.
- 2) Although Jainism does not believe in God it believed in Godhood which a man can attain by following the path of moral and spiritual discipline.
- 3) Man has got an eternal conscious substance within him known as the Jiva (Soul) in fact, all living beings have souls within them, only the soul of man is most developed, because consciousness in it is most manifest. Man's soul is the most potentially perfect and is capable of attaining infinite power, infinite knowledge, infinite faith and infinite bliss.
- 4) Jainism believes in life after death which is either in the form of rebirth, the transmigration of the soul from the old body to a new one, or Moksa. Moksha is the final liberation of the soul from the chain of birth and rebirth.
- 5) Jainas believe that the present of man is state of bondage which is due to his own past Karmas. Actions

done with passion are the poison of the soul and it is these which cause the soul to be reborn. Thus Jainism believes in all the chief Hindu doctrines of Karma, Rebirth, bondage and liberation.

- 6) Man suffers due to his own Karmas and there is no other explanation of human suffering.
- 7) Liberation can be attained not by offering rituals to gods and goddesses, but by following the path of three jewels right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.
- 8) Jainism lays emphasis on the value of moral conduct and which Ahimsa is the first emphasized virtue of others, purity, chastity, non - attachment, compassion, love, fellow - feeling etc are much emphasized.
- 9) Jainism much extols the life of a monk or a celibate who has renounced everything and is engaged in spiritual elevation by following a path of religious moral and spiritual discipline.

Jaina religious pictures

Originally there were 14 Purvas and 11 Angas. Purvas were transmitted only and induce course have been lost. Hence, 11 Angas form the main Jaina religious literature. Besides there are 22 upangas, 10 Pakinnakas, 6 chedas, 5 Mula - sutras and 4 other sutras. Out of 11 Angas the Acharanga formulates the rules of conduct for the monks, and sutranga describes the Jaina rites and points out its distinctive features. Uvasaga is the 7th Anga was translated into English by A. F. R. Hoernle in 1888. English translated of Jaina Sutranga in sacred books of the east vol 22 and 45 is also important. Formerly the jain scripture was written in Ardha Magadhi. Later it was written rather more systematically in prakrit and Sanskrit. (It is difficult to state about what has been explained above because the facts are not corroborated with evidence).

God in Jainism

Jainism regards the world eternal, naturally there is no room for any supernatural entity who can be the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. Hence, there is no God in Jainism Further, for Jainism each soul in his pristine nature is alone and solitary. He does not need any help from other souls and does not give any help from other souls, and does not give any help to others. Thus there is no hope for worship consequently each soul in bondage is said to be an architect of his own soul. Either he can work out his own destiny for liberation or sink further into deeper bondage. Hence J. L. Jain observes 2. "Alone he accumulates merit, alone he enjoys the various happiness in heaven; alone he destroys Karma; alone also he attains to Moksha. (Anupreksha 76). He alone is doer and experience of his status. Again C. R. Jain writes –

"None can help the jiva in his troubles. He alone has to bear his jain and suffering, friends and relatives, wives and children are powerless to combat suffering.

In like manner Mrs. S. Stevenson writes: -

3 "The soul is the maker and itself makes happiness and misery, is its own friends and its own foe, decides its own foe, decides its own condition good or evil, is its own river vaiarni."

Not only Jainism has no place for God in its system, but has advanced very powerful arguments against the existence of God. But in spite of its atheistic thinking jain temples are full of idols, specially of Lord Mahavir. Yet the jainas do great deal of bhakti towards the idol of Lord Mahavir, for according to them the mere sight of the Tirthankar serves as a reminder for them to lead a life in such a way as to win one's own release. Of course the desire, for release lies in dormant form in each man and the sight and the sight of the idol makes the desire for release awakened in the believers. Hence an idol is a support in meditation and its sustaining aid! H. Z. immer states this with a great insight in the following way: "It one holds a red flower before a glass, the glass will be red; if one holds up a dark blue flower the glass will be dark blue. Just so, the mind, the mind is changed by the presence of the image contemplating the form of the passionless Lord in a jain temple, the mind becomes filled automatically with a sentiment of renunciation. The mind straight way becomes purified. But given purity of mind, one is already on the way to final bless 4.

World

An Jainism does not believe in any creator God, it has got no creation myth. In fact, the world has not come into existence at a definite moment of time. It exists eternally. It tries to explain the material world by the help of the following five substances. (Dravya) Dharma (Motion) Adharma (Principle of rest, Akasha (space) Kala (Time) and Pudgala (Matter) To explain conscious beings it adds a sixth substance Jiva (soil). Matter is composed atoms (pudgal) These atoms form the fundamental bases of all material objects. Material atoms possess the qualities of touch, taste, smell and colour. Space gives room to for the pudgals. It is infinite. Time effects change. Dharma and adharma are the principles of motion and rest respectively. These two principles are peculiar to Jainism and they make the Jainas explanation of the world very scientific.

It is by the principles of motion that the pudgals move and combine together to form objects. This motion is not imparted to objects by some external agency (God) from without. It is inherent, self - working principle of the world. Thus the formation of the world is a function of these five substances.

Jainism is realistic and pluralistic. It believes in the reality of the world with all plural objects in it. Unlike Buddhism, it believes in the permanence of substances. As a matter of fact, it cuts middle course between Vedantic externalism and the Buddhistic theory of momentariness. In one sense substances are eternal, in another sense they are changing. In its essence, every substance remains the same, but in terms of its modes it changes. To be more precise, every substance has got two sorts of qualities essential quality (Gune) and modes (Paryaya). Jainism takes the world as real, but counsels not to be unduly attached to it. It may be taken as a ground for performing moral actions, but not as a lace of sensuous enjoyments. The world, of course, generally attracts one in the direction of the latter, but that is exactly what is to be guarded against. The world is a moral ground and not a place of rejoice.

Man

Man is given the highest in Jainism. There is no God in the

ordinary sense of the term, but if the word 'God' has any meaning it is applicable to man himself. Potentially man is perfect. He is capable of attaining infinitude, absolute perfection. He has a soul within him which is imbued with infinite potentialities. It is an eternal conscious substance and does not die with physical death consciousness is there with all living beings but it is present in the most manifest form in man. Consciousness is the essential quality of the soul (chetna lakshano jiva) although there are various changing qualities in it also. This soul in man is capable of attaining infinite power, infinite knowledge infinite faith and infinite bliss, because potentially it is all that. It is capable of attaining God hood, so to say.

But the question arises as to why is man working under so many limitations then ? He is obviously finite and is living and working under very miserable conditions. If he has a soul with him which is virtually infinite or potentially capable of infinitude why is man so imperfect ? The Jain answers to these questions is that man in his state is in bondage. His present state is not his real or natural state being associated with pudgal (which is the real nature of bondage, the soul has lost its original character. Just as the Sun's brilliance is covered by the clouds, similarly, the souls real brilliant nature has been subdued by the cover of pudgals around it. The associates of soul with the body is its bondage. But, then, why this bondage ? This is basically due to ajana (ignorance) Due to ignorance man's soul (jiva) becomes a slave of its passions and does everything under their influence. Like Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism also believes in the law of Karma. It rather believes in it some what rigorously. Man is strictly a product of his own past karmas. This speaks of a kind of determination, but taking it as purely deterministic if is not fair. Man has got freedom of will also. By his present sincere efforts, he can improve his lot and get rid of the constant chain of birth and rebirth.

Evil and Suffering

Jain approach to the problem of evil and suffering is practical. Being a non - theistic system, it does not have any occasion to tackle the problem in a fashion in which it is raised and answered in the context of semety religions. But even apart from it, it does not ask and answer the general question as to why there is evil in this world. It rather raises and tries to answer the specific question as to why man suffers. In other words it raises the question of suffering in a subjective context rather than in a purely objective one. Moreover, it does not simply diagnose suffering, rather it also makes out explicit ways and means so as the get rid of suffering. Its interest in the problem of suffering therefore is no way purely theoretical, it is primarily practical.

The Jain answer to the above question is that man suffers due to its own past Karmas. Life in this world is a consequence of ones past Karmas and in a broad sense coming to life in the (i. e. taking birth) itself is suffering. But in a sense, life in the world may be distinguished between a happy life and a miserable one. Both are respectively due to the good and bad actions performed by someone in his past life. Besides believing in the Law of Karma in a general sense in which all the other Hindu and Buddha systems believe in it, Jainism believes in the Law of Karma in a very specific sense also. According to it, specific Karmas of one's

past life determine separately his taking birth in a specific family, in a specific economic condition, in a specific state of bodily health etc.

Life after Death

The Jaina view about life after death is similar so that of the Hindu view. Man has an immortal soul within him which does not die with physical death. Immediately after the death of the physical body the soul transmigrates into a new body. The assumption of the new body with all its circumstances depends on the Karmas of the previous life, Everything of the new life, bodily condition, economic and social status etc. is conditioned and determined by ones past Karmas. Excessively bad Karmas such as those done with sinful intentions, deceitfulness sense of excessive attachment etc bad to subhuman birth. Action done with less of attachment and with humble and kind disposition lead to human birth. There are Gotra - Karmas and Namakarmas which determine the family of birth and the bodily birth respectively. The following cause birth in a low family speaking ill of others, self - praise concealing good qualities of others, proclaiming false qualities of oneself etc similarly, crookedness of mind and disintegrity of character lead of having a deformed and diseased body whereas the opposite qualities bad to having good physical body. Thus Jainism goes into the details of the specific causes of specific kind of rebirth.

Ultimate Destiny

The ultimate destiny of man according to Jainism is Moksha or Kaivalya. As bondage is the association of the soul with matter, quite naturally Moksha is complete dissociation of the soul from matter. The disassociation is complete only when (1) matter already accumulated with the soul is completely annihilated and (2) any further influx of matter is completely checked. Thus there seems to be no scope for what is called Jiwanmukti in Jainism. Moksha in the real sense is possible only when the physical body is destroyed and there is no possibility of the soul taking another body, negatively speaking Moksha is complete cessation of birth and death and of all consequent suffering, and positively speaking, it is the attainment of a status of absolute perfection and bliss. In the state of Moksha the soul regains its original status of infinite power, infinite knowledge etc. Just as the sun after the removal of the clouds shines in his full brilliance the soul after attaining Moksha becomes completely clear of the dross of matter and shines in its original brilliance. It resumes its original character of perfection and knowledge. It is completely free from ignorance which is the root cause of all evil.

Jaina Discipline

Basically, Jainism teaches three fold discipline, called the discipline of the three jewels, following which one can get rid of bondage and attain liberation. The three fold discipline is the discipline of right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. Moksha is a function neither only of faith nor only of knowledge, nor again of morality alone. It is a joint product of all the three. Again the three are interconnected right knowledge is possible without right faith and right conduct is not possible without right knowledge.

Right faith

There seems to be a controversy regarding the exact

connection of right faith. Some define it as a belief in six substances whereas others define it as a belief in the nine categories and some define it as a faith in the dharma devoid of violence prescribed by the Jins and Kevalis, some define it as a belief in Jaina scriptures and teachers and soon. The following eight essentials are given in Jainism for right faith.

Right knowledge

Right knowledge is the knowledge of the nature of things in the real perspective. It is the proper knowledge about the real nature of the living and non living substances. We have seen that according to Jainism there are five non - living substances and the one living one. Knowledge about the nature of these substances and also of the distinction between the living and non - living is regarded as the right knowledge.

Right knowledge is very essential for Moksha according to Jainism because we have seen that the root cause of bondage is ignorance. Right knowledge is that which helps in controlling the mind and purifying the self, and this is possible only by knowledge which is self - realized, which is attained in one's inner intuition or vision. "The wise declare knowledge to be nectar - - - - - a glory which does not depend on others". It is self attained and self - realized.

Right Conduct

Only right faith or right knowledge is not sufficient for liberation. Generally speaking, right conduct is the conduct based on detachment going into details. Jainism gives a long list of actions constituting the right conduct for a householder and for a monk separately. However the five vows mentioned below constitute the necessary ingredients of the behaviour of everyone, whether to be a householder a monk. These five vows are known as panch amahabrate in Jainism and they are as follows –

- 1) Non - violence (Ahimsa): - it is the greatest rule of conduct in it. Violence of any form is strictly prohibited in if emphasis on Ahimsa is the distinguishing mark of Jaina religion. Again, ahimsa is understood and practiced in Jainism in a very wide connotation, violence or injury or harm caused to any living being in any form is himsha. So Ahimsa is to be practiced not only in deed, but also in thought and deed but words also causing injury to someone due to negligence is also himsha. Negligence's implies the passions of attainment and aversion (dwesha) and any action done under their spell is violence. So non - violence understood in this widest possible sense is the rule of conduct according to Jainism. Practicing Ahimsa in the Jaina sense is not something very easy. It is a kind of Tapas. On its positive side Ahimsa implies a life of love for all.
- 2) Satya (Truthfulness): - Generally speaking, this rule of conduct enjoys abstinence from giving false statement or telling a lie. But mere statement of fact is not truth. Truth if it is harmful to others should be avoided. It must be spoken with beneficent intentions. Otherwise it will offend or harm somebody and that will be himsa.
- 3) Asteya (Non - violence) generally speaking, this means abstention from taking a thing of someone also which is not given. Jainism regards stealing as a kind of violence (himsa), because wealth is external vital force of a man and taking away of it without his consent offends or

harms him. Even abetment of theft or purchasing a stolen property or doing any illegal business would be taken as stealing according to Jainism because everyone of these affects right or property of someone.

- 4) Brahmacharya (celibacy) The vow has been much emphasized in Buddhism and Hinduism also, but Jainism lays much more emphasis on it, because it extols the life of a celebrate of a monk much more than any other religion.
- 5) Aparigraha (Non - possession or non - attachment) It stands for not only abstinence from excessive material possession but also for the avoidance of desire for such possession. So, in its inner meaning is non - attachment rather than non - possession. Excessive desire for material possession is parigraha and therefore it must be avoided.

In accordance with the two sects in which Jainism was later on divided, there are two types of Jaina monks Svetambaras and Diganabaras. The following are the rules of conduct for a Digambara monk.

- a) Observance of the five great vows mentioned above.
- b) Observance of the five fold path of vigilance (vigilance in movement, in speech, in taking food, in lifting and putting articles and vigilance in throwing away excrements, dust etc.)
- c) Control of five senses.
- d) Performance of six essential duties –
 - Samaika – already mentioned above.
 - Chaturmunitatistava – offering prayers to 24 trithankaras.
 - Vandana paying respect to the preceptors, superiors, images of the Kevalis and siddhas and to those who are superiors in respect of austerity and knowledge.
 - Parikrama – confessing transgressions of the moral conduct ensuring oneself before the guru etc. This is like repentance
 - Pracrtyakhyanca – Determination to avoid sinful activities in future.
 - Kayaofacarga – cultivating postures of meditation.
- e) Cutting out of the hair
- f) Nudity
- g) Non - bathing
- h) Sleeping on the ground
- i) Not cleaning the teeth
- j) Taking food in standing posture.
- k) Eating only once in twenty four hours.

In the swetambara tradition however, a monk is required to observe the following rows.

- a) Five great vows.
- b) Not taking meal at nights.
- c) Controlling the five senses.
- d) Inner purity,
- e) Purity of possessions,
- f) Forgiveness
- g) Detachment,
- h) Mental goodness,
- i) Good in speech,
- j) Physical goodness,
- k) Protection of living beings,
- l) Three fold discipline,
- m) Forbearance.

Some of the qualities that a monk is required to inculcate and cultivate are the following – forgiveness, humility, straight forwardness, contentment, Truth, Restraint, Penance, Renunciation, Detachment and celibacy. Both men and women are qualified for Jain monkhood, women monks are rather qualified for Jain monkhood, women monks are rather respected and honoured.

The above clearly shows that Jainism is a religion of ethical discipline which lays utmost on the qualities of purity, chastity self - restraint, detachment, humility, love certain ceremonies also find place in Jainism. There are Jain temples at many places in India which contain the images of the gins or the Tirthankaras, specially of Lord Mahavira to which people pray and give offerings. The Jains organize big processions with the image of Lord Mahavir in the front on his birth anniversary every year. Important Jain temples are also treated as places of pilgrimage and the Jain's visit these places of pilgrimage from all corners of India.

Conclusion

As we have seen the Jain philosophy is the oldest religion of India and an offshoot of Hindu religion it has all the qualities of Hindu religion with a different form. Here the Tirthankaras play a vital role. It believes in Jain faith, right knowledge, conduct, Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Its main qualities are forgiveness, Truth, Restraint, Penance, detachment and also believes in Monkhood. It organizes big procession with the image of Lord Mahavir in the front on his birth anniversary every year.

Glossary (Names of Tirthankaras)

- 1) Rishava
- 2) Ajita
- 3) Sambhava
- 4) Abhinandana
- 5) Sumati
- 6) Padmarabha
- 7) Syparshva
- 8) Chandraprabha
- 9) Ushpadanta or Suvidha
- 10) Shitala
- 11) Shreyamsa
- 12) Vasupijya
- 13) Vimala
- 14) Ananta
- 15) Dharma
- 16) Shanti
- 17) Kunthi
- 18) Ara
- 19) Mali
- 20) Manisuvrata
- 21) Nami
- 22) Nemi or Arshtanemi
- 23) Parasnath
- 24) Vardhamana or Mahavira

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