

Aparigraha, its Relevance in Modern Times

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Satya (speaking truth), *Ahimsā* (non-violence), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacarya* (celibacy) and *Aparigraha* (non-possession) are the cardinal principles of Jain Ethics and it is on them that the great edifice of Jain religion is built. One can be able to free oneself from the binding *karmas* (actions) and achieve *mokṣa* (liberation) if one practises them. In all religions, a premium has been put on good conduct and virtue. The observance of *śīla* (virtue) is a *sine qua non* of spiritual life. Lord Buddha laid great emphasis on *śīla* (virtue) and regarded it as the pre condition for making any progress in spiritual journey. According to him *śīla* (virtue) *śamādhi* (concentration) and *prajñā* (insight) are the three important milestones on the road to *nirvāṇa* and without observing *śīla* one cannot be able to practise concentration of mind and develop insight. Lord Buddha in a famous *gāthā* shows the importance of *śīla* for developing higher spiritual life as also for being able to practise meditation and attain *prajñā* (insight).

सीले पतिट्ठाय नरो सपञ्चो, चित्तं पञ्चं च भावयं
मातापी निपको भिक्खु, सो इमं विजट्ठये जटंति ।

Lord Mahāvīra also considered it absolutely essential to observe the five *mahāvratas* referred to above. These *mahāvratas* come under *śīla*, *himsā* (violence), *stea* (stealing), and *abrahmacarya* (sexual indulgence) come under *kāya kamma* (physical actions) and refraining from them is a matter of *śīla*. Refraining from telling a lie and its positive side i.e. speaking the truth come under *vacīkamma* (vocal action). But under what category of action does *aparigraha* come? Obviously under physical action, because *parigraha* the opposite of *aparigraha* means hoarding things and possessing them which are physical actions. All that one possesses are physical things. Therefore they come under physical actions.

Parigraha actually means, as I said above, possession of all kinds of property and so called means of comfort and pleasure. Possession of things ironically leads one to desire for more of them and thus a tremendous amount of greed comes into being which binds a man to the cycle of birth and death. Lord Buddha regards *trṣṇā* (pāli-*taṇhā*) as the source of all kinds of sufferings.¹ In the famous *Dhammacakka-pavattana sutta* *trṣṇā* has been set down as the cause of suffering. Lord Mahāvīra also regards *parigraha* as the cause of our bondage to the world and *trṣṇā* lies at the root of *parigraha* (possession). Desire pollutes our souls. Impelled by our hydra-headed desires, we indulge in several activities which result in *leśyas*,² which, in turn, bind us to the wheel of *samsāra*.

1. यायं तण्हा पोतोब्भविका नन्दिरागसहगता तन्न तन्नाभिनन्दनी सेय्यथीदं—कामतण्हा, भवतण्हा, विभवतण्हा ।

—*Mahāvagga* (Nalanda edition) p. 13

2. किण्हा नीला य काऊ य, तेऊ पम्हा तहे ब य ।
सुक्कले सा य छट्ठा य, नामाइ तु जहक्क मं ॥

—*The Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, Chapter 34, Verse 3

चित्तमंतमचित्तं वा, परिजिम्म किसानवि ।
अन्नं वा अणुजाणाइ, एवं दुक्खाराण मुच्चइ ॥¹

It has been said again and again that wealth cannot give happiness and peace to man. One who amasses wealth with a view to achieving peace in life makes a terrible mistake. In fact, the more he amasses wealth, the more he is fettered. At long last, wealth does not come to his help and he goes away from this world leaving all his vast wealth behind.

जे पावकम्मेहि धणं मणूसा, समाययन्ती अमइं गहाय ।
पहाय ते पासपयट्ठिए नरे, देराणु बद्धा रायरं उपेन्ति ॥²

Keeping this fact in mind that all the objects of the world are transitory and they cannot give real happiness and that one will leave this world without being accompanied by his wife and children or by his relatives let alone by wealth, he should never develop any attachment for them.

खेत्तं वत्थुं हिरण्णं च, पुत्तदारं च बन्धवा ।
चइत्ता णं इमं देहं, गन्तव्वमवसस्स मे ॥³

Man's desires are infinite, so infinite that they can never be satiated even if the world's wealth including gold and silver is placed at his disposal.

कसिणं पि जो इमं लोयं, पणपुष्णं दलेज्ज इक्कस्स ।
तेणाऽवि से न संतुस्से, इइ दुप्पूरए इमे आया ॥⁴

सुवण्णरूपस्स उ पव्वया भवे, सिया हु केलाससमा असंखया ।
नरस्स लुद्धस्स र तेहि किंचि, इच्छा हु आगाससमा अणंतिया ॥⁵

Parigraha presupposes attachment to things of desire and attachment causes suffering. It is an obstacle for the soul in attaining liberation. St. John of the Cross has got something very relevant to say about attachment. "The soul that is attached to anything, however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union. For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds the bird, it matters not, if it really holds it fast, for until the cord be broken the bird cannot fly. So the soul held by the bonds of human affections, however slight they may be, cannot while they last, make its way to god."⁶

The principle of *Aparigraha*, therefore, must be practised not only by Jain monks but also by others. It is true the practice of *aparigraha* will go a long way in enabling a Jain monk to make progress in his spiritual journey but it will also help a layman develop what is called altruistic motive. If the members of a society practise *aparigraha*, the whole society will be benefitted.

Aparigraha does not mean to possess nothing. If a Jain monk has clothes and a bowl and a blanket, it does not mean that he is a *parigrahī* because these he possesses in order to live a moral life. Lord Buddha also allowed four requisites to a monk and rebuked those who indulged in earning wealth and storing it. In the *Brahmajāla sutta* of the *Dīgha nikāya* he has given a long list of professions through which the Buddhist monks earned wealth.⁷

1, 2, 3, 4, 5. All quoted from *Śrī Mahāvīra Vacanāmṛta*

6. Quoted from *Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan*, Jaico Publishing House

7. See *The Brahmajālasutta*

It is true that for making one's own spiritual development the observance of the said *mahāvratas* is essential. But they have a social dimension inasmuch as they have a direct bearing on social ethics. I shall only deal with the social ethics contained in *aparigraha*.

While defining *aparigraha* it has been said that it got two aspects viz. *bhāva pakṣa* and *dravya pakṣa*. The desire to hoard and possess constitutes what is called the *bhāva pakṣa* (motive) of *parigraha* and actual possession of things constitutes *dravya pakṣa*. Of the two (material aspects), the first is real *parigraha*. Lord Mahāvīra says that actual possession of clothes and other items does not constitute *parigraha* but if they are possessed with a desire to own them for one's own comfort-this is real *parigraha*.

न सो परिग्रहो वृत्तो, नायपुत्तेण ताइणा ।

मुच्छा परिग्रहो वृत्तो, इइ वृत्तं महेसिणा ॥¹

Lord Buddha also, like Lord Mahāvīra, says that the real spring of actions is mind i.e. all actions proceed from our mind, from our thought. The first verse of the *Dhammapada* very clearly explains it, "All our tendencies of character are the offspring of consciousness, dominated by consciousness and made up of consciousness."² At another place Lord Buddha says that consciousness gives rise to actions.³ In fact consciousness is action. Thus it seems to be clear that both Lord Mahāvīra and Lord Buddha regard mind as the most important thing. Both of them regard intention of an action as the most important thing. But there is a fundamental difference between the two. Whereas the Buddhists put a greater premium on the purity of intention and do not refrain from eating even meat it is pure in three ways (*Tikoṭi paṇṇasuddha*), the Jains put an equal premium on actual action. That is, in no case meat eating can be said to be justified.

Whereas the Buddhists are mostly satisfied with only the *bhāva pakṣa*, the Jains consider both *bhāva pakṣa* and *dravya pakṣa* as equally important. If we analyse Buddhists' concept of *śīla*, it will be clear that only physical and vocal actions come under it. They do not bring in mental actions under *śīla*. Why don't they do so ? Because it is very difficult to know one's mind. Whether One's mind is pure or not can be judged by only his actions. The purity or otherwise of one's mind is perceptible only through his vocal and physical actions. Up to this both the Buddhists and the Jains see eye to eye with each other but in actual life the latter seem to give more importance not only to intentions but also to resultant actions. It is this *dravya pakṣa* of *śīla* which comes under social ethics. Ethics, for the most part, has a social dimension. Our actions have their repercussions in the society in which we live. Therefore, our intention is not enough. It is our actions which will reflect our intention and character and will be the unfailing and sure yardstick of the purity or otherwise of our intention.

As far as *aparigraha mahāvratā* is concerned, it is not enough to say that one has no desire to possess things but he should not actually possess them. The only perceptible method of judging his intention is his action.

Parigraha does not mean that one should possess things but to cause others to possess both living things and other articles either for himself or for themselves or to advise others to do so also constitute *parigraha*.

1. The *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*, Chapter VI, Verse 20
2. मनोपुब्बङ्गमा घम्मा मनोसेट्ठममनोमया ।
मनसा चे पटुट्ठेन भासति वा करोति वा // The *Dhammapada*, Verse 1
3. चेतनाहं, भिक्खवे, कम्मं वदामि ।

जैन तत्त्व चिन्तन : आधुनिक सन्दर्भ

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The importance of the principle of *aparigraha* is very great both in the life of an individual and in the life of a nation. If individuals and nations follow the principle of *aparigraha* and live up to its ideal the world will be a veritable paradise and there will not be so much hatred, jealousy, ill will and suffering in the world.

The attitude to possess material goods and other means of comfort is what pollutes one's life. What is important in life is not to increase one's desire but to reduce it to the minimum. Desire fulfilled begets further desires and there is no end to them, but happiness and peace in life follow a state of desirelessness.

Lord Mahāvīra, like Buddha has averred it again and again that annihilation of desire is the precondition of peace in life. This is amply proved in modern times also. In modern times there are hundreds and thousands of luxury items which constantly keep on attracting man's notice. He looks avidly in the show rooms and shop windows where several kinds of gadgets supposed to give him pleasure and comfort are displayed. With the development of science luxury goods and gadgets have multiplied in number and man's desires have grown many more times than ever. It is true, he possesses infinite means of comfort and pleasure but it is an irony that in spite of all his possessions he is not happy. His desires have increased in geometrical progression and for peace and happiness he seems to be running after a mirage. It is true, man's knowledge has increased many times. He can produce unlimited amount of grains in the limited field. Thanks to the development of science and technology he is now in possession of more dangerous and deadly weapons than ever before. But really speaking he feels more insecure than ever. Economic prosperity has not enabled him to get rid of diseases like hypochondria and paranoia. The desire to make money has compelled him to be involved in rat race and he has lost his peace of mind. In modern times man is far more unhappy than ever before.

The importance of *aparigraha* in modern times, therefore, cannot be exaggerated both in the life of an individual or in the life of a nation. If an individual practises *aparigraha*, he cuts down his desires until he is satisfied with his bare necessity and that also he possesses without attachment. Thus he can make great progress in his spiritual journey and can attain liberation (*mokṣa*). *Aparigraha* practised even moderately enables one to live peacefully. Therefore one should practise it as a matter of habit. If he does so, he will do society a lot of good. He, at least, will not look at other's property with greedy eyes and live up to the ideals taught by Lord Mahāvīra and also up to the ideals contained in the Upaniṣads (*Mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid-dhanam*). If he practises *aparigraha* it will do him good inasmuch as he will reduce the quantum of desire and consequently he will enjoy peace and happiness of mind. Again if he practises *aparigraha*, the society in which he lives will be benefitted. If one does not possess more than his share in the society, the other members will not be robbed of their share and thus ill will among the members of society will not grow. Moreover the gap between the haves and the have-nots will be bridged in stead of becoming wide. If Lord Mahāvīra's teaching of *aparigraha* is put into practice seriously many social evils can be eradicated. Living up to the ideals of *aparigraha* will go a long way in cultivating peace and the class struggle which is assuming fierce proportion will be annihilated. If *aparigraha* is practised by nations the affluent nations will share their wealth with those nations which don't have much. If the powerful nations practise *aparigraha* they will not spend billions of dollars in manufacturing weapons and thus will not cause other nations to spend on collecting arms and ammunitions. As a result the people of the world will not be thinking of the horrors of war all the time.

There are some people who argue that if people will not possess what they produce, why should they take initiative to produce more? Such objections can be met by asking counter questions such as 'aren't people members of a society?' Don't they owe something to the society in which they live. They should take initiative for more production of wealth in order to make the whole society prosperous. But they should not have desires to possess it all by themselves. Desires of all kinds are bad. They corrode our mind and to desire for peace with a corroded mind is like trying to hold water in a sieve.

Lord Mahāvīra and Socialism

The Problem of Problems today is how to stop the struggle between the rich and the needy. The people of wealthy section have plenty of food, clothing and bank balances. Yet they are struggling hard to augment and increase what they have had struggling restlessly. On the other hand there is the sweating mass, toiling and moiling for scanty meals. There is again a third class of men, the so called middle class people, who have got to put up the appearance of the wealthy section whereas in reality they are as poor, if not poorer than the labour class, and their condition is really miserable. One view in this connection has been that the needy and hungry exploited mass should openly rise up and snatch away the riches of the rich by force. The other is to vest all wealth in the state to take away the excess wealth from the rich and distribute it in accordance with the needs of the people. The present day socialism suggests that every man at a certain stage of his life should stop to earn more.

The Life of the great Jain Teacher Lord Mahāvīra shows that from his very childhood, he was extremely unaggressive and of non-acquiring disposition, For one full year before his renunciation of the world, he was giving away all his wealth and at the time of ascetic life he distributed the very clothes and ornaments which he had on, his body and when he attained the final self realisation, he went on without any food. He gave away all that he did not want, not because he was compelled to do so but because of his own free will and choice. The life of Lord Mahāvīra thus teaches us a lesson, which the modern Socialism would profit by always remembering that in order that a human being may voluntarily consent for an equal distribution of wealth, his character and not merely external atmosphere should be built up in an appropriate manner.

Lord Mahāvīra, keeping nothing for himself reduced his necessities to their barest minimum—in the words of Thomas Carlyle, made his "claim of wages a zero." It is true that the people of this materialistic age would not be able to practise renunciation to the extent and the manner done by Lord Mahāvīra, but unquestionably, He is the transcendent ideal to be followed as much faithfully and closely as possible. Some amount of renunciation or *Aparigraha* as it is called in the Jaina Ethics should be the fundamental principle of all the socialist philosophy and the motto of the socialist should be *Live and let live* like that of Lord Mahāvīra.

—Prof. H. S. Bhattacharya's article quoted in *Bhagavān Mahāvīra Aura Unakā Tattva Darśana*, pp. 869-73.