

Ethical Values Reflected in Jain Philosophy

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By :

Dr. Nalini Joshi

Professor, Seth H.N.Jain Chair
Department of Philosophy,
Ambedkar Bhavan,
University of Pune,
Pune - 411007

E-mail : nalinijoshi53@gmail.com

Mobile : 9421001613

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Relation of Indian Philosophy and Ethics :

Generally in Ethics, it is expected that the conceptual analysis of moral values should be presented in a very logical and convincing manner. One question can be asked, 'Is there an independent inquiry in Indian tradition that undertakes the analysis of moral terms?' In his book *Gītārahasya*, Lokamānya Ṭīlak shows how the discussion of morality has to be carried out in the context of Dharma and Nīti and it is not necessary to have a separate discussion of Ethics on par with western philosophy.¹ We have to admit that in Indian context, an autonomous and independent branch of Ethics or Moral Science does not flourish. It is the mindset of Indian thinkers that we cannot consider ethical values separately, in isolation with other inquiries. The classical Indian philosophies are '*darśanas*'. The term hints at an attempt which not only includes a rational inquiry but the direct perception of the reality. Except Cārvākas all *darśanas* accept *mokṣa*, Kaivalya or *nirvāṇa* as the ultimate goal of human existence. Thus the six orthodox and two heterodox *darśanas* are basically spiritualistic in nature with a due limited scope for ethics or morality.

Ācāradharma in Brahmanic and Śramaṇic Traditions :

The *ācāradharma* (code of conduct) is expressed in Brahmanic tradition by providing the ideal of *catuṣṭvīdha puruṣārtha* (i.e. *dharma-artha-kāma-mokṣa*) and duties according to *varṇa* and *āśrama*. Śramaṇic traditions did not focus on these concepts, many-a-times negated enthusiastically. The early Buddhists have used the term Dharma which refers to moral rules applicable to all human beings irrespective of class as caste.² The Jaina text *Ādipurāṇa* proclaims clearly that, 'मनुष्यजातिरेकैव'.

The Jaina philosophers have used two terms - viz. *dharma* and *vrata*. The term '*vrata*' implies choice and willingness to accept certain rules on the part of a person and '*dharma*' implies a moral force or pressure.³ Jainas maintain that '*dharma*' does not possess intrinsic value but only a means to liberation. Considering the separate patterns of life, Jainas and Buddhists have prescribed separate code of conducts for householders (*śrāvakas*) and monks (*śramaṇas*).

Two Models to Look at Jainas Ethics :

1. When we cast a glance on the books titled 'Jaina Ethics', we find that without any scrutiny, the whole monastic conduct and householders' conduct is taken under Jaina Ethics.

2. Some scholars of Jainism presuppose that the monastic conduct is spiritual and the rules prescribed for householders are ethical or moral.

Both the above-mentioned models are partially true. Monastic conduct is basically *mokṣa*-centric. Many of the rules and regulations are prescribed from the religious and spiritualistic point of view. Many of the behavioral patterns of monastic conduct are not universal. Moral values are required to be followed by human agents irrespective of caste, creed, sex, nationality etc. But still the five greater vows viz. non-violence, truth, non-theft etc. can be designated as common moral values applicable to all human beings as such. Since the full-fledged observation of these five bigger vows (especially *brahmacharya*) is too lofty ideal, still Jainism suggests the smaller versions of bigger vows for practical purposes. The five main vows can be called *sādhāraṇa dharmas*. In the Jaina, Buddhist and Yoga philosophy they are introduced serially as *mahāvratas*, *śīlas* and *yamas*. They can be regarded as central to Indian moral thought.

One more point from the Jaina monastic conduct can be considered as ethical values. Generally the topic of '*daśavidha dharma*' is included in monastic conduct. Ninth chapter of Tattvārthsūtra gives the list of vulnerable human qualities. Esteemed Jaina scholars Dr. Nathmal Tatia translates it likewise :

“Morality is perfect forgiveness, humility, straightforwardness, purity (i.e. freedom from greed), truthfulness, self-restraint, austerity, renunciation, detachment and continence.”

One may disagree about the universality of some of these virtues, but grossly we can designate them as ethical values though they are enumerated under *sādhū-dharma*.

Likewise, some of the *vratas* of a householder may go outside the sphere of universal morality. But grossly speaking, the whole scheme of *aṇuvrata-guṇavrata-śikṣāvratas* with its transgressions (*aticāras*) possess ethical values and that too within the range of practicability.

Thus, in the second part of this paper an attempt has been made to put light on the conduct of Jain householder. Wherever possible, the ethical values are tagged with the contemporary modern terminology viz. environmental ethics, professional ethics, social ethics, bio-ethics, media ethics and so on.

There is a whole branch of Jaina literature which is dedicated to the conduct of laymen and laywomen. Śvetāmbaras have noted down five *aṇuvratas*, three *guṇavratas* and four *śikṣāvratas*. Total twelve *vratas* are described in detailed manner with the enumeration of five *aticāras* (transgressions) of each of the *vratas*. These transgressions help us a lot for the proper understanding of the ethical or moral values implied in it. Digambaras provide almost same purport but in a graded manner. Total eleven stages are described which are called *pratīmas* in which firmness is expected which naturally leads the layman to the next stage.

It is impossible to note down critical observations on each of the *vratas* with its transgressions within the limited scope of this paper. In fact the total number of seventy *aticāras* is a separate issue for

ethical examination. For the sake of avoiding monotony of mechanical discussions, selected few important observations are noted down.

(1) The word *sthūla ahimsā* itself suggests that for a normal householder it is impossible to observe non-violence in perfect or ideal manner. The philosophical framework of Jainism presupposes that in almost every activity of body, mind and speech, violence is implied. Eating, drinking, walking, talking even breathing causes harm to the *ṣaḍ-jīvanikāyas*. We can divide all violent activities in four categories. In three of them, we have no control to avoid it totally. The last category viz. *saṃkalpī. himsā* (intentional violence) should be avoided totally. This practical view towards *ahimsā*, put the unreachable ideal of total *ahimsā* in the range of moral value.

(2) The transgressions of gross *ahimsā* are almost animal-centered. Many of the scholars have expressed their wonder about the animal-centrality and expect human-centrality in the place of it. But I highly appreciate the implied moral value of preventing cruelty to animals and also to birds, insects and all living creatures. It is told likewise: One should not (i) keep the animal tied (ii) cut or pierce the animal in any part of its body (iii) overload or burden it and (iv) disturb the animal during its feeding. This humanitarian attitude towards animal-kingdom is highly appreciable.

(3) The vow of *sthūla satya* is to abstain from falsehood. At the face it looks like a personal virtue but when we cast a comprehensive glance to the transgressions mentioned, we come to know that it is highly concerned with media ethics. These transgressions mentioned in the old Jaina texts as if to provide reasonably good norms to all media whether printed or electronic. These norms are significantly applicable to ‘breaking news’, ‘sting operations’, ‘debates’, ‘reality shows’ and ‘irresponsible twits’. It is categorically mentioned in Jaina texts that one should abstain from (i) Rash or thoughtless speeches based on exaggeration, understate or misrepresent in one way or other, (ii) Accusing others of conspiring, (iii) Disclosing very personal secrets of one’s close family members, (iv) Misleading advice and (v) To make false document.

The vow of ‘*satya*’ is specially elaborated with mentioning five more prohibitions. ‘Deceitful acts regarding the engagement or wedding of a girl or boy’- provides moral guideline in family matters. ‘Deceitful acts in selling or buying of cattle (in modern times-all the vehicles)’-is a high alert for businessmen and agents. Land-mafias are covered under the third transgression of ‘*satya*’. All misappropriations of deposits are mentioned as a crime called ‘*nyāsāpahāra*’. Fairness in justice occurs if one abstains from false witness. Thus the judicial matters are also taken care of in this transgression.

(4) The transgressions of *sthūla adattādāna* go deeper in business ethics in general. Due to the close proximity of Jaina householders to trade and business, these transgressions demand a high standard of honesty. There is no separate low-code of ‘Jaina Law’ as such, these are the moral bindings prescribed for the entrepreneurs up to the small traders, retailers and shop-keepers. Bad practices are mentioned likewise :

(i) Buying a stolen good, (ii) Encouraging a thief, (iii) Cheating in measurements, (iv) Production of duplicate articles and (v) Tax-evading. All the above-mentioned transgressions reflect a curious connection with the details provided by Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra. The word ‘*viruddha-rājyātikrama*’ suggests

that a true religious person should be primarily a law-abiding citizen. Morality is highly connected with the rightful means of earning. We can think of Nīścaya-naya if we are righteous in Vyavahāra-naya.

(5) There is a high alert against sexual crimes under the observation of the vow of *sthūla-brahmacarya*. Complete celibacy is expected from a monk or nun from the spiritual point of view. But if we wish to put it under moral or ethical perspective, partial observation of celibacy or continence is sufficient. Thus the vow of restricting one's sexual life only to one's wife or husband (i.e. loyalty or faithfulness) comes under the regime of ethical code of conduct. The transgressions of this vow provide sanctioned middle way to lead good sexual life. Sexual enjoyment with a kept woman, an unmarried woman or a widow is strictly prohibited. The word '*anaṅgagrīḍā*' puts restrictions among these transgressions is odd because it prohibits to help or to take lead in arranging others marriages. From social point of view it is not proper to remain totally aloof from match-making but otherwise all other transgressions provide legitimate guideline to maintain 'character' in popular sense.

(6) *Sthūla-aparigraha* means lining one's possessions and particularly one's desire or excessive greed. Its importance from the standpoint of social welfare is so important and so much underlined by social philosophers that it needs no elaboration. It is a high ideal from the standpoint of an individual and the exact measurement of '*aparigraha*' is difficult to prescribe. One thing is highly appreciable in it. The Jaina expression of *aparigraha* is its flexibility. Jaina code of conduct advises oneself to restrict one's needs according to one's monitory conditions and social status. Jainas know that the concept of '*aparigraha*' of a beggar, a poor, a middle-class person, a rich man and a multi-millionaire is obviously distinct. So Jaina texts suggest to restrict one's possessions accordingly.

(7) The vow of *dik-parimāṇa* limits one's movements in various directions. From the practical viewpoint, it is impossible for a householder to limit his field of activity especially in this age of expansion and globalization. This difficulty is taken into consideration in the description of this particular vow. This vow is not taken specifically at the time of taking the twelve *vratas*. It is taken from time to time. It underlines the need of isolation and firm residence at a particular place for serious studies, valuable research work, writing down literary works, spiritual meditation and so many other important things. This vow and the vow called *deśāvakāśika* help us a lot in fulfilling the above-mentioned aims. Though Jainas religion connects these vows to non-violence and ultimate good of self, it can be utilized to fulfill practical aims and ends.

(8) The second *guṇavrata* is *upabhoga-paribhoga-parimāṇa* which can be easily covered under *parigra-parimāṇa* is discussed under *aṇuvratas*. One important point noted under the transgressions of this *vrata* is fifteen *karmādānas* i.e. a list of fifteen prohibited professions. A grate debate can be done whether all the professions mentioned in the list can be designated as immoral or not. Still four or five of them are worth-considering with grate emphasis at present time viz. illegal mining, trade of ivory and sandalwood without permit, depleting tanks and wells, setting fire to woods for making char-coal, trade of poison (in which drugs and narcotics can be included) and specially illegal traffic of children and women. The all-time-illegality of these professions puts light on the foresight of Jaina thinkers by including these professions in the list of prohibited trades.

(9) *Anartha-danḍa-vīramāṇa-vrata* is a vow to abstain from frivolous and harmful activities which do not serve any human purpose. Four manners and five transgressions of this vow are mentioned. The vow is so dynamic that it starts from rearing good qualities on personal level and extends up to the observance of International norms of political ethics through which 'world-peace' can be realized. If we groom the tendency of indifference, laziness and negligence, it will affect our personality. Majority of such people will create hindrances in national prosperity. Excessive stock and careless use of arms and weapons are mentioned here which provide guideline for the International treaty of ceasefire. Use of obscene language or expressions is connected with sexual crimes. The typical terms '*kautkucya*' and '*maukharya*' can be related to media ethics. The last transgression of this vow is suggestive of artificial scarcity is important from the viewpoint of social ethics.

(10) The first *śikṣāvṛata* called *sāmāyika* is the vow to practise equanimity. Though it is converted into a peculiar Jain ritual it is a *sādhāraṇa dharma* of all existing religions. Whether it is *sāmāyika*, *pūjā*, *sāṃdhyā*, *namājh* or confession - it is a natural effort of a common human being to connect oneself to the sublime principle which is highly adorable.

(11) If '*paṣadhopavasa*' or fasting is done for the upliftment of the soul through *karmanirjarā* then it comes under religious or spiritual field, but if it is willful diet control with purely health-reasons, then it enters into the sphere of ethics because for many reasons it is our duty to keep ourselves fit and fine. The transgressions of this vow are connected with social ethics. Spitting, throwing out of garbage, contamination of water etc. by improper disposal of toilet - a caution has been given to avoid all unfair behavior while living in the society.

(12) *Atithisaṃvibhāga*, the last among the twelve vows of a householder advises us the social sharing of one's possessions to deserving people. Though a very narrow interpretation of this vow is found in many Jain texts, the Jain society is broadening its view by giving liberal donations and extending charity to socially distressed and deprived people as well as to animals. Jains are changing their traditional view towards charity viz. temple building and coming forward to build libraries, educational institutes and upliftment of the down-trodden.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS :

Since equal weightage is given to *cāttrta* i.e. conduct in Jain Philosophy it becomes very interesting to examine the rules of conduct stated in almost all Jain texts. We have to admit that in monastic conduct, spirituality and ritual prevail. The aim of *mokṣa* is highly individualistic. Therefore the issues of social ethics are found less in it. Śrāvaka, Śramaṇopāsaka or Gṛhastha is a Jain householder. Basically all the twelve *vratas* or eleven *pratimās* are connected with the centre of Jain philosophy i.e. Ahimsā. Outwardly it looks that householders' vows are important from the religious point of view, but the social-views, national-views and world-views are so skillfully imbibed in various vows that we can very easily connect it with (the so-called !) branches of ethics viz. individual ethics, social ethics, political ethics, professional ethics, media ethics and so on.

Since Jainism is deeply concerned with the well-being of the earth, in a comprehensive way it can be called bio-ethics or environmental ethics.

At this point we have to remember Nītivākyāmṛta of the Jaina author Somadevasūri belonging to ninth century A.D. The name of the treatise itself suggests that he is very keen to incorporate the moral principles in general, in his book. Nītivākyāmṛta is the simplified version of Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra. He enumerates many moral virtues common to all the people and at the end, he exclaims -

सर्वसत्त्वेषु हि समता सर्वाचरणानां परमाचरणं ।⁴

In nutshell we can say that in Jaina Philosophy there is a great spiritual leap but the take-off is from the firm ground of Ahimsā and it penetrates through the sphere of ethical or moral rules. In Indian environment, ethics did not flourish as a separate branch but the Indian thinkers never thought of bypassing ethics. Actually their journey can be designated as ‘from ethics to meta-ethics’.

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- 3) Studies in Indian Moral philosophy, page 23
- 4) नीतिवाक्यामृत 1.4, page 9

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