

Importance of Morality in Jainism

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Morality is the basic value of Jainism so it is a priceless possession for the followers of Jain religion. To uphold the ethical principles of this religion the officers were equipped with wide ranging powers and absolute authority in order to deal effectively with the varied cases of dispute. As Jain monks were not foolproof so they used to commit offences of various natures and to atone them different types of expiations and punishments were prescribed in the Jain scriptures. The leading proceedings initiated against the defaulter was known as *Vyavahāra* based upon one or more than one of the following norms (a) the canon, (b) the tradition, (c) the law, (d) the charge, (e) the custom and both together (expiation and punishment) was termed as *Prāyaścitta* (expiation) or (atonement) to be imposed as a penalty on the guilty monk. These atonements were ten in number, namely (a) condemnation, (b) confession, (c) confession and condemnation (d) discrimination (e) corporal punishment (f) penance (g) curtailment of seniority (h) Reconsecration, (i) suspension (j) expulsion. Any Jain monk could get himself absolved of the first enumerated six kinds by self-imposed penance. The presence of a preceptor was a prominent factor in such a critical situation as he had only the authority to guide the guilty to go through the prescribed mode of penalty in the form of penance and confession. The penalty imposed in the case of first of the last four '*Prāyaścittas*' was to deprive the offender from important powers of clergy order as held by him in past. The minimum penalty imposed on the guilty was of five days duration, determined by the erring monk's status in the monastery hierarchy. Besides this the loss incurred was also computed by the period during which the offence was committed by the offender.

The next *Prāyaścitta* known as *Parihāra* or purification of the transgressor was performed by isolating him or her from the others which lasted either for a month or for four months or for six months or even more depending upon the seriousness of the committed offence. The guilty monk suffering the punishment was also subjected to social boycott to make him realise the intensity and degree of his offence.

Any Jain monk who due to the committing of offence completely lost his clerical or ecclesiastical position among his brethrens was subjected to bear rigorous penalty as imposed by the Head of the monastery and then only he or she could qualify himself or herself to be readmitted in the order. Loss of ecclesiastical position by the offender implies the suspension of his clerical rights and privileges as well as putting such a person on probation period till he or she may justify by their right action their claim for fresh admission in the monastic order. Committing of an offence of grave nature entails expulsion and dismissal from monastery order for good. But later Jain administrators and upholders of morality took some other stringent measures to impose penalty on the transgressors by forcing him/her to observe expiatory fasts whose duration differs and depends upon the gravity of offence committed by the offender. Thus we see that the monastery order in Jainism has a galaxy of expiations and punishments. An offender was given a fair chance to defend himself or herself against the charges before the punishment was awarded and also given a free hand to choose the mode of punishment he would like to undertake. To conclude it can be justly remarked that the judiciary was guided by the truth during those hoary times than by self and power as we see prevalent in the courts of modern time.