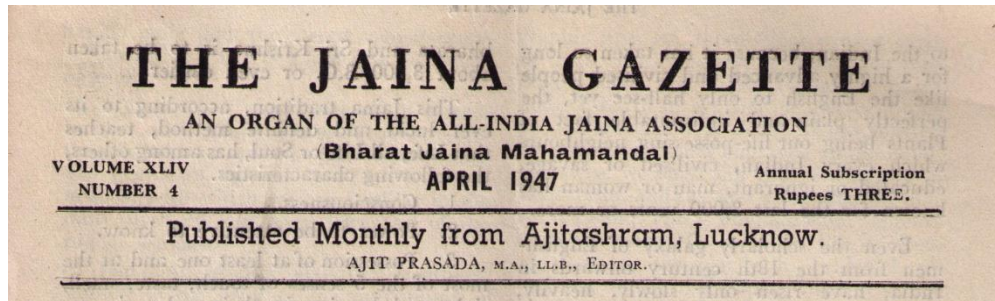


Rare Articles ► [1900-1950]

Jain Plantology



The following essay was first published in April 1947 in **The Jaina Gazette**, Vol. XLIV (No. 4), pp. 49-52, including an additorial note titled "Whether a Tree Has a Single **Soul** or Many?".

Jain Plantology

[The article published below was written by **J. L. Jaini** over twenty years ago (i.e. 1926, Editor HN4U) . A careful reading and thinking over it will, we hope demonstrate to our readers the folly of uselessly tramping over grass or vegetable growth, and will induce them to refrain from the fashionable indulgence in lawn tennis or badminton on green lawns. The childish and foolish habit of plucking leaves, flowers, and the unnecessary cutting of trees should also be avoided —Editor of The Jaina Gazette].

The October, 1926 "Overseas" contains an interesting and illuminating article, "*Anchored Animals*," by Major Fancis Yeats-Brown D.F.C. It is interesting to the English people because of its novelty. But it is interesting to the Indian, because it has taken so long for a highly advanced and civilised people like the English to only half-see yet, the perfectly plain and indisputable fact of plants being our life-possessing neighbours which every Indian, civilised or savage, educated or ignorant, man or woman has known for the last 3,000 years or more.

Even the scholarly galaxy of Englishmen from the 18th century onwards in India, have risen only slowly, heavily, through mountains of fogs of skepticism, misunderstanding, ignorant criticism, and hasty misrepresentation to a knowledge of Brahmanism and Buddhism.

But a still more important and ancient system of thought and philosophy is yet almost a sealed book to the western world. This system is **Jainism**. The marvelous feature about it is its transparent lucidity. There is no conception in it, which if rightly seen, is not a gem of pure truth, testable by anyone in his or her everyday experience. The philosophy of Jainism in its most essential lines has been handed over to humanity *without change* from at least 3,000 years ago. Twenty-four teachers taught Jainism: the first Lord Adi- (is Adam a distant and distorted echo of Adi?) Nath or [Rishabha Deva](#) in [Ayodhya](#), in the united provinces in North India, untold years ago; the last, Lord [Mahavira](#) in Bihar and Bengal in the 6th century B.C. The 24th teacher or guide ([Tirthankara](#)) was preceded 250 years earlier by the 23rd, Lord Parsvanath, whose hill, the Paresnath Hill in Hazaribagh, is well-known to all English officers of Bengal and Bihar. The 22nd Tirthamkara was Lord [Neminath](#), who was a cousin and contemporary of Sri Krishna,

the Lord of love and song and the flute, who is one of the most famous incarnations of the deity in Hinduism. I refrain from taking the Jaina sacred tradition further back in time, as for the present purpose it is more than enough to show that the Jaina teachings are at least 3,000 or even 5,000 years old, if the date of **Mahabharata** and Sri Krishna is to be taken about 3,000 B.C. or even earlier.

This Jaina tradition, according to its ever lucid and definite method, teaches that life, all life or soul, has among others, the following characteristics.

1. **Consciousness.**
2. Power to be attentive to know.
3. Possession of at least one and at the most of the five senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing in their order, *i.e.* an embodied soul possessed of the sense of hearing must have all the senses; one having sight must have at least four; one with smell, must have taste and touch also, and every one must have at least the sense of touch. It is easy to remember this by going in the human face from the chin upwards to tongue, nose, the eyes and the ears.
4. Power of the **body**, sense or senses, and mind if any, for, there are some-sensed beings who possess the mind, while others do not possess it, *i.e.*, are mindless.
5. Respiration, which is the eternal tick-tick of the clock of life and the last sound of which is the death-knell of our existence, when we say of a man; He has breathed his last.
6. Age, or the span of life, *i.e.* the limit of time as to which the clock of life is wound, and at the close of which it ceases to beat or function. The man has numbered his days. The clock is to be rewound; *i.e.* the soul is reborn, or resurrected or reincarnated.

Now all the, above characteristics are inseparable from any embodied soul. Plants also have all these:

Regarding 1., 2., 3.: A plant has consciousness and knowledge both these being confined to the sense of touch only. For a plant has no other or higher sense. It cannot taste, smell, see or hear, In all experiments of Sir Jagdish or in any other experiments by anyone else, it will be found clearly that every plant, the mimosa or the mighty oak, has no more than the merest consciousness or knowledge which is confined to the sense of touch only.

A plant "eats" and "sleeps" in a way, but we must guard against attributing to these *impulses* or *instincts* of all living beings any degree of thought or depth or significance, with which we are familiar in the daily lives of our own selves or of the higher animals.

The plant, in all its activities, is entirely limited to the orbit of the functioning of consciousness through Touch only. This must never be forgotten, otherwise instead of knowledge we shall be grasping ignorance.

Regarding 4.: The plant has the power of the body and of the sense of touch that is, it has the vitality of body and touch. Its soul or consciousness manifests itself only through its force of body and its power of touch. It has no mind, and therefore, it is devoid of the power or force of mind.

Regarding 5.: It has respiration. It inhales and exhales. This is clearly shown by experiments.

Regarding 6.: It has its age-span also. It is evidently born and dies after a period of time.

The above is quite clear. The point is that all this lies clearly and definitely stated in Jaina books of an antiquity of at least three millenniums. This is most elementary. But more details of plant life are given in the same Jaina books. I am not scientist enough to prove or disprove them by measurement and mathematics in the laboratory, but the general reader may find this old Jaina plantology of interest and suggestive of further steps in scientific research and therefore it may be given here.

Jainism believes clearly in two classes of embodied souls.

1. Mobile (called *trasa*), which can move at will for pleasure or fear, such as man, monkey, dog, cat, cow, bull, bee, ant, worm etc.
2. Immobile (called *sthavara*) fixed, "anchored" is a graphic title, *i.e.* those which cannot move at will.

The *sthavara*, or immovable embodied souls are of five classes:

1. Earth bodied; earth in a primitive mound. Stone on the pavement is dead, lifeless matter. This must be clearly engraved on the mind, otherwise we shall fall into the fallacy of hylozoism and say that all is life, all matter is living. This is obviously and demonstrably wrong. There is no life or consciousness in the pen with which I am writing, or in the paper which you are reading, or the chair on which you are sitting. The test is roughly this: so long as the earth or stone has the capacity of growing, it is a soul which as embodied in earth, *i.e.*, has the particles of earth as its body, has the sense of touch just like a plant and no more nor less, has respiration and age-span.

2-4. Similarly there are water-bodied, fire-bodied and air-bodied souls, which have for their bodies only the elementary particles or molecules of water, fire and air. They all have one sense, *viz.* the sense of touch and that only. They have the vitality of body, of contact, of respiration and age-span.

5. The plants or vegetable (*vanaspati*). The chapter in Jainism dealing with these is long and interesting. It recognizes no less than 24 lacs (24,00,000) *yonis* or wombs or nuclei for the birth or production of plants, as against 7 lacs (7,00,000) each of their one-sensed brethren the earth, water, fire and air-bodied souls.

Then the vegetable or plant kingdom is divided into

1. plants which are inhabited by many souls, called *sadharana* or group-souled plants, having one body but many souls, which are born together breathe, eat and function and live together and die together. These are called ***nigoda***. They are also of two kinds with 7,00,000 nuclei each:
 - those which have never left this condition of life. They are *nitya nigoda*, ever-group-souled,
 - those which did leave, this lowest condition of embodied existence, were born as something better and higher, but have again returned or fallen back to this condition. They are *itara nigoda* or re-group-souled.
2. plants which are inhabited by one soul only, called *pratyeka* or individual-souled plants. These again are of two classes:
 - host-individual or *sapra-tishthita pratyeka*, *i.e.* plants which are hosts for parasites;

- non-host-individual, or *apratishthita pratyeka*, i.e.; plants which have no parasite.

More details about these may be found in higher Jaina books, e.g. the [Tattvartha Sutra](#), [Jiva](#) Kanda, *Daavala* etc. In conclusion, two important points may be noted:

1. Every soul fills the whole of its body. All souls, human and sub-human, plants etc. are essentially the same. The soul has got a wonderful capacity of contraction and expansion. But it always occupies fully its whole body, whether big or small. An ant being reborn as an elephant is the same soul in each divergent body. That is, the size, form or character of the body does not alter the essentials of the soul. Each embodied soul may be called the unit of manifested life, if the sum-total of life is carefully considered to be the total of all embodied and disembodied souls.
2. The discoveries of Sir Jagadis do not demolish the partition between organic and inorganic, between the living and the non-living . They only label as living, what was not considered hitherto quite as such.

Neither Jainism, nor Hinduism rightly understood, has ever countenanced a conclusion which would justify a negation of this eternal and unremovable distinction between the living (*jiva*) and non-living ([ajiva](#)).