JAINA ATTITUDE TO ANIMAL WORLD: IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE IN INDIA

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The paper aims at focussing attention on the cultural attitude of Jainas towards the animal world in its totality including birds, insects and fish. Although the historicity of Jainism is believed to date back to the pre-Aryan times in India, it emerged as a religion in the fifth century B.C. with Mahavira, the last and the twenty fourth Tirthankara (Divine teacher) of the Jainism, to be adopted and practised by an influential section of the Indian Society. There after with the passage of time and growing royal patronage, it further evolved itself into a powerful philosophy of life which has its bearing on millions of people in India.

The meaning of the term jaina is to be understood from its Sanskrit origin which means the conqueror of desires and in whom the soul asserts the supreme and perfected powers. Such a person is called jina and his followers as Jainas. Jainism acknowledges twenty four Tirthankaras or the divine teachers whose chronological names along with their symbols are given in Part-II of this paper. The Bhagwata Purana, an ancient scripture
of the Hindus corroborates the Jaina tradition beginning from Rishabha, the first of the twenty four Tirthankaras. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observes that the Yajurved mentions the names of three Tirthankaras: Rishab, Ajit Nath, and Aristanemi. The Bhagwata Purana endorses the view that Rishabh was the founder of Jainism. ‘The Ahimsa doctrine preached by Rishabh is possibly prior in time to the advent of the Aryans in India and the prevalent culture of the period.’ Some scholars are of the opinion that the Jaina culture is identical to the prevedic Dravidian culture. Both these cultures are believed to be ‘simple, unsophisticated, clearcut and direct manifestation of the pessimistic outlook’. The Jaina philosophy is generally pessimistic i.e. it believes that life is full of misery. The optimistic attitude of the vedic Aryans is totally different from the Jaina pessimism.

Apart from the traditional account, the last two Tirthankaras, namely Parsava and Mahavir are well known historical personages. Dr. Herman Jacobi in his book ‘Sacred Books of the East’ (1984) has incontrovertably established that even before the times of Mahavira, Jainism was very much in existence under the leadership of Parsava who is known as the twenty third Tirthankara.

The historicity of Parsava is unanimously accepted as having preceded Mahavira by 250 years. The tradition has it that the parents of Mahavira were followers of Lord Parsava who preached four Vows:

1. Not to kill,
2. Not to lie,
3. Not to steal,
4. Not to own property.

Mahavir added a fifth vow of chastity to the vows enunciated by Parsava. Dr. Herman Jacobi observes that ‘the followers of Parsava especially Kesi who seems to have been the leader of the sect at the time of Mahavira are frequently mentioned in Jaina sutras in such a matter of fact way as to give us no reason for doubting the authenticity of records.’ The historical event of the acceptance of fivefold ‘dharma’ of Mahavira by 500 followers of Parsava at ‘Tumgiya’ further reinforces this view.

In Jainism ethical discipline is regarded as having supreme importance. It has two aspects: One relates to spiritual purification by pursuing the doctrine of Karma which is free from any divine intervention. The individual has to suffer the consequences-good or bad - of his or her
thoughts, words and deeds. **Karma** in Jainism is regarded as a subtle matter or form of energy which affects the soul as a result of one’s thoughts, words and deeds. The Second aspect relates to the social obligation of an individual. According to this, Jainism helps the individual to develop an attitude of equality towards all beings and inculcates a sense of sanctity for an individual and his possession.

Jainism believes in the cycle of birth and re-birth and emphasises the doctrine of soul. According to this the body is merely a cover for the soul. Therefore, the comforts of the body are considered as chains for the soul and as such should be shunned so that ultimately the soul may be liberated from the bondage of karmas and re-birth cycle. This metaphysical belief logically culminates into the concept of Ahimsa in Jainism.

Ahimsa is the foundation of the doctrine which basically recognises the inherent right of an individual to life; because every living being wants to live and does not want to die. This leads to the belief that no one has a right to destroy or harm any other living being. This Ahimsa is considered as the bedrock of all moral instructions in Jainism.

Albert Schweitzer in his book ‘Indian thought and its development’ (London, 1961 pp. 82-83) has observed that ‘the laying down of the commandament not to kill and not to damage is one of the greatest events in the spiritual history of mankind...so far as we know, this is for the first time clearly expressed in Jainism.’

Here two major questions arise before us:- (1) How a religion based on the principle of Ahimsa (non-violence) was followed by the preachers and followers two thousand five hundred years ago when most of the people including Aryans and Brahmins were non-vegetarians and the agricultural technology was not well developed?

(2) What attitude was adopted to the animal world in symbolic and practical form.

The explanation of these questions can possibly help us in understanding the Jaina attitude towards the animal world and its impact on the social life in India.

As stated above the concept of Ahimsa determines the entire attitude of the Jaina preachers and their followers. According to them any appearance of passions in an individual is considered as commencement of Himsa (violence). It means that any deviation from the fivefold path of
self realisation as stated above is **Himsa**. **Ahimsa** as defined in the Acaranga Sutra by Lord Mahavira is that ‘no living beings, no animate objects, no sentient being, no life should be slain or treated with violence, or tormented or abused or driven away.’ In the Avashyaksutra **Ahimsa** has further been conceptualised as not committing **Himsa** by thought, speech and action and it extends further to:

(a) 1. no **Himsa** by thought;
   2. not causing others to commit **Himsa** by thought;
   3. not approving **Himsa** by thought;
(b) 1. no **Himsa** by speech;
   2. not causing others to commit **Himsa** by speech;
   3. not approving **Himsa** by speech.
(c) 1. no **Himsa** by action;
   2. not causing others to commit **Himsa** by action;
   3. not approving **Himsa** by action.

In this way there are nine different ways by which **Himsa** is to be shunned and **Ahimsa** to be observed.

This strict adherence to the concept of non-violence in Jainism provides us a key to the understanding of their attitude towards animals including birds and fish. Without having this knowledge of the belief in the principle of **Ahimsa** it is almost impossible to have a clear concept about the evolution of their attitude towards not only the animal world but even the vegetable world which is also considered as having one sensed beings (Ekendriya Jiva).

The Jaina system as made applicable to the householders leaves some leeway for their practice. It is called as **Ahimsanuvrata** in Jainism, according to which certain latitude is granted to the Jaina householder from the practical point of view. Since it would be almost impossible to shun **Himsa** strictly in accordance with the Jaina tenets, a Jaina householder has to keep away from the deliberate commission of **Himsa** of the two sensed to five sensed beings. Even in the realm of one sensed beings (Jivas) i.e. the vegetable bodied, the air bodied, the fire bodied etc., he should manage to confine his operations in such a way that the existence of a very **limited** number of jivas is affected. The emphasis is, however, on alleviating the amount of injury and not on total relinquishment.
which is not possible without jeopardising the survival of man.

1. Jaina attitude as influenced by non-violent vow reflected in their food habits:

Influenced by the philosophy of Ahimsa, the Jaina community in India is completely vegetarian. Use of wine, meat, honey and such fruits which contain germs or insects is totally prohibited. The Jainas observe eating only in the day as they believe that eating in the night may inadvertently lead to killing of imperceptible insects. Some people are so strict that they do not even drink water during night. In case of illness they do not accept medicines after sunset. The 8th and 14th day of each fortnight according to Jaina Calendar are considered pious and on these days, even green vegetables are not eaten for they believe that these vegetables have one sensed Jivas. There are many Jainas who even go to the extent of not consuming eatable which are dug out from the soil such as potatoes, carrots, groundnuts, etc., for the simple reason that the process involved in taking them out involves destruction of millions of tiny insects. Many householders cover their mouths with a piece of cloth during nights so as to avoid any possibility of invisible insects or germs entering their mouths inadvertently. Killing of animals is forbidden not only for the entertainment of guests but even for adoration of Gods. In Jain households drinking water attracts special attention. The water pitchers are cleaned every day and kept in clean place in the house. The unfiltered water is never used either for drinking or preparing food.

2. Jaina Attitude influenced by Ahimsanuvrata towards animals.

The philosophy of non-injury to any living being has influenced the attitude of Jainas towards the use of animals. They believe that tying up the living beings is nothing sort of putting external pressure on their freedom to move and therefore this is considered as undesirable. Similarly beating an animal is considered as entering into the realm of Himsa as it is a reflection of one’s anger leading to causing injury to the animal by beating him. Overloading or putting excessive weight over an animal is also forbidden in Jainism. Even withholding of food and drink to the animals is considered as highly undesirable as it causes pain to them. Mutilating or sterilising of animals is also completely forbidden in Jainism. All these are considered as excesses (Aticara) which are considered as contrary to the principle of Ahimsa.
This attitude of love and compassion for all living beings finds its social manifestation in a custom which is observed every year in India on the day of Deepawali, the festival of lights. Those Jaina householders who own cattle not only clean them by giving them a good bath but decorate them and pay homage to them in the form of a ritual and not taking any work from them for a couple of days. This is observed by their Hindu brethren also.

A monumental example of this attitude can be found in the existence of a Hospital founded at Delhi (India) for the exclusive treatment of the ailing or wounded birds in the year 1926 under the patronage of a Jaina saint (Muni Shanti Sagarji Maharaj). The Hospital has a capacity to accommodate 5000 birds as indoor patients. No fee is charged from the owners of the birds for the treatment. But if they want to offer donations, the same are accepted. The birds, after cure, are not returned to the individual owners, but are set free. In case of the non-vegetarian birds like Kites, Hawks, Eagles, Falcons and Vultures, only outdoor treatment is given as meat or insects, etc. cannot be served to them as diet in this Hospital. For large birds like Ducks, Geeze, Cocks, Peahens and Peacocks, seven large wards have been set apart and one emergency and intensive care unit for the seriously ailing patients. Such birds as are invalid and are unable to fly are looked after by the Hospital permanently. Such birds include even those who though cured, are not prepared to fly away. All these birds the number of which is about 2000 are treated as permanent guests of the Hospital.

The Jaina community is running a few more such Hospitals in India on this pattern but the Delhi Hospital is the biggest. The French in their Guide De Routard have entered about this Hospital as ‘must visit this Hospital if you visit India’.

In the case of Munis (Ascetics) the principle of Ahimsa has been elevated to a higher level where it is considered as the first of the five Mahavratas. According to this Mahavrata (great Vow) even in dreams injury to all living beings - mobile and immobile, gross and subtle is forbidden. A monk has to extend active friendship to all living beings for the purpose of purifying his thoughts and curbing his passions. This involves complete caution in regard to his movement, speech, mental thoughts, handling of things, food and drink. Even while walking barefooted he is to see only eight or ten feet ahead and not allow his eyes
to wander here and there. This is only to ensure that the insects moving about on the ground may not get killed or injured. This is why the Jaina Monks do not undertake any journey after sunset so much so that they have to be extremely careful in selecting the place for attending to the call of nature lest they should injure the insects.

3. The Jaina attitude of love for Animals as reflected in religious symbols:

The Jainas believe that there were twenty four Tirthankaras. These Tirthankaras are identified by their distinguishing symbols which are carved on their statues. The following table would amply clarify this point how the Jainism has tried to identify its philosophy of Ahimsa with various levels of life in different forms i.e. from one sensed beings to five sensed beings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Name of Tirthankara</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Rishabh Nath</td>
<td>Bullock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ajit Nath</td>
<td>Elephant</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sambhava Nath</td>
<td>Horse</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Abhinandan Nath</td>
<td>Monkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Sumati Nath</td>
<td>Ruddy goose (A legendary bird known as Cakva in India)</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Padma Prabhu</td>
<td>Lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Suparsava Nath</td>
<td>Swastik (A ritualistic Symbol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Chandraprabhu</td>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Pushpa Danta</td>
<td>Crocodile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Shital Nath</td>
<td>Tree (Nigella Mass - A legendary tree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Shreyansa Nath</td>
<td>Rhino</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Vasupuiya</td>
<td>Buffalo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Vimalnath</td>
<td>Pig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Ananta Nath</td>
<td>Porcupineoe</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Dharma Nath</td>
<td>Sceptre (A symbol of religious discipline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Shanti Nath</td>
<td>Deer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Kunthu Nath</td>
<td>Goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Arahanta Nath</td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Malli Nath</td>
<td>Pitcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Munisurwata Nath</td>
<td>Tortoise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Nami Nath</td>
<td>Redlotus</td>
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Shri Vijyanand Suri Swargarohan Shatabdi Granth
22. Neminath  Conch (Sankha used for & lowing in temples)
23. Parsava Nath  Snake
24. Mahavira  Lion

The above table shows that out of twenty four Tirthankaras fourteen are identified with animals of different varieties, two with birds and fish, three with vegetable world and the rest with miscellaneous inanimate objects. In this way we see that 19 out of 24 symbols have been drawn from the animal and vegetable kingdom.

This attitude is further perceived in their general approach even in the matters related to the sub-conscious world. This point can be exemplified by a mythological belief among the Jainas that the mothers of each Tirthankara had 16 dreams in their sleep before giving birth to their respective divine children who subsequently attained the divine position of Tirthankara. In these sixteen dreams, four relate to animals i.e. an elephant, a bullock, a lion and a pair of fishes besides other dreams which include even smokeless fire. This may be only a mythological story but it does reflect the attitude of Jainas towards the sanctity of the animal world.

**IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE**

In the Second part we have seen that the attitude of Jainas conditioned by the philosophy of Ahimsa is mostly dominated by don’ts and very little do’s. Therefore it has also had its simultaneous effect on the way of life, vocations, eating habits, social customs etc., observed by the Jaina community as such.

In India the Jaina community is considered essentially as a business community. In trade and business also the Jains generally do not indulge in such trades as may entail any such activity which may ultimately lead to killing of animals. The agriculture, animal husbandry and cattle rearing are not their main planks. This is perhaps the reason that even in business activity they are mainly confined to general merchandise, textiles, manufacturing of medicines, books and stationery, food grains etc.

The Jains observe 8 days in a year in the rainy season as the days of religious significance known as Paryushana during which they either observe fast or avoid eating such things which may be considered as involving violence of even one sensed beings. This strict adherence to
Ahimsa has influenced their social mingling with only such other communities as are nearer to the observance of the concept of Ahimsa as far as possible in the Indian social spectrum.

Prompted by this spiritual content of the respect for life and non-injury to the living beings the Jainas have provided for inns (Dharmashalas), Schools, water huts, and free medicine distributing centres throughout India at various important places and specially the places of pilgrimage.

There are many communities even among Hindus who are vegetarian. Some of these communities who have had soical intercourse with the Jaina community in trade and business have also been influenced by the Jaina concept of Ahimsa in their food and drink habits. Most of Vaishya community among Hindus are affected by this Jaina attitude. The Jaina schools which are open to other communities have also contributed to a great deal in this regard. In recent history, Mahatma Gandhi who was born in a Vaishya community of Hindus is an outstanding symbolic example of the influence of Jaina philosophy of non-violence taught by his Jaina Teacher in school days which changed the entire course of Indian political history.

This attitude has also led the Jainas to preserve as much of the vegetable kingdom as possible by utilising the minimum for their own essential use for they believe that the vegetable world also has life. In this way, Jainism provides a stronghold for the modern environmentalists.

**JAINA ATTITUDE AS REFLECTED IN LITERARY FOLKORE**

The Jaina literature abounds in the mythological legends depicting the practice of Ahimsa in the lives of Tirthankaras and other influential members of the Jaina community. One such legend related to the life of Neminath, the 22nd Tirthankara of Jainas is quite popular in the Jaina households. Neminath was a Kshatriya prince who was to marry a princess namely Rajul of the neighboring principality. When the marriage party was proceeding towards the palace of the bride in a royal procession, Neminath, the bridegroom happened to glance at an enclosure wherein a good number of animal heads had been kept ready for being butchered and served in the form of various delicacies to the
honourable guests attending the marriage ceremony. On knowing this, Neminath ordered an immediate release of the animals and leaving the marriage procession headed towards the Jungle and became an ascetic. Pictures of this folklore are commonly available in the Jaina households. Such legends in different forms are available in plenty in the Jaina literature in respect of other Tirthankaras also.

In Jaina literature, with a view to infinence the followers of Jainism, the consequences of committing Himsa have also been depicted as the doer undergoing severe penalties in the subsequent cycle of birth and rebirth in different forms. Such fables include such ordinary householders also who indulge in the trade of egg selling, animal butchering and fish catching. As opposed to this, there are such stories as well in the Jaina literature in which Himsa was considered necessary for protecting the party of monks resting in a forest from the lion or attacking a kindgom for protecting the honour of a Jaina ‘Sadhavi’ (Nun) or a household lady from the forcible abduction by a lustful person. This literature gives out a message of rational and practical application of the concept of Ahimsa in the real life of a Jaina householder. This is how the general attitude of the Jainas towards the other human beings, animals, birds and even vegetable kingdom has been evolved through the centuries of metaphysical belief and practice in real life.

V - CONCLUSION

The above brief discussion leads us to arrive at this fact that the Jaina attitude towards all living beings is that of conservation and not of consumption. It aims at protecting and preserving them rather than destroying them for their own use. One of the five great vows propounded by Lord Mahavira is non-acquisition (Aparigraha). This vow helps the Jainas in restricting their desires for acquiring physical assets. In this way it also helps them not only in not killing the animals for their use but also preserving the vegetation and mineral resources for the mankind. Thus the Jaina attitude goes a long way in preserving the ecological balance of nature as inherited by mankind. Spiritually also the Jainas believe that violence (Himsa) in any form degenerates the soul whereas the non-violence (ahimsa) elevates it and ultimately paves the path of salvation (Moksha) for the follower.