

JAINA RELIGION—ITS PLEA, PRACTICE AND PROSPECTS

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Religion and State are equally essential for the total progress of the society. While State looks after and provides the external or material needs of man's life just as it creates conditions and climate which facilitate Religion to operate, the Religion, in turn, organises, shapes, and nourishes man's internal or spiritual life. The State currently has acquired extra usefulness and importance since the entire mankind is madly persuing after material prosperity. But a time may come when the State can be wholly dispensed with as the man would either function under the dictates of his intuition or in accordance with the mandates he receives from the front-ranking leaders possessing genuine spiritual learnings. The most exalted goal for any society, according to Jainism, can only be the "spiritual excellence". The religion which shapes the man from within is coeval with the existence of the "world" itself.

The meaning of "religion" is comprehensive. It is in fact the religion that keeps the whole world well-knit and saves it from disintegrating. It secures peace and happiness here and emancipation from all fetters hereafter. It is concerned not merely with life after death : it indeed has much to do with the life that is lived here and now. On the operative side, it includes various types of disciplines and duties towards family, society, nation and the country as is inherent in the concept of the fourfold Saṅgha-organisation in Jainism. Only the supreme spiritual knowledge and its fullest expression can be the *summum bonum* of any human being's life. As this aim is to be attained in the existence as a human being and as this body is the only vehicle for that purpose, its efficiency is to be maintained as far as possible and the social set-up as well as the cultural environment should be such as would conduce or contribute to the fulfilment of this aim.

To a question why must one do good to others, a materialist has no logical reply. He will simply say (and finish with it) that the tendency is ingrained in human nature. But the spiritualist's thinking on that point is decisive and clear. To him the world is the manifest form of an all-pervasive God; that there is unity everywhere; and eternal happiness as well as internal bliss follows from realising this unified identity which in turn is realised by wiping out personal ego. This attitude makes it inevitable for everyone to leave aside his own self-centeredness and place other's good above his own. This philosophical attitude is also advocated by some Western thinkers among whom Kant and Greene are prominent. The problem of morality and immorality should be thought of and decided from

this viewpoint, based it must be on the axiomatic truth that we all are essentially one and the same.

I begin with this viewpoint because it is the largely shared one, indeed by adherents of several different religions. However, the Jaina viewpoint also, and equally, is capable of explaining the whole phenomenon of existence in the same convincing manner. According to the Jainistic standpoint, the Law of Karma is inexorable and ruthless in its operation. However, one must not desert duty towards his fellowmen by simply saying that an individual gets what he is destined to get according to his own past *karmas*. No religion denies, much less Jainism, to cultivate virtues as far and as much as is possible. It is the Jaina dictum that, as a category, the individual soul, as self and substance, is identical with every other being's soul. The difference that divides one being from the other is the Karmic covering—enveloping the soul of each individual. Thus do we see disparity between the more universally accepted view of God and the Jaina view of the individual self as a noumenonal being. However, underlying this disparity, there is basic unity which makes it obligatory for everyone to perform his duty towards others and subject oneself to discipline which strengthens the foundation and structure of the whole social edifice. Compassion, in this case, has its own role to play. This can be carried out only if the body, which is the main vehicle, has “operational worthiness” and is in good order. This implies maintenance of its fitness, not for comforts and pleasures but for effectively meeting with the responsibilities towards society, that is to say, to fellow beings. The ultimate consequence of the basic logic of all the religious systems is essentially the same. Verily, no religion can afford to be anti-social.

Jainism advocates suspension of aliment unto death when one finds that one's continuing practically has no usefulness either for himself or for the society. This can also be interpreted to mean that the body is for others as much as for one's own self. There can, then, be no other justification worth the name. But let me also warn against equating Jaina's voluntary disintegration with suicide which is solely negative and self-destructive. If the ethical grounds of this Jaina practice are called into question, one would also want an answer why the Siddha Yogis of the Brahmanical religious systems also follow it in their own way of course. They too wound up their mortal coil when they notice that their mission on this plane is over.

The innermost secret of any religion, and for that matter that of Jainism, cannot be comprehended through sense-organs, nor can it be reached by intellect and mind. Its total perception is possible only after “realisation”: which is why we find that the “seers”,—the Ṛṣis and Arhats,—of all religious systems preached Law only after attaining realization of the “Ultimate Truth” or “Ultimate Reality”, whatever its nature may be. Assuredly, perfection in preaching is in no other way possible as human imperfections block the right perception.

It is in the very nature of a human being, whether he is a Brahminist or a Jaina, that he must strive hard for securing power, knowledge with happiness as end in view. No sensible human being has, and can have, any other ideal or objective. Discontent for the present conditions and environs and the attainment of the most ideal conditions and situation, thus is the motivating force behind all his activities. Intellectual development (which is the helping factor in his activities) is the distinguishing quality that places man above all sentient and conscient beings. He possesses the faculty of discrimination which he employs in distinguishing, separating truth from untruth. This unique equipment enables him to put forth effort to obtain mastery on Nature. He is not bothered by the fact that he is at the moment enslaved due to nescience, for he is confident that he possesses potential which he can bring to use, when he wills to work out his own absolute freedom. Hankering for this highest goal—ultimate liberation—is innate in him, providing, according to Jaina reckoning, he is a *bhavyā*, or eligible for emancipation.

Indeed there exist persons (though extremely few in number) who by nature or training are averse to the pleasures of the senses. Their perception is at once clear, penetrating and comprehensive. They are continually endeavouring to realize the eternal truth or abiding essence of the entity, through calm of mind and control of the sense-organs. Some do succeed and then they are designated “supremes”. The rise and fall of a nation can be linked up directly with the presence or absence of such supermen.

When broadly divided, religion falls into two categories, namely eternal, or basic, and transitory, or changing. Ideology on which it rests or is founded is its permanent and principal limb; while the rites, rituals and ceremonious celebrations, symbols and images, temples and accessories etcetera, collectively form its subordinate of superficial limb which is renovated from time to time. The philosophy which, alongwith other things, treats of the relationships of soul with that of the complete annihilation of the *karmas* resulting into final release from the bondage, is for certain the “basic” one. What can happen if top priority is assigned to religion in the organisation and management of one’s own life? If we so did, the materialists state, we would from the start be deemed “failures” from the worldly standpoint. This doubtless can happen if sufficient discrimination is not exercised and no balance between the mundane and the supramundane pursuits is maintained. A balance then should be the guiding principle in all activities and actions. The Jaines called it *viveka*, or *sadviveka*.

Various theories are advanced a proposal of the origin of the religious instinct in man. According to some, the religion was invented to explain the grand nature of the organized universe, the supposed (or imagined) miraculous background of certain awesome and sometimes inexplicable phenomena, and the concept and operation of Godhood behind these two. According to others—and

this is an anthropological view—it was traceable to the worship of one's departed relations who supposedly remain in a perpetually blissful state "somewhere" and from there help their kinsmen living on earth. There is, in fact, no dearth of theories on this subject. But it is almost certain that the religious instinct is as old as the human existence. If there is Bondage, there must, correspondingly, be Release and hence Freedom also. It is here where Religion comes in the picture.

Just as there is the presence of one or the other eternal element in the concept of Religion, this likewise is the potential for its realization. The secret of religion is beyond comprehension of mind; it can be cognised only by meditation for which it is necessary to strip the mind of the layers of impurities. Such and similar considerations have found place in the framework of all religious systems of the past and present.

In all the religious systems we come across three common principles, namely the Cosmic Law (God, or alternatively, the Law of Karman), indispensability of adequate knowledge (*jñāna*) of its form and nature for securing bliss, and the necessity of restricting and finally annulling the ego.

Two paths lead to this goal, namely, *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti*, (inertia and activity). Knowledge alone and nothing else can constitute to the first: Pious activities, penance, etcetera the second. From the highest standpoint, religion can be one and only one. A variety of them which we see only represent its branches ramified in different regions, times, and differing local conditions. This then leads to a conclusion that future religious systems, too, will be preaching the same basic concepts and truths in a manner of course appropriate to those times. Time and again "path-makers" or "way-showers" are born to reorientate and reinterpret the Eternal Law and its corresponding form of religion to the then existing society. The cycle will go on for ever. Jainism, too, is no exception nor does it so claim. It rather boldly states about the periodic degradation (*avakāḷana*) and resurgence of "dharma" as Śrīmad Bhagvad-Gītā from the brahmanic standpoint does.

Mankind at present is marching towards basic unity in all spheres of knowledge and directions. In the field of politics, the ideals and principles formulated by the United Nations Organisation are accepted and being followed as far as the national interests of an individual member-country permit. Almost all the countries are now-a-days economically interlinked. The frequent and often intimate contact between peoples of different sections, countries and continents, lends credence to the idea that the whole mankind is after all one and only one; this feeling is getting stronger. When the conditions such as these prevail everywhere, isolationism in the field of religion is not only impossible but also dangerous. Time has now come to bid goodbye to all the narrow, sectarian, conservative and reactionary thoughts in the domain of religion. Comparative studies of different religious systems of the world are now being undertaken with the result that the

mind and heart now tending to become large and liberal. Knowledge, power and bliss have now become the birthright of man. It is a sheer delusion (stemming from ignorance) that only a religion of a particular nation or a country is valid to the exclusion of others. To accelerate the speed of a man's progress and to make the external unity stable and sound, religious outlook shall have to be catholic, comprehensive, and right. Emphasis shall have to be shifted from routine ritualism to the purifying programme of the mind. To achieve this aim the will have to be steel.

It is a belief voiced by several and shared by some that the religions are on their way to extinction as they have served so far no really useful. But this belief has no real basis as can be seen from what the philosophers and scientists in the West have for some time been saying. Day in and day out various serious publications are seen in the market that testify to the fact that the distance between religion, pure philosophy, and science is daily diminishing as indeed it logically must.

The majority of writers in the West are now unanimous in proclaiming that man is the architect of his own fortune, that he himself has independently to work out his own redemption, that there is rebirth, that there is something which is sentient, conscious and distinct from the physical body which by itself is insentient and that there is an inviolable moral law which is supreme. The concept of the future religion will be vastly broader, accomodating as it will the knowledge of all kinds inside it as also a central ideal and guiding philosophy that all activities of times and climes from part of, and contribute to, the furtherance of the "universal religion". The final goal of life of each and every human being should be to achieve the ultimate goal of life here or anywhere and now or in any time. There is no other option.

Universal religion, as Wood indicates, can be one only, and Jainism has qualifications and intrinsic potential to play a significant role in its formulation. Therefore, it follows that we must be even-minded towards all the promulgators of the religious systems and to the sacred writings of all religions. However, tolerance alone is barely sufficient. At best it is a passive if not totally negative an approach. On the contrary, we must adopt what is best in all of them and assimilate it in life so that it becomes our very way of life. Practice, and not profession, should be our aim. What Haribhadra sūri had said is valid for all times. He had said to the effect that he possesses no partiality for either Vīra or Kapila. He will accept and absorb everything from any religion whatsoever, that stands to reason. Dogmatism deserves dismissal. Faith is one thing; fundamentalism is another.