KARMA

In the logical development of the Hindu philosophical systems, the doctrine of Karma occupies a conspicuous place. The earliest effusions of the Aryan people, when we first find them settling on the bank of the Indus, are prayers to nature-gods, invoking them to protect themselves and their flocks and to help them in conquering their enemies. Their ceremonial consisted of offerings of oblations to the manes of deceased ancestors, sacrifices to the powers of nature and praises of the benign forces which they had personified. This the later Hindus called the Karma-mārga, the path of works, in contradistinction to the Jñāna-mārga, the path of knowledge. The Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā treats of Karma in the above sense and the sense of duty. The Dharma-śāstras prescribe many ceremonials and duties under the head Karma. The Vedānta sharply distinguishes the Karma-mārga from the Jñāna-mārga.

One of the truths of Philology, which strikes us more than others, is that a word continually develops in ideas with the advance of culture and civilization. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus uses the word ‘Logos’ in the sense of the reason of the world. His analysis of the world ultimately leads him to the principle of Becoming, Change. In his view, this change is accomplished in accordance with definite relations, and in a succession that remains always the same. This rhythm of events he calls by various names. Destiny, Order, Reason
(Logos) is his First Principle. These predicates, in which physical, ethical and logical order in the world appears as still identified, prove only the undeveloped state of thought which does not yet know how to separate the different motives. The Stoics had a little different view of the Logos. According to them the entire universe formed a single, unitary, living, connected whole, and that all particular things were determinate forms assumed by a divine primitive power which was in a state of eternal activity. In their view, the deity, as the actively productive and formative power, is a kind of Logos; also the rational part of souls is a con-substantial emanation from the divine Logos. The Christian idea of Logos is largely influenced by the Stoics' doctrine; only—there are added to it the appeal to and the supremacy of authority. Right knowledge was, therefore, not possible except through divine revelation. All knowledge is, as Numenius said, the kindling of the small light from the great light which illumines the world. Later Logos gets entirely personified. Origen teaches that God begets the eternal Son, the Logos, as the sum-total of his world-thoughts, and through him the realm of free spirits, which, limited within itself, surrounds the daily as an ever-living garment.

I have given the above illustration simply for confirming the idea that a word, with advancing civilization develops in meaning. I need not go into the discussion of the various meanings that were attached to Karma at different periods of its history. My present purpose is only to present to the readers
a complete view of the subject of Karma as the Jainas have understood it. What is Karma? Before answering this question, it will be necessary to know what the philosophical view of the Jainas is in regard to the Cosmos. They teach that the total reality known as the Cosmos had no beginning and will have no end. More correctly speaking, the Cosmos did not come out of nothing and will never be annihilated. The substance, in the abstract sense, of the Cosmos is permanent; its activities are changing every moment. If Reality means the highest generalized idea we can form of whatever we come to know, it is the Being, Esse. It being the most abstract idea, it is not divisible. We may say it is one, without a second. Truly speaking, numbering does not apply to abstraction. If, however, Reality means concrete substance having essentially different activities, different not only in degree but in kind, then we have two grand divisions of the Universe: the animate world and the inanimate world. In the Jaina view, the inanimate world consists of matter, two kinds of ether, known as Dharmāstikāya and Adharmāstikāya, and space. The animate world consists of innumerable kinds of living beings, each being a centre of complex forces. Time may be figuratively called a substance, really meaning a generalized mode of thought in regard to the activities of beings and things.

The universe is not merely a congeries of the above mentioned substances, heaped together and set in activity by an extra cosmic creator but is a system by itself, governed by laws inherent in its
very constitution. Law is not to be understood in the sense of a rule of action prescribed by authority, but as a proposition which expresses the constant or regular order or certain phenomena, or constant mode of action of things and beings. It is not a command but a formula to which things or beings conform precisely and without exception, of course, under definite circumstances and surroundings. Jainism, therefore, is not a theistic system in the sense of the belief of the existence of a god as the Creator and Ruler of the universe. And still, the highest being, in the Jaina view, is a person and not characterless, qualityless Being like Brahma of the Vedānta.

Every living being, from the minutest to the highest embodied one, is the centre of innumerable activities. In any particular being, these activities determine the stage of its evolution. It has its biological or vital activities—those of drawing the necessary nutritive elements, assimilating them, also of growth and decay, and feeling in a way the influences of the forces of nature. Under certain circumstances and relationships, certain influences act upon it in an incongruental way; and still, in course of time, it develops a wonderful adaptibility.