

THE MESSAGE OF THE RELIGION OF AHIMŚA

Prof. A. CHAKRAVARTI, M.A., I.E.S., (Retd.)

Of all the Indian Darśanas, Jainism is the only one which has the principle of Ahimśā as its central doctrine. The other Darśanas also speak of Ahimśā whenever convenient but they never offer such loyalty to the principle of Ahimśā as is found in Jainism.

What is the message of Ahimśā to the modern world ?

Before answering this question we have to remember the important aspects of modern thought. The most dominant factor of modern thought is Science. It is clear nowadays that no idea which does not satisfy the bar of scientific reason has any chance of being accepted by modern thinkers. Religious ideas mainly based upon irrational traditions and superstitions will all be brushed aside as of no great importance. In this respect Jainism is on a safer ground. Jaina thinkers from the very beginning emphasise the importance of reason in all matters connected with religion. In fact, they prescribe as the first and most important condition of religious development, complete freedom from popular superstition. Samyak Darśana or Right Faith according to Jaina thinkers requires freedom from three types of superstitious beliefs or three moodahs. These are described as Loka Moodah, Deva Moodah and Pāṣaṇḍi Moodah,—popular superstition, superstition about popular deities, and faith in false ascetics. These three types of superstitious beliefs must be first got rid of by a person before he starts on his spiritual path. Unless he discards various superstitious beliefs he cannot begin his spiritual development freely unhampered. Belief that bathing in a particular river will wash off one's sins, going round a particular tree will promote one's virtue, or climbing up a particular hill will produce spiritual development are all avoidable impediments on the way of true belief in the nature of Reality. Whenever there is an epidemic in the society, people try to appease the deities by offering animal sacrifice. Such an attempt to propitiate certain deities is based upon the false belief that these deities are the real cause of the epidemic disease, such as Cholera, or Smallpox. Such practices are not only useless and ineffective but prevent men from discovering the true cause of such disease and preparing suitable and effective remedies. Hence this second type of false belief is extremely ruinous to society, if not completely eradicated. The third type of false belief is

based upon superstitious faith in all sorts of Samnyāsins. Very often undesirable crooks put on kāsāya, the robe of a samnyāsi, and trade upon the simplicity of unthinking people. These false ascetics very often mislead the people as to true form of religion. They cheat the people to secure their own benefits. Getting rid of all kinds of superstitious belief, a person gets firmly established on the foundation of Samyak Darśana, Right Faith. Getting firmly established in Right Faith or Samyak Darśana is the first step firmly established in Right Faith or Samyak Darśana is the first step in spiritual development. But that alone is not enough. Right Faith no doubt places a person on the correct path. But that alone cannot lead to complete spiritual development. This right faith must lead to Right Knowledge or Samyak Jñāna. Equipped with correct faith one must try to secure correct knowledge of things in reality. Unless one acquires an accurate knowledge of things and persons, unless one understands the true nature of oneself one cannot achieve anything.

Therefore, an accurate knowledge of the nature of Reality is a necessary condition to spiritual development. These two alone, right faith and right knowledge, would not be sufficient. Acquisition of correct knowledge must lead to correct action. What is the use of correct knowledge if it is not going to guide you in action? Hence correct action in the light of correct knowledge is a necessary condition for complete spiritual development. Hence Jainism maintains that all these three aspects must be present in a person if he is to reach his spiritual goal. This truth is expressed by the Jaina Thinkers in the following statement :

सम्यक् दर्शनज्ञानचारित्राणि मोक्षमार्गः ।

“Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct together constitute the path of Salvation.”

In this respect Jainism differs from other Darśanas, some of which emphasise only faith, some emphasise knowledge and some emphasise conduct. Faith or Bhakti alone is considered enough to lead to salvation. Knowledge alone is supposed to be sufficient to achieve salvation. Conduct or activity alone is considered to be enough to secure salvation. Such one-sided religious beliefs are dismissed by the Jaina Thinkers. They maintain that all the three must be present together to achieve the purpose. Very often the following analogy is quoted.

Salvation implies escape from Samsāra which is associated with birth, old age and death. Every person aims to reach a place which is

free from birth and death. Such a desire is similar to the desire of a sick man to cure himself and attain normal health. Such a desire to be effective, the sick man must have implicit faith in his doctor, whom he consults. Next he must have a clear knowledge of the medicine prescribed by the doctor and thirdly he must take the medicine according to the instructions given by the doctor. Faith in the doctor, knowledge of the medicine, and taking the medicine as prescribed, all these three are necessary to eradicate the sickness and to secure normal health. Similar is the acquisition of spiritual health, which could be secured only by the co-operation of the three items of Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct.

What is the conception of God in Jaina Religion ? What is the nature of God worshipped by the Jainas ?

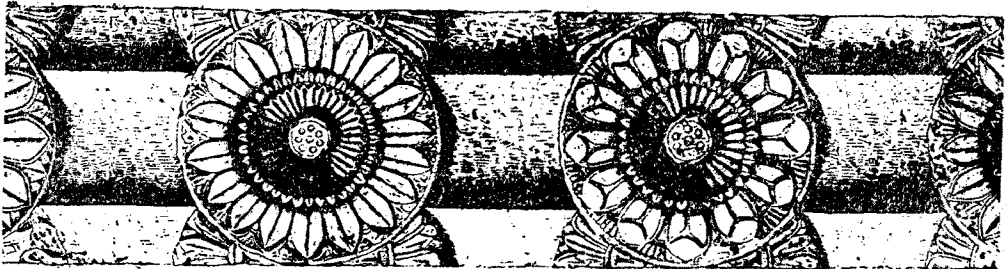
Jaina Darśana, just as Sāṅkhya Darśana and Mīmāṃsā Darśana, does not believe in the doctrine of creation or a Creator, or an Īśvara, and yet believes in a Divine Being for whom the Jainas build temples and conduct religious worships. What is the nature of their God whom they worship ? He is worshipped because he is the Revealer of the path to salvation. One who reveals the path to salvation and leads man along that path towards the ultimate goal must certainly be adored.

What is the qualification of such a Leader and Revealer of the path to salvation ? He must first of all be pure and free from all spiritual defects. How does he acquire such freedom from spiritual defects ? Such freedom he acquires by completely eradicating and destroying all such root causes by adopting a strenuous path of spiritual discipline or yoga. He is able to destroy all infirmities associated with the pure spiritual self. After destruction of all karmas by yogic dhyāna and severe tapas he acquires, Omniscience. He becomes the Lord and the Revealer of Dharma. Being a sarvajña, an all-knowing Supreme Being, he qualifies himself to be the leader of Humanity. Directing man towards the goal of perfection, attaining omniscience and spiritual perfection for himself, he does not go self-satisfied. Since he is equipped with the supreme principle of Ahimsā, Universal Love, and unstinted reverence to life in general, the Lord, the Revealer of Truth, goes about the world preaching to people the spiritual truth that he achieved for himself. Such a divine person is interested in the welfare of all men irrespective of caste or race. Every person is entitled to learn truth. Therefore the Jaina leaders of Thought

permitted all people irrespective of social distinctions to approach them for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. Such a great leader of thought perfectly pure in himself, endowed with infinite knowledge and unbounded sympathy and love for all living beings is worshipped as the saviour of mankind. His spiritual purity is so sublime and grand that in his presence there is no evil or hatred. A tiger and a lamb move about in his presence without fear or ferocity. Such a divine person is worshipped by the Jainas as their God. He who is the leader on the path of salvation, he who is completely free from all karmas, and he who is all-knowing, such a person is worshipped by all.

The rules of conduct prescribed for the Jainas are all based upon the fundamental principle of Ahimsā or Universal Love. These are five in number. Ahimsā, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha. Universal Love, Truth, Non-stealing, Sexual Purity, and Renunciation of all possessions. These five principles are prescribed for both the Ascetics as well as Laymen, the householders. In the case of the ascetics these five are called Mahāvratas, the five great vows which are to be observed absolutely without any limitation. In the case of the laymen or the householders these are prescribed with qualifications and limitations. The first and the most important is Ahimsā or Universal Love. This positive principle implies expression of reverence for Life without any limitation. All living beings deserve love and sympathy from man. Some people confine these to human beings alone. But in Jainism there is no such limitation. No life should be injured and a living being in suffering must obtain relief and safety from man. The present day practice among the Jainas is marked by a sincere endeavour to avoid harm to all living beings including insects. But the importance of man as such is almost forgotten by the modern Jainas. They have not realised the exact significance of Dharma Prabhāvana, propounding the dharma in which the Tirthaṅkaras engaged themselves after obtaining Kevala jñāna or Omniscience. In preaching Dharma they did not confine themselves to a selected few. There were no chosen people for the Tirthaṅkaras. All persons whether they were Suras or Asuras had equal opportunities of knowing the truth. Not only the Āryans but also the Rākṣasas had the privilege of knowing Ahimsā Dharma. It is clear that their object was to create a casteless society and also a classless society. The object of the founders of Jaina Dharma was to avoid as far as possible the economic distinction between the rich and the poor and the social distinction between the high and the

low. These ideals have to be achieved by following the fifth vow prescribed for mankind, the vow of Aparigraha. The Jaina Ascetic according to this principle will not own any property as his own. Himself without any possession as his own, the ascetic depends upon the layman or the householder for his sustenance. Sustained by the society, the ascetic devotes his time and energy for promoting the cultural development of society as a whole. The layman or the householder is the main stay of social organisation. He maintains the economic stability of society. It is incumbent on him to see that wealth does not accumulate in a few hands. He must prevent poverty and misery in concentrated form. In order to secure such an economic harmony he is expected to follow the main economic principle based upon the moral idea of setting apart a small portion of his wealth for himself and devoting the rest of his possessions for the benefit of the society at large. Such a principle when strictly followed as a moral ideal will successfully avoid accumulation of wealth on the one hand and concentration of poverty on the other, and will promote a healthy social organisation based upon the principle of welfare of all human beings and the whole society. Such an ideal when sufficiently promoted and practised by all individuals will naturally lead to a social development, and there will be no possibility of a clash between Capitalism and Communism. In such a society there will be no clash between groups of people. Such a society will create a condition of Universal Peace and general happiness.





आदीश्वरप्रभुनी मुखमुद्रा : धातुप्रतिमा : अकोटा संग्रह (गुप्त समय)

Head of a bronze statue of Ādiśvara : Akoṭā hoard (Gupta Period)

वडोदरा म्युजियमना सौजन्यथी]

[तस्वीर : डॉ. उमाकान्त प्रे. शाह



चामरधारिणी : धातु-प्रतिमा, अकोटा (आठमी सदी आसपास)
Female chauri-bearer, bronze, Akota hoard c. 8th Century

चंद्रादरा मयुर्जितमना सांज्ञन्यथी]