A Reflection on the Life of Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra

Lord Mahāvīra appeared as a great ascetic, a religious teacher, a philosopher, religious reformer and the last of the twenty four Tīrthaṅkaras, wandering with the retinue of his monk,—disciples from village to village, from town to town, from city to city, throughout North India, extending from West Bengal up to the united kingdom of Sindhu-Sauvīra, and preaching religion to the people of all social grades, belonging to heterogeneous faiths, expounding and interpreting developing and systematizing the metaphysical aspects of Nirgrantha Dharma by refuting the arguments of his own followers and those of the people at large on the religious and abstruse philosophical doctrines through his holy teachings, partly in the forms of questions and answers, partly in that of dialogues, legends, numerous parables, familiar similes, analogies and incidents of their daily lives.

He has developed and systematized the fundamental principles of the doctrines Nirgrantha Dharmalaid down by his predecessors on a firm ground by making some improvements on them, as their moral precepts demanded a deeper metaphysical foundation necessitated by the religious conditions of his time.

There was no fundamental difference between the Laws preached by Lord Pārśvanātha and Lord Mahāvīra, because both of them pursued the same end. So the development of the metaphysical side of Nirgrantha Dharma was a historical necessity due to the existence of strong oppositions of heterodox religious sects, having different faiths, such as, Brāhmaṇīsam, Ājīvikism, Buddhism, Cāravākism Parivrajakism, Vānaprasthisn, those of Anyatīrthikas, etc. and the followers of Lord Pārśvanātha and that of Jamalin his own disciple.

In such a condition of religious firmament Lord Mahāvīra reformed and consolidated the entire Nirgrantha Sangha on a solid foundation of metaphysical principles by absorbing the followers of Lord Pārśvanatha, into his Saṅgha and strengthened it by converting, initiating and admitting those of other sects and common people to his order.
Dr. J. C. Sikdar

In this respect he only followed in the footsteps of his predecessor and erected a great edifice of Nirgrantha Dharma on the foundation laid by the latter. He persisted in carrying out his mission with his best effort and attention and courage and brought it to a successful conclusion and passed away with glory, entrusting his work to be continued by his devoted followers to perfection.

A Reflection on his ascetic life Vairāgya (detachment) of Mahāvīra

If the thought on Kāmini-Kaṇcana (woman and wealth) goes away from the mind of anyone, then it will be devoted to the realization of paramātmā (Supreme Soul) and then he who is bound by Karmas can be free, but he who is averse to paramātmā is bound by Karmas, so one must be anāsakta (detached from the worldly life). If there is no vairāgya (detachment) in anybody, he appears to be a straw and vulture like person. The study of the life of Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra reveals that a strong divine feeling of detachment and dispassionateness to the worldly life arose in his soul, so he renounced the world at the age of thirty. He became free from the attachment of Kāmini-Kaṇcana of the royal family. He was dispassionate, his soul became anxious to realize the divine knowledge, truth and reality and paramātmā like a mother with intense love for her child. He did not want anything but the attainment of spiritual realization of paramātmā. The world appeared to him as well and he felt that he was sinking down into it. He regarded his relatives as foreign people from whose association he desired to flee away, and actually he left the world. He did not think at all that he would first, make all provision for his family, then he would leave the world and practise austerity and meditation on Supreme Soul. Like a good and industrious farmer he made all efforts to irrigate his field of spiritual life and next he took rest at night, on the rise of his divine feeling for renouncing the worldly life, and he did not look back to his relatives and home, etc. with a feeling of attachment. He tore up all worldly ties and practised severe austerities and meditation for the attainment of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana (Omniscience and Omni-self-awareness).

The worldly people die in the nets of their own Karmas like the silk-worms. So long as one does not know paramātmā the world is false and non-eternal. Then the man who forgets paramātmā and always says: “This is mine, this is mine”, sinks down into the world, being enmeshed in the nets of Kāmini and Kaṇcana with their alluring charm. He becomes so ignorant in Māyā (illusion) that he cannot fly away from the worldly bondage of Karma, although there is a path for flight. After realizing paramātmā, if one leads a worldly life, the world is not anitya (non-eternal). Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra became free from the nets of the worldly attachment to Karma by renouncing the world and realized paramātmā by practising severe austerities and meditation for twelve years at Tīmbhaga gaon on the bank of Rjukula.

It is difficult to practise austerity in the worldly life as there are many hindrances on the way to spiritual realization. That is why Mahāvīra went to lonely and quiet places to practise austerity and meditation and exerted himself
to attain Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana. He was a true monk, for his life was dedicated and devoted to the realization of paramātmā after his renunciation of the worldly life beset with Kāmini-Kāncana.

He had eagerness (vyākula) for spiritual realization, so it was possible for him to attain Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana. In the ascetic life Sādhusanga (association with monks), Vivekajñāna (knowledge of making distinction between sat and asat-eternal being and non-eternal being) and Sadguru (good preceptor) are essential for the spiritual progress. Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra had all these three factors in himself.

Asecticism of Mahāvīra

Mahāvīra thought it necessary to get cured of the disease-vikāra (mental perversion) by observing austerity and meditation, having gone to a lonely place, after giving up the Kāmini-Kaṇcana, as there was no danger from them there. So he became successful in his ascetic life. In the first stage of asceticism one must practise austerity and meditation to attain spiritual strength and power from paramātmā, then only he can lead the worldly life; at that stage Kāmini-Kaṇcana or Rāga and Dveṣa (attachment and aversion) cannot do anything harmful to him. Curd must be made in a lonely place, then butter can be made out of it by churning process; it will float on water if thrown into water, but milk-like mind gets mixed up with water, being involved in the worldly affairs.

He realized this danger, so he left the world for spiritual realization. He held paramātmā with both hands, having renounced the worldly life, not like the worldly being, holding one foot of God with one hand, while keeping another in the family life.

Meditation must be practised in mind, in the corner of the house and in the forest. Lonely place is necessary for the observance of tapah (austerity).

As long as the seedling of a plant is there, there should be raised a fence around it to protect it, otherwise cows and goats, buffalos, etc. will eat it up. If the trunk of the tree becomes big enough, then there is no need for fencing it any more. Even if an elephant is tied to it, the tree will not break down. If one can make the trunk of the tree strong, there is nothing to worry for its destruction. Lord Mahāvīra first protected his ascetic life in this way by putting up fencing of moral conduct and became strong enough like a big tree after his attainment of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana on the bank of Rjukūla. He first tried to attain vivekajñāna by making distinction between sat (real entity) and asat (unreal entity). Paramātmā is sat (eternal and real) and all others are asat (non-eternal and unreal). He attained this viveka and knew paramatma as real entity and all others as unreal. There arose the awakening of this idea or thought of viveka in him, so he had the desire to know paramātmā.

Vivekajñāna arises due to the distinction of sat and asat. The Supreme Soul or Dravya (Substance) is sat and other things are asat. If there is nivṛtti (cessation) of desire for worldly objects in mind, there arise viveka and consequently the knowledge of tattvas (reals or principles of reals) in it. And mind
travels to the sphere of paramātmā. If one desires to have the shadow of it, mind easily attains the fruits—dharma (religion), artha (means-object), Kāma (desire=material satisfaction) and mokṣa (liberation).

It is the moral duty of a monk to withdraw his mind from attachment and aversion (Rāga and Dveṣa), for Kāmini and Kārcana are non-eternal. To know paramātmā is knowledge, not to know him is ignorance. So there must be earnestness on the part of the Yogi for the realization of the Supreme Soul. Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra had both vivekajñāna and eagerness (vyākulata) and other potential factors in him to attain knowledge of paramātmā and to have its vision (darśana).\textsuperscript{11}

If anyone likes a sat, such as, physical pleasure, popularity, respect, money, etc. then there does not arise any desire in him to know paramātmā. If there takes place or is an analysis of sat and asat, there is a desire to do so. Mahāvīra had vivekajñāna of sat and asat\textsuperscript{15}, so he had the desire to know and realize paramātmā.

If anyone acquires real knowledge, he will feel the presence of paramātmā within himself. If the realization of paramātmā takes place in one self, his dehātmabuddhi (the thought that body is real) goes away; he moves as Jivanmukta (free even in this life). Mahāvīra had no dehātmabuddhi, as he attained the state of paramātmā himself. It is stated in the Āgamas that he became insensitive to the physical sufferings, when the wooden wedge was driven by a milkman into his cars and he withstood the bodily pains caused to him by various elements during his ascetic life.\textsuperscript{16}

There is fire in wood. (1) First work is to take than out fire from it by lighting it and then to cook food with it and to consume the same and (2) finally to get contentment are two things. The master had this belief in the existence of spiritual fire in himself. He took it out by him austerity and meditation and cooked him inner stuff of religious thoughts and ideas with it. Finally he consumed it with spiritual knowledge and became content with his spiritual realization.\textsuperscript{17}

There is no end of divine paramātmāhood. One should advance farther and farther, then he will realize it more and more. If anyone prays and meditates in a lonely place, he can realize paramātmā. One may sense the existence of it by studying the sacred books. But if he does not go deep into the sea of conscious by meditation, he cannot realize it. Mahāvīra meditated on paramātmā in lonely places in his ascetic life and realized the same.\textsuperscript{1} He plunged deep into the sea of consciousness by the practice of austerities and meditation, consequently he realized it. Thus, paramātmā revealed itself to him and he became one with it.

One can read and recite thousands of religious verse from memory (Sahasrāvadhami) but if he does not go deep into meditation with earnestness, he cannot realize paramātmā. He can befool the people by his pedantry and scholarship, but he will not realize it. The scriptures and religious books do not help him at all in the attainment of spiritual knowledge and power. How much one will study the scriptures? What is the use of vicara (discussion)
only? One should exert himself to attain paramātmāhood and do something, having faith in guruvakyā (the words of his guru). If there is no guru, there should be prayer with devotion and meditation on the self. One will realize paramātmā how it is. So long as one is not in the market, he will hear the noises or sounds coming from it. If he reaches it, he will clearly hear the words of the people, “take potatoes, give me money, etc.” There is sound or noise in the sea. If one goes near it, he will see how many ships are going or sailing, how many birds are flying over there, etc. Therefore, one cannot realize paramātmā by studying the canonical works and other religious books. There is a great difference between the act of hearing and that of seeing. After the realization of paramātmā, the books, scriptures, sciences, etc. appear to be as straws. Mahāvīra attained the divine power of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarsana by observing austerity and meditation thus he realized paramātmā but not by studying books.21 He was honoured by the people everywhere because of the power of paramātmā as manifested in and through himself.

Mahāvīra attained mahābhāva or Samādhi22 (highest spiritual state or condition) as the manifestation of paramātmā in his self on the bank of Ruṣikūla23 after twelve years of austerity.21 Without the realization of the Supreme Self there cannot be bāhva or mahābhāva. If a big fish comes out of deep water, it moves and splits up water, just like that Tirthaṅkara Mahāvīra attained different stages of spiritual development (Guṇasthānas) in his attainment of highest spiritual realization.

In conclusion, one’s spiritual life Karma or Sādhanā (act of austerity) is necessary to realize paramātmā. Meditation, recitation of religious verses, devotional songs, donation of gifts and sacrifice also are karmas. If one wants butter, he must make curd first out of milk in a lonely undisturbed place, then only he can churn out butter from it. There must be karma (act of austerity) and meditation for the spiritual realization paramātmā in a lonely place with great devotion. Mahāvīra observed austerities and meditation in quite places and realized paramātmā.

As samsāratatyaegin (world renouncer) Mahāvīra became pure like Mallikā flower without spot and attained pūrṇajñāna (i.e. Kevalajñāna), having the nature of simplicity of a child of five years, so he had no discrimination between man and woman.

Mahāvīra knew caitanya (Consciousness) by attaining it. So there took place his samādhi24 (Sailsi stage) in his meditation. Consequently he forgot the care of his body and physical pleasures and did not have any attachment for Kāminī or Kāma and Kancana, he did not like anything but the Supreme Self. He fell distress when he listened to worldly affairs. When he realized paramātmā by the act of austerities and meditation there did not remain vicāra (argumentation) in himself, but there took place spiritual sleep-Samādhi.26

Divine simplicity is the fruit of austerity of many births.27 If there is deceitfulness, it is not possible for anyone to realize the spiritual power. The man who has realized the Supreme Soul is childlike in simplicity. The study
of the life account of Mahāvīra reveals that he had divine simplicity. He was above all the three guṇas—Sattva (essence), rajas (energy) and tamas (inertia or mass) or all leśyds; purity and impurity were equal to him, as he was childlike in simplicity and behaviour. He dressed like a fashionable man when he was prince, then he became nude as ascetic and moved as a free man; sometimes he sat quite in meditation as an insentient thing in his ascetic life.

Pride or ego goes away in Samādhi stage only, but if an iron sword becomes a golden sword by touching a touch-stone, it is ineffectual to kill anybody, for there is then only the form of it, but not sharpness. Just like that pride or ego of Mahāvīra went away with the attainment of his Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana. Ego and pride consistute illusion or deceitfulness (māyā) Mahāvīra had no ego. With the attainment of his Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana it fled away, than there followed then attainment of his Samādhi stage. It is difficult to achieve this stage, there must not be viśayabuddhi (thought on worldly objects) of a person, but there must be cittaśuddhi (purification of heart or soul) for this objective of a Yogan.

After the attainment of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana or Samādhi, the body of the yogin does not often remain in this life, but the bodies of some yogins remain in the world for some time for imparting holy teachings to the people. The body of Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra and those of other Tīrthaṅkaras or the Avatāras survived for the benefit of the world even after the attainment of their Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana. After diggig a well, some destroy or sell out the baskets, spades, etc., while others preserve them on this consideration that their neighbours may need them for the same purpose. Such a great man like Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra who was compassionate for the suffering beings in the case of their miseries could not be selfish with this thought that he had attained his Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana, so nothing should be done for the suffering humanities.

An ordinary man is afraid of imparting holy teachings to the people in religion. There must be spiritual power as possessed by Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra like an Avatāra. Ordinary wood floats on water anyhow, but even when a bird sits on it, it sinks down into water under the physical weight of this small creature. But Bāhāduri wood itself floats on water and carries many people, even elephants also, to the opposite shore of the river when filled as a ford. Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra was the ford like Bahāduri wood for the suffering people in the sea of the human world to carry them over to the shore of liberation. The paid or appointed Ācāyas cannot deliver the goods to the people in their spiritual aspiration. They are themselves sectarian baddhajivas (Captive beings). If the guru (preceptor) is raw in knowledge, it is trouble for the guru as well as the šiṣya (pupil), the pride of the latter does not go away, consequently the tie of the worldly karmas does not get destroyed.

Mahāvīra had equal compassion (dayā) for all beings, but not māyā (attachment or illusion) for his own relatives. He had not this pride or ego that he was the guru; he was desireless. He always thought of paramātmā and
rendered a great service to humanity, having known that paramātmā is in all beings.

As it is very hard to attain Tīrthaṅkaraship, so it is harder and more difficult to impart holy teachings to the people in religion. The study of the life of Mahāvīra shows that if the spiritual power dawns on the ascetic life of a monk and commands him to preach religion, then it is possible to do so. Mahāvīra attained Kevalaṇjāna and Kevaladarśaṇa by observing severe austerities and meditation; so he could instruct the people in religion like Nārada, Śukadeva, Lord Buddha and other Indian holy Divines. Nobody will listen to the holy teachings of any preacher of religion who is not endowed with the spiritual power. The people are generally emotional, they may attend any religious congregation in lakhs, but they will forget very soon the teachings of the man devoid of spiritual knowledge and power.

If paramātmā manifests itself in and through Jīvatmā (finite soul) and converses with it, then only there will be the manifestation of divine power. There is force in it. Here lectures of the hired logicians and the so-called intellectuals devoid of spiritual power are useless. For some days the people will hear them, then they will forget them very quickly. They will not act according to the speech delivered by the so-called preachers of religion. But in the case of Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra endowed with spiritual knowledge and power it is observed that lakhs of people were attracted by his religious discourses in his time and they accepted Śramaṇadharmā in latter and spirit. Without the possession of spiritual knowledge and power nobody can preach religion and teach the people in it. The preacher will be a laughing stock, if he is devoid of spiritual power. How could the person who himself did not attain any spiritual knowledge and power teach others in religion? This will be like the showing of path by one blind man to another blind man for advancing forward, if he does so. If the realization of spiritual power takes place in anyone, the inner spiritual vision opens up in him automatically. Without this power, if any body imparts the religious teachings to the people, pride arises in his mind that “I am teaching the people”. This pride occurs due to ignorance. In ignorance it appears to him, “I am the subject.” But really paramātmā or enlightened soul is the subject. It has done everything, “I am not doing anything”. If this sense arises in a man, he becomes Jīvanmukta. Kevalin Mahāvīra was Jīvanmukta (free in this worldly life) after the attainment of his Kevalaṇjāna and Kevaladarśaṇa. He acquired these great qualities, so he taught religion to the people with his spiritual power in his time.

The world is big enough. How can one render service to the world without spiritual power, as it is not small. First he should realize the spiritual power in himself by observing austerity and meditation. If he can attain it, then only he can do good to the world, otherwise not. Until and unless the worldly business becomes less and less one forgets the spiritual aspect of life and he may think. “I am doing niṣkāma karma (desireless work).” But it becomes sakāma karma (work with a desire), as he gets involved in Karma and awwnts to be respected. Niṣkāma karma is very difficult to be performed with-
out spiritual power. Who will listen to him who has no spiritual power? Really speaking, karma is to be done for the realization of spiritual knowledge and power, then only one can do his desireless work. Mahāvīra first left the worldly life and worked hard for spiritual realization in himself. After the attainment of his Kevalajñāna and Kevaladārśaṇa by observance of severe austerities and meditation, he had done his desireless work of preaching religion to the people for their spiritual welfare with his spiritual power. That is why he could build up śramanic tradition on the basis of five principles—non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-possession on the metaphysical foundation.

Mahāvīra who had spiritually known and seen paramātmā by his Kevalajñāna and Kevaladārśaṇa respectively did not write the Sāstras (Scriptures). He was absorbed in his own spiritual thoughts. The Gaṇadhara scholars, having listened to his holy teachings, transmitted them from the ācāryas to the ācāryas and later on the ācārya-scholars had written down the oral scriptures passed by guru paramāparā according to their own intellect and learning, while going to reduce them to writing at Mathura and Balabhi Councils or elsewhere.

There must be the capacity in the preacher of religion for lokaśikṣā (people's education) in religion. Like the steamship Mahāvīra crossed the sea of the world and took others also over to the shore of liberation. What is the capacity of a man to liberate others from the worldly bondage. Only paramātmā can emancipate Jīvātmā from the worldly illusion. There is no other alternative saccidananda guru like Mahāvīra, Buddha, Ramakṛṣṇa, etc. Mahāvīra was the able mature guru. That is why he could liberate many people by enlightening them with his teachings in religion.

If there is divine command, there is nothing wrong in imparting holy teachings to the people. Nobody can lose them in such a case, if they are given by a spiritual teacher. If the ray of power comes to any one from the goddess of learning, such a power gets generated in him that the great pandits become small like earth worms before him, for the so-called pandits devoid of conscience are not pandits at all. Mahāvīra was self-illuminated light which enlightened many people with his spiritual knowledge and power.

If a lamp is lighted, many insects come to it in flights. There is no necessity to call them. Similarly, if there is the light of divine command in anyone, no call for the people is necessary that there will be his lectures at such a place and at such a time. Because of his magnetic attraction the people will flock to him in thousands and lakhs. The kings, the so-called Maharājas princes and the aristocrats all come to him in groups and batches. And they earnestly request him to know what he will accept from them whether fruits, sweets, rupees etc. But the Siddhapurusa says, “take them away, I don’t want that, I don’t like that.” Mahāvīra was the perfect spiritual guru having divine command, so the common people, kings, lords and others came to him in thousands and lakhs without any propaganda call for the religious congregation because
of his magnetic spiritual power of attraction in order to attend his religious discourses at many places in his life time. He did not accept any presents from the people except, of course, alms for his physical needs.

Does the magnetic stone say to the iron piece? "You come to me", it is not necessary to say so, the iron-piece itself comes to it of its own accord. The people came to Mahāvīra of their own accord because of his magnetic spiritual attraction, such a great man was not a so-called pandit. But one should not think that there was deficiency in his knowledge in any way. Can anybody attain red knowledge by studying books only? There is no end of knowledge in him who has attained the spiritual realization and divine command. The knowledge which comes from paramātmā does not get exhausted, Mahāvīra had inexhaustible knowledge, it came to him from paramātmā as a result of his spiritual realization attained by austerity and meditation.

If the person is not good, there will be no effect of his lecture or preaching on the people, in case he preaches religion. If an ordinary man delivers religious sermons, there does not take place any impact on the minds of the people. There must be the stamp of spiritual knowledge and power. The man who imparts the holy teachings to the multitudes of people must have the spiritual power. What Mahāvīra or the Buddha or Rāmakṛṣṇa did in the past, does anything of it exist in its original form at present? There is no benefit from his lecture, who has not attained the divine command. Mahāvīra possessed it, so he could make a great impact of his holy teachings on the minds of the people in his time. He led his followers to the path of jñāna (knowledge), darśaṇa (self-awareness) and caritra (conduct) to attain perfection.

Renunciation of Mahāvīra

A true ascetic must not possess wealth nor save it for his use. If there is divine love for paramātmā, there takes place the renunciation of karma. If there is shame, hate, fear, like and dislike (ragadveśa), passions (kāśaya), etc., in oneself, there is no possibility for him to attain spiritual power. Shame, fear, like and dislike, pride of caste, secret desire, passions etc.—all these are the ties for the worldly life; if they go away, then only one attains spiritual emancipation. Mahāvīra became completely free from all these bondages of karmas—physical and psychial karmas, so he attained spiritual emancipation.

Karma of Mahāvīra

Karma is ādikānda (first event) in the evolution of life. There cannot be any attainment or spiritual realization of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana or of paramātmā without sattva-guna, i.e., bhakti (devotion or faith), viveka-jñāna (knowledge of distinction) between real and unreal entities, vairāgya (detachment) and dayā (compassion). Mahāvīra was endowed with all these qualities. There is grandeur in rajuguna; tamahguna arises from it. Too much envolement in work leads one to forget paramātmā, for Kamini-Kaṇcana increase attachment (raga) in oneself. But it is not possible to give up karma (action) one’s nature will force him to work whether he wants it or not. So it is said that work must be done with non-attachment to the worldly objects,
Dr. J. C. Sikdar

i.e., not to expect fruit of action. Worship and meditation are not to be made for becoming lokamaṇya (to be respected by the people) nor for merit (puṇya). Mahāvīra practised austerities and meditation for not becoming celebrated nor for puṇya, but for Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana. Work as such is karmayoga, but it is difficult to be done. Only the man who has realized paramātmā can do work with non-attachment. Mahāvīra worked as such after his attainment of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana.

It is not possible for an ordinary man to give up karma; thought and action like “I think, I meditate”; also are karmas. Paramātmā is real, all other things are unreal, it is the subject, if it is realized, many social welfare works can be performed. So karma is adikāṇḍa. Just as the flower drops down after the fertilization of the ovary and the birth of the fruit in a plant, just so karmas of Mahāvīra got dissociated after his attainment of Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana. He meditated on his self, realized paramātmā, went ahead, plunged deep into the sea of consciousness to attain it, the light of knowledge and emerged from it with spiritual knowledge and power and vision. He attained consciousness and did not go out of step nor he renounced or destroyed karmas by counting one by one. He had so much divine love for paramātmā that the work which he did was meritorious.

He had two marks of divine love, viz. (1) he forgot the world; he was insensitive to the outside world and (2) his dehatmabuddhi (thought of body as real) went away, i.e. he had no love for his own physique. Without spiritual insight, divine love does not arise in oneself. There are symptoms of attainment of paramātmāhood, wealth of divine love, viz. viveka, vairagya, daya, sādhusevā or sādhuvaiwartya (service to ascetics), sādhusānga (association with ascetics), devotional recitation to paramātmā and truthfulness. Love for soul removes the sensual pleasures. Mahāvīra had love for soul, so he was free from the sensual pleasures. He was modest, hence he was high and noble, just as cultivation of crops is possible in the open low land, but not on high land, for water gets accumulated in the low land, just so he was modest in all respects in his ascetic life, even when he was provoked and charged by Gosala Maṅkhaliputta with censure at Śravasti. He enlightened the temple of his body with the lamp of his spiritual knowledge as a result of the union of his jivātma with paramātmā. He realized the truth “You are I and I am you, you eat, I eat, everywhere there is the existence of paramātmā, while house, family and sons, etc. are non-eternal.”

The Master knew that the world was karmabhūmi (field of action) so something must be done. Sadhana (austerity) is necessary, after this one takes rest just like a goldsmith after melting his gold in a melting pot. Mahāvīra had tenacity for sādhana and firm determination, he kept his mind fixed on paramātmā by withdrawing it from Kamini-Kaṇcana; he thought of paramatma only and enjoyed spiritual honey like a bee from flower to flower.

First, purity of heart is necessary in a sādhaka (practiser of austerity and meditation), then sādhana (austerity) is essential, next knowledge will arise
A Reflection on the Life of Tirthaṅkara Mahāvīra

in him as a result of purity of heart and practice of austerity. Many people think that knowledge and learning cannot be acquired without studying books. But the listening to the holy teachings is better than the study of books, the seeing of an object with one’s own eyes is better than the hearing about it from some body.

Mahāvīra had purity of heart and he practised austerity to attain Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśāna. He saw the vision of the realities of the universe as a result of his austerity and meditation. He became the great Tirthaṅkara by attaining spiritual knowledge and power through austerity and meditation without studying books in his ascetic life. All Āgamas were his teachings issued from his mouth. Many persons make long talk and say that they have performed all actions according to the śāstras. But their mind is attached to the worldly objects, wealth, honour and physical pleasure. They are busy with these objects. One may teach them religion thousand times. If time is not ripe for them, there will not be any success in these efforts to reach them religion. Pandits and Spiritual Men. Just as the kites and the vultures soar high up in the sky, but their eyes are fixed on carcass (sāva deva), just so the so-called pandits soar high up in the intellectual horizon, but their minds are set on Kāminī and Kāncana. Only pendency is unreal and useless similarly wealth, richness, honour and social position are also unreal and false. The words and teachings of those who are only pandits but have no faith in religion and paramātmā are confusing. Mahāvīra was not like the so-called pandits, for he had spiritual realization of knowledge and power. So his holy teachings were clear and concise and easily comprehensible to the people.⁴⁵

Classes of Men

There are two classes of men, viz. baddhajīvas (men in worldly bondage) and muktajīvas (liberated men). The latter is not attached to any illusion nor to any worldly object. The ascetic who is born free because of the knowledge and consciousness attained in his previous birth has his spontaneous flow of devotion, detachment to worldly objects and divine love in him like a fountain suddenly opened up from its concealed state by a little effort. Mahāvīra attained Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśāna by observing austerity and meditation as he had some progress in the path of his spiritual knowledge and consciousness acquired in his previous birth.

Pilgrimage and Mahāvīra

Mahāvīra never made pilgrimage for attaining puṇya (merit) like householder. He realized the truth that there was no need of going to the places of pilgrimage, if one acquired faith in his heart about reality i.e., paramātmā. At these places there existed the same trees with the same leaves as are found at other places. If one cannot attain bhakti (faith) by making pilgrimage, what is the utility of going there? Faith is only real and essential element for spiritual knowledge and truth. Mahāvīra had samyag darśāna (right attitude of mind or faith) which led him to samyagjñāna (right knowledge) and samyag-caritra (right conduct).
Mahāvīra as Religious Teacher

Tirthaṅkara Mahāvīra had no desires to be honoured by the people nor the desire for liberation nor the fear to be bound by the nets of Karma. He was the real renouncer of the worldly desires and objects, so he could impart the holy teachings to the people in religion, but it was not possible for the worldly people to do so. Although he had the finite non-eternal body after the attainment of Kevalitva, nevertheless, he was always in the state of Yoga; he attained Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana, even then he could come down to the worldly people and enlighten them in religion. Without renouncing the world and achieving the spiritual power one cannot perform the function of Ācārya as such. The people will say that this man is worldly and he enjoys Kāmini-Kancana secretly but instructs others that paramātmā is real, the world is dream-like and unreal. So they will listen only to the teachings of a Sarvatyāgin (renouncer of all worldly desires and objects). Mahāvīra was sarvatyāgin, that is why the people listened to his holy teachings and accepted him as a true Tirthaṅkara, having attended his religious congregations in thousands and lakhs.

Forbearance of Mahāvīra

The mental and physical forbearance of Mahāvīra was like that of the anvil of a blacksmith. Hundreds of blows of the hammer fall on it every day, still it is undisturbed and unreacting in nature. Like this the intellect of Mahavira is absolute (Kuṭṭastha). The bad people abused and tortured him in many ways during his ascetic life, even then he led quite unperturbed and peaceful life by practising austerities and meditations. He remained calm and observed forbearance in the different stages of his ascetic life with his unmoving mind like a steady and still rays of light of a lamp towards paramātmā. He was beyond ajñāna (ignorance) and jñāna (knowledge) as he attained Kevalajñāna (Ominiscience).

Nirvāṇa (Liberation) of Mahāvīra

Just as the dice can be preserved or broken by a goldsmith after making a golden image out of it, just so the body of a monk can be preserved for sometime or given up by himself. The body of Mahavira was given up by himself, while delivering religious sermons at Rajajrgha of king Hastipala of Pava in his last religious congregation with his followers, after the attainment of spiritual knowledge and power and the completion of his glorious mission of life as the Tirthaṅkara to a successful consummation, having left his immortal life to be worshipped by mankind.

References:

1 Bhagavati Sūtra 15. 1. 541; Kcārānga Sūtra 1. 158. 15. 17 Kalpasūtra, Fifth Lecture 109, 110, 111, 112, SBE XXII.
2 According to the Svetāmbara tradition, Mahāvīrā married Yaśodā (Ācārāṅga 15) but left the world later on due to his detachment to the worldly life.
A Reflection on the Life of Tirthaṅkar Mahāvīra

3 Bhagavati Sūtra, 15. 1. 541.
See Āvasyaka Malayagirivṛtti; Mahāvīra Carīyam. Guṇa Candra, Pra 4; Triṣaṭhisalākāpurṣa, 10. 3. 2.

4 Bhagavati Sūtra, 15. 1. 541.

5 Ascetic life of Mahāvīra as depicted in the Āgamas—Ācārānga, Bhagavati, Kalpasūtra, Āvāsyakacūrṇi, etc. reveals that he first attained spiritual realization and Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana.

6 Kalpasūtra, 120, p. 186; Tiloyapaṇṇatti, pt. 1, 701, p. 230.

7 Chatthena egayā bhunje adeva atthameṇa dasamenaṁ I duvālasameṇa egayā bhunje pehamāne samāhiṁ-apaḍinne I” Ācārānga, I. 9. 417.

8 Kalpasūtra 120, p. 186; Tiloyapaṇṇatti, pt. I, 701, p. 230.

9 ibid.

10 Refer to his ascetic life of twelve years as depicted in the Āgamas.

11 Bhagavati Sūtra 9. 33. 385.
“Siddhimajjhie niṭhiṇahi ragadosamalle taveṇa.”

12 Tiloyapaṇṇatti Pt. 701, p. 230; See Ācārānga Sūtra 1. 9. 417.

13 Bhagavati Sūtra, 2. 10. 118—119-20, 13. 4. 481; 20. 2. 665, etc.

14 Saddravyalaksanam Tattvārthasūtra, v. 29.

15 Mahāvīra attained Kevalajñāna and Kevaladarśana, so he attained the knowledge of paramātmā and consequently the vision of it. As Sarvajña (Omniscient) he could know and see all entities—life and the Universe.

16 Bhagavati Sūtra, 1. 3. 3. and its comm.


18 At Rādhadeśa (Burdwa, West Bengal) Mahāvīra was greeted by the people with disrespect, censure, threat and beating, etc.
“Aha duccara Lāḍha-macāri” Ācārānga, Adhyayana 1, Uddesa 3, gāthā 2, 1st Srutasandha.
“Duccarāṇi tattha Lāḍhehiṁ” Ācārānga, Adhyayana 6, Uddesa 3, gāthā 6, etc.

19 Bhagavati Sūtra, 15.1.541.

20 Bhagawati Sūtra, 15. 1. 541. Mahāvīra realized paramātmāhood on the bank of Rjukula after twelve years’ austerity and meditation. Ācārānga, I/9/ 417; Kalpasūtra, 120, p. 186; Tiloyapaṇṇatti, pt. 1, 701, p. 230.
50 Dr. J. C. Sikdar

21 No reference is found in regard to the study of the scriptures by him in his ascetic life, although there is reference to the existence and study of the pûrvas and the Aṅgas by the monks in his Sangha.

22 Châtathena egayā bhûnje aduvā atthamena dasamena egayā bhûnje pehamane samâhim apaḍiṇē Ācârânga 1/9/419.


24 Ibid. v. 678, p. 227; Ācârânga 1/9/417.

25 Ācârânga Sûtra 1/9/417.

26 Ācârânga Sutra 1/9/417.

27 As it is found in the case of Mahâvîra in his entire ascetic life.

28 Mahâvîra became a nude ascetic by giving up his devaduṣya. See Āvaśyaka, Malayagiri vr̥tti.

29 Āvaśyaka, gatha III ; Malayagirivr̥tti, page 267.

Mahâvîra was calm, silent and emersed in meditation as an insentient thing at Kûrmarâgaon (Kâmanchapra) in Bihar, when one husbandman charged him without finding out his pair of bullocks that he was intent upon stealing them.

30 After the attainment of his Kevalajñana and Kevaladarśana Mahâvîra went to Madhyamanagari from Írmbhaka gaon and delivered religious sermons in a great assembly attended by thousands of men and women. Avaśyaka, Malayagirivr̥tti, prathama bhaga, p. 300/1, ff.

31 He observed ahimsa strictly in the case of all beings as he had equal compassion for them. Ahimsa contains Daya. Bhagavatī Sûtra 2. 1. 92, 95.

32 He left his relatives and took to asceticism by cutting off the tie of māya for is relatives.

33 Once Mahâvîra told Gautama Indrabhûti that the latter and he would be as equal after the attainment of liberation.

34 He delivered his religious sermons to the great assembly of Madhyamâ only after the attainment of his spiritual knowledge and power.

35 Bhagavatī Sûtra 11. 12. 436; 9, 33. 380, 382, 383, 385, etc.

36 Ibid., etc.

37 As Jîvanmukta puruṣa he lived and preached his religion to the people. Its evidence is the continuation of Jainadharma upto the present day.

38 Bhagavati Sutra 2. 1. 92, 95.

39 See the Bhagavati Sûtra and other Āgamas for the reference to his making the people enlightened in religion.
40 King Seniya and queen Cellanā attended the religious discourses of Mahāvīra together with their retinue and thousands of people when Mahāvīra delivered his sermons at Guṇaśilaka Caitya in Rājagṛha. See Bhagavatī Śutra, 1.1.6. etc.

41 He was tempted by many ladies in his ascetic life, but he was free from sensual pleasures due to the firmness of his moral character. See Avaśyaka Niruykti, gāthā 461/2, p. 267 ; Avaśyaka, Malayagirivṛtti, p. 268/1 ; Mahāvīra Cariyaḥ, Guṇacandra pra. 5, pp. 145-146.

42 He was very modest in his ascetic life, even when censured, tortured and provoked by other persons. He even tolerated the arrogant behaviour of Gośalā Mānkhari with calmness.

43 Bhagavatī Śutra, 15, Śataka.

44 Bhagavatī deals with the non-eternity of worldly objects and life at many places.

45 Mahāvīra imparted his holy teachings in the language of the people, Ardhamāgadhī so that they could follow and understand them easily.

46 Kalpasutra 122, p. 198.