

ROLE OF JAINISM IN MODERN INDIA

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According to Jain Cosmography our present India is known as Bharatakhanda, situated in the Jambudvipa. It is known and designated as Bharatakhanda after the name of Bharata, the son of Lord Rsabhadeva, the first Tirthankara out of the twenty-four Tirthankaras of this "Avasarpini", a long aeon of time. The Jains have divided time i.e. the Kalacakra into two main parts known as 'Utsarpini' and 'Avasarpini'. Each of these is divided into six 'aras', corresponding to the spokes of a wheel. The first Tirthankara, Lord Rsabhadeva taught to the then living humanity the three Rs, i. e. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic besides 'Brahmi' and other 'lipis' to the human world. Thus the seeds of culture and civilization were sown for the future generations of the humanity.

Jainism is a very old religion according to the Jains. Lord Mahavira was a historical being, so also Lord Parsva and Lord Neminatha, the 22nd Tirthankara of the Jains. Lord Neminatha is said to be related to and contemporary of Lord Krishna Vasudeva of the Hindus. Taking Lord Rsabhadeva as the first Tirthankara and the time that has lapsed between these Tirthankaras as is given in the Sacred literature of the Jains. Jainism enjoys a hoary antiquity. There is reference to Jainism and its Tirthankara in the Bhagavata Purana of the Hindus. Not quarreling over its antiquity, we can safely surmise that the sacred land of Bharata is sanctified and purified by the trinity of three rivers in the form of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. These three great religions of India have gone a long way in

bringing about a cultural synthesis and have established and developed and shaped Indian Culture and Civilization. The cultural, social, economic and educational under-currents of these three streams have so undistinguishably merged with one another that it is next to impossible to pin point one or many things that has been solely contributed by one current only. The union of these under currents is indivisible. Each one ultimately aim at 'moksa', absolution or Nirvana. Call it by any name it aims at the same goal.

The pristine purity and spiritual attainment of Jainism is indisputable. Right up from the early records of ancient history and antiquity the glorious might and contribution of Jainism is beyond dispute. Jainism and therein can be included Jain monks, religious pontiffs, lay-men and women too who have added to preserve and sustain Indian Culture. The first Tirthankara, Lord Rsabhadeva taught his subjects cooking, building, construction, reading, writing etc. which enabled them to lead a happy social life. Kings like Kumarapala and Kharvel made Jainism a state religion. Personalities like Siddharaja patronised Jainism and gave impetus to literature, art, sculpture, painting, music etc. Even the muslim monarch Akbar listened to Jain pontiffs and encouraged Jainism in developing Indian culture. Jain Saints like Haribhadra Suri and Kalikala Sarvajna Hemachandra arya are too well-known for their literary accomplishments. Such Jain monks have tried their deft hand on each and every genre of literature. Jains have written Mahakavyas,

Kavyas, dutakavyas, samasyapuraka-Kavyas, dvisamdhana and saptasamdhanakavyas, puranas, grammear, works on rhetorics, kathas, akhyayikas, dramas, caritas, prabandhagranthas, scientific literature on astronomy, astrology, prosody, didactic literature, commentaries on Sanskrit works etc. etc. To illustrate this by mentioning a few of the outstanding works will serve the purpose. Such works are Trisatisalakapurushacaritam, Upamitibhavaprapancakatha, Siddhahema, Kavyanusasana, Ganitatilaka, Paumacariyam, Desinamamala, Kathakosa, Joisasara, Karalakhana, Ristasamuccaya, Paialacchlnamamala, Tattvarthasutra, etc. The Jains have written in all the principal languages of India. They have written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsa, old Gujarati, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada etc. South Indian languages owe a good deal for development as literary languages to Jainism and Jain saints. Apabhramsa language is the sole sphere of Jain authors. Jains have not lagged behind in art, architecture, sculpture, painting etc. The beautiful and world famous temples on Mount Abu, Acalgadha, Sammetikhara, Satrunjaya, Girnar are enough to show the patronage and enthusiasm given to art and sculpture. Even among lay men we have such historical personalities like Jagadushah, Vastupala and Tejpal and in our modern times Jain monks like Vijayvallabhsuri, the Kesari of Punjab, Agamodddharak Sagaranandsuri, Muni Kasturvijayaji, Bhuvanavijayaji, Jamburijayaji etc. and philanthropic Sheth Sri Kasturbhai Lalbhai.

Jainism is noted for activism. Its monks and nuns are ever vigilant and active. Buddhism that was born in India was propagated and promulgated outside India has been almost driven out from India; whereas Jainism has remained to this day in India on account of its Anekantavada, Ahimsa, and strict rules of conduct both for monks, nuns and laity.

Singing the past glory of a thing cannot be useful to us. The question that should haunt our mind is the roll of Jainism in our modern times. What can be its contribution in the development of India, culturally, socially, economically and spiritually.

The Sanskrit word for religion is dharma. It is derived from the root/dhr to sus-tain, to support and hence we have dharanat dharma ucyate. Jainism defines it as : durgation prapatanpranim dharyate its dharmah. All religions ultimately aim at absolution and it is to be attained by one's own endeavour as

atmana atmanam uddharet. So religion and spiritualism depends on an individual. Norms for this have been laid down but they cannot be rigorously pursued and executed.

Out of the four purusarthas of the Hindus Artha and Kama are of effect in the evolution of a state socially and economically. The world of to-day has not remained isolated. The world has become much more complex as well as narrow in its geographical sense. One cannot show apathy to any event that may happen at a place thousands of miles away. It is bound to take effect socially and economically. The food habits, the way of wearing dress both of men and women, the cinemas, the T. V., the press etc. are slowly, succinctly and imperceptibly mould the life of people in society. Let us take an example. The modern dress of ladies. One has to change the orthodox mode of thinking and accept this with standard's of decency in view of its usefulness, utility and urgency as it helps fast walking, climbing, running etc. Similarly taking food before Sun-set. Even though one wished in a city of Bombay for men and women in service it is not feasible on account of distance. According to the Hindus the present aeon is Kaliyuga and according to Jainism it is the fourth ara of the avasarpini. Things are bound to shape in this way willy hilly. What I want to derive from these stray examples is that religion has to evolve different norms otherwise the younger generation will go away from religion and be apathetic to it. Just as in our temples we have brought in electricity, just as for laymen use of telephone, radio, T. V. etc. can never remain a taboo, just as going abroad cannot be stopped, so also religion if it has to survive in the present circumstances, it has to evolve differently¹.

Jainism is equated with Ahimsa. In our modern times it is useful in its threefold aspects. Practicing Ahimsa, will help the country. Jainism has another 'Vrata' in the form of 'Aparigraha'. To-day people live and spend extravagantly because of black money. This 'aparigraha' will go a long way in moulding the life both socially and economically. If one has money and if he wants to spend why not give this extra money as donations to schools, colleges, Universities, hospitals, etc. Everybody has to be educated to-day. If money pours into such educational institutions, the society and the country is to benefit by it. Jainism has another 'vrata' in

1. There are ANUVRATAS for Shravak and Shravikas which they can practice according to their wish and circumstances. —Editor

the name of 'Brahmacharya'. By effective practicing this Jainism can contribute in reducing the size of the family. During the history of last two thousand years the population has enormously increased in the last century or so. Was India able to effectively control population owing to this important fifth 'varta'? Jainism should look at these socio-economic problems that confront our country.

Jainism was and is noted for its largeness of heart. It has flung its door open to all irrespective of caste, colour and creed. So it has no problem of untouchability. Personalities like Harkesbhali & Matarya could embrace Jainism and attain the goal of mortal life even though down trodden and in servitude. The vast monetary funds with persons, institutions can be channelised to help youths to get jobs, setting up of new industries etc. and reducing the problem of employment. Jainism had a glorious past and it can effectively curve out a still glorious future it can just accommodate the new values set up by the Government and change the routine attitude and perspective. The citizens are tempted to lead a free life, each illegitimately, indulge in a moral sexual life, eat and drink without restrictions and indulge in all sorts of sensual pleasures as a want of following five 'Mahavratas' according to Jainism, 'Pancasila' according to Buddhism and salutary 'vratas' like 'yama', 'niyama' etc. in Hinduism. Population explosion is the crux of the problem. As a result of this all the evils discussed so far cor-

rodes the life of individuals. Jainism can give orientation, guidance and pin point the dangers during the course of religious discourse in upasaras etc. For laxity in life, dress, drinks, foods etc. is even visible on religious occasions like 'Paryusana' also.

Thus to conclude, Jainism which has enjoyed such a glorious past in every sphere and walks of life can continue its past glorious heritage by playing the role of a religion which fosters aims, aspires for the goal that the present Indian Government endeavours to attain and realise. The 'vratas', the religious ceremonies, religious practices have to be so rationalised and re-oriented that they can well fit in with the change in time. Religions cannot remain isolated from society and economic life; it has to be dynamic and not static. Jainism should feel the pulse of changing time and its needs if it wants to translate its past glory into a permanent reality. In the past Jainism was embraced and encouraged by Kings as I think it could translated its well-known philosophy known as Syadvada or Anekantavada. This philosophy of understanding and respecting the view-points of others is the crux of Jainism. If Jainism in modern times is able to bring about a synthesis between its ancient doctrines and social, economic, cultural and political needs of our present century, then it will shine with its glory and grandeur.

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RELIGION

The art of religion is the best of all arts, the story of religion is the best of all stories, the strength of faith is the greatest of all sources of strength and the happiness of salvation is the finest of all pleasures.

JAINISM

Jainism is society-oriented and condemns individualism. It dispels false logic, it is true for all times and a destroyer of the darkness of ignorance.

—Rajendra Suri