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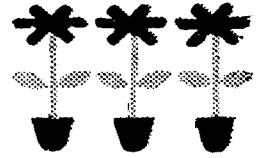
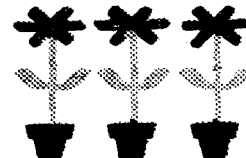
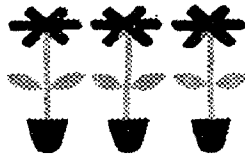
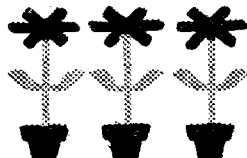
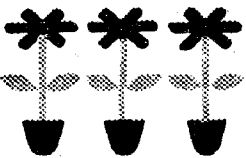
A SURVEY OF JAINA RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

So far as tradition preserved in the Jaina Āgamas is concerned, Jainism is to be traced to prehistoric times for its origin. To be precise, Jainism as a religious movement and philosophical attitude is undatable. In this respect, it is on a par with Vedic religion. It has been shown with overwhelming weight of evidence by Shṛīmat Anirvāṇaji in his *Vedamīmāṃsā*, recently published, that there were free thinkers contemporaneously with the Rīṣis of the Samhitās, who did not profess allegiance to the religion of sacrifice. Whatever that may be, Jainism, Buddhism and other protestant creeds took distinctive shape and structure several centuries before the Christian era, and this does not admit of dispute. Vardhamāna Mahāvīra was the elder contemporary of Gautama Buddha. Pārśvanātha, the immediately precedent Tīrthaṅkara, is admitted on all hands to have been a historical figure. Mahāvīra's family was attached to the creed of Pārśvanātha. There are evidences in the Jaina Āgama that Mahāvīra succeeded in winning over the followers of Pārśvanātha to his reformed church. Mahāvīra consolidated the monastic order as well as the lay community on strictly regulated code of religious observances. This explains the survival of the Jaina religion, though Buddhism disappeared from the land of its birth after the Muslim conquest in the 13th century. This is in a nutshell the historical background of Jaina religion and philosophy.

The division of the Jaina church into Svetāmbara and Digambara schools is believed to have taken place at the time of Bhadrabāhu who was a contemporary of Chandragupta Maurya. The points of agreement between the schools are overwhelming and those of difference are rather matters of detailed observance. There are some credal divergences such as the problem whether a woman is capable of achieving final emancipation (*mokṣa*), and such other minor issues which may be slurred over by dispassionate students of Jainism as bagatelle. In philosophy and ethics, there is enormous unanimity. The following are the cardinal doctrines of Jainism.

1. Soul and God :

The Jaina believes in the immortality of the individual soul which does not owe its origin to a Personal Creator or combination of natural forces. Jainism is frankly dualistic in so far as it distinguishes spirit from matter. Both of them have parallel existence. The soul is bound in meshes of matter and its freedom from matter constitutes final emancipation liberty. The soul



is consciousness compact, intuition, bliss and power, each infinite in its range. The limitation of knowledge, power and happiness is adventitious and accidental, and not historical events. In this, Jainism and Vedic religion are perfectly in unison. Its difference from Buddhism is fundamental. The Buddhist does not believe in unitary soul. But the Jainas are emphatic on the real unitary character of the self. Perfection is innate to the self which will manifest itself in its true character in the state of emancipation and the self will then realize its infinite knowledge, intuition, bliss and power. In one word, the self will become God. Godhood is the birthright of every self.

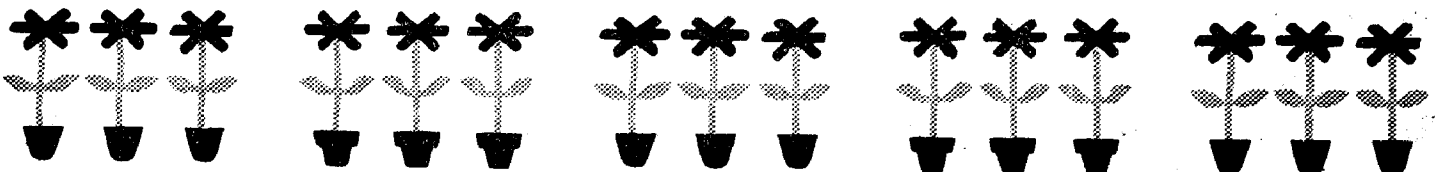
2. Ethics :

The Jaina is a believer in the five *mahāvratas*—non-injury (*ahimsā*), truth (*satya*), non-appropriation of what belongs to others (*asteya*), continence (*brahmacharya*) and non-possession and non-acquisition of surplus material goods, (*aparigraha*). These ethical disciplines can be practised in excelsis by those who follow the life of homeless wanderers. For the householder also these disciplines are compulsory, but can be practised with moderation and limits due to the exigencies of human life and conditions. But this is only a concession which can be transcended only in the life of complete renunciation. In the code of ethics, the agreement between the Jainas and Brahmanical schools is almost perfect. The difference lies in emphasis on practical application and observance.

The philosophy of *ahimsā* is liable to be misunderstood. *Ahimsā* must proceed from perfectly disciplined mind. All moral weaknesses, *pramāda*, are manifested in the animal impulses of anger, pride, deceit and greed, and unless these mental and moral weaknesses are completely overcome, mere practice of external code such as vegetarian diet and the like will not lead to the spiritual development. In one word, a man aspiring for perfection must be spiritually free from animal passions and in external conduct must follow the path of non-resistance to evil. All discomforts, inconveniences and lack of creature comforts must be endured without resistance and with infinite forbearance. This is of course the ideal which can be lived and fulfilled only by saints. But the householder also has no immunity from the moral obligation. Purity of conduct must be the exponent of perfectly pure mind.

Truthfulness is also a necessary concomitant of non-injury. Lying and deceit are resorted to by those who want to avoid the unpleasant consequences. The tyrant must be disarmed not by recourse to physical violence, but by infinite forbearance. Not a word of abuse should escape the lips of the saint. Pride and greed are the signs of moral weakness. They are the concomitants of the fear of loss, or the desire to be feared by the less fortunate creatures. This weakness must be transcended by the realization of the truth that infinite greatness in knowledge, power and self-possession are the natural heritage of the individual soul, and until this consummation is reached, one has every reason to feel humble and ashamed of the limitations. No pride of possession is legitimate and rational, because material power and wealth have their inevitable limitations. Only one who has risen above greed can be really great and noble. This is in sum and substance the ethical philosophy of the Jaina.

The concept of *ahimsā* is not negative. One has no right to take the life of another creature for his self-gratification. Life cannot be restored to the victim, and it is nothing short of brutish barbarism to indulge in self-pleasure at the expense of other creatures who have the



same charter of rights to live and work out their ultimate destiny. The tyrant is the worst coward, though he poses to be the boldest man. The true hero is he who has mastered the animal in him. The last Tīrthaṅkara was called Mahāvīra, the great hero, because he conquered the weaknesses of the flesh.

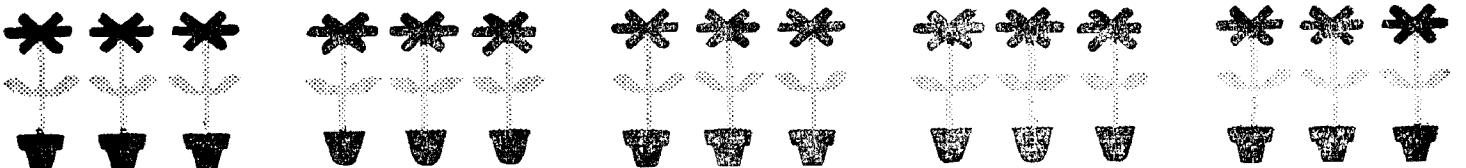
3. Religion :

In religion, the Jaina lays emphasis upon self-exertion. One must not depend upon the grace of another for his self-upliftment. Of course, the teachers of humanity, the prophets, seers and the path-finders are entitled to the respect and loyalty of all right-thinking persons. This is the reason why Mahāvīra is worshipped as God. These perfected saints show their mercy only by imparting spiritual strength to the weaker souls who are victims of their own past deeds. The very contemplation and meditation of perfect teachers of humanity vouchsafes grace and spiritual strength. Grace cannot be acquired by sinners unless they turn away from the evil course of life.

It is nothing but a travesty to think that the Jainis are atheists. Worship of a Personal God is not encouraged in Jaina religion, because this has the tendency to encourage sloth and a spirit of helpless dependence. However much one may speak of the infinite grace and mercy of God, one cannot have the benefit of this grace unless one helps himself and prepares himself for the appropriation of the spiritual light. The Jaina believes that every man is a potential God and one who does not believe in the Godhood of man is an atheist.

4. Philosophy :

In the field of philosophy which, in one word, is the urge to realize the ultimate destiny of the soul, the Jaina thought is based upon a correct appraisal of truth and reality. So far as the world of experience is concerned, the doctrine of non-absolutism (*anekānta*) expresses the philosophical outlook of the Jaina thinker. The Jaina is not a dogmatist and seeks to shun extremism in thought and action. Fanaticism is the virulent expression of extremism. One believes in one's doctrine, and in the truth and infallibility of one's mode of worship attached to one's particular faith. But truth is multi-form and has many facets. One therefore should not condemn another for his view, but try to appreciate the intellectual and moral foundation of the belief. If he is wrong, he must be enlightened not by physical force or tyranny of wealth and knowledge, but by sympathy and demonstration of the truth in one's own life. The seven-fold predication (*saptabhaṅgī-naya*) expounds the metaphysical position of the Jaina. The Jaina is a believer in infinite number of *jīvas* and is not willing to dismiss the plurality as false appearance. Reality is infinite in its variety and this has to be accommodated in one's philosophical evaluation. The Jaina therefore is not a monist. He is not a subjectivist idealist who believes in the reality of his own thoughts and ideas alone. He is not a nihilist. He believes in all these onesided estimates only as facets of one infinite reality. They must be integrated into one whole. His difference with the Buddhist nihilist and the subjectivist is on the score of onesided, partial and imperfect evaluation. A thing is true in its own place and own character, but is untrue and false in another. This falsity *qua* another is compatible with its truth in its own sphere and nature. The Jaina does not condemn these thinkers as incorrigible and unregenerate souls destined to be condemned without any chance of redemption. The Jaina only seeks to draw the notice of the opponents to the other side of the coin. One must



not put the telescope on the blind eye, but try to develop the correct vision which is within the reach of all, and can be acquired only if one chooses. *Anekāntavāda* in metaphysics and ethics and so also in epistemology is thus an exponent of the broad liberalism of the Jaina thinker who however is never tired of preaching the infinitude of the modes and grades of the ultimate reality.

The Jaina does not believe in vicarious emancipation. Every man must realize his ultimate freedom and unless he is earnest in the quest of truth, he cannot help himself out of the rut. Mahāvīra is merciful because he has shown us the way to truth, and not because he chooses to take the sins of erring souls on his head as their saviour. He gives the saving knowledge which must be acquired and appropriated by every individual as his own. Mercy is not exploited for giving an unlimited charter of a sinful career to the sluggards. Every man has the power (*vīrya*) to achieve his perfection, and for this he has to depend on his own self. He must be grateful to the great prophets who have shown the path to be followed for working off his load of accumulated sins. The Jainas have produced a wonderful philosophy and a still more wonderful code of ethics and it is incumbent upon all seekers of truth to cultivate a deep acquaintance with this heritage left to humanity.

