

# The Ultimate Goal of Jaina Philosophy

Prof. J. L. Shastri

The ultimate goal of man's life in Jainism as in Buddhism and Brahmanism consists of release from the bondage of births and deaths. The contribution that Jainas have made to Indian Culture is something unique. Jainism aims at the realization of the soul (ātma-darśana) after emancipation of the same from the entanglement of the senses. Emancipation is in fact, the purgation of the soul through various processes observed by the emancipated. Jainism is fortunate in having a vast literature on this topic. The series of processes are described in detail in the sacred books of the Jainas. They have been the kernel or the keynote of Jainism through the ages. The attainment of the final goal is open to all people in the whole of this universe. Viewed from this point, Jainism has universal appeal and has impressed each and every religion it came in contact with, in one form or other. Its methodology for achieving the goal has been very successfully exploited by Indian leaders for realizing their political end.

Jainas believe in the teachings of spiritual guides (*Tīrthaṅkaras*) who had realized soul in their lifetime and who preached their experiences to mankind for their benefit. A *Tīrthaṅkara* is defined as "one who is free from hunger, thirst, weakness due to old age, disease, birth, fear, pride, attachment, hatred, care, sweat, sleep etc." He is a spiritual guide to enable people to cross the ocean of existence." Twentyfour *Tīrthaṅkaras* are said to have appeared at long intervals during each half cycle of time to preach the doctrine of Jainism afresh for the benefit of humanity.

Mahāvīra possessed a clear vision of Reality ; he knew and saw all things in their right perspective. He claimed perfect knowledge of Dharma (righteousness) which he preached to mankind, irrespective of their status, caste and creed. His teaching is a path leading to the cessation of suffering, Central to this path is the practice of austerities. Austerities may be considered the heart of Jainism to which all the preliminary stages of the path lead and out of which higher stages flow. One of the most essential aspects of Jainism encountered repeatedly in the scriptural texts of early Jainism is a set of processes—prescriptions and restraints—the observance of which destroys the root-cause of suffering occasioned by series of birth and death. Mahāvīra practised and preached austerities for the annihilation of old Karma and the prevention of new Karma. For, he had the enlightenment that when Karma ceases, misery ceases. Thus the contribution of Mahāvīra to Jaina Religion and Philosophy is immense.

He laid stress on the purity of means to achieve nobler ends. Rather, he preached desirelessness for the attainment of desire, to be unsoldierly to become a soldier, non violence to oppose violence. He gave message of peace and good will, of universal brotherhood, bliss and happiness, not only for the land of its birth but for the world at large, not only for the individual but for the whole of mankind.

Mahāvīra's concept of liberation is built upon old Jaina tradition "Treat others as thine own self" (*ātmyat sarvabhūteṣu*) which found resemblance in the Bhagavadgītā and the Vaiṣṇava Movement of the medieval age in India. The code of life propounded by Mahāvīra and followed by the Jainas inculcates love of all beings, love of truth, avoidance of falsehood, attachment, hatred, gambling, meat, wine, bribery, corruption,

debauchery, adultery, hunting and stealing and all sorts of vices which lead to a life in hell. To become a perfect Jaina one should observe all these prescriptions and restraints. Moreover, he should control anger by forgiveness, vanity by humility and fraud by straight-forwardness.

He laid emphasis on chastity. He said : "One who is a slave to lust forfeits human life". He preached nudity, as he observed nudity leads to abhorrence of lust. Moreover, nudity was a natural state as people were born nude and as they would go naked after death.

Jainism is international and universal in character. It is a fundamental mistake to regard Jainism as the religion of any one particular caste or community. Shorn of ritual which it has imbibed from its neighbour—Hinduism, it is a religion of Yoga meaning realization (*ātma-darśana*), constant awareness of the self at all times and at all places. Being the primitive faith of all mankind it has its door open to all living beings. All ritual is but a prescription for the cure of physical and mental ills of suffering humanity. The conquest of suffering by annihilating Karma can be achieved by other means too but the means laid down in the Jaina Code of Morals and Religion are far superior as they hold out the promise of achieving the goal in the simplest and the easiest possible manner.

Jaina Philosophy is much anterior to Vedānta and other systems of thought. Jainism is an original system quite distinct and independent from all others. But in spite of its individual traits, it possesses certain characteristics common with Hindu traits. For instance, in Vedānta Brahman is not said to possess existence, intellect, joy (*sat, cit, ānanda*) as qualities of his nature but he is existence, intellect and joy itself. Similarly, the Jaina metaphysics treats merits and demerits as substratums rather than as qualities.

The atomic theory which is absent in the Vedānta, Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems of Hindu thought but has found its way in the Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya makes an integral part of the Jainas and Ajivikas.

The greatest contribution that Jainism has made to the field of Philosophy is their theory of *Syādvāda* or *Anekāntavāda* which declares that everything in the universe is related to everything. This assertion reconciles the opposites or the contraries and is the true characteristic of Jaina philosophical thought. In fact and indeed we cannot ignore the variety of things and their relations and say that the side of the sword that faces us is the all-in-all of the shield. Our mode of looking at a thing must take into account the multifarious variables with every change in time and space.

Being purely indigeneous and the earliest religious system of civilized man, Jainism has endured many hardships and persecutions, yet it has survived to the present day. From its very beginning it has been acting and reacting on all religious systems it came in contact with and influencing human thought and culture. Its contributions to Indian Culture and civilization are by no means small. It has the noblest and the most practical message of peace and good will. It aims at universal brotherhood, bliss and happiness for the world at large.

