



THE BASIC THOUGHT OF BHAGAVAN MAHAVIR

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To all of them

who want to understand

the vision - n - thought of MAHAVIR

THE BASIC THOUGHT OF BHAGAVAN MAHAVIR

Nature was in its full bloom, heralding the dawn of an auspicious event....BIRTH. Mahavir was born in the year 599 B.C.E. on Saturday, 19 March (the 13th day of the bright half of the moon in the month of Caitra) at Kundagram, near Vaishali in Bihar. Kundagram was a republic of the Jñatri Kshatriyas.

Mahavir's father, king Siddhartha was the head of the State. His mother Trishala, also called Priyakarini was daughter according to Digambara and, as per Shvetambara sister of Cetak, the famous head of Vaishali Republic and was of the Licchavi clan. On conception of the son in the mother's womb, the treasure and agricultural produce increased in the state. Therefore, the father named the son VARDHAMAN. Then right from childhood, due to purity of thought and his many acts of bravery, young Vardhaman captured the titles of SANMATI and MAHAVIR.

DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT

Mahavir inherited from his parents not only the latent impressions of democratic thought, but grew in the open-minded environment of the Ganarajya (oligarchic republic), whose government was vested in a senate, composed of the elected resident members and presided over by an officer who had the title of the king. The king used to get this office by election. His election was for a specific term. He chaired the ganaparishad (senate). Decisions of the ganaparishad dictated his governance. In the senate, the rule of quorum was applied. The proposal was read thrice; then it went through the democratic process of discussion, debate and voting. For

voting, the voters were given small pieces of timber or bal-lots (Shalakas). For counting, these shalakas were collected by the returning officer. The vote was kept secret. Meetings were held in the council hall (sansthaagar). The record of the proceedings was preserved in writing. The members had to maintain decorum, and unnecessary gossip was not allowed. There was proviso for bringing a motion of condemnation against a member for despicable behaviour. Many ganarajyas when combined made a confederacy (sangh). The status and rights of all the members of the confederacy were equal. The Vajjis to whom the Jñatris belonged were a large confederacy, which had within its fold at least eight clans: the Videhas, the Licchavis, the Jñatris et cetera. The Vajji Sangh was the foremost and powerful. Its capital was Vaishali and its contemporaries were under the sway of its power. The powerful monarchy of Magadh also thought it better to seek friendly relations with its members.

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Thus, Mahavir witnessed freedom for all, equality of everyone, autonomy, negation of a dynasty system, freedom of expression, discussion and debate, complete transparency in the decision making process, noninterference, mutual respect for regional rights, the spirit of co-existence and the benefits of good human behaviour not only within the gambit of a limited focus of ganarajya but within the wider arena of larger confederacy of the Vajji Sangh. Besides the strong and highly developed legacy of thought right from the first Tirthankar Adinath / Rishabh Dev to the twenty-third Tirthankar Parshvanath, the scenario of goodness of the contemporary age may have naturally influenced Mahavir. The invincibility of ganarajyas and Vajji Sangh remained intact even after the nirvana of Mahavir (527 B.C.E.) for many years. After capturing the throne of Magadh by killing his own father Bimbisar/Shrenik/Bhimbsar/Bhambisar in 490 B.C.E., Ajatashatru chose schisms as an alternative to weaken Vajji Sangh. The weakened Vajji Sangh fought a war with Ajatashatru for the next ten years.

MAHAVIR'S LIFE

No impetuosity is seen in the life of Mahavir. Events connected with him prove that his life was not wild, but was serenely composed, pre-meditated, impartial, and ready to understand things unbiased, without presumptions. He was neither emotionally impatient to assimilate, nor did he have a heavy weighted repentance of missing matters. His life was neither dramatic nor showy. Life was like a quietly flowing river through the plains.

REALISATION OF TRUTH

Therefore, Mahavir's accepting sanyas (renunciation) at the age of 30 years may not have been the end product of any immediate tear-shedding event, but instead, the culmination of a deeply meditated thought-out process. Oh! This was hardly the age for anyone to tread on the path of renunciation. Was it? Yet, Mahavir may have decided to abandon temporal pleasures and to walk on the thorny path of renunciation. He waited to get the family's consent.

Shvetambars (white-clad) believe that he was married. Digambars (sky-clad) believe to the contrary. When he was 27 years of age, according to Shvetambars, his parents died. Digambars believe that his parents were alive at the time of his renunciation. Mahavir, keen on walking the high path to moksha, sought his family's consent for renunciation. On observing their hesitation, he waited for a time. At last, he left the house for good, with the consent of his immediate family. He took silent penance for twelve and a half years and realized TRUTH through the mode of thinking and contemplation. This event occurred under an Ashok tree at Jrimbhak, a village in Bihar, along Rijukula river on (Vaishakh Shukla Dashami) Monday, 31 March 557 B.C.E. After this, he was called OMNISCIENT (Sarvajña). Journeying by the conveyance of knowledge and thought, the foundation of his thought and conclusions was very solid, deep and eternal.

RESPECT FOR JIV & AJIV

Mahavir's penance gave him the gift of the Truth that matter/thing/substance or the existence is eminent. As such, be it a Jiv (living) or an Ajiv (non-living or insentient matter), we should treat them with respect. The importance of this conceptually amazing experience is revealed to us with the fact that it took over two thousand five hundred years for modern science to deduce and appreciate this theory. We could comprehend it only in the 20th century, through Einstein. Again, political science had to wait for over two thousand years to follow this enunciation. It could be understood only at the time of the French Revolution.

Einstein understood it in relation to inanimate objects, and the French Revolution with reference to human beings. But Mahavir had the self-realisation in the context of everything sentient and insentient. He was concerned not only with human rights or rights of beings but those of all living and non-living beings.

MOBILE AND IMMOBILE BEINGS

Today, the world is worried about saving the environment - water, forest and land. We should be pleasantly surprised to learn that Mahavir considers them living entities and not non-living. In his esteemed view, there are two types of organisms in the Universe. Tras or Jangam (mobile) and Sthavar (immobile). Conch, ant, black bees, and animals/men are two, three, four and five sensed (indriya) mobile (tras) beings (Jivas) respectively. They can resist. They can walk on their own. On the other hand are those who can neither resist nor walk (such as earth, water, fire, air and plants). They are called immobile beings (Sthavar Jivas). In Jain scriptures, they are classified as Prithvikaya, Jalakaya, Tejakaya, Vayukaya and Vanaspatikaya ekendriya Jivas. Putting the sthavar Jivas in danger, their wastage and unnecessary usage is also violence in the eyes of Mahavir. Gradually, our modern scientific experiments are confirming Mahavir's realisation of life in these organisms.

OMNISCIENCE

The omniscience of Mahavir does not connote that he had gained knowledge of all things and processes or he could manufacture a car, television and so on. Or, that he could repair a defective machine. His omniscience means that he knew THAT, after knowing which, nothing remains to be known. With this knowledge, he could standardize and codify mutual behaviour of entities, which opens the door for the development of personality. With this knowledge, he could visualize the Truth of Anekant, Syadvad, Ahinsa and Aparigrah and could underline the need for catholicity, endurance (Sahishnuta) and respect for others in human behaviour. After gaining knowledge of matter, nothing more remained to be acquired for Mahavir. It was like watering the roots, after which it is not necessary to water the flowers, fruits and branches.

ENRICHED VISION

Now Mahavir had an enriched and wide vision. Such a person did glance and gaze everywhere. Mahavir's vision widened. He knew himself. Knowing oneself means knowing all. Mahavir attained omniscience. Omniscience focuses on the soul. Acarya Kundakunda wrote that

jāṇadi passadi savvaṃ vavahāraṇaṇa kevalī bhayavaṃ

kevalnānī jāṇadi passadi ṇiyameṇa appāṇaṃ

Niyamasāra, gatha 159

Mahavir knew his soul, hence he knew everything.

In the modern age, we saw such enriched vision in Mahatma Gandhi. He was not a literary critic, but whenever some controversy was referred to him, he judged it purely on literary grounds, acceptable to all. He was neither a physician nor an economist but effectively intervened in the medical science and economics. He was not a philosopher yet; he had his own insights on the Gita. Though not a sociologist, he presented his novel schemes for the Harijans. He was not an educator, but his views on the mother tongue, our educa-

tional system, script et cetera posed a challenge to the educators. Omniscient Mahavir's vision was deeper, more logical and altogether more profound.

CONCEPT OF REALITY

His disciple-teachers have critically analysed Mahavir's concept on the nature of REALITY. The gist of which is that:

Matter has many attributes, such as knowledge, vision, and happiness in living beings, form, touch, smell, colour, and taste in non-living beings.

Every substance in the universe is related to every other substance. Thus, reality is manifold. Due to relativity, matter (Vastu) has many (Anek) antas or Dharmas (attributes). An illustration of the doctrine of several modes of assertion is that the same man is spoken of as father, uncle, father-in-law, son, son-in-law, brother and grandfather. We are calling father a man who is a brother in the eyes of his sister. Is the sister's calling him brother incorrect? We see that an opposite view discernible in the attributes of a thing is inherent in it. The dispute is not in the thing but in the vision of the person holding it. How can we forcefully say that what is apparent to us is the only truth? The feeling of despising others' views and being conceited of one's own view is generated in us due to ignorance of the real nature of thing. As such, Mahavir generously accommodates the different opposing views and visions and pleads the concept of Anekant. This enunciation was considered so basic that Mahavir's Thought and Philosophy was named Anekantavada - The Theory of Manifoldness of Reality - a method that allows for reconciliation, integration and synthesis of conflicting views.

Reality has three characteristics - creation (Utpad), destruction (Vyay) and permanence (Dhruvya). That means something increases or decreases every moment. Yet, within that substance, there is something that is permanent. The river changes every moment due to the flowing away of the previous water and arrival of new or fresh water. But in the process of change, it remains the same. Even today, the river

Ganges is Ganges. Due to this characteristic of reality, the universe is self-regulated and continues.

Every substance has its own independent existence. It does not affect any other thing or attribute. It is self-existent. It has an essence that does not change. It is constant, permanent and unchanging. That which changes, or is the subject of creation and destruction, is the order of things. Order changes. Conversion of milk into curd is the change of order, not the destruction of essence. Due to the attribute and order, the substance is called orderly-attribute.

Reality is independent. Due to its transitory or resultant nature, it changes; sheds the previous order and assumes post order. It continues to do so. That is, the orderly change does take place. But thing has its own jurisdiction, which nobody can transgress.

Nobody owns matter. To say that the horse is of the king, is merely a practical way of expression. In fact the horse is that of the horse. He belongs to himself. In a famous Hindi poem, the poetess raised the basic question sprouted from the social deliberation - 'Whose wife am I?' and its reply 'I am nobody's wife. I am my own wife'. (Apne Jaisa Jeevan: Savita Singh) is in consonance with Mahavir's thought.

Matter may be small or large, living or non-living, it is so vast that we cannot visualize it in its entirety at the same time. An iceberg is far larger than what is visible on the water surface. The major portion of it is sunk below the surface. The ship that hits it on the assumption of apparent size is destroyed in pieces after colliding with it. The story of Titanic is fresh in our memory. The same is the story of all matter. Matter is like an iceberg. We have heard a Hindi saying : 'Muye cham ki sans son loh bhasm huve jay' [the breath of dead skin (bellow) melts iron.]

SYADVAD: ANEKANTAVAD

In the context of Mahavir's thought, the word Syadvad is used many times. But Syadvad is not in the nature of things.

It is a linguistic representation of Anekantavad. What Anekantavad is in the sphere of thought, Syadvad is in the domain of speech and communication. In fact, we project far less than what we see. In comparison to our perception, our language is incompetent. It is unable to delineate the personality of a thing in its totality. It is expressed half-baked and in an unrealistic manner. The word Sthuna (pillar) is evolved from the root "Stha" (to stand). That which stands is a pillar. Much earlier, the etymologist Yask argued that if that which stands is called a pillar, then it should be called 'darshaya' (as it is sunk in a pit) as well as Sajjani (as it supports the bamboo poles).

The English word Horse, has evolved from the Latin word Curro, which means, to run. An expert linguist of the modern age, Michel Breal comments that we are forced to tell a lie even though the horse may be resting, is lying wounded or dead. Bringing out the incompetence of language, Patañjali cites the example of the word 'Dadhi' (curd). It has many categories - Mandak (less coagulated), Uttarak (with a crust), Nilinak (non-coagulated) et cetera. By simply uttering the word Dadhi, do we bring out its definite and complete nature? To accept this limitation and incompetence of the language is to reach Syadvad.

Syat word is NOT used in the sense of PERHAPS. If it means this, then there is no definiteness in stating the nature of REALITY. The Sanskrit word syat, after going through the process of phonetic development, has become 'siya' in Pali and Prakrit languages. In these languages, it is seen being used in definite context of classification and facets. It hints at the plurality of a thing. While characterizing a thing, the usage of the word syat indicates that a thing has definitely other characteristics. Those characteristics are not being stated here because words are unable to specify them. The word syat only indicates that, while conveying, much more remains untold. REALITY (thing) has many dimensions, many characteristics, but they are not all perceived immediately, due to the peculiar focus of our vision. And if they are not perceived, how could they be expressed? But this does

not imply that they do not exist.

In this way, Syadvad is not a symbol of possibility, uncertainty, and confusion, and so on, but a replica of certainty and truth. Mahavir's concepts of Syadvad, ahinsa (non-violence) and aparigraha (non-hoarding) are erected on the foundation of Manifoldness of Reality. What is plurality (Anekantavada) in thought is Syadvad in speech, non-violence in conduct and aparigraha in the social system. Via the mode of Anekant, Mahavir is in search of a classless, secular, serene and sublime life for an individual and the society. His agony and concern is not merely for human beings, but for all Jiv (living beings) and Ajiv (non-living beings). In an era when it was impossible to think of equality between man and man, Mahavir declared that all things are equally vast and independent. Translating his declaration into deeds, he admitted men and women of all castes and creed impartially in his fourfold Sangh (religious organization).

DOCTRINE OF UPADAN

How should we interact with this immense expanse of living and non-living things bearing in mind the manifoldness of reality with its concomitant characteristics of creation, destruction, permanence, independence and self-sufficiency has been the basic concern and the gist of Mahavir's philosophy. Mahavir has spelled out this behaviour by attributing the role of material cause (upadan) and of instrumental agency (nimitta) to an entity. He says that each entity is solely responsible for its progress or regress.

Change takes place in the upadan (material cause). For instance, clay is the upadan in making a clay pot. For it is clay that changes form to turn into a clay pot. But it retains its essential identity (svadraya). It has the attribute of being transformable from a lump of clay to a clay pot.

Nimitta (instrumental cause) is the catalyst. For instance, the potter is merely the instrumental agent in turning a lump of clay into a clay pot. Hence, clay is the upadan and the potter is the nimitta. It is the essential but external factor in

the change that any entity undergoes. It cannot do anything on its own, in the absence of the upadan.

Every entity is its own material cause (upadan). Everyone has to walk on his or her own feet. Nobody can walk for others. Neither a group of servants, nor any agency, or the father can study on behalf of his son. The son will have to study himself. Despite the greatness of our instrumental agent (nimitta), he or she can never be our upadan (material cause). In Sutrakritanga (1/4/3), Mahavir has said 'surodaye pasati cakkhuneva'. Even after rising of the Sun, it is the eyes that have to see. The question is, if we cannot become upadan for each other, then are we merely silent spectators?

ART OF LIVING

If an entity has nothing to do with the other, then it is like cooking one's own meals separately. Does Mahavir give such a message? While conceding aloneness, he brings out our deep relationship with other entities. He says, we may not become the upadan (material cause) for others but we can become a nimitta (instrumental agency). Our role is that of the upadan for self and nimitta for others. Mahavir has given this formula for living and leading a practical life also. Trying to become the upadan for others is a form of violence. Today, this violence is the main reason for conflict, chaos, friction and division in our houses, establishments and offices. In "The Prophet", Khalil Gibran, musing on bringing up children, unknowingly echoes Mahavir's thoughts: 'They come through us, but not from us and though they are with us, yet they belong not to us.' Yet, how many parents think this way? Most of them strive to make their children do and become what they want them to. That they should always tread the path decided for them, by their parents.

By not trying to become the upadan (material cause) for others, do we have any obligation toward them? There is no question of any obligation. This is their due, which we give them. If we are not violent with others, it is not our mercy. Mahavir did not begin his journey with a notion and

sense of mercy or compassion. It is others' privilege that we do not trespass in their field of authority. So, it is our privilege that they should not enter in our jurisdiction. This is mutual. Where is the question of obligation? In fact, Mahavir expects nothing from us at the level of compassion. Why should he? Who are we to show compassion to vast entities? He has already put a question mark on our status in showing mercy.

ROLE OF NIMITTA

If we are instrumental in the development of an ant, who knows, tomorrow the ant may become instrumental in our development. In fact, the nature of being instrumental in awakening the latent powers of one another is that of substance. Later Acaryas have codified Mahavir's thought—Parasparopagrahojivanam (Tattvarthasutra 5/21). (To be mutually and beneficially instrumental / nimitta is the nature of living beings.) Similar thought 'Jiyo aur jeene do' (Live and Let Live), moulded into simple words over centuries, is the integral part of the body politic of our social life. After every war, weary humanity in the wake of defeat and victory alike surrenders to this philosophy wounded and mutilated in body and with a broken wheel in hand. Maybe, we could understand forever that Truth is greater than our individual notions and perspectives. Thus, Mahavir is not only a protagonist of mukti (salvation), but advocates LIFE as well. His thinking revolves round saving the life of every single being.

And if we do not become instrumental for others, we would be doing an injustice to half of our role. Our role is that of upadan (material cause) for ourselves, and that of an instrument (nimitta) for others. So, by not becoming instrumental to others, we damage ourselves. Later on, Saint Kabir also said that for refinement of one's self one has to face the multifarious difficulties of life. If we do not become instrumental, what will be the loss of others? Not much. If we do not become instrumental, so what? Someone else will become instrumental. So, for a determined upadan (material cause) to climb the ladder of progress, a nimitta (instrumen-

tal agency), auxiliary factors and favourable circumstances ought to present themselves. Mahatma Gandhi used to say, 'If I don't become an instrument for India's freedom, somebody else will.' In fact, today, when it is said in a poem: "In darkness, a hand searching for a matchbox, though in darkness, is not in darkness" We, in fact, convey our faith in the power of upadan rising above the surface, its undoubted capacity and unlimited prospects.

By not allotting us the role of upadan (material cause) for others, Mahavir saves us from conceit. Yet, by handing over the role of instrument for others, he rescues us from the feeling of inferiority complex. From one perspective, we are nothing. From the other perspective, we are something. In a way, we are aloof and confined to our chamber. But from other view, we are connected with others. The doors of our chamber open in the chambers of others. We are alone and with the crowd too. Our individuality is preserved, even though we live with the crowd. We can be identified in our journey with the faceless crowd. This is the amazing magic of preserving individuality while remaining embedded in the community. But is it not in any way connected with the republican traits of Mahavir?

The role of nimitta is no less revered. In the Jain Mahamantra Namokar, among the five Parameshthis (great venerated ones) Arihantas are offered salutations before Siddhas. It is a fact that one becomes a Siddha (a perfect and liberated soul) by snapping the legacy of eight karmas - The four ghati karmas i.e. jnanavarani, darshnavarani, mohani and antaraya, are the karmas that block the soul's basic nature of knowledge & perception. They prevent the soul from attaining Kevala Jnana. The four aghati karmas, vedaniya, ayu, nama & gotra are responsible for causing happiness-unhappiness, span of life, rebirth in various gatis and in higher or lower families. The Siddhas are in the state of moksha in the unembodied form. For the world, they are an indirect repository of inspiration and ideal. In case of Arihantas, they have shed only the four ghati karmas. Spiritually they are liberated but physically they are still in the world. The snap-

ping of the bonds of their residual four karmas and physical liberation is bound to occur, but, presently, their status is lower than that of Siddhas. However, while still living in the world with the physical body, they are directly playing the role of an instrument for the emancipation of souls. The Namokar Mantra has given a right direction and meaningful cue to our human-life, by making provision to first salute the Arihantas, despite their lower status as compared to Siddhas, because they are connected with the creative role of nimitta (instrumental agency) in the interest of humanity.

For efficiently executing the double role of upadan for self and instrument (nimitta) for others, the pre-requisite is correct understanding of this dual role. We can reach this understanding only when we have the conscious knowledge and acute awareness of the vastness of the entity or substance, its independence and multiplicity of attributes. This is the knowledge of tattva and its powerful realization. In classical parlance, this is called rational knowledge (samyak jñan) and rational perception (samyak darshan).

SEEKER'S RELIGION

Mahavir is not a bookish man. For the liberation of the soul, He does not consider scriptural knowledge sufficient. He realized Truth by contemplation, meditation and sadhana (spiritual practice), not by books. As such, his knowledge is compulsorily linked with life. He believes, if knowledge is rational (samyak), then it will sublimate and flow in life, just as water flows automatically to lower level. The samyak jñani need not consult anyone. He himself becomes a praman (proof/authentication). Pure soul is a praman by itself. As such, Mahavir's religion is the religion of a sadhak (seeker) and not of a follower. The samyak jñani KNOWS the truth. He does not CREATE it. We, the ignorant create it. Rather, try to create it (because how can we create it?) and then argue in its favour, and finally challenge each other to debates. TRUTH is no issue to be debated by jñanis; there is only one Truth. Mahatma Gandhi had the privilege of the company of and close contact with Shrimad Rajacandra, a true follower of Mahavir. In his au-

tobiography: “The Story of My Experiments with Truth”, Gandhiji has acknowledged the influence of Shrimad’s thoughts and sanskar (impressions) on him. Shrimad Rajacandra has rightly said, “There is only one option for crores of jñanis; whereas an ignorant has crores of options.”

RATNATRAYA

Knowledge alone is a mask, and so is Conduct alone. And mask or false appearance is the cause of sorrow. The greatest sorrow of a man or woman is that he or she always wears a mask. He or she wants to display what he or she is not. He or she is always under tension that he or she may not be found in his or her real nature. Without rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct it is impossible to get rid of masks. Acarya Umasvati/Umasvami of the first century C.E. has simultaneously placed perception, knowledge and conduct under a single adjective “rational” and by putting the path in singular number, has specified them as a means of liberation. His assertion that rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct are the way to moksha or liberation [“samyagdarśanaññānacāritrāṇimokṣamārgah” - Tattvarthasutra (1/1)] keeps our faith in their indivisibility. These are called ratna-traya (trio of jewels).

In order to walk the path of moksha, rational perception is the first requirement. Perception deals with the internal, knowledge with the external. He who has perceived the internal can perceive the external correctly. Rational knowledge gives us an insight into substances that we already have profound faith in. For it is faith that motivates us to seek knowledge. This is why the above sutra from the Tattvarthasutra mentions rational perception before rational knowledge.

If rational perception is the passport, rational knowledge is the visa. Only those who have a passport can get a visa.

Mahavir has profound faith in a person's potential. Therefore, he does not wait to instruct a person who has attained rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct. In his view, such a person is at par with him.

Real democracy gives every man the option of reaching the highest pedestal to its member - a man standing on the lowest pedestal. In the vast democratic thought of Mahavir this option is available to every being. Any soul can become Mahavir. Mahavir is not a fatalist. He does not believe in any Godly power outside the realm of soul. He concedes that the entity, due to its upadan (material cause), transforms on its own, but in this process does not negate the role of nimitta (instrumental agency) of others and, the efforts of the entity being itself upadan, the reins of the entity are in its own hand. The element of bondage and salvation are inherent in it. It can choose anyone. Karmas are fruit bearing but if the soul is awakened, they will be dissipated without bearing fruits.

NOTION OF MERCY

Mahavir has forcefully propounded the concept of Ahinsa (non-injury), aparigraha (renouncing everything) et cetera, on spiritual soil. He does not stop after advising that we should be compassionate. He also explains, why we should show compassion. He does not proceed further without stating the reason and necessity. Compassion should blossom from awareness. Compassion delivered out of ignorance is not helpful in freedom from bondage. In the Dashavaikalik Sutra (4/10), he states, 'Padhamam nanam tao daya' (First awareness, then compassion).

MAHAVIR'S ITINERARY

After attaining keval-jñān (absolute knowledge/omniscience) and before his nirvana (final dissociation of soul from all karmas) on Wednesday, 13 October, 527 B.C.E. (Kartik Krishna Amavasya) at Pavapur in the brahma muhurta (auspicious period of dawn), Mahavir toured continuously for 29

years, 3 months and 24 days. For conquering the self, total victory over hatred and malice, like the earlier Tirthankars, he was called Jina and his speech was called Jinavani. For making Jinavani their mode of faith and conduct, such persons irrespective of their caste, creed and colour, were called Jain. The general area where Mahavir moved about (vihar) and stayed for longer periods and whose borders may have changed/reduced is still recognized by its original name - Bihar. Mahavir's religious assembly was known as samavasaran. Not only people of various religions, faiths, views and age had the liberty to attend, but also birds and animals too had a free access. He himself was a Kshatriya. His chief disciple (ganadhar) Indrabhuti Gautam was a Brahmin. For his preaching, he did not adopt Sanskrit, the language of the elite but used the language of the common person and adopted Prakrit.

Although Prakrit was the language of the new Age, the Sanskrit-speaking people comprehended it, because it had evolved from Sanskrit itself. Mahavir's mother tongue was Magadhi Prakrit but for preaching, he chose Ardhamagadhi Prakrit. The speaking area of Ardhamagadhi was between Magadh and Shurasen. This enabled more people to understand him - people who spoke Ardhamagadhi Prakrit (present Poorvi Hindi, that includes Avadhi, Bagheli, and Chattisgarhi dialects) as also those in the east who spoke Magadhi Prakrit (present Bihari, Bengali, Assami and Oriya languages) and those in the West who spoke Shauraseni Prakrit (present Western Hindi, that includes khadi Boli, Braj, Bundeli, Kannauji and Bangru / Harayanavi dialects). In this way, in the matter of language, Mahavir, due to his democratic thinking, could establish communication and contact with men in a wider geographical area. By describing his language as non-syllabic, assimilating all languages and the Divine Voice (divya dhvani); Jain Agams have explained its adaptability and its quality of being understood simultaneously by all the living beings present at his discourse.

MAHAVIR'S THOUGHT AND VISION

Due to Mahavir's perfect & flawless comprehension of

reality his vision & thought do not have the rigidity of "only I am correct" but the fluidity and gentleness of "we can all be correct from our standpoints". He wants to give others a margin and space to exist. To do so is not a sign of cowardice but courage of a higher order. For defending the country and annihilating the enemy with rational knowledge, is not violence. It is, indeed, violence when under the influence of ego and in a state of hysteria, one snatches life or pleasure of someone. Umasvami has classified Mahavir's concept as - Pramattayogat pranvyaprapanam hinsa (Tattvarthasutra 7/13) (taking away life is violence when the act is done with an ego). Mahavir realised that it is attachment that gives birth to violence. Whether it is attachment to the body, to land, power or wealth, all of this leads to violence. Impelled by such attachment, Pakistani tribals attacked Kashmir in 1947. People were worried about Mahatma Gandhi's reaction to India's measures of self-defence. But proving all the apprehensions false, Gandhiji christened the planes carrying Indian troops, as the Messengers of Peace.

CONCEPT OF AHINSA

Violence arising out of day to day activities occupational violence and violence arising out of self defence may be justifiable, but nevertheless they are violence. It is difficult to avoid this type of violence completely, but one must try and minimise it. Even such violence must only be indulged in when we are absolutely compelled to do so. Not out of anger, attachment, pride or ego. Intentional, deliberate violence is neither important for life, nor for the country or family. We indulge in intentional violence only to appease our ego or out of attachment. This type of violence destroys the soul. It is a sin. Mahavir strongly tabooed intentional violence.

Violence, be it of any type, its sin and the level is decided by the person's intent or mental attitude which matters more than the act. Such an act is bounded by karma and is a sin. It is 'mental' violence.

Acarya Amrtacandra has given an essence of the Jain

doctrine, stating in Purusharthasiddhyupaya (shloka 44) that the non-appearance of attachment and aversion in the soul is ahimsa and their appearance is himsa. This is the essence of the Jain scriptures.

The vessel in which fire is lit, gets heated first. This is why, when we commit himsa, we hurt ourselves first.

Physical violence is 'physical' or substance violence. Where both mental and physical violence occur, that is the cause of more sin, more bondage. If primary, occupational, protective (resisting) violence crosses the Laxman Rekha (limit) of minimum and essential and enters the region of unnecessary, then it also joins hand with sin. One may argue that possession (parigrah) is possession only when we are attached to it. But possession does not allow us to avoid attachment / involvement (murcha), desire and lust. That is why Mahavir abandoned it totally. Then, if there is no 'murcha', we may be saved from the sin of emotional violence, but for crossing the limit of minimum, we shall be carrying the sin of substance or physical violence.

When an entity is incapable of resistance and protest at the time it is made a target of violence, our heart is generally in lesser Kashayas (passions). So, there is less sin in such violence. On the contrary, an entity capable of resisting and protesting does not easily come under our sway. We have to be more aggressive. As a result, we fall under the clutches of Kashayas (passions) such as, anger (krodh) conceit (maan), deception (maya) and greed (lobh) and become a culprit of strong karmic bondage. Compared to plucking of flowers, fruits or destroying a tree, the killing of a person or an animal is a greater sin.

CLASSIFICATION OF SUBSTANCES

Mahavir has classified the universal existence in six substances (reals) - Jiv, Pudgal, Dharma, Adharma, Akash and Kaal. Jiv is unlimited. Pudgal is infinite. Dharma, Adharma and Aakash are single substances each. Kaal (Time) substance is numerous. Jiv has a life. Other substances are lifeless.

Pudgal is tangible. All other substances are intangible, devoid of odour, colour and taste. They cannot be known through the senses. Jiv and Pudgal are active. The rest of the four substances are inactive, Dharma, Adharma, Aakash and Kaal are respectively connected with 'gati' (motion), position, avagahan (inception or space occupation), and transformation. In Jain scriptures, their usage does not connote the present day meaning. Whatever is visible with form, colour, taste, smell and touch - that is all Pudgal. When its contact is broken with the live soul, its acetana (non-conscious) and Pudgal Tattvas are discernable.

Hence, for identifying Jiv (soul) different from body, Mahavir has postulated the essential condition of rational perception. Being sentient, the Jiv substance is joyous or sorrowful. Other substances are having no grasping power; they do not feel happy or unhappy. That is why the central core of Mahavir's thought is Jiv or soul. He has mentioned other substances, as obiter dicta, to reveal their distinctness from the soul.

THE GAME OF KARMAS

Atma (soul) assumes re-birth, heaven, hell, human body, animal body et cetera as per karma. But to be entrapped into the net of Karma, not to be entangled or after being entrapped, to come out by cutting it, is in the hands of the soul. So, whatever be the movement of Karma, it does not stand against purushartha (industrious perseverance). Soul is its own regulator - other than it or outside it, nobody is its controller. Mahavir does not believe in the regulatory powers of any Creator, His grace or displeasure or the loss and profit of birth or race. Yet, we cannot escape from the fact that so long as the soul remains in the net of Karma, until such time, the net is its controller.

Acarya Joindu, in his masterly work on the soul - Paramappapayasu (Paramatmaprakasha, doha 66) says that the soul is like a handicapped person. It does not go anywhere. It is the karmas that carry it from place to place.

For explaining the game of karma, Mahavir considers soul surrounded by two bodies:

1. The physical body that is obtained from the mother's womb. It is a companion for one life. On death, it is destroyed by cremation or burial. In human and animal species, its appellation is 'audarika'. It comes out of the mother's womb. In heavenly and hellish options, it is 'Vaikriyaka'.

2. The invisible subtle body is the result of accumulated karmas of previous births. Soul carries it in the four states and eighty-four lakh yonis (genus or birth situations). This is its real prison. This is a karman body, and due to our mind, speech and behaviour, continuously increases or decreases daily. When we are under the influence of Kashaya (anger, attachment, jealousy, pride and so on) then different accessories of Pudgal (numerous atoms in the universe) are drawn towards our soul; coincide with kashayas, and transform into karmas. Since karmas play an exclusive role in drawing them towards the soul, they (different accessories of pudgal) too are called Karma. Language behaves like this. Husband's sister may be playing a limited and partial role in giving pain but she is called nananda (Sanskrit) or nanad (Hindi) (not giver of pleasure). Karma covers the soul just as a layer of dust quickly settles on a sticky surface, or dirt quickly is settled on a wet ball. "Sakashayatvajjivah karmanoyogyan pudgalanadattesahbandhah (Tattvarthasutra 8/2). The drawing of vargas (species) / karmas towards the soul is the asrav (karmic inflow) of the soul; its mingling with the soul like water with milk, is its bondage. The accumulation of the bondage is the Karman body.

Both these bodies are inactive, whereas soul is active. For liberation, soul has to get rid of the karman body. With the passage of Time, karma is matured. This is the result of their emergence. After fruition, they are destroyed. This is like bursting of a ripened boil. It is burst and we feel comfort. That karma which is dissipated by suffering is dissolved. We are liberated. However, that karma which, due to stillness of pacified senses, goes into consciousness can raise its

head again. Its suppressed lust covets satiation, and keeps a person in terror. The manner in which we suffer the fruits thereof and the state of mind in which we accept them attracts new karmas that are added to our sañchit (accumulated) karmas. Suffering attracts karmas and karmas bring about suffering. This vicious circle goes on until a point of equilibrium is reached where new karmic bondage is stopped and penance, austerities and negation of desires burn the previously accumulated karma. This is respectively the stoppage of karmic inflow (Samvar) and dissociation of bound karma (Nirjara). The natural trait to avoid coming in the claws of anger, ego, deception and greed, loosens the clasp grip of karma on soul. But if this awareness is nourished in our inner being, then there is karmic influx (Asrav) of a new karma. To be free of ego is a good thing. However, there is no dearth of people who have the ego that they have no ego! For this, Mahavir does not support the desire to earn punya (merit). To covet for merit is to covet for the mundane (samsar). Merit is a synonym of good state, not of liberation. For liberation, one has to rise above merit also. Even the desire for moksha is an impediment on the path of moksha. One has to rise above merit and also above the desire for moksha.

May be, merit is made of gold, but after all, it is a chain. If you cling to it, it will bind you in fetters. Therefore, you have to become not only vitadvesh but vitarag also. Although a storehouse of virtues including knowledge, faith, character, loyalty, and happiness, the soul attains its pristine glow through detachment (Vitaragata), in the same way as dirt is wiped out of the mirror. This is the return of the soul / 'the thing' in its nature. Mahavir says the nature of any substance is its dharma. 'As many persons as many religions' (Hind Svarajya: Mahatma Gandhi) - In such quotations we hear the echo of Mahavir's thought, even after centuries. Return of any substance in its nature is like returning to ones' home, for which there is yearning. This is getting rid of homelessness and release from alien wandering. Medieval Hindi Jain poet Daulataram says: 'We never came to our own home / but wasted much time in wandering to other homes.'

Mahavir's unflinching faith in the strength of the soul, which is freed from the karman body and has returned to its pure nature, is running in the thinking nerves and veins of this country. 'The illumined soul cannot be compared with any other resource. On earth, above earth and below earth / this is the most powerful resource. ' - Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President of India.

NINE TATTVAS

Feeling the thrust of soul or the knowledge of its distinctness from the body is not easily done. For this, we have to assimilate the tattvas - Jiv (soul), Ajiv or Pudgal (non-living or matter), Asrav (inflow of karmas), Bandh (bondage), Paap-punya (demerit-merit), Samvar (blocking inflow of karmas), Nirjara (shedding of karmas) and Moksha (liberation). And take the help of Dev (Arihant, Siddha), Scriptures (shastra) and Guru (Acarya, Upadhyay and Sadhu). How does the body-centred vision travel further? We get the body for a certain period, whereas the soul has generally to go through the ebb and tide of Time. The soul of Mahavir became Mahavir only after passing through many births.

Mahavir believes in multiplicity. The souls are infinite in number and independent. Each soul is one complete whole in itself, is eternal immortal and retains its individuality even in liberation. It is all pervading and in the embodied state is of the same size that it happens to occupy. The souls of an ant and that of an elephant are equal. In its pure condition, it is without sense qualities, is all the quality of sentience, is beyond inferential mark and has no definable shape. All souls are equal and alike in their inherent nature, essential qualities, intrinsic characteristics and potentialities; they are capable of attaining liberation. The unity of soul with body is life. But this unity is a mark of continuity of karman body with soul. The soul liberated from the bondage of karma also gets liberated from transmigration. It is the Everest of developed joy, bliss, power and consciousness. It remains in the subtle form. It does not merge into any thing. This is its liberation. This is its Nirvana (salvation).

For the progress towards the goal of soul's emancipation from the lust-embedded causal body, the Jain scriptures have enumerated the following progressions: Fourteen Gunasthanas (levels of purity of soul, in a way the last eleven are the levels of developed stage, and the first three are the levels of the undeveloped stage). Two types of indirect knowledge (mati and shrut acquired through sense organs and the mind) Three kinds of direct knowledge (avadhi, manahparyaya and keval directly generated by the intellectual soul) Eleven Pratimas (stages of renunciation for a layman) with reference to Shravak. The rank-order can only be explained through the system of Bhed-Prabhed (classifications). But, the soul heading towards its goal does not entangle in counting these milestones. This is such a journey where always lies the danger of turning back before attaining the goal. We can regress even further from the point where we had started in some earlier birth.

Mythology has presented the incarnations of Mahavir in previous births in great detail and fantasy. As compared to his eventless life, his previous births are very eventful. The narration of previous births in the first section of Jain literature classified as Prathamamanuyog indicates that Sadhana and asceticism can make any soul a Mahavir, that by taking birth in previous incarnation as a Lion, a soul can attain the qualities of Mahavir and can be instrumental in liberating and freeing human beings from the cycles of life-and-death, that in the deep-darkness of karmic bondage is inherent the existence of light and one has simply to search for it. For liberation from the bonds of karmas, the roles of upadan (material cause) and nimitta (instrumental cause) are to be fulfilled with rational perception, rational knowledge and rational conduct. This path of Mahavir is difficult, but once is fully comprehended and put into practise, it is uniquely very simple.

The thought of Mahavir is a composition in its entirety- a complete structure/construction, in which the bricks have been laid one over the other scientifically. We cannot remove a brick from anywhere. Mahavir's teachings should be seen in their epistemological entirety. To cull an isolated sen-

tence from his preaching and to take it as everything is not doing justice to Mahavir. His basic concept of multiple manifoldness of reality (Anekant) realized by real identification of the nature of thing cannot be comprehended by our one-sided vision.

Every era evolves a comfortable and so-called profitable lifestyle. Simple and pure life is neglected. A bad coin turns out a good coin from circulation. Mahavir wants to save us from bias, stagnancy and rotten old-age customs. Mahavir is relevant even today and as and when Scientific tenor is developed further, his relevance will be appreciated more.

KARMAKAND OPPOSED

Mahavir opposes all sorts of discrimination, snobbery and rituals (karmakand). His attempt is that man should try to learn to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. But today the world is caught in the web of non-essentials. Sometime back, necessity was called the mother of invention. Today, the case is reverse. Invention is done first. Then for its necessity or utility a market is created through advertisement and publicity. Instead of mother's milk for the complete development of a child, this process performs the magic of bottled milk. Inflated desires and necessities do not allow us to take rest or leisure. We are caught in the web of prestige and competition or rivalry. We are in the clutches of race, caste, creed, image management and neo-feudalism and are losing ourselves. Let alone mutual respect, we are not prepared even to accommodate each other.

A new type of karmakand - fatalism, garland and bouquets, reception-arches, touching the feet, astrology, blessings, slavery, show biz and snobbery is taking the world under its claws and clutches. Telling lies and fraudulent behaviour have become our destiny. We are more interested in our own words (nij vani) rather than Mahavir's teachings (Jina vani). We pine for the publication of our photographs & the erection of our idols. If there is a group photograph of ours with family friends or even with Mahavir's idol, we will

look at our photo first. The increasing commercialisation of communication media & the entertainment industry has taken its toll and made us anti-social, aggressive, unemotional, fearful and full of complexes. Violence is not only apparent in reshaped form, but also prevalent everywhere in an invisible form.

Those, who are playing the role of nimitta, are successful in creating such an atmosphere that a common person is feeling snapped with the power of upadan. Those who are engaged in creating mafia like dominance do not allow self-confidence to be generated in the masses. It is their attempt to make others subordinate, dependent on them, and accustomed to the sense of helplessness. They never remember Mahavir's dictum: that every person or every entity is a creator of self-destiny. On the other hand, gratefulness towards nimitta (instrumental agency) is being considered useless; whereas earlier it was not so. While in the past, salutation to all the Arihants, Siddhas, Acaryas, Teachers and Saints became a revered Mahamantra among Jains; anger, jealousy and not only false pretensions but ungratefulness, were all considered as a destroyer of human qualities (Sthanang Sutra 4/4). The post-war modern chicanery is to try to pull the ladder, by means of which you are elevated. Don't name the nimitta; otherwise, a share will go to it from the credit of your success.

MODERN CHALLENGES

To save the earth and humanity, these challenges can be faced in a cool, reasoned and lasting manner by remembering Mahavir. Today, 2600 years after Mahavir, can we take a vow to return to his thought and conduct?

It is not too late. After traversing a thousand or two thousand miles in the wrong direction, we need not walk the same distance to find the right direction. We have just to take a U-turn. As soon as we take a U-turn, we shall be facing the right direction.

It does not require a thousand years to lighten a room lying in darkness for thousands of years. You simply have to switch on the electricity. The room will be flooded with light. This is why no matter how intense the karmic bondage is, no matter how arduous the difficulties and obstacles, unceasing efforts should be made to follow Mahavir's path and attain liberation like him.

Bahari dishayen hain, shabd ghute jate hain
kaun hava chalati hai, sab lute jate hain
khuli is hatheli par ek ratan aur
raushani ugane ka ek jatan aur abhi ek jatan aur.

The directions are deaf, words are muffled.
What storm blows, everybody is being looted.
On my open palm let there be one more gem.
To spread light, let there be one more effort, one effort more.

+ The day and dates of birth, acquiring ultimate knowledge and Nirvana of Bhagavan Mahavir, have been derived with the help of Future Point Pvt. Ltd. Hauz Khas, New Delhi.

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Bhagavan Mahavir had an unflinching and thorough perception of the manifoldness of reality as well as the expansive, independent, vivid and self-sufficient nature of matter, both living and non-living. This perception is the key to his lofty and sublime thoughts. For comprehending this perception, micro-classifications into endless types and subtypes may only be a primal need. Sometimes they may shift the original facet of Mahavir's thought out of the focus of our vision. Therefore, the need is to go beyond the classifications and shape our behavioural patterns according to Mahavir's basic and non-bookish thinking.

Mahavir's path, for comprehending the nature of reality, is simple and natural. He believes in non-imposition. He disfavours a throbbing attraction towards merit (punya) within us. For him it is only the purity of emotion and not its goodness or evil that may free the soul from all bondage of karma and the possibility of rebirth.

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