

Guest Editorial:

## **Water Shall Have To Be Filtered(1)**

by Late Dr. Nemi Chand Jain

English Adaptation by Dr. Trilok Chandra Jain, Shastri

The Jain Study Circular endeavors to present the basics of the Jain religion as related in our scriptures, by encouraging Jains to follow the spirit of Jainism and preserve the unique features of our religion. With this goal, the following article by Dr. Nemi Chand Jain, a visionary scholar, is reprinted from the July 1988 issue of the Jain Study Circular.

- DCJ

Today we are passing through an age of spectacular scientific accomplishments. Things that once seemed utterly impossible, have been achieved. There is no doubt that we have made advances beyond our wildest imagination and have discovered countless mysteries of nature. We have also realized that substance is indestructible and may be obtained in its purest form.

Certain things that were deemed useless in the past and were discarded are now recycled. We have read such news with astonishment. For example, we have filtered and purified the waters of the Ganges river. Mechanical filters have been invented which are capable of purifying dirty and filthy water. In big metropolitan areas, dirty water is filtered by separating waste. Man has constructed the best possible filters for purifying dirty water. **This is symbolic of the fact that man has learned, to a certain extent, the art of discovering the meaningful and useful aspects of life. To the same extent, man has shed the snake-skin of irrelevance.**

We know that water being purified by us is a physical entity. However, perhaps, we do not realize that our thought-current is muddy and polluted. Our religious system is like a pond of water which has become shallow and dirty. A lot of muddy precipitate has collected at its bottom. Thus it has become impossible to fathom the depth of the true fundamental principles of the Jain religion.

**Shall we ever devote some thought to the ways to purify the rivers and streams of our religious and social establishment? Could there be such filters of good ideas and good conduct which can be employed to cleanse Jain society?**

Years and decades have passed. However, we cannot forget the deficiencies and drawbacks that continue to disfigure and disgrace our society. Some terrible incidents have occurred that have made the future of our religious system uncertain. ... Under these circumstances, we are not in a position to figure out how the water of the pond of religion can be purified.

[Let us consider the components of our Jain system: monks and nuns (SAADHUs and SAADDHVIIs) and men and women householders (SHRAAVAKs and SHRAAVIKAs).]

The devotion and care of monks has taken a strange twist. Many monks exhibit feelings of possessiveness. Many monks exercise indirect control over public funds. Some monks have forgotten the scientific nature of the Jain philosophy. They are indulging in MANTRAs(2) and superstitious rituals (TANTRAs). For some of them, the

measures of greatness of religion are the heights and grandeur of images and temples. .... Many monks are organizing bathing and worship (ABHISKEK and POOJA) of idols claiming that some demigod (YAKSHA) has directed them to such celebrations. They overlook the distinction between the Jain concept of God - one who is beyond attachment and aversion (VEETARAAGI JIN) and the concept of demigods who are pleased and displeased. Well, what can be said of the monks who suffer from ignorance, pretence and hypocrisy? Doesn't the conduct of such monks distort and defame the pristine quality and scientific nature of Jainism?

Some monks are boisterous - they are powerful orators and thus they command significant influence. ... [However] they are after rich food, pomp and show, and colored posters. They publish books with little substance but with attractive get-up. These monks have descended from the mountain tops of great vows (MAHAAVRATs) to the life of cheap publicity through posters. Don't you think that we should adopt some effective measures to filter this stream of dirty water? Remember that the Jain community in India is identified with 'filtered water'.

... The conduct of monks has been defined and described in great detail in scriptures. No modifications are warranted in the spiritual lifestyle of a monk as time passes. Nevertheless, some minor adjustments which do not violate the fundamentals of Jainism, are in order. We have to see that the character of Jain monks (SHRAMANs) does not get tarnished and that undesirable behavior does not lead to any unfortunate incident.

There should be some control over immature persons being admitted to monkhood. Also, householders should be made aware of the characteristics of a monk as spelled out in the scriptures. Common people respect a monk who observes celibacy and who travels on foot. Unfortunately, even these symbols are losing ground. Now, many monks are becoming book-oriented; they make all kinds of compromises to get their low-quality books published, and, they get stuck to certain books. These practices conflict with the concept of 'person without any tome' (NIRGRANTH). At present, we Jains have a historic opportunity to revitalize the teachings of our scriptures through our conduct and practice of religion.

... On the one hand, the conduct of our monks is becoming increasingly lax, and, on the other hand, the code of conduct of householders has assumed an undesirable twist. Jain laymen are indulging in such businesses and professions which have jeopardized the spirit of Jain principles. People continue these practices without any remorse because they have the blessings of some so-called monks or they are president or secretary or treasurer of some institution. The common people are unaware of such practices and so things go on unabated. Many such leaders of the society have been responsible for the killing of countless living beings and they still are respected by the community. Why? Simply, because they are doling out money with both hands - money which the government will take anyway if they do not donate it. This practice amounts to cheating the self and the society. **These are times of trial for Jains. At present it is imperative that we get involved in a serious study of ethics as taught by our scriptures and literally live up to them in temples, in places of worship, in study halls, in business, in factories.**

... Jain places of worship and study are not just physical sites but they are centers of the practice of ethics in every sphere of life. We should give up the double standard in our conduct. We should return to the basic integrity and reliability [for which Jains have

been known in the past]. It is well-known that the trustworthiness and credibility of Jains has suffered considerably in present times. This fact is not only a matter of shame but it also signals a great danger to our community because laxity of morals can totally destroy the moral fabric of society. **We Jains should examine our professional and business practices in the light of the basic values of our religion, and, we should make a conscientious effort to give up any undesirable practices. We should purify our thoughts and actions.**

It is said that our diet influences our thoughts and feelings. These days our diet has become vitiated (impure), which gives rise to indiscriminate behavior patterns. ...

Some people have the misconception that our kitchen is just an ordinary room, limited to a certain area of our residence. But, in fact, the kitchen is a symbol of our habits and attitudes. When we or any of our family members or relatives are away from home, in an airplane, in New York, in London, in a dormitory, in a restaurant, he or she is in principle eating in an extension of our home kitchen. Thus we should make every effort to explain the religious and scientific basis of our diet to our sons, daughters and relatives. We should tell them what kind of food and lifestyle are good for their health and what is injurious to their health. We should teach them about which foods, drinks and addictive substances have undesirable effects on our physical and mental health. If our concern is confined to our sons and daughters becoming successful professionals and businessmen, and we do not pay attention to their diet, habits and lifestyle, we will not be able to make any beneficial and constructive impact on our family and on our society. In fact, if we do not take the necessary steps today, we may not be able to do anything about it later. A tiny slip may assume the form of a big tragedy and we will just watch it like a helpless spectator. The word "JAIN" will become lifeless and meaningless.

There was a news item from Goa that certain improvements are being made in the bullock cart to make it suitable for the twenty-first century. A model has been constructed with aluminum frame and pneumatic tires. If the bullock cart is being improved, should we not transform the structure of our socio-religious system in the light of the basics of the Jain religion. How can we expect to run the chariot of our religion and society with the weak and rickety bullocks [of lax morals and ethics]? These days many religious organizations have collected large donations by introducing truck-chariots (decorated floats on trucks), which are deemed a remarkable success. **But we should realize that if our society is devoid of good moral character, such chariots [and celebrations] are meaningless. They only harm our integrity. They distort and deface our pristine religion.(3)**

We cannot deny the fact that we are carrying the burden of our fundamental values on our backs like a porter. We are carrying this load as if it belongs to somebody else. We are performing the meaningless task of transporting it from one place to another. [We do not realize that the values preached by Bhagwaan Mahaveer are ours to follow.] In other words, the saying of the great medieval Indian saint, Kabir, applies to our plight. Its essence is:

**Water in the lake is immense; but the poor thirsty fish remains thirsty.**

**Well, today, the fish (the soul of Jainism) is not only thirsty but it is also suffering in polluted and poisonous waters. Can't we take up the bold task of filtering the waters of the streams of religion and society?**

Footnotes:

1. Adapted from the prestigious Hindi journal "TIRTHANKAR", Volume 17, Issue 8, 1987.
2. This should be distinguished from NAMOKAAR MANTRA, a prayer which is meant to remind us of the principles of Jainism. It is not for material gains.
3. Remember, Bhagwaan Mahaveer taught us that without purity of thoughts, feelings and actions, all rituals are meaningless. - D. C. J.