

A Gem From The October 1982 Issue:

*Jainism And Modern Age*¹

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We hope that our readers will enjoy these original and illuminating concepts presented by a non-Jain scholar. - DCJ

In the 2500th year of Mahaveer's salvation (PARINIRVAAN), it will be appropriate to discuss the relevance of his philosophy and preaching to modern times and modern man. In my view, three contributions of Mahaveer stand out as eternal verities and unquestionable values.

Nonviolence:

The greatest contribution of Jainism is non-injury to anything living. The scope of terms 'life' and 'living' is extended by Jains to all beings, like Leibniz's monads, to the smallest and insignificant 'particle' of this creation. The real Jain raises the question: Pray, what is insignificant in the scheme of things? What is great or small is merely our mental measurement and prejudice, while the mind itself is flexible and relative and never stagnating process of cognition. What is needed is right cognition and right action shall follow.²

Modern ecologists and psycho-biologists would corroborate the fact that nothing living is irrelevant in the scheme of things. It is merely our ignorance which pooh-poohs respect for life. As Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Tilak in a letter: It is our moral cowardice and impatience that we take recourse to violence. In reality, violence destroys the very cause, which advocates it. Let us look at the various political murders done by mad or high-strung abnormals: the recent murder of Gandhi, Bandarnayake, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King may be recounted. Large scale violence, may it be Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Pearl Harbor or Mi Lei, Vietnam or Bangladesh, or even earlier at Auschwitz or Siberian Camps, only proves the point. Not that India has been free from wanton large-scale killings and arson and destruction. The riots after partition and the

¹ Reprinted from the prestigious journal 'Tirthankar', volume 1, pp. 8-12, 1975.

² This is the Jain concept that rational perception and rational knowledge must precede rational conduct. - DCJ

unnecessary bloodshed are a recent example. All this deliberate and pointed killing of men by men, or even of men by man, as in recent highjackings, leads to one conclusion, that as easily man can take life, he cannot give. Science and technology have come to his aid to add to the poignancy and lethal power of this nihilistic activity of man. And under what sweet names, masks and cloaks does man enact this drama of cloak-and-dagger, war to end war, and what not!

Mahaveer's teachings carry the prognosis of this element of pugnacity in the inherent nature of man. Nietzsche called war a biological necessity, the Brahmins advocated that violence in the name of religion is not violence or life of one living being is for the survival of another living being.³ All that may be partly true for scales of life manifestation and life assertion. But man does not live by the Darwinian survival of the fittest rule giving the right to the mightiest to set the rules. Marxism, which advocates class war, dialectically defends violence in the name of Cultural Revolution or suppression of any dissenting voices. Violence has been used freely even in those countries that claim to have achieved the El Dorado of equality and fraternity (if not exactly liberty). The rise of a new class or a new serfdom indulges in violence. However, the consequences of all such activities convincingly demonstrate that violence is a sterile activity and in the human context, it only leads to more violence.

While man has unlimited capacity to destroy, he has very limited means to reconstruct or build or heal or enliven. Mahaveer's teachings, if widely applied would include all pacifist movements in politics, all trusteeship and reconciliatory methods of arbitration in economic disputes, all guidance and readjustment therapy in social psychology. Advocates of extreme violence argue that they have no other alternatives. Some people have a feeling that there is no other way. So do all terrorists and anarchists and Marxist-Leninists, and similar other groups theorize and call themselves panthers and quick-remedy-believers. However, if one thinks coolly, in the ultimate analysis, it is merely losing

³ VAIDIKI HIMSA HIMSA NA BHAVATI.
JEEVO JEEVASYA BHJANAM.

Some religions believe in a similar edict that God created animals for man's food.

- DCJ

faith in man's goodness, in the possibility of a change of heart, in the basic trust that an individual can transform the system.

The one objection that is generally raised against the concept of nonviolence advocated by Mahaveer is that it is humanly impracticable. Voltair's 'The Fable of the Good Brahmin' illustrates the case where he becomes a victim by pardoning a tiger. But the argument can be rebutted by saying that all civilizations and cultures, all intellectual activity and human commerce would lose its meaning if man is to eternally doubt the other and believe that the law of the jungle alone would prevail. This is too pessimistic and rigid view of life. Even though some great minds like Spengler or Sartre or the great Urdu poet, Iqbal, may believe in it. Life's gates do not have the motto engraved on it in ironmould 'No Exit'. With the kind of philosophy to dominate/convert the world where ego (KHUDI) becomes superior to God (KHUDA) and holy wars are conceived to capture the holy land, man's basic moral stature would shrink. On the other hand, Mahaveer's teaching of nonviolence will serve as a beacon of light and hope for humanity.

Logic of Probability and Relativism

(ANEKAANT or SYAADAVAD):

The second great contribution of Mahaveer to human intellect is the logic of probability. In the Aristotlean scheme of things, all trouble started with A and non-A, as Eric Fromm points out in his Art of Loving. There is always a third possibility according to the hoary wisdom of the East. Lao-Tse told through parables that it depends on how you look at things; there is no final judgment on human behavior and choices. The leeway or freedom given to man is highlighted by many a philosopher in the East. The ISHAVASYOOPANISHAD states: Those who go after possibility (SAMBHOOTI) are going to blind darkness; those who run after impossibility (ASAMBHOOTI) are pursuing greater blindness. Different philosophers, from Shankara to Acharya Vinoba Bhave, have given different interpretations of this statement. But the Jain logician introduced a very important category of what Vahinger would have called "The Philosophy of As If (SYAD)". The relativism of knowledge and perception, of cognition and even volition is accepted by modern logicians in the West, even existentialist psychologists and anthropology- based historiographers.

In fact, the concept of relativism is one of India's greatest contributions to world thought. It is not always of Schweitzer who would

have categorized world-and-life assertion (SYAD ASTI) and world-and-life negation (SYAD NAASTI). Man is not constantly closing himself in cages and shutting himself up into switch-on and switch-off mechanizations. Man is not the object but the subject of this dividing line, if any. Further, there is always the third possibility (SYAD ASTINAASTI). Thus Jains added this great dimension to human thinking and peeped into the world beyond. Why should we always insist on belief in God or non-belief in God; there can be a third agnostic possibility. Are all so called good or bad things always and everywhere good or bad? The same applies to man-made divisions and antinomies in every field of thought and action.

In my view, the category of inexpressible (AVAKTAVYA) is yet another great contribution of Jain logic. Many a thing may exist there but may be beyond the reach of human intellect. Do not many starry firmaments and galaxies existing beyond the views of telescopes? Do not microbiological specs and molecules exist beyond microscopes? Is what is grasped through sensual vision identical to philosophic or literary or artistic vision? This brings Jain logic very close to modern linguistic and analytical logicians. In fact, Jains applied mathematics to logic and carried it the viable extremity. This is a field in which more research needs to be done.

Non-possessiveness (APARIGRAH):

How far can one go in non-possessiveness? There is a famous story of Diogenes, the Greek philosopher who lived in a tub, that the day he discovered that he could drink by cupping his palm, he threw away the half coconut shell, which he had been using, as a cup. So there are Indian monks (SADHUS) who call themselves KARA-PAATRI (those who use their hands as cups or dishes). Jain mendicants carried the question to its logical extreme and said that clothing is also not necessary. A real monk is one for whom the directions and the sky are the dress and apparel (DIG-AMBAR).⁴ This shows that in a world where men are after material possessions and amassing things, there can a few who can be pursuing existence and its essence without things. Matter is not all; in fact, matter is naught. What matters is man and not matter.

For this Jain ethics insisted on regarding outside things as mere means and not end in themselves. Partly because the community in which this philosophy spread was merchants and traders and partly because they did not travel beyond India, or even not in all parts of India, this aspect of

⁴ Evidently, the author was not familiar with both traditions of Jainism. - DCJ

their philosophy, though very noble, was not fully practiced. We find that amongst the Jains the richest and the wealthiest families of the country. This fact could be reconciled by the fact that Mahaveer taught two different sets of observances for the monks (SHRAMANS) and for the householders (SHRAVAKS).

Moreover, wealth in itself is nothing, if it is not related to human welfare, to the betterment of man. Mahaveer insisted on charity (DAAN) and also the various phases of man's disinterestedness in external material. The very relationship of inner life with outer world is such that the possession and the possessed try to get over the better of each other. So the way of the Jain supreme human being (ARHAT) was to get gradual emancipation from the bondage of karma. The Jain way of getting lighter by discarding the weight of this bondage, the process of shedding of karma (NARJARA) is what modern Western psychotherapists advocate also. "The world is too much with us," bemoaned Wordsworth and exclaimed, "What man has made of man?" So did Indian poets. Chandidas said,⁵ "Man is the highest truth - nothing is above that." Maithili Sharan Gupta wrote,⁶ "You are a man, die for a man." Jainism preaches this humanism. If we shall not share our possessions, we shall be eating each other. Mahaveer, 2500 years ago, pointed out the way: 'If man has to survive, he has to respect every other man, irrespective of caste, color, creed, community or class.'

Let us remember Mahaveer and try to learn from him and gather the rays in our own small gardens of hearts, in the hope that some seed would sprout and some buds would blossom. Great men elevate, their memory ennoble.

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Some Unique Features Of Jainism

(Excerpts from Jain Study Circular, January 2007, page 33)

The rational basis of Jainism has contributed to the growth of scientific temper and the fight against superstition and blind belief. Rejecting the rigidities of doctrine, Jainism presented a new openness and in a new freshness in our approach to matters considered spiritual. This approach has helped in grappling with social, religious and even economic problems facing mankind. Jainism is part and parcel of the rich tradition of rational intellectual discourse that has flourished in this ancient land of India.

- Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India

⁵ SABAAR OPER MANUS SATYA, TAHAAR OPER NEI.

⁶ MANUSHYA HO MANUSHYA KE LIYE MARO.