

A Gem From July 1998 issue:

*Revolutionary Thinking:
Who Should Take the Lead?*¹

By Shri Abhaya Prakash Jain

In this article, Shri Abhaya Prakash Jain points out that significant changes have occurred in people's thinking on account of scientific and technological advances. He has made some keen observations and has discussed some very important questions that might have plagued our minds as well at one time or another. Our family members, youngsters and friends too raise such questions. It is hoped that our readers will enjoy these revolutionary and provocative ideas presented by Shri Abhaya Prakash Jain. - D. C. J.

Today, the spectacular advances of modern science have brought the human intellect to such a level that many questions have arisen concerning our accepted beliefs. Simultaneously, social ills such as hatred, lack of trust, zeal for religion beset with blind faith, sectarianism, suspicion, duress, lack of faith (in morality), and the tendency to raise questions and concerns, have generated an unusual sense of agitation and mental tension in the lives of individuals. Even some Jain thinkers of today are promoting disregard of the moral principles and neglect of the code of conduct. Instead of human decency, cooperation and the theory of karma, ineffectual and unhealthy customs and practices embracing extreme material pleasures, are escalating. Such tendencies involve exploitation of the trust and potency of the society. This is like serving the same stale food to people with which they are fed up. There is no justification or excuse for such practices.²

¹ English adaptation of the article "Chintan Kranti: Sawal Pahal Ka", published in the prestigious journal 'TIRTHANKAR' of September 1990. We are grateful to Dr. Nemi Chand Jain, editor, for his kind permission to adapt this article. The help of Richa A. Jain with the adaptation of this article is also acknowledged. - D. C. J.

² This is an accurate description of the variety of charades such as conventions, seminars and celebrations that are organized by various institutions. Even some charitable institutions indulge in such practices. - D. C. J.

Today the attitudes and thinking of people are significantly different from those of yesteryear. In the past, individuals in general and Jains in particular did not blame the social order when they did not have material means including the bare necessities of life. They accepted whatever happened in their lives as consequences of their karmas or as acts of fate. Today's man is relegated to be free. Today's man does not want to depend on others. He wants to progress by putting into practice his own independent ideas. He does not want to live his life with the help of blind faith in God or fate. Nevertheless he demands the means of pleasure and comforts in this very life. He expects that society should accept his independent existence. He expects that if he uses his intellect, the system would allow him means of support for his life. If today's man is denied these things, he threatens to derange the social, political and economic order. (These traits have led to conflict and social problems.)

When we seek the solutions to human problems, we turn to religion, the reason being that only religion is the element that limits the boundless desires of individuals and broadens their outlook. In this context we need to understand that the Jain youngsters of today are indisposed to place any faith in religion beset with unscrupulous ritualism (ROODHIGRAST DHARM). It is not possible to conciliate them by saying 'This is what is written in the scripture.' The need of the hour is that we examine religion at each and every level, open our eyes and analyze the promises made by religion in the past. Had it not promised that it would bring happiness to all by unifying the various sects and subsects, and all communities and castes? Did it not promise to bring auspicious bliss, and thereby establish an ideal and beneficial social order? What happened to this sacred deal accorded by religion? (On account of our experiences in these matters,) today only that religion and philosophy, which inspires us to think from an unfettered outlook, can address our problems.

Religion and philosophy should have features that make them appealing to all. Moreover, they should elucidate the path to development and advancement of soul based on self-endeavor. What good are religions and philosophy that erect walls between peoples, and that demolish all bounds of morality and social norms to fulfill their selfish motives? We Jains understand the truth about our system but we are not ready to admit it. The meaning of being a Jain has been radically distorted. We

have put on a mask of being a Jain and so we have become the target of mockery by others. The roots of Jainism appear to be sinking in the mire (of corrupt practices) and we are fast asleep. We refuse to notice the undesirable changes taking place in the Jain society. We seem to have firm belief in certain worthless falsehoods. On the other hand, there are features (of the Jain religion) that are worthy of our attention. We need to examine them logically and critically. But we are totally oblivious to them.

Bhagvaan Mahaveer censured dubious religious fabrications and denounced all pomp and show in religion. Today his followers are indulging in various dubious fabrications, ritualistic practices, pompous investiture of temples and images, and community feasts in the name of religion. Religion is neither in any temple nor in any village. It is neither in pilgrimages nor in jungles. Religion is in one's own soul, which is inherently pristine. We should determine our religious practices based on sagacity and rational knowledge. The self is the supreme universal spirit. Physical activities do not lead to spiritual progress. Looking deep into one's soul and purifying it are the means to advance on the path to spiritualism.

Generally, it is said that the new generation has become atheist, disoriented and undisciplined. Though not completely, but it is true to some extent. This fact cannot be denied. As I understand it, although there is no basic difference between youngsters and adults, a gap in thinking, usually referred to as the generation gap, has developed between the two groups. The new generation wants adults to allow room for their ideas while the adults want to maintain their undisputed control. The youngsters want adults to first set an example by practicing what they preach while the adults want the young generation to turn themselves into pure gold. The problem is: Who should take the first step? In my view, the new generation will have to take the first step. Accusing the adults is of no avail. The new society belongs to the new generation.

In this modern age of intellect and logic, we should follow a philosophy that can impel us to investigate the truth from a complaisant viewpoint. The Jain system of multiplicity of viewpoints shakes the roots of ego, and questions its extreme viewpoint. It is not possible for an individual to grasp the various aspects of truth. Further, aspects of truth vary with time, circumstances and social structure. For example, when it is sunrise

in our country, it is sunset in some other country, and, the sun will rise some time later in yet another country. The same person has different relationships with different individuals. We do not have to live in a state of suspense because of these facts. We have to seek a compromise between apparently opposite views. A thing, which is real, unified, true and eternal when seen from a global viewpoint, might appear to be unreal, untrue, varied and momentary when seen from a limited and experiential viewpoint.

We should endeavor to examine an element, a religion, a concept from every possible angle. Thinking and maintaining that whatever we are saying is the only truth, is our stubbornness. We should understand that whatever we say may be appropriate from our viewpoint. We should also realize that our means of expressing our thoughts are limited. Every element of the philosophy of life changes with time. It changes with circumstances³. How many conflicts among individuals arise on account of misunderstandings about intentions? To avoid such conflicts, we need to revolutionize our thinking. Such revolutionary thinking will bring us closer to a culture of tolerance, and a culture devoid of preconceived notions.

³ We should not compromise the basic teachings of Jainism in this process. - D. C. J.