

# Self-reliance: A Distinctive Feature Of Jainism

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## Religion of self-reliance (SHRAMAN DHARM):

Once a Western scholar asked Pandit Phool Chandra Jain Siddhantacharya, "What is the distinguishing feature of Jainism that makes it a religion distinct from Hinduism or Buddhism?" He replied, "The concept of independence of each individual soul is the fundamental principle of Jainism. Further, self-help is the way to achieve such independence." This indicates that Jainism is the religion of self-reliance (SHRAMAN DHARM).

The Sanskrit word 'SHRAMAN' is derived from the word 'SHRAM', meaning labor or effort. Thus 'SHRAMAN' is one who engages in 'SHRAM'. The derivation of the word 'SHRAMAN' is SHRAAMAYATI ITI SHRAMANAH. It means that one who exerts or endeavors is SHRAMAN. The SHRAMAN tradition is predicated on endeavor. It treasures penance consorted with knowledge.(1) In other words, a 'SHRAMAN' makes a serious effort to improve his/her life. The followers of SHRAMAN DHARM believe in self-endeavor. They rely on efforts made by themselves for their spiritual progress. A self-reliant individual believes that, in the final analysis, one is responsible for one's accomplishments and privations, successes and failures, gains and losses. Our environments, animate and inanimate, do serve as instrumental or auxiliary causes (NIMITTA KAARAN) but the individual is the substantive cause (UPAADAAN KAARAN). Thus, ultimately, the individual is responsible for the course of his/her life. This is the culture of self-reliance.

Most other religions, on the contrary, extort that good fortune and ultimate salvation result by accepting a certain scripture, a supernatural or superhuman entity, and/or by indulging in certain ritualistic practices. Thus one's life depends on the favors granted by some external entity that can be influenced through one's actions such as prayers, worship and certain rituals performed by the self or by other individuals on one's behalf. However, a self-reliant person (SHRAMAN) believes that the course of one's life is governed by the interactions between soul and its animate and inanimate environment. These interactions are governed by the intrinsic characteristics of the entities involved. Thus self-reliant persons believe that self-endeavor plays an important role in shaping their lives. Some other 'SHRAMAN' traditions, including Buddhists and AJIVIKAs, were prevalent in India. However, Dr. Padmanabh Jaini has remarked, (2) "Perhaps more than any other religious tradition, Jainism is imbued with the emotional commitment to self-reliance."

It should be pointed out that the word 'SAMAN' is derived from 'SHRAMAN'. Sometimes, the former is interpreted to imply 'one who has equanimity (SAMATA). However, the virtue of equanimity is embraced by the Vedic tradition and other religions as well. Thus this connotation of SAMAN or SHRAMAN does not uniquely define the Jain tradition of self-reliance.

The ancient Jain scripture ACHAARAANGASUTRA states:(3)

Man, you are your own friend; why do you seek any other friend?

This implies that we are the masters of our own destiny. This is logical corollary of the Jain theory of karma, as expressed by Acharya Amitgati in the following stanza from BHAAVANA DWAATRINSHATIKA:(4)

A soul bears the consequences of the desirable and undesirable karma that it had acquired. The karma obtained by oneself would be of no consequence if one could enjoy the favors bestowed by others. Nobody provides anything to the beings except the karma that they acquire themselves. One should completely give up the thought that someone else can grant us means of comfort or genuine bliss.

This indicates that self-reliance is the only way to happiness and peace of mind.

BHAGVATI SUTRA states, (5)“Gautam! He does bring up karma not yet mature but fit enough to mature by endeavor, also by action, also by strength, also by energy, and also by self-reliance; but he does not bring up karma not yet mature but fit enough to mature by non-endeavor, non-action, non-strength, non-energy, non-exertion. Hence exist endeavor, action, strength, energy and self-exertion.”

### **Self-reliance and the Jain theory of karma:**

The Jain theory of karma, which is a direct consequence of the seven (or nine) aspects of reality described in the Jain scriptures, (6) implies that the lives of all worldly souls are fashioned through self-endeavor. In GOMMATASAAR KARMAKAAND, Acharya Nemi Chandra Siddhant Chakravarti has stated:(7)

On account of its association with a body, a worldly soul accumulates karmic particles and pseudo-karmas continually, just as a hot ball of iron attracts water.

In plain words, an exchange of material particles, including karma particles, continuously goes on between a worldly soul and its environment. Some karma particles come to fruition and are shed by the soul; some fresh material particles are attracted by the soul and become associated with it.

The influx of karma particles is caused by the activities of body, speech and mind (YOGA) while the duration and intensity of fruition are determined by the four passions of anger, pride, intrigue and greed as described by Acharya Nemi Chandra Siddhant Chakravarti in GOMMATASAAR KARMAKAAND:(8)

The nature and quantity of the influx of karma particles depend on the thought-activity (YOGA), and duration and intensity of fruition of karmic bonding, by passions (KASHAAYA). In the spiritual states where deluding karmas exist in a passive or destroyed state, there is no cause for bonding of any kind.

In TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Acharya Umaswati has elucidated the same concept:(9)

The nature and intensity (TEEVRA-MAND) of desire or thought-activity, intentional or unintentional character of activity (JNAAT-AJNAAT), dependence of the act involving living and non-living substances (ADHIKARAN) and one's own potentiality (VEERYA) determine the kind of karma and the amount of karmic influx.

These concepts point to the fact that the interactions between a soul and karmic particles depend on the physical and mental activities of a worldly being. No Supreme Being or supernatural entity controls these interactions.

One may point out that the lives of worldly souls are governed by karmas. The following quotations from Acharya Kundkund's PANCHASTIKAYASAAR bring out the fact that interactions between a soul and karmic particles occur according to their own respective attributes:(10)

The emotional states of a living being are caused by karma particles and karma particles in their turn are caused by the emotional states. However, the soul is not the intrinsic cause and yet without intrinsic cause these changes cannot occur.

Soul that brings about changes in itself is the intrinsic cause of the mental states but the soul is not the intrinsic cause of the changes in the karma particles, which are material in nature. This is the teaching of JIN - the conqueror of passions.

The changes in karma particles occur due to the intrinsic nature of material particles. Similarly, the changes in a worldly soul occur due to the intrinsic characteristics of soul and through its own impure states of thought, which are conditioned by karma.

Acharya Kundkund elucidates the same concept in the following couplet from SAMAYASAAR:(11)

The qualities or attributes of one substance  
cannot be generated by another substance.

Therefore, all substances of the universe  
evolve in accordance with their own nature.

Evidently, the Jain theory of karma embodies the concept of self-reliance.

### **Characteristics of a self-reliant person (SHRAMAN):**

Acharya Kundkund describes the characteristics of a self-reliant individual in the following words:(12)

An individual, who does not depend on external objects,  
performs all activities of body, speech and mind independently;  
such independent actions lead to shedding of karma,  
so independent actions constitute the path to liberation.

This concept implies that spiritual advancement and ultimate salvation can be attained through self-endeavor. No supreme being can help us attain salvation. ARIHANTs, the Supreme Human Beings and SIDDHAs, the liberated souls, serve as ideals (instrumental cause) for us to follow.

The insightful acharya continues:(13)

A self-reliant person, who, on account of defiled thoughts,  
indulges in activities involving external objects,  
is not independent by any measure or definition,  
he does not have the distinctive feature of independence.

If a self-reliant person luxuriates in external objects and activities on account of attachment and aversion, he/she indulges in defiled states (ASHUBH BHAAV) of soul. Such dependence on and indulgence in extraneous objects leads to involvement in worldly affairs and impedes spiritual uplift.

In the following couplet, Acharya Kundkund emphasizes the virtue of self-reliance and deprecates dependence on external entities.(14)

A self-reliant person who is devoid of independence,  
can not cultivate rational conduct by any means;  
as has been stated earlier, one should pursue  
independence before imbibing propitious conduct.

In Jainism, souls have been classified into three categories: BAHIRAATMAs, who are wholly engrossed in the affairs of their worldly existence, ANTARAATMAs, who are engaged in spiritual pursuit, and PARAMAATMAs, who have attained salvation (MOKSHA). Evidently, BAHIRAATMAs are dependent on external entities while ANTARAATMAs enjoy independence from all extraneous things. These concepts have been presented by Acharya Kundkund in the following couplet:(15)

A self-reliant person who practices the essential virtue of

independence of soul is called ANTARAATMA - absorbed in the self, having no such inclination, one is said to be BAHIRAATMA, the soul who is dependent on the external objects.

### **Implications of the religion of self-reliance:**

The concept of self-reliance addresses the problem of freedom versus determinism. Is the course of life of a worldly being predetermined or one is the master of one's destiny? Self-reliance implies that each individual soul is independent. Freedom of the individual is the focal point of the religion of self-reliance. Evidently, a worldly soul has the bondage of karma. Further, one depends on the various external entities for one's survival. Salvation entails attaining freedom from such dependence, which can be achieved through self-endeavor. In this context, the following quote from Acharya Mahaprajna is illuminating:(16)

One may mistakenly conceive that power and wealth are the ultimate goals of the domain of religion. The fact is that once power and wealth enter the domain of religion, they make it narrow and produce an aberration in our thinking. Once rituals become more important than proper conduct, religion recedes to the background, although it does not cease to exist.

Acharya Mahaprajna has elucidated a unique concept of Jainism: power and material comforts do not comprise the goals of Jain religion. Nevertheless, some individuals, acharyas and scholars included, advocate the worship of demigods such as Padmavati and Bhairav for material gains. Such practices are totally alien to the concept of self-reliance and violate the spirit of the Jain religion.

In RATNAKARAND SHRAAVAKAACHAAR, Acharya Samant Bhadra states:(17)  
Individuals, who have rational perception, do not honor and respect,  
on account of fear or affection or expectation or greed,  
gods symbolizing attachment, gurus spreading delusions  
and scriptures showing glimpses of material comforts.

The celebrated Jain scripture, UTTARAADHYAYAN SUTRA, portrays the concept of self-reliance through an expressive metaphor depicting our worldly existence and the path to liberation in the following couplet:(18)

This body may be viewed as a boat,  
the soul is its worthy sailor,  
the ocean is the cycles of worldly existence,  
which is traversed by illustrious beings.

We, the worldly beings, have to face the ocean of innumerable cycles of birth and death. Our bodies can be compared to the boats floating in the ocean and our souls serve as skillful sailors, who can take the boats across the ocean of worldly miseries. We Jains do not believe that some superhuman entity helps us in achieving salvation. We have to liberate ourselves through self-endeavor. Thus we Jains are self-reliant (SHRAMAN). The concept of self-reliance is a unique feature of the Jain religion.

#### Footnotes:

1. 'MUNDI AUR SHRAMAN PARAMPARA' by Munishri Kanakojjvalanandi, PRAKRIT VIDYA, Vol. 8, Issue 8, 1997, page 25.

2. 'The Jaina Path Of Purification', published by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979, page 138.
3. PURISA! TUM MEV TUMAM MITTAM, KIM BAHIA MITTAMICCHASI? |Sutra 118|
4. SWAYAM KRITAM KARMA YADATMANA PURA  
FALAM TADEEYAM LABHATE SHUBHAASHUBHAM,  
PAREN DATTE YADI LABHYATE SFUTAM  
SWAYAM KRITAM KARMA NIRATHAKAM TADA;  
NIJAARJITAM KARMA VIHAAY DEHINO  
NA KOPI KASYAAPI DADAATI KINCHAN  
VICHARAYANNEVMANNANYAMANASAH  
PARO DADAATEETI VIMUNCH SHEMUSHIM.
5. Bhagvati Sutra, English translation by K. C. Lalwani, published by Jain Bhawan, Calcutta, 1973, Book 1, Chapter 3, Answer 134, page 59.
6. For details, please see 'Quotations From Scriptures', Acharya Umaswati's TATTVAARTH SUTRA, Jain Study Circular, January 2003, page 5.
7. DEHODAYEN SAHIO JEEVO AAHARADI KAMMA NOKAMMAM |  
PADISAMAYAM SAVVANGAM TATTAYASAPINDA-OVVA JALAM | 3|
8. JOGA PAYADIPADESA THHIDI-ANUBHAAGA KASAAYADO HONTI |  
APARINADUCHCHHINNESU YA BANDHATTHHIDIKAARANAM  
NATTHI | 257|
9. TEEVRAMANDA-JNAATAAJNAATA-BHAAVAADHIKARANA  
VEERYAVISHESHABHYAS-TADVISHESHAH |6-7|
10. BHAAVO KAMMANIMITTO, KAMMAM PUN BHAAVAKAARANAM  
HAVADI |  
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11. ANNADAVIYEN ANNADAVIYASSA NO KEERAI GUNUPPAAO |  
TAMMHA U SAVVADAVVA UPPAJJANTE SAHAAVEN |372|
12. JO NA HAVADI ANNAVASO TASSA DU KAMMAM BHANANTI  
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13. VATTADI JO SO SAMANO ANNAVASO HODI ASUHABHAAVEN |  
TAMHA TASSA DU KAMMAM AAVASSAYALAKKHANAM NA HAVE  
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14. AAVAASAAEN HEENO PABBHATTHO HODI CHARANADO SAMANO |  
PUVVUTTAKAMEN PUNO TAMHA AAVAASAYAM KUJJA |148
15. AAVAASAAEN JUTTO SAMANO SO HODI ANTARANGAPPA |  
AAVAASAYAPARIHEENO SAMANO SO HODI BAHIRAPPA |149 |

16. Jain Study Circular, April 2004, page 11.
17. BHAYAASHA SNEHALOBHAACHCHA, KUDEVAAGAMLINGINAAM |  
PRANAAMAM VINAYAM CHAIVA, NA KURYUH  
SHUDDHHADRISHTAYAH ||
18. SAREERAMAAHU NAAV TTI JEEVO VUCHCHAI NAAVIO |  
SAMSAARO ANNAVO VUTTO JAM TARANTI MAHESINO || 23-73 ||