
Ethics in Jaina tradition

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Jainism being a heterodox system does not believe in the ultimacy of any transcendental entity rather has attached maximum emphasis on the doctrine of karma, rebirth and salvation. The world and the being (*jiva*) are not God's gift in any manner for these thinkers. That the present is the continuation as well as the result of the past events happens to be the fundamental assumption of this system of thought. The emphasis on ethical or moral activities is also found to receive importance because of the necessity to get rid of the birth and rebirth cycle. For them salvation can bring an end to this cycle and the salvation is possible through ethical means. The other important ground of emphasizing on the moral conduct of man is to make the society free from impure, harmful, self-centered activities. It might be the case that the bad consequences of the immoral acts must have taught them to become moral or ethical. In other words the expectation of the common good must have prompted them to emphasize on the moral conduct or behaviour of man.

Jainas have emphasized on *samyak drsti* by which they could see the all-pervasiveness of the life and the necessity of releasing the life from the state of bondage (*bandha*). This became the beginning step in their journey in moral path. That is why it is sometimes thought that their ethical way of living was the outcome of their necessity to make the society pure and release the *jiva* from the bondage. Jaina ethics seems to have been grounded in self-understanding and the psychology. Without ethics their dharma seems to have been incomplete. Their ethics appears to be the major part of their dharmic principles. Because Jainism is found both as a philosophical system and also as a dharma, especially as a way of life. Moksa happens to be the end goal of jaina tradition. For this the individual has to undertake a disciplined life may be rigorously or at least in a mild form as per the prescribed principles of their 'great teachers' (*Tirthankaras*). Those who were opting for the rigorous adherence to principles they preferred the life of monk or an *arhant* or as an ascetic. But the common mass live in society and their living also have been idealized by the principles of *sangha*. The ethical life of Jainas is very much linked with the observation of number of vows and austerities. In order to have a systematic look on their ethics it is required to look to their metaphysical assumptions and their three-fold emphasis on *Triratnas*, five vows and observation of *Vratas*.

As it has already been pointed out that for them moksa is the highest goal and for the attainment of this right knowledge is one of the essential requisites, it is important to mention their

metaphysical and epistemological understandings in this context. It is seen that in their system of thought for the higher values of life their metaphysics and ethics are interdependent.

So far as their metaphysical understandings are concerned they consider that the soul is not merely a symbolical object. The soul in its pure state possesses infinite perception (*ananta darsana*), infinite knowledge (*ananta jnana*), infinite bliss (*ananta sukha*) and infinite power (*ananta virya*). There are few released or liberated souls (*mukta jivas*) those are not affected by their body or karmas. But the souls of all other *jivas* are because of their attachment with their karmas remain behind the thin veil and their infinite potentialities remain unexposed. It is for the karma the *jiva* connected with the activities of the world including the process of birth and rebirth.

The karmas, in Jaina system are, considered as infra-atomic particles of matter (*karma-vargana*). When there is influx of karmic particle to soul, the *bhava bandha* turns to *dravya bandha*. Since the nature of karmic particles are sticky, those always remain attached with the soul. The passions attract the flows of karmic particles into the soul. It happens due to ignorance. The influx of karma particles into soul is called *asrava*. Just like outsidewater needs a channel to get into the pond, *asrava* functions as a channel and karmic particles enter into the soul. Gunaratna described it as “The influx of karma means the contact of the particles of karma matter, in accordance with the particular kind of karma, with soul, just like the sticking of dust on the body of a person besmeared with oil. In all parts of the soul there being infinite number of karma atoms it becomes so completely covered with them that in some sense when looked at from that point of view the soul is sometimes regarded as a material body during its *samsara* stage.”¹

The means to come out of this state is to put into practice, right faith, knowledge and conduct. By this the influx of fresh karma to the soul is stopped and this state is known as *samvara*. Gradually the existing karmas get exhausted and it leads to the state *Nirjara*. The soul shines, attends salvation when the partnership between the karma and soul is completely detached. Since liberation is the sole goal of life moral perfection is very much important for them. There has been the prescription of the three-fold methods in the following manner.

(a) *Tri-ratna* or the three Jewels of Jainism must be taken into account at the beginning.

(b) Keeping up five vows (*panchamahavaratas*) in daily life.

(c) Observance of *Anu Vratas* by every one

(a) *Tri-ratna*:

For Jaina thinkers the *triratna* constitutes Right faith (*samyag dasrana*), Right knowledge (*samyag janan*) and Right conduct (*samyag charitra*). All the three are to be pursued jointly for liberation. *Samyag- darsana-jnana-caritrani moksa margah*.

Right faith: - Umamani considers that right faith is the respect or *sraddha* for the truth. Very often our karmas stand on the way of our *sraddha* for certain hard truths and reasoning. But it is necessary to develop respect towards truth and reasoning. It may be noted that right faith does not refer to strong faith or blind faith on the words of their religious leaders or preachers. Jain system is very much rationalistic and anti-dogmatic. It has never emphasized on the dogmatic faith. Their primary aim was to make the society free from impurities. For this reason the

dogmatic faith must be avoided and right faith, based on reasoning must be adhered to. Here it may be asked that can faith and reasoning go together. The faith is psychological and reasoning is logical. How can both go together? Here the reply of Jaina thinker would be the blind or dogmatic faith and reasoning cannot go together. But the faith being supported by right knowledge can very well be reasonable also. The faith increases when it is supported by right knowledge. That is why Jaina thinkers have said that the tri-ratna should be pursued together.

In this context Manibhadra, a Jaina writer says that “the attitude of the jaina is rationalistic, rather than dogmatic, and it is summed up in the following dictum: I have no bias for Mahavira, and none against Kapil and others. *Reasonable words alone are acceptable* to me whose- ever they might be.”²

It is also important to note that knowledge proceeds with faith. Initially one has to keep partial faith which can be increased or decreased in course of acquiring more and more knowledge. So faith cannot be given up completely. Rather it is rightly pointed out that “perfect faith can result only from perfect knowledge” or “perfect knowledge would cause therefore, perfect faith (*samyagdarsana*)”.³

Right Knowledge: - In Jaina scheme the right knowledge refers to such which should be free from doubt, error and uncertainty. In Jaina epistemology the method of reaching at the knowledge statement through seven fold dialectics happens to be quite dependable. Like the case of faiths, karmas are also found as obstacle against perfect knowledge. The perfect knowledge can be possible when the attempt will be taken to stop the entrance of karmic particles to the soul. In the process it is expected to reach at the purely perfect knowledge, that is, *Kevalajnana* or absolute omniscience.

Right Conduct:-In the verse forty fifth of *Dravya-sangraha* it is said that good conduct consists in doing something beneficial for others and refraining causing harm to others. The most important task before a being is to stop the influx of new karmas to the soul and the eradication of existing karmas. For this right conduct is also essential along with right faith and knowledge. Right conduct constitutes several activities of a being. First of all one has to maintain a disciplined life by observing several practices and vows (*vratas*). The *vratas* will be spelt out later. Regarding the practices they have suggested to follow up these things meticulously.

(i) One must be extremely careful in his activities like talking, walking, receiving alms, answering questions, etc.

(ii) To become restraints in respect of thought, speech and bodily movements.

(iii) The following ten dharmic practices are to be followed: forgiveness, humility, straight forwardness, truthfulness, cleanliness, self-restraints, austerity, sacrifice, non- attachment and celibacy.

(iv) To conquer over the pains arise out of hunger, thirst, heat, cold, etc.

(v) Attain equanimity, purity, greedlessness.

(b) *Pancha Mahavrata*s or the five vows

Jaina thinkers unanimously accept that the observation of *pancha mahavrata*s are sufficient to make the conduct perfect. These five vows are also accepted as most valuable virtues in the upanisadic tradition. So it is not the invention of Jaina thinkers. The Buddhists have also emphasized on these five principles with the expression *pancha sila*. But the amount of emphasis attached on these vows by Jainas is not found elsewhere. It shows that these five principles or the vows are very much necessary to have moral perfection in their framework. In practical life one has to observe *ahimsa*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacarya* and *aparigraha*. These five are treated as five vows in their axiological scheme.

The emphasis on ahimsa in the form of causing non-injury or non-harming to any one is found to be maximum in Jaina tradition. So it is quite important and fundamental vow of jaina ethics. In Jaina ethics the reverence for all life happens to be most significant virtue. They are not in favour of killing any animal for human food or comfort. So meat eating is strictly prohibited in Jaina tradition. Not only have they guarded against injuries to any animal they are also against any kind of mal-treatment to animals or any living organism. So beating, mutilating, over loading in respect of animals are not allowed. Animals should be provided with required food and shelter. Now a day there has been huge attempts in respect of animal liberation. But Jainas were conscious of it much before. Even in their tradition they are supposed to be very much careful about incidental or accidental killing of animals and insects. To prevent such possibilities they were using some precautionary measures.

Satyam: Abstinence from falsehood

The practice of ahimsa is very much linked with observing the truth. Because by lying one may cause harm to others. To lie is to bring positive hindrance against the development of the soul or jiva. So the use of falsehood for selfish purpose must be avoided. It is necessary to speak truth and speaking something pleasant and good. In the extreme form Jaina monks observe silence where speaking (the truth) lead to unwanted consequences.

Asteyam: Abstinence from stealing.

Jainas do not prefer to take away or use other's goods and belongings. It is clear that wealth is a necessity. But for that reason snatching other's wealth is never appreciated. So they observe the vow of withdrawing themselves from snatching away other's wealth. Jainas are very much careful not to affect other lives. So also is the case with wealth. They do not want to enjoy or affect other's property. Very nicely they treat it as to rob other's wealth is as good as to rob other's life because wealth is the outer life of man. They consider the sanctity of property is as good as the sanctity of life.

Brahmacaryam: Abstinence from self-indulgence.

It is understood as observing celibacy. Further it is also understood as giving up any kind of unwanted desire (*Kama*). In the strict form of this vow it suggests remaining away from any kind of indulgence in thought, speech and action. It may be outwardly we may drop something but internally it might be there. So they desist indulgence in any form, external or internal, mundane or extramundane, and direct or indirect.

Aparigraha: Abstinence from attachment.

Normally we are attached to the favorite objects related to our five sense organs. Any attachment to worldly object leads to bondage and cannot help the person to lead a disciplined life. Since Jainas want to lead disciplined life and aim at salvation they want to observe this vow of giving up all kinds of attachments.

(C) Observation of Anu Vratas

The last phase of Jaina ethics is to observe the *vratas*. In Jainism it is said by Hemachandra that for moksha the practice of yoga is essential. This yoga is not same as meditation. In their framework yoga stands for knowing reality and building *charitra* which is possible through observing certain *vratas*. The practice of *vratas* in full vigor is known as *Mahavrata*. It is mostly recommended to monks and ascetics. Hemachandra has said that the *charitra* consists in vigorously observing the vows like *ahimsa*, *sunrta*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya* and *aprigraha*. Thus the observation of five vows rigorously leads to *mahavrata* which is recommended to monks and ascetics. But the same is also recommended to house holders to observe as far as possible. For example, the practice of *brahmacharya* for a monk is to remain away from sex-acts, sex-thoughts and also the use of sex words. But the practice of *brahmacharya* for house holder is not to go for adulterous or polygamy. When the practice of vows by monks known as *mahavrata*, in case house holder it is known as *anubrata*. Moreover, the *anubrata* which is mainly for householders are found in two ways, namely, *gunavrata* and *siksavrata*.

Gunavrata

The *gunavrata* are the moral imperatives recommended for the common man. Within *gunavrata* the people are advised for food restrictions and also to remain away from many evil practices those pollute the individual, family and the society. One who observes this *vrata* he is supposed not to go for music parties, not to take intoxicating materials, not to go for gambling, and reading pornographic literatures, etc. They observe the *vratas* so meticulously that use of honey is prohibited for the reason, man should not consume the food of bees. Such a principled way of living is really rare in any other tradition.

The *gunavrata* are found as moral imperatives for the common man. Within these they emphasize on following three important aspects:

- (i) Reduction of desires
- (ii) Keeping mind free from malicious thoughts and body in good vigour.
- (iii) Live with virtues like good temperament, modesty, sociability, respect for elders, etc.

Jacobi points out their moral recommendations in the following manner.

- (i) To limit the distance up to which one may go in any direction.
- (ii) To abstain doing anything that does not concern him.
- (iii) To avoid certain foods (that is meant for others or bringing intoxicating effects)

Siksavrata

For them the *siksa* (learning) constitutes several activities, not reading books only. The aim of education is to bring control over senses and mind. It will be possible if one will limit his passion, anger, vanity, pride and greed. In order achieve this they suggest that meditation will be of much use. One should go for meditation for some period daily. Similarly observation of silence is also recommended by them to bring control over body and mind. So they recommend observing silence at least one hour a day. In their framework education also constitutes not to use perfumes and costly ornaments. It is advised not to go for excessive sexual union to keep the mind and body in good condition. Under education they include the disciplined way of living like to get up in the morning, observing silence, go for meditation, recite *mantra*, to go for charity, etc. They have attached emphasis on charity and *dana* for which they suggest to give alms to monks and needy people. They also suggest to offer *seva* to others which comes under there *sikhsavrata*.

The *gunavrata* and *sikhsavratas* are found to be complementary to each other and to be pursued together by the common mass. It shows that jaina ethics is highly helpful to build up a good society or just society.

References

1 Gunaratna, from *Saddarsana Samuccaya*, p.181

2 Quoted, Chatterjee, S and Datta, D., *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, University of Calcutta, 1968, 7th Ed. P 105.

3 *Ibid*

