

LORD MAHAVIRA'S ANUDHARMIKA CONDUCT

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It is an established fact that Mahavira's parents were the followers of Lord Parshva, the 23rd Tirthankara of the Jainas. It is also a fact that there were some of the followers of Parshva who did not accept Mahavira as their tirthankara in the beginning but later on accepted his authority. As regards Mahavira himself, we know from the tradition that he was the last tirthankara of this age. It means that he must have followed the tradition of Parshva. In this note, I propose to discuss some of the references to the effect that he followed the old tradition.

Acharanga, the oldest amongst the Jaina literature clearly refers to Mahavira's anudhammiya conduct in these words:-

(Original language words are missing)

The word anudhammiya is explained in churni as gatanugata, meaning thereby the traditional law.

This meaning of the word "Anudhammiya" i.e. "traditional law" is supported by other textual references also:-

(Original language words are missing)

In all these references the word Anudhamm-Anudharm- means the 'traditional Law.'

The meaning of the word Anudhammiy will be quite clear from the following discussion of Nishitha Churni:-

(Original language words are missing)

gatha 4855. See also Brihatkalpa-gatha 995.

The word anudharmita is not found in Sanskrit Dictionary but Pali Dictionary mentions (Anguttara Vol. 2, p. 46) and gives its meaning:- lawfulness, conformity to Dhamma. The word is also found in Pali having its meaning:- conformity or accordance with the law, consistency etc. The word Dhammanudhammata is also used in Pali. The meaning of it is the major and minor Dhamma. If we consider the meaning of all these words then we can say that the word Anudhammiya of Acharanga means that Lord Mahavira acted according to law and so the Commentators are right in explaining it as the traditional conduct.

While explaining the word anudhammiya Silanka the commentator of Acharanga says:-

(Original language words are missing)

Here it is clear that the word Anudharmic means the traditional conduct. It is clearly said in the text that Mahavira had a cloth, but it was not used for the covering of his body. So the question is: then why did he keep the cloth with him? The answer is given by the word 'Anudharmic' i.e. in keeping a cloth he only followed a tradition. And what was that tradition? The commentator has quoted an Agama which means that it is a tradition that every tirthankara keeps a devadusa-devadushya at the time of his pravrajya. It is clear that

though it was of no use to him still he kept it only to follow a tradition.

We know from the Buddhist text Mahavagga (1.1.12) that it was customary for a novice to keep uttariya on his skandha at the time of pravrajya. It seems that this was the custom which was followed by Mahavira by keeping Devadushya on his skandha. We know from the Buddhist texts that nigganths were having only one sataka. This should be that one Sataka which was customarily kept by them at the time of pravrajya. They did not accept other than this, that is why they are called by the Buddhist 'Ak satka niggantha'. This tradition was explained later by Acharyas in such a way that it became almost unbelievable on the one hand when they said that devadushya was given by Indra at the time of pravrajya. And on the other hand the Shvetambara Acharyas found in it the proof of their 'Sachel Dharma', though it is quite clear that it was not used by Lord Mahavira and that after 13 months he was without any cloth. So we can say that keeping a cloth at the time of pravrajya has nothing to do with 'Sachel' of 'Achel Dharma' but only it was a custom which was followed by Mahavira. Though at heart he was not in favour of keeping any cloth whatsoever, he simply kept it in order to follow the tradition. So we see that when it was removed from his person, he did not care to ask for other.

The secondary meaning of the word 'Anudhamm' is 'Anukaldhamm' according to Churni, which means that this was done so that the others coming later may follow him. This meaning of the word is also possible because whenever a tradition is followed by a great man it is to be taken as to be followed by others also in the time to come.

We know from other sources that Parshva and his followers were using clothes and were not naked. So it is possible that though Mahavira of his own accord wanted to be a naked monk, he had to keep a cloth at the time of his pravrajya to follow the tradition of the Parshva's sangha. This seems to be the reason why the word 'Anudhammiy' is used for his conduct of keeping a cloth at the time of his pravrajya. Later when he became a powerful monk it was quite possible for him to leave that traditional cloth and innovate entire nakedness in his sangha.

Mahavira's anudharmita is not restricted to the traditional conduct only but is extended to the traditional preaching also. This is testified by the following reference:-

(Original language words are missing)

"This is the traditional Law preached by the Muni that one should follow Non-violence."

Here the commentator explains the word 'Anudhamm' as: 'Moksha prayatnkulo dharmonudharmo': But it should mean traditional law when we certainly know that the nonviolence is the traditional law for the Jains.

There are certain things and places which are prohibited for the Jaina monks because of their possessing life. And life is so subtle a thing that each and everybody is not competent to know its existence or non-existence. In view of this fact one has to obey the rule of prohibition even though there may be no life in those things and places where there is possibility of life. In view of this fact Lord Mahavira, knowing fully well due to his omniscience that the tilas which were offered to him had no life, the water of certain pond had no life and a certain place was fit for removing the refuse of the body, did not make use of those things. This was because he had to follow a tradition knowing fully well that if he would accept those things his followers would follow him and thereby he would be a cause to the break of that tradition. There was a danger of life of his followers in not accepting those things, still he was not ready to break the tradition. This incidence is narrated in Nishitha Bhashya Gathas 4855-4859 and also in Brihatkalpa Bhashya Gathas 995-1000.

So all these references show clearly that Lord Mahavira had sufficient regard for the old traditional laws which he inherited from Parshva's sangha and also establish the existence of the Jaina tradition prior to Mahavira himself.