

ROLE OF JAINISM IN MODERN INDIA

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According to Jain Cosmography our present India is known as Bharatakhanda, situated in the Jambudvipa. It is known and designated as Bharatakhanda after the name of Bharata, the son of Lord Rsabhadeva, the first Tirthankara out of the twenty-four Tirthankaras of this "Avasarpini", a long aeon of time. The Jainas have divided time i.e. the Kalacakra into two main parts known as 'Utsarpini' and 'Avasarpini'. Each of these is divided into six 'aras', corresponding to the spokes of a wheel. The first Tirthankara, Lord Rsabhadeva taught to the then living humanity the three Rs. i.e. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic besides 'Brahmi' and other 'lipis' to the human world. Thus the seeds of culture and civilization were sown for the future generations of the humanity.

Jainism is a very old religion according to the Jainas. Lord Mahavira was a historical being, so also Lord Parsva and Lord Neminatha, the 22nd Tirthankara of the Jainas. Lord Neminatha is said to be related to and contemporary of Lord Krishna Vasudeva of the Hindus. Taking Lord Rsabhadeva as the first Tirthankara and the time that has lapsed between these Tirthankaras as is given in the Sacred literature of the Jainas. Jainism enjoys a hoary antiquity. There is reference to Jainism and its Tirthankara in the Bhagavata Purana of the Hindus. Not quarreling over its antiquity, we can safely surmise that the sacred land of Bharata is sanctified and purified by the trinity of three rivers in the form of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. These three great religions of India have gone a long way in bringing about a cultural synthesis and have established and developed and shaped Indian Culture and Civilization. The cultural, social, economic and educational undercurrents of these three streams have so undistinguishably merged with one another that it is next to impossible to pin point one or many things that has been solely contributed by one current only. The union of these under currents is indivisible. Each one ultimately aim at 'moksha', absolution or Nirvana. Call it by any name it aims at the same goal.

The pristine purity and spiritual attainment of Jainism is indisputable. Right up from the early records of ancient history and antiquity the glorious might and contribution of Jainism is beyond dispute. Jainism and therein can be included Jain monks, religious pontiffs, lay-men and women too who have added to preserve and sustain Indian Culture. The first Tirthankara, Lord Rsabhadeva taught his subjects cooking, building, construction, reading, writing etc. which enabled them to lead a happy social life. Kings like Kumarapala and Kharvel made Jainism a state religion. Personalities like Siddharaja patronized Jainism and gave impetus to literature, art, sculpture, painting, music etc. Even the Muslim monarch Akbar listened to Jain pontiffs and encouraged Jainism in developing Indian culture. Jain Saints like Haribhadra Suri and Kalikala Sarvajna Hemachandraarya are too well-known for their literary accomplishments. Such Jain monks have tried their deft hand on each and every general of literature. Jainas have written Mahakavyas, Kavyas, dutakavyas, samasyapurana-kavyas, dvaisamdhana and saptasamdhana-kavyas, puranas, grammar, works on rhetorics, kathas, akhyayikas, dramas, caritas, prabandhagranthas, scientific literature on astronomy, astrology, prosody, didactic literature on astronomy, astrology, prosody, didactic literature, commentaries on Sanskrit works etc. etc. To illustrate this by mentioning a few of the outstanding works will serve the purpose. Such works are Trisatisalakapurusacaritam, Upamitibhavaprapancakatha, Siddhahema, Kavyanusasana, Ganitatilaka, Paumacariyam, Desinamamala, Kathakosa, Joisasara, Karalakhana, Ristasamuccaya, Paialacchlnamamala, Tattvarthasutra, etc. The Jainas have written in all the principal languages of India. They have written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsa, old Gujarati, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada etc. South Indian languages were a good deal for development as literary languages to

Jainism and Jain saints. Apabhramsa language is the sole sphere of Jain authors. Jains have not lagged behind in art, architecture, sculpture, painting etc. The beautiful and world famous temples on Mount Abu, Acalgadha, Sammetsikhara, Satrunjaya, Girnar are enough to show the patronage and enthusiasm given to art and sculpture. Even among lay men we have such historical personalities like Jagadushah, Vastupala and Tejpal and in our modern times Jain monks like Vijayavallabhsuri, the Kesari of Punjab, Agamoddharak Sagaranandsuri, Muni Kasturviayaji, Bhuvanavijayaji, Jamburijayaji etc. and philanthropic Sheth Sri Kasturbhai Lalbhai.

Jainism is noted for activism. Its monks and nuns are ever vigilant and active. Buddhism that was born in India was propagated and promulgated outside India has been almost driven out from India; whereas Jainism has remained to this day in India on account of its Anekantavada, Ahimsa, and strict rules of conduct both for monks, nuns and laity.

Singing the past glory of a thing cannot be useful to us. The question that should haunt our mind is the roll of Jainism in our modern times. What can be its contribution in the development of India, culturally, socially, economically and spiritually.

The Sanskrit word for religion is dharma. It is derived from the root/dhr to sus-tain, to support and hence we have dharanat dharma ucyate. Jainism defines it as : durgation prapatanpranim dharyate its dharmah. All religion ultimately aim at absolution and it is to be attained by one's own endeavour as atmana atmanam uddharet. So religion and spiritualism depends on an individual. Norms for this have been laid down but they cannot be rigorously pursued and executed.

Out of the four purusarthas of the Hindus Artha and Kama are of effect in the evolution of a state socially and economically. The world of to-day has not remained isolated. The world has become much more complex as well as narrow in its geographical sense. One cannot show apathy to any event that may happen at a place thousands of miles away. It is bound to take effect socially and economically. The food habits, the way of wearing dress both of men and women the cinemas, the T.V., the press etc. are slowly, succinctly and imperceptibly mould the life of people in society. Let us take an example. The modern dress of ladies. One has to change the orthodox mode of thinking and accept this with standards of decency in view of its usefulness, utility and urgency as it helps fast walking, climbing, running etc. Similarly taking food before Sun-set. Even though one wished in a city of Bombay for men and women in service it is not feasible on account of distance. According to the Hindus the present aeon is Kaliyuga and according to Jainism it is the fourth ara of the avasarpini. Things are bound to shape in this way willy hilly. What I want to derive from these stray examples is that religion has to evolve different norms otherwise the younger generation will go away from religion and be apathetic to it. Just as in our temples we have brought in electricity, just as for laymen use of telephone, radio, T.V. etc. can never remain a taboo, just as going abroad cannot be stopped, so also religion if it has to survive in the present circumstances, it has to evolve differently.

Jainism is equated with Ahimsa. In our modern times it is useful in its threefold aspects. Practicing Ahimsa, will help the country. Jainism has another 'Vrata' in the form of 'Aparigraha'. To-day people live and spend extravagantly because of black money. This 'aparigraha' will go a long way in moulding the life both socially and economically. If one has money and if he wants to spend why not give this extra money as donations to schools, colleges, Universities, hospitals, etc. Everybody has to be educated to-day. If money pours into such educational institutions, the society and the country is to benefit by it. Jainism has another 'vrata' in the name of 'Brahmacharya'. By effective practicing this Jainism can contribute in reducing the size of the family. During the history of last two thousand years the population has enormously increased in one last century or so. Was India able to effectively control population owing to this important fifth 'varta'? Jainism should look at these socioeconomic problems that confront our country.

Jainism was and is noted for its largeness of heart. It has flung its door open to all irrespective of caste, color

and creed. So it has no problem of untouchability. Personalities like Harkeshbhali & Matarya could embrace Jainism and attain the goal of mortal life even though down trodden and in servitude. The vast monetary funds with persons, institutions can be channelised to help youths to get jobs, setting up of new industries etc. and reducing the problem of employment. Jainism had a glorious past and it can effectively curve out a still glorious future it is can just accommodate the new values set up by the Government and change the routine attitude and perspective. The citizens are tempted to lead a free life, eat and drink without restrictions and indulge in all sorts of sensual pleasures as a want of following five 'Mahavratas' according to Jainism, 'Pancasila' according to Buddhism and salutary 'Vratas' like 'yama', 'niyama' etc. in Hinduism. Population explosion is the crux of the problem. As a result of this all the evils discussed so far corrodes the life of individuals. Jainism can give orientation, guidance and pin point the dangers during the course of religious discourse in upasaras etc. For laxity in life, dress, drinks, foods etc. is even visible of religious occasions like 'Paryusana' also.

Thus to conclude, Jainism which has enjoyed such a glorious past in every sphere and walks of life can continue its past glorious heritage by playing the role of a religion which fosters aims, aspires for the goal that the present Indian Government endeavors to attain and realize. The 'vratas', the religious ceremonies, religious practices have to be so rationalized and re-oriented that they can well fit in with the change in time. Religions cannot remain isolated from society and economic life; it has to be dynamic and not static. Jainism should feel the pulse of changing time and its needs if it wants to translate its past glory into a permanent reality. In the past Jainism was embraced and encouraged by Kings as I think it could translated its well-known philosophy known as Syadvada or Anekantavada. This philosophy of understanding and respecting the view-points of others is the crux of Jainism. If Jainism in modern times is able to bring about a synthesis between its ancient doctrines and social, economic, cultural and political needs of our present century, then it will shine with its glory and grandeur.

RELIGION

The art of religion is the best of all arts, the story of religion is the best of all stories, the strength of faith is the greatest of all sources of strength and the happiness of salvation is the finest of all pleasures.

JAINISM

Jainism is society-oriented and condemns individualism. It dispels false logic, it is true for all times and a destroyer of the darkness of ignorance.

-Rajendra Suri.