

*Pro-Environmental Thoughts and Actual Practices in Jain Tradition :
A Critical Review*

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Introduction :

In the last two decades the branch called 'Jain Studies' is flourishing in India and abroad with amazing pace. Jain institutions and Study Centers arrange grand conferences, symposiums and seminars with a great zeal and pomp.

The subjects like Environment, Bio-diversity, Ecology, Liberalization, Global warming, Bio-ethics, Feminism, Scientific Nature of Jainism etc.- are chosen because these are current popular contemporary themes. In almost 90% of the papers, the conclusion - runs likewise :

""Jain tradition is scientific, logical and we find solutions of every problem in this revered, pious and ancient religion. Ahimsa, Anekanta, Syadvada, Nayavada, Five bigger vows, Doctrine of Karman, Jain spiritualism and Vegetarianism contain great capacity to resolve every kind of conflicts and will bring peace, in the world ."

These words are murmured like a 'Japamala' in each and every academic endeavor of Jainas. During the last 25 years I got a rare opportunity to study Jainism from philosophical and literary point of

view as well as to observe the Jain life-style with their daily and occasional practices.

It is an established fact that Jainism contains valuable seeds of the protection of environment. In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine and scrutinize the pro-environmental thoughts of Jainas as well as their culmination into actual practices. The congruency and incongruency between these two is documented in this paper in a very comprehensive, lucid and brief manner.

The paper is divided into four parts viz. (A), (B), (C) and (D).

[A] The Pro-Environmental Thoughts in Jainism (in nutshell)

(i) The central part of the known universe is known as *trasanadi*, which is full of living entities. The scope of the living entities is from a subtle, tiny microbe up to the animals having huge size. Besides this, there are infinite groups of *nigodi-jeevas*.¹ They are undeveloped living microbes sharing a common body. The total number of all *trasa-sthavara-sukshma-badara-paryapta-apryapta*² living beings is mentioned as *anantananta* (*ananta* x *ananta*).

(ii) Basically all of them possess consciousness or cognition which is expressed in the term *upayoga*³ i.e. *dnyana*.

(iii) We can examine these living entities from fourteen points of quest (*margana-sthana*) viz. realm of birth, number of sense-organs, mind, passions, life-spans⁴ etc. etc. If we cast a glance to the varieties and sub-varieties of the bio-forms, we come to know easily that Jainas

are fully aware of the living world around us which is called environment in modern terms.

(iv) Earth, Water, Wind, Fire and Vegetables are actually aggregates of minute living beings.⁵ Innumerable microbes live together with the shelter of a small particle of Earth, Water etc. Besides this, a drop of Water etc. in itself is a group of water-bodied beings, which means a soul (*jeeva*) having the body made up of water. All these tiny bio-forms possess only one sense-organ i.e. touch.

(v) The Jain text like Pannavana and Gommatasara are totally dedicated to the description of the whole "living world". We can designate these books as biological texts expressing extreme sensitivity towards all the bio-forms. The oldest Ardhamagadhi text proclaims at the very outset that one should be fully aware of the environment. Each human activity is disastrous to the world of *ekendriyas*.

(vi) From the transcendental point of view, all the living forms are equally important. All of them possess individual soul. Each of the bio-specie wishes to live and tries to avoid which is not favorable to it.

(vii) It is our duty, specially the duty of a human being, to let them live together with us. Though "man" enjoys top position in the complicated world of living beings, he has no right to harm them, use them and kill them unscrupulously.

(viii) Food, fear, sex and possession are the four basic instincts⁶ of all living beings. We get our food from this living world. We should inculcate sensitivity towards them by their minimum usage.

(ix) The doctrine of karman is applied to all the living bio-forms and not selectively for humans and sub-humans.

If we analyze the famous quotation "*parasparopagraho jeevanam*"⁷ in Darwinian manner, we can understand this ancient Jain tenet in a very illuminative manner. Darwin says, ""Life-process is a continuous chain of activities which is comprehensive, interdependent, inter-related, complimentary, reciprocal and collaborative."⁸ Jainas are fully aware of the nature of the living world.

Thus Jain thoughts fully support for the preservation, conservation and well-being of the surrounding world full of bio-forms from the epistemological, religious, ethical and spiritual point-of-view.

[B]

[I] The Negative and Defensive Behavioral Patterns in Practical Jainism :

With all this philosophical background we naturally expect that Jainas might have introduced positive models for the enhancement and enrichment of the environment. But alas ! The fact is exactly opposite.

Here, I declare categorically that the behavioral patterns of Jainas which are mentioned here are true in gross manner. These observations are based on the considerations of the age-group of forty-plus. It is the privilege of woman-folk to stick to practical Jainism and to impart it to gen-next through family *samskaras*. The general tendencies are likewise -

(i) Jainas are very choosy, selective and critical in their food habits ; even veg food is provided to them. Dr. Padmanabha Jaini, a world-class

scholar has been aptly point out this view in one of his research papers, viz. "Fear of Food : Jaina attitude on eating'. The exactly opposite attitude is kept by the Hindus i.e. "*anna he purna-brahma*". This attitude of exclusion culminates naturally into the least botheration about the prohibited fruits, flowers, vegetables, grains and cereals. Thus they have least awareness of their names, species and harvesting procedures. Usage of roots, bulbs and so many other eatables are looked upon as "sin'. The Jain teachers and texts have developed a thought-model that, "a path of *moksha* consists in overcoming the desire for food because liberation is freedom from hunger and thirst for ever.'⁹

(ii) Though a class of Jainas is engaged in farming, organic farming is rarely seen because microbes, insects, earthworms etc. play an important role in organic farming which involves harm and violence to these creatures.

It is very amusing that a common Jain housewife generally hesitates to call a pest-controller because a thought-package of non-violence is inherent in her mind-set.

(iii) For thousand of years it is hammered on the Indian society by the Dharmashastrakararas that the professions of Vaishyas are farming, cattle-rearing and trade (or commerce).¹⁰ Jain house-holders from the Vaishya community generally choose trading and commerce because other two occupations involve more violence. A long debate on professions is seen in medieval Jain texts. Fifteen professions were declared as prohibited. Thus defensive back-foot play is seen on the home-ground of Jainas.

(iv) Leather, silk, honey and use of wet flowers in decorations is avoided as far as possible because these things are procured by harming animals, silk-worms, honey-bees and flowering plants serially. To a certain extent, this life-style seems to be pro-environmental but on the other hand it gives rise to create a lot of artificial products. It produces huge heap of wastage which is highly non-degradable. The Jainas mostly prefer artificial things. The long-run effects are totally neglected.

(v) Cruelty to animals is not tolerated by Jainas. They are extremely compassionate towards insects, birds and animals. But truly speaking it remains only on the intellectual and emotional level. In the vast society around Jainas, so many "nature clubs" and institutions are there dedicated to observation, study and curative measures related to environment. "*mittee me savva-bhuesu*"¹¹ is the popular slogan of Jainas but it is hardly seen that they have joined the club of *pakshi-mitra*, *prani-mitra*, *sarpa-mitra* and so on. When we take account of the hobbies of Jainas, we find that environmental awareness is distinctly lacking.

It is a solace that the activity of *goraksha* is prevalent at least from the last two hundred years or even more especially in Gujrath, Rajsthana and Maharashtra. But a comment can be made in this matter that the philosophical framework of Jainas provides no special sanctity to a cow.

We can enumerate many such behavioral patterns in which the non-violent attitude is seen but this attitude is developed in such a manner that Jainas do not take part whole-heartedly in the activities like the study of bio-centric sciences, tree plantation, organic agriculture, gardening, animal and bird sanctuaries and so many.

[B]

[II] The Rationale Behind the Defensive Role :

This *moksha*-centric *shramanic* religion developed in its initial stages from the point of view of monks and nuns, leading life based on strict renunciation, severe austerities and penances. While observing five bigger vows they have to abstain from all violent and sinful acts. Each and every movement of body, mind and speech involve subtle violence and causes *papa-karma-bandha*.¹² Strict injunctions are provided in the monastic conduct that they should minimize all the activities. It is a duty of a monk to avoid usage of all bio-forms as far as possible because due to any negligent act, he attains sin.

In the course of time, the rules of conduct for a common householder were developed, prepared and articulated. Actually it is expected from a householder to observe five bigger vows in its gross manner. Lay-persons are not expected to lead a spiritual life. Common ethical rules, strict vegetarianism, daily *upasanas*, occasional religious practices and limiting the needs as far as possible - these are sufficient to lead a good life.

The rules for lay-persons were prepared, preached and executed by various Jain monks. Naturally the attitude of renunciation and prohibition got reflected in householders' conduct. The monks get alms from the householders. For getting the *prashuka* and *eshaneeya* (suitable) food,¹³ they might have imposed the restrictions over the householders.

In this manner the defensive and back-foot play started in the sphere of householders' conduct and over the centuries a kind of aloofness and detachment towards bio-diversity crept in.

[C] Few Signals Exhibiting Constructive Attitude :

(i) The biography of Teerthamkara Rushabhadeva is documented in Jain mythologies at length. It is described that when natural resources (*kalpa-vrukshas*) come to an end, he preached the mankind to cultivate land, the art of agriculture, tree-plantation, house-building and water-management.¹⁴ In fact his life is a great inspiration to lead an eco-friendly active life with enhancement and enrichment of Nature.

(ii) In the old Ardhamagadhi text Dynatadharmakatha, it is mentioned that the Jain merchant Nanda Manikara developed a beautiful spot for travelers full of natural forests and artificial gardens, provided eco-friendly houses and water-supply.¹⁵

(iii) A rare reference in Suttrakrutanga documents that it is our duty to preserve the rare species of the flora and one should help them to grow.¹⁶

(iv) The 24 signs or emblems of 24 Teerthamkaras are chosen from the world of flora and fauna.¹⁷

(v) Several *chaityas* (gardens) are mentioned as the shelter-places of the preachers. It seems that the Jain householders took care of the gardens.

[D] The Attitude of New Generation of Jainas :

The observations in this point are based on a group discussion held in Mahaveer Jain Hostel at Pune on 15th September 2011. The boys and girls belonged to the age-group of twenty to twenty-five. During the discussions, I feel their new attitude and aspirations to look at their ancient religion. With due respect to their tradition, they expressed that, it is high-time now to revise the rules of householders' conduct in the new perspective. The excessively highlighted spirituality should be minimized and a focus is necessary on ethics and morality. They were eager to learn Jain Studies on academic level. They expressed that larger part of the generous donations and charities of Jainas go to construct temples and hall (*sthanakas*). Majority of the youngsters want to utilize the funds for the betterment of the society. It was a great ray of hope that almost twenty percent of the students were eager to take active part in the pro-environmental activities.

CONSULSIVE REMARKS :

When we think of environment, ecology or bio-diversity, two attitudes or angles are important. Preservation, conservation or less usage is one angle. But the angle of restoration, enrichment or enhancement with all possible measures is also or even more important.

We have already seen that Jain thoughts provide ample valuable data about the natural energy sources and the mutual relationship of all types of bio-forms. Jainas are aware of the degradation and degeneration of the eco-system. The concept of degradation is reflected in their

concept of Time-wheel (*kalachakra*). Jain mythologies say that when the bountifulness of *kalpavrukshas* started diminishing, Rushabhadeva purposefully exerted a lot for tree-plantation, agriculture and water-management.

In the initial centuries of the Christian era, rules of monastic conduct were formulated. The monastic conduct was totally *moksha*-centric. The models of - (i) minimum usage ; (ii) non-attachment towards all the sensual pleasures and (iii) minimizing the activities of mind-body and speech - were the central guiding principles of monastic behavior.

We see a parallel growth of the rules of conduct for normal householders, in the meanwhile. These rules were constructed, taught and preached to the Jain society by the class of Jain monks and nuns. Naturally householders' aspirations and aim of life were not properly considered. It was hammered on them that for observing non-violence, "don't touch them", "don't harm them", "don't dabble into them". As a corollary, the feelings of awe, fear and sin took possession of the householders' mind while interacting with the four *ekendriyas* (earth, water, wind, fire), especially the world of vegetation, insects, animals and birds.

Various behavioral patterns came into vogue over the centuries which are mentioned in the main content of this paper. They were imparted to the next generations through family *samskaras*. When a person is brought up with the attitude of back-foot play, naturally the connectivity and awareness of the environment diminishes slowly. That

is the reason why Jainas generally hesitate to come forward for tree-plantation, organic-agriculture, gardening, bird-watching and so many activities related to nature. The conflict of *pravrutti* and *nivrutti* is always present at the back of their minds which does not allow them for the wholehearted participation in pro-environmental activities.

In the last two decades, the young generation of Jainas is thinking seriously over it. We can conclude with the happy note that these young people with broadened views will overcome the negative thoughts and participate in the preservation, restoration and enrichment of our mother earth.

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