

## **Role of non-violence in the present scenario with special reference to Jainism**

**Dr. Kokila Shah**

Hon. Professor

K.J. Somaiya Centre Studies in Jainism

Adjunct Professor

University of Mumbai

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions indigenous to India. Spreading values as much as wealth, it is rooted in Indian cultural ethos. Jainism through ages is sustained to spread the message of 'Ahimsa Parmo Dharmaha'. 'Non-violence is the paramount religion.' This motto summarizes the vision, moral fabric and idealism of the Jain Seers. Lord Mahavira represents the Jaina tradition of India and that of non-violence. His message is full of pragmatic optimism, self-discipline and bears special significance for better social order and spiritual advancement of mankind. It is different from Hinduism and independent of it. The paper attempts to highlight relevance of Jaina principle of non-violence in the 21st century. The ethical doctrine of the Jainas is unique and non-violence is central to Jaina system of thought. In Jainism non-violence is a religion and not merely a part of religion. In Jain text 'It is explicitly mentioned' 'Every living being wants to live. Sorrow and killing are not liked by any living being. All beings love their life'. This implicitly establishes that all beings have the right to live. Another Jain text says, Non-violence is for the welfare of all beings.

Violence aggravates enmity whereas non-violence promotes friendship. Further 'Nonviolence is the shelter for the terror stricken. The basis of Jain concept of non-violence is reverence for life. Non-violence is the virtue, which asks us to respect all forms of life. The quintessence of Lord Mahavira's teachings is that Religion sustains the world.

Different aspect of Non-violence

1. Non-violence is the primary, chief and principal vow and all other rules of conduct - non-stealing, truth, chastity or self-restraint and limitation of possession are derived from non-violence

2. Non-violence is the principle of interdependence. All Souls are bound together by mutual support and interdependence which is the principle of modern ecology. Thus non-violence is the principle for ecological harmony par excellence. It is the natural law.
3. Non-violence is the basic value In jainism this ethical value has been extended to fauna and flora, to Animal protection etc.
4. It is tolerance necessary for resolving conflicts. It can be applied as a creed on a mass scale in the field of politics.
5. Non-violence implies vegetarianism, which is supported today by the science of medicine. Food affects mind body and soul.

Journey to spiritualism is common to all religions. The doctrine of non-violence has been universally accepted by all the religions- In Buddhism compassion occupies an important place Islam recognizes the merciful God. In Hinduism, it is a great religion. Christianity preaches 'love thy neighbors as thy self.' "Thou shall not kill" is one of the Ten Commandments in the Bible. However we find that every religion except Jainism has permitted or approved of violence in one form or the other. Perhaps Jainism is the only religion which not only abstains itself from all types of cruelties and it preaches Non-violence as it's first and foremost tenet. It considers thought at the root of action. Hence the need to change attitude. The evil practices prevailing in the contemporary society are the results of violence in thought translated into violence in action - the physical violence which, we see all around us. Violence brings disharmony polluting Individual self as well as society. We have to reinterpret the antique value of non-violence in the modern context. Psychologists agree that motivated by internal thoughts type electric power external act takes place.

### **Positive Aspect of Non-Violence:**

The positive side of non-violence is as important as the negative side but it is sometimes not fully appreciated. The positive aspect implies forgiveness, kindness, charity and service, friendship towards all beings, respect for the qualities of virtuous people, utmost compassion for the afflicted beings and equanimity towards those who are not well disposed towards us. Socio-cultural dimension of non-violence is important in the age of globalization today.

### **Implications of non-violence for 1) Ecology 2) World Peace 3) Interfaith Dialogue**

- 1) **Ecology** : Environmental degradation is burning problem of this age. Ecological crisis we are facing today is perhaps, one of the worst crises in history. Man in his attempts to get mastery over Nature has destroyed it.

The solution to the problem will come from man himself and not from science and technology. Jain philosophy of the nature is based on non-violence. It teaches us what we at individual level can and must do to change our mind, practices and mode of living, so that environment is protected.

In Jain literature it is said that life exists in not only human and animal organisms but also in stones, earth, water, fire, air and vegetation. Consequently man should not cause harm to them, disturbing the equilibrium of nature. The implication is that destruction of environment is an act of violence.

Some of the steps for sustainability are as follows:

1. The culture of over consumerism which is the result of technological revolution has to be checked, as it is the root cause of degradation.
  2. Environmental education on conservation is a must. It can show the direction for fundamental transformation of an individual by nonparticipation in destructive activities. There must be attitudinal change.
  3. We must educate children our Indian heritage, which it is their right to know. This will lead to change in value-system for sustainable development.
  4. Sustainability must be achieved by adopting nonviolent simple, eco-friendly life style and by avoiding eco-terrorism to preserve incredible biodiversity.
- 2) **World Peace** : Jain seers have craved for the peace and prosperity of all on the earth and prayed for their welfare in their prayer. Non-violence can play a role in competing terrorism. "One must almost sum up the atmosphere of Jainism in one phrase that we find in '*Sutrakritang*' that man by not injuring living creatures reaches the "Nirvana" which is peace-peace between man and man, peace between man and animal, peace everywhere and in all things". Peace is an ethical issue that shows concern for humanity.

In the modern strife-torn world when all sorts of distrust, doubts and wars are prevalent all over the universe and when violence threatens to ruin the entire fabric of human civilization, the quest for peace, which is at the very heart of Jainism, is significant. Jain ethos have cosmic significance in the context of global problem of peace.

### 3) **Interfaith Dialogue:**

#### **“Religion unites and does not disintegrate”**

In this context, it is pertinent to note: Anekantvada or syadavada or theory of manifoldness of Reality or Jaina Theory of Relativity. (Multiple vision) The doctrine of multiple vision is another important contribution of Jainism, to world thought. It is extension of principle of non-violence in intellectual field. It is logic of probability or relativism based on realism. It implies non-absolutism. This theory is unparalleled in history of philosophy. ‘Respect to the views of others’ is important for attitudinal change. It will result in toleration- This principle develops catholic outlook necessary for peaceful coexistence It is holistic principle. The kind of intellectual toleration it will develop will further lead to an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence avoiding dogmatism and fanaticism. Much violence in the world today arises from fundamental ideological and religious disagreement “Jainism with its theory of multiple visions provides a framework through which qualities like tolerance understanding etc. can be developed”. Jain thinkers have consistently shown respect for other faiths. No wonder that Jainism is opposed to all forms of religious fanaticism. Religions should unite the people and not divide them. The idea of manifoldness of reality is well illustrate by the parable of six blind men & the elephant. They all touched the elephant and then tried to describe their perception of the elephant. The one who touched the side believed it to be like a wall, the one who touched the leg described it as a pillar, the one who touched the ear described it that it is like a fan and so on. Each of them was right but each one’s experience was but one aspect of reality. The truth is synthesis of all of them. It fosters tolerance, respect for another point of view. In the context of inter religious dialogue, it implies, not merely, to accept another religious view point but rather to approach it with a spirit of understanding, respect and appreciation.

The real threat to world peace comes from Ideological conflict. According to Jainism antagonism can be resolved not by quarrels but by communication and understanding. It is the principle of peaceful coexistence. This means toleration, which is characteristic of Jaina Ideology. One should accept one's faith but also respect other's faith. It is also an ideal for successfully managing conflicts-personal or interpersonal, national or international. It is the doctrine of open-mindedness, which is the expression of fundamental non-violent attitude. Jain doctrine develops catholic outlook necessary for peaceful atmosphere.

Another principle called non-attachment to possession is a comprehensive precept or an ethical principle for a good social order. It refers to limitation of mindless accumulation of things and articles of consumption. All human vices are due to attachment to possession. "The desire for power and possession has given birth to the race for atomic weapons. This virtue stresses change in attitude". One major factor for peace is our attitude towards our possession. This is the principle of Aparigraha It means- non acquisitiveness which is a precept for good social order.

### **Conclusion:**

Needless to say, that a proper understanding of all these principles will contribute to the solution of manifold problems confronting humanity in search of peace.

Today world is passing through value-crisis. These unique concepts help in building up sound value system. A new type of thinking is required. Jainism preaches that ultimately peace is conciliation. It involves factors 'within'. Main features of Jain framework for securing peace are, 1) Global disarmament, 2) self-restraint, 3) Liberation from violence, 4) Giving up of ego, negativity and impurity. Jainism offers unique philosophy for world era.

From the forgoing discussion it is evident that Jainism deals with the permanent values of life, which are of enduring benefit to mankind.

In the end, distinctive Jain principles can be used to facilitate and establish peace on the globe. In India religion and philosophy are not isolated practices but they are intertwined with life.

Lord Mahavira was the great apostle of peace in the world and with the Jain principle of non-violence world can travel along the path of peace and freedom from fear. Perhaps in the twenty-first Century Jainism may rule the world with its principle of non-violence. Jain message of peace and world fraternity is a call for internationalism.

In the age of globalization, we have to reaffirm faith in Indian ethos. We may be able to create then technocrats' entrepreneurs Managers and business leaders who would try to improve quality of the life. Lord Mahavira advocated overcoming vices like anger greed etc. and recommended the practice of certain virtues. The ethical principles of Jainism prescribe a code of conduct, which requires an individual to be an ideal person with non-violence as the foundation of his life.

Agenda for action:

1. Commitment to culture of non-violence in all fields of life at all levels- individual, social, national and international.
2. We have to come out of narrow mindedness, selfishness and egoism and practice liberalism in thought.
3. To eradicate the desire for acquisition by resisting greed and feeling of passiveness and thus practice restraint.
4. To adopt the principle of 'Live and Let live', for ecological equilibrium. Protection of wild life.
5. Development of toleration through interfaith dialogues is important. People should be educated for peace and harmony.
6. Last but not the least- Ethico - spiritual considerations are significant and for that implementation of virtues and value- perspective should be stressed.

I would like to conclude the paper with an optimistic note: "No wonder then that Jainism is a system which offers much that is permanent and eternal and has stood the test of time, it has helped and still help humanity to regain its inner balance which is the crying need of the present age.

In the end, indeed, non-violence is the most sublime gift of Jainism to the world which is for the welfare of all, the protector of the universe.