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JAINISM AND HUMAN WELFARE

By

PROF & DR. PREM SUMAN JAIN

DIRECTOR,

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PRAKRIT STUDIES & RESEARCH

SHRAVANBELGOLA, KARNATAKA.

JAINISM AND HUMAN WELFARE

Religion without philosophy degenerates into blind faith and philosophy divorced of religion becomes dialectical gymnastics. Thinkers of Jainism propounded a practical religion based on firm philosophical foundation. This is why, they stressed equally the importance of Right vision (of truth), Right knowledge and Right conduct. All these three yoked together result in the perfection of human personality. A group of such personalities create the core of cultural society, which indeed constructs an awakened and enlightened Nation. This type of planning is a prerequisite of emotional and national integration. Dedication and devotion to duty- at all levels result in solidarity. Jaina thinkers by their keen foresight paved the way which India need most in modern times. They realized that 'philosophy is not only an 'idealist view of life' but a 'practical way of life'.¹ This scientific system has well stood the test of time.

Jainism made no distinction and discrimination on account of caste, color or creed. With a humanist spirit Jain thinkers admitted the masses into their faith and established the dignity of an individual based on the merits of personal conduct. Jaina Acharyas dealt his opponents rationally and reasonably. A spirit of accommodation and charitable outlook of Jainism ultimately won the hearts and changed the minds of the diehard critics. The liberal attitude created a climate conducive to the propagation of Jainism.

Importance of human birth

Jainism by discussion of karma theory has made it plain that the human self is the center of ethical existence and that, by virtue of its knowledge and consciousness, it has infinite powers. However, these superior qualities are concealed for the developing individual due to the overlay of karma. It therefore becomes the ultimate goal of the individual to achieve the pure form of the self and to attain absolute being. Though difficult, this goal is possible because human nature is rational and voluntaristic. Only human beings can achieve this goal, hence the importance of human birth³.

Jainism permits no separation between religion (dharma) and morality because both are concerned with the well-being of the individual in the world, in keeping with his own nature. The word dharma signifies the nature of things (vatthu sahavo dhammo). it is the law which "leads, binds, or takes back a being to its essential nature; enables it to realize the divinity inherent in itself; helps it to extricate itself from the misery of mundane existences and reach the state of perfect beatitude."⁴ All beings seek happiness and try to avoid pain and loss. The practice of Dharma enables them to achieve this end. In the words of the well-known Acharya Samantabhadra, " Religion is something which takes the living beings out of the worldly misery and establishes them in the highest bliss."⁵

Jainism proclaimed that a true man is the highest achievement of life, and that all men are equal. Every one deserves freedom, fraternity and equal rights of progress, caste, creed, color or race do not come in the way of these fundamental rights of a man. Jainism and Buddhism started preaching for the welfare and happiness of the world at large ***bahujanahitaya bahujanasukhaya***. Both started teaching of *Ahimsa* and *karuna* love and compassion to all. They tried to find out the way to let the man escape from *dukkha*, misery. And it is how *vinaya*, *Achara* the code of conduct, for a man was worked out. Lord Mahavira preached that let the common man believe that the man was all powerful.⁶ Man is the architect of his own destiny. He is responsible for his every action and deed. This proclamation of an all powerful man was the highest socio-philosophical achievement of Jainism. The ultimate aim of Jainism is. explosion of knowledge *sambodhi* which leads to *nisseyasa* or *nirvana*, the liberation from all the sufferings⁷.

The Ahimsa : Central theme of Jainism

Ahimsa is the central theme of Jainism. In Jain literature, the world '*dharma*' is synonymous with ahimsā. Jain dharma is identical with Ahimsa dharma. Ahimsa is so central to Jainism that it may categorically be called the beginning and the end of religion.⁸ The whole of Jain Acara is derived from this principle. The Sutrakrtanga exhorts us to regard *ahimsa* as the quintessence of wisdom. Nirvana is nothing else than Ahimsa, therefore we should not injure living beings. All beings from one-sensed to five-sensed ones are basically like one self. It may also be noted that *ahimsa* is recognized as the first of the *anuvratas* as well as mahavratas.

The consequences of violence (himsa) are calamity and reproach in this world and the next. He who commits violence is always agitated and afflicted, being actuated by animosity. He suffers pain and suffering, sometimes imprisonment also. Therefore everyone should avoid violence and practice benevolence towards, all living beings, feel joy at the sight of virtuous, show compassion and sympathy towards the afflicted and adopt an attitude of tolerance towards the insolent and ill-behaved. He who conduct himself in life in this way is able to practice non-violence and other vows to perfection.⁹ Thus the positive virtue which a votary of nonviolence must possess are maitri (love or friendship), pramoda (joy and respect), ka-runya (compassion), madhyastha (tolerance) towards living beings as stated by Umasvami. Compassion towards all beings is as invaluable and miraculous in its effects, as a Cintamani gem, says Somadeva.¹⁰

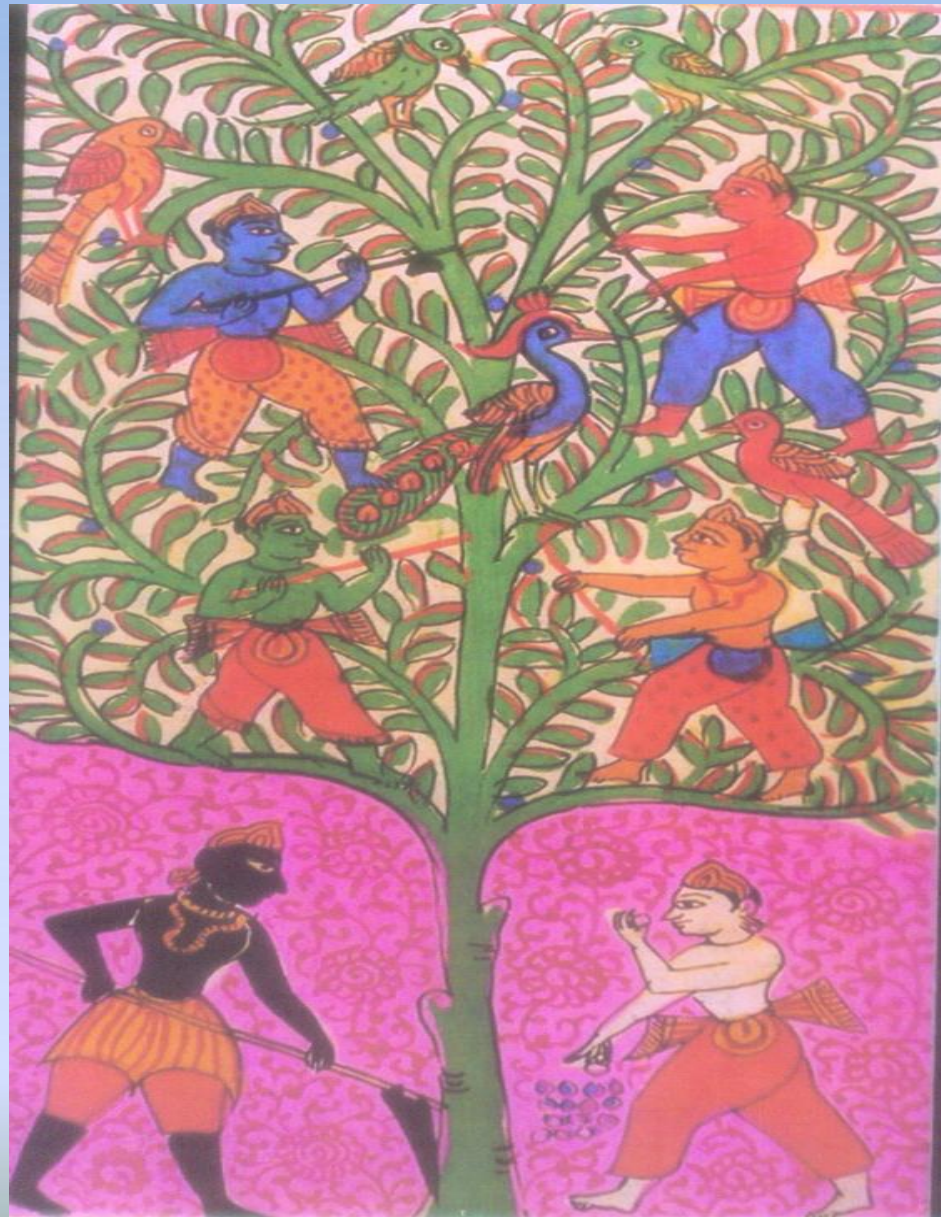
Social Life and Public Welfare :

Various Pictures of social life and service of the humanity are available in Jain literature. Dr. J. C. Jain has portrayed in his book the life of the people depicted in Jain stories.¹¹ Scholars have presented a cultural study of some of the texts of Jain literature. From this study we come to know of the social life in city and country side as depicted in this literature. The Jaina narrators have minutely depicted in their texts the customs, conventions and practices in the lives of characters belonging to different classes of society. Jain literature contain significant material for the social history of India. It is inferred from the Jain literature that in ancient India social service was popular in different forms. It is clear from the story of Nanda Manikara that he had a centre named Vapi constructed. it contained a bunch of trees for shade (Vanakhanda), picture-gallery for entertainment (Chitrasabha), a centre for getting free food (Mahanasashala) , Medical aid centre (Tigicchiyashala), Saloon and make-up room (Alankara-Sabha) etc.

The feeling of social and human welfare was very much popular among people. The King Pradesi resolved to become a monk. He divided his property in four parts of which one part was kept for public welfare. He established some charitable institutions from this part.¹² There were various such institutions devoted to public welfare mentioned in Jain literature. An orphanage (Anatha Mandapa) mentioned in Kuvalayamalakaha can be called a social welfare centre of ancient India. This centre helped the needy in different ways. In this text the word 'Udhdarattha' has been used. It means free boarding facility for the by passers. This is a new word for social institution in ancient Indian literature. There was an in named Siva-Mandapa, which establishes the quality of its being for the welfare of the people.¹³

Shatleshya Tree in Jainism





Almost all the Jaina philosophers who have dealt with the subject of Karma have referred to and expanded theory of Lesya. There are six kind of Lesya [paint], namely: Krasna (black), Nila (blue), Kapota (dove-grey), Teja (yellow), Padma (pink) and Sukla (white). The Lesya is the functioning of yoga, or the activities of thought, word and body as tinged by the Kasayas.

Acarya Nemicandra has given a very illuminating example of the different thought-paints occasioned by the activities of the mind.¹⁴ Six travellers miss their way the central part of the forest and see a tree laden with fruits. Naturally they have a desire to eat the its juicy fruits. The first one wants to uoroot the entire tree and eat the fruits. He is actuated by black thought-paint. The second one want to cut the trunk and eat the fruits. He is actuated by blue thought-paint. The third wishes to cut the branches and eat the fruits. He is actuated by grey thought-paint. These three travellers intended to cause great harm to the tree to get its fruits, though in differing degrees.

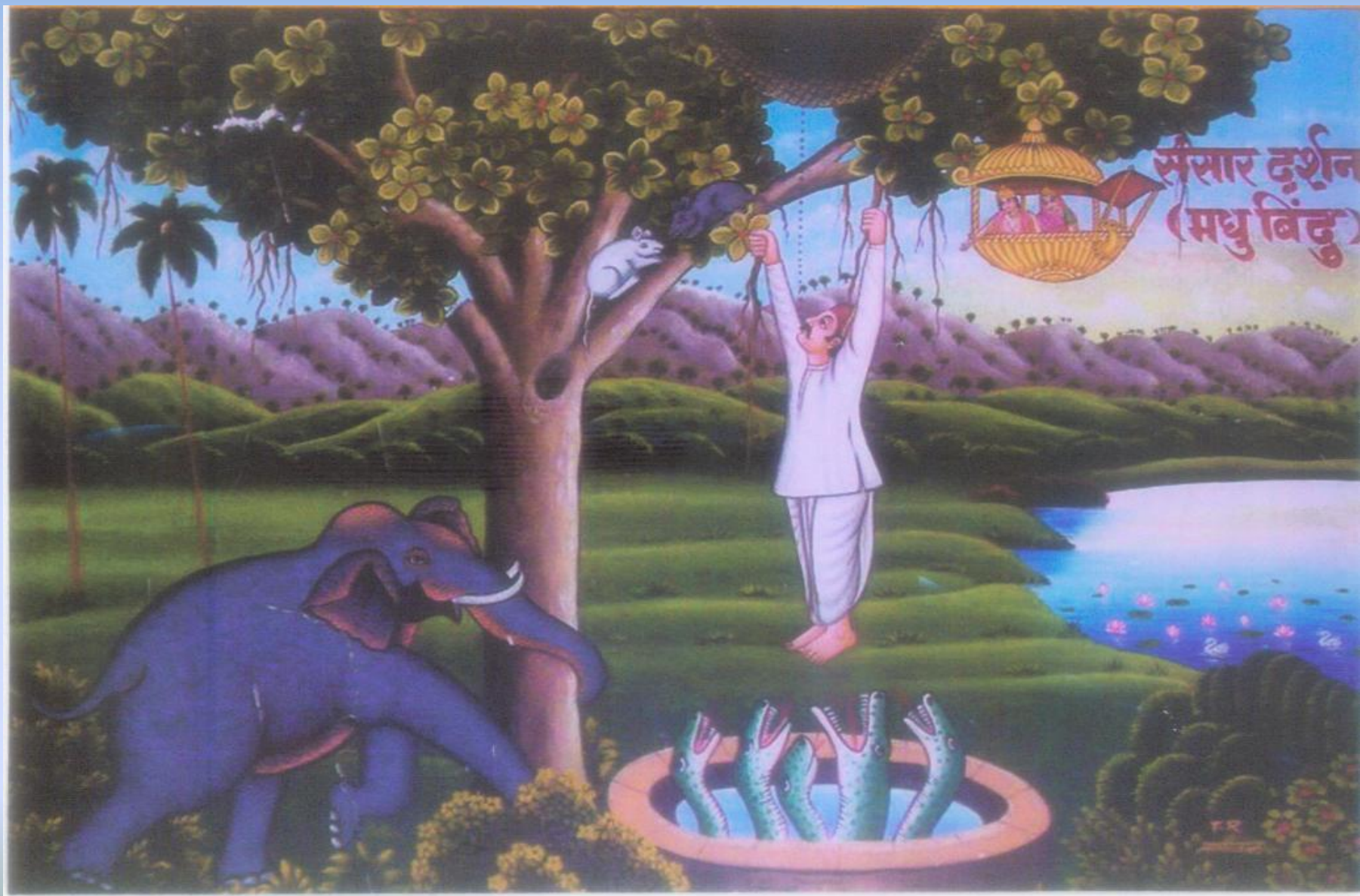
The remaining three travellers were better type of individuals who desired to have their object fulfilled without destroying the generating parts of the tree. The forth one wanted to cut the twigs that had fruits. He is actuated by yellow thought-paint. The next one the fifth traveller wanted to pluck the fruits only from the tree and eat them. He is actuated by pink thought-paint. The last man wanted to eat only the fruits that had fallen down. He did not want to do any harm to the tree and he was therefore the best man with white thought-pant. This example of Lesya tree tells us that the first traveller is obviously the morally worst and the last one is the best. The first three (worst, worse and bad) being designated inauspicious and the last three (good, better and best) the auspicious ones. The set signifies wanton cruelty, gross negligence, rashness, lack of self-control, wickedness and violence and the second set represent the gentlemanly qualities, human behaviour, abstinence from sins and evil deeds, self-control and the like.¹⁵

Madhubindu Drustanta in Jaina literature :

The style of Symbolic narratives in the Jaina Canons has attracted many a subsequent author of note and has become more and more popular in later literature. One comes across many tales of this type in the *Vasudevahindi* and elaborate Katha in Prakrit of Sanghadasa. Haribhadra's *Samaraiccakaha* (7th century A.D.) is veritably a symbolic tale in which it is demonstrated how one soul, under the influence of passions, goes down and down to hell and how another, due to auspicious Parinama, goes to better and better grades of existence. In both these texts, we get the parable generally known as *Madhubindu dâ¼²anta* in Jaina literature¹⁶ and "Man in the Well" in world literature which is as follows :-

A poor man proceeded in search of fortune to a distant country. He lost his path in a dense forest, and started moving helplessly in search of food and drink. Just then he found himself pursued by a wild elephant and right in front a demoness of fierce appearance. In his attempt to save himself, he saw a lofty Vata tree which he wanted to climb, but the trunk was too big for him. The elephant was on him. Just then he jumped into an old well, wherein he got the support of a clump of reeds to which he kept clinging. As he looked below, he saw four deadly cobras infuriated and about to bite him. In the centre there was a boa-constrictor with its mouth wide open. When he looked up he saw one white and one black rat gnawing the roots of the clump of reeds. The wild elephant dashed against the Vata tree. The honeycomb on it was disturbed, with the result that the honey-bees began to hover round him, Just then, by chance fell on his head and trickled down into his mouth a few drops of honey which he licked and desired for more. He felt a little pleased by licking the drops of honey even in the face of so many dangers. The parable is intended to remove the infatuation of persons destined to be liberated. Its Upasamhara or meaning stands thus:

The man stands for the soul; the wandering in the forest for the wandering in the four grades of Samsara: the wild elephant is the death; and the demoness, the old age. The Vata tree stands for liberation; the well, the human existence; the cobras, the four passions. the clump of reeds stands for the period of one's life, age ; the two rats, the white and dark for nights. The honey-bees are the various diseases; the boa-constrictor is the hell; and drops of honey stand for momentary sense-pleasures.



It is not possible here for want of space to discuss in full and to evaluate their worth and bring out their quintessence of all the such symbolic stories presented in the Jaina Literature. It is a subject of an independent study. Dr. J.C. Jain has attempted to shed considerable light on the origin and development of Prakrit stories.¹⁷ Dr. A.N. Upadhye too has given us some significant material, in his introduction to '*The Brahatkathakosa*', related to Jaina narrative literature.¹⁸ The learned editors in the editions of some of the Jaina texts have endeavoured to compare the stories. But the comparative study of the entire Jaina literature has still remained a desideratum. This still awaits a competent hand for its study and evaluation as it conserve hopeful and tremendous wealth of material.

In Jaina literature one finds unprecedentedly a very precious material accumulated which bears on the cultural history of India. A very many pictures have been presented in it which pertain to social life. A live descriptive account of the Indian economic life can also be had in it. In the olden days of India how adventurous voyages were carried out and what was the position of relationship of India with other countries-such facts may only be gleaned out by reading the Prakrit stories. One can also obtain an authentic account of various arts and crafts as well as educative material that pertains to ethics, polity and the like. So from the point of view of cultural heritage this literature is exceptionally rich.¹⁹ Although efforts have been made to explore wealth in this direction, yet it awaits the proper, comprehensive and concerted efforts by team of scholars of Indology.

Social service and public welfare

Jaina ethics are relevant to the quest of modern man for they satisfy not only the value-orientation of the individual, but of society. They find the basis of these values in a spirituality that is as deep as it is open and tolerant. The Jaina scriptures indeed show us the way to escape material bondage within this world, but the ethical path they prescribe takes us through all the highways and byways of this mortal life. Society is never overlooked. Human welfare is at all times taken seriously.²⁰ The *Tirthankaras* whom Jains worship are known to have led full social lives before attaining salvation. Contemporary Jains are a prosperous community. There is therefore no modern custom or usage from which the Jain must abstain, as long as it does not conflict with the ethical principles of the Jaina faith.²¹

Social service is a prominent outcome of Jaina ethics. It prescribes six daily duties for every householder. These duties are: adoration of deity (*Jina*), veneration of the Gursu, study of literature and scriptures, practice of self-discipline, observance of fasts and curbing appetites, and charity.²² All of these daily duties are related to the performance of social service for mankind. The duty of charity (*dana*) sets the mood and manner of the layman's daily life. The details of scripture so that it is all done wisely, equitably, politely, and in a spirit of gratitude and humility.

One vow of spiritual discipline (*siksavrata*) that the householder takes is that of hospitality to monks (*Atithi-Sambibhaga-Vrata*). This involves the supply of food, books, medicine, etc. Acarya Samantabhadra calls the vow of hospitality physical service (*Vaiyarratty*). It makes the householder into the parent of the monk. Sick, aged, and helpless monks are thus taken care of in their time of need. The practice of such physical service developed particularly in the area of medical charities (*Ausadhi-Dana*). Its effect was the creation of a communal sense of fearlessness (*Abhaya-Dan*).

Jaina ethics also makes the study of scriptures (*Svadhyaya*) an important service of monk and layman. This endeavor is known as *Sastra-Dana*. Its purpose is to advance knowledge, eliminate error, and it brings many others into its orbit of enlightenment. By following the duty of scriptural charity, Jain laymen have erected prestigious libraries containing numerous literary treasures. These Grantha-Bhandaras are not confined to Jaina works but contain collections which are of value for Indian culture at large.

No religions support for casteism:

Jain egalitarianism rejects the traditional division of society into higher and lower castes. It finds no basis for the idea that makes one caste superior to the other. On the contrary, it finds castecism an evil based on hatred, pride, and deluded vision. Jainism gave no ground for the supremacy of any caste by reason of birth. This explains why many slaves, untouchables, and lao-caste people entered the Jaina fold, and some were able to prove their personal merit by raising to the level of saints.²³ Lord Mahavira shed his feelings for the dignity of his fellows by eliminating the convention of caste distinctions in mutual address. He says, "Worthy beings! Take it as my command that henceforth no monk address another by the latter's caste."²⁴ He was very conscious that pride of caste is destructive of communal solidarity.

Jain ethics comprises right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct. Is manifest as nonpossession, nonabsolutism, and nonviolence? Through faith one discerns the nature of body and soul, and this awareness produces an attitude of detachment and nonpossession. Right knowledge frees one from absolutism and enables one to see things with a liberal and open mind. The discovery of the oneness of all living beings leads to nonviolent conduct. The centrality of ahimsa to Jain ethics makes it truly global. Its practitioners are world citizens.²⁵ Its message of goodwill is for the whole of humanity:--

“May all people thrive in happiness? May the ruler be of religious bent of mind? Mind there be timely rains. Let all diseases disappear. Let there be no famine, theft or epidemic in this world even for a moment. May this wheel of religion. (dharma-chakra) moves ever and anon, and bring about universal happiness and peace”.²⁶

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