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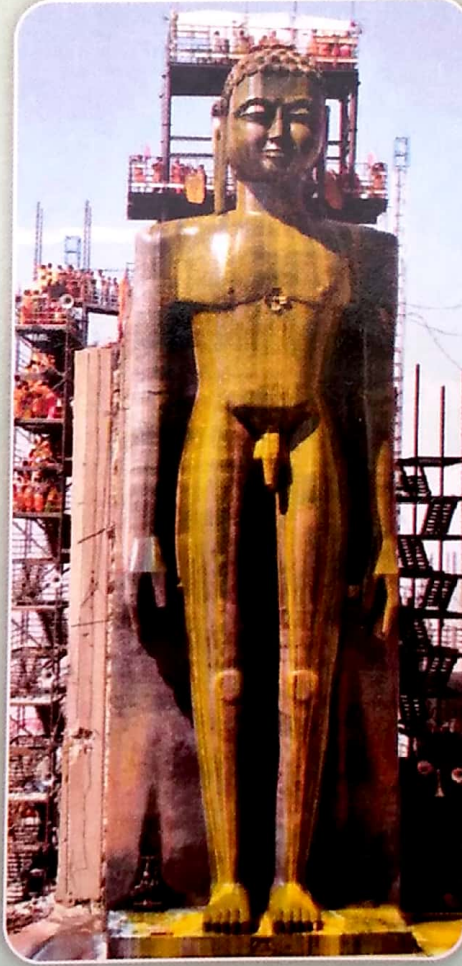
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Dignity of man in Jainism

Prof. B.R. Dugar

The central themes of Jain Philosophy are non-violence, non-absolutism and non-possession. Nonviolence being the core - principle, all other virtues emerged out of it and strengthens autonomy of life of every being. Non-absolutism strengthens the thought of every being and non-possession strengthens the interdependence of all existence.

If you feel that every soul is autonomous, you will never trample on its right to live. If you feel that every person is a thinking person, you will not trample on her or his thoughts. If you feel that you owe nothing and no one, you will not trample and exploit the planet or your neighbor. These are the values that can care the dignity of a man and can save humanity as well from deadly acts of war, economic exploitation and environmental destruction.

A significant contribution of Jain philosophy is that it recognises the dignity of all living beings and not of human dignity alone. Non-duality of the self and the other living beings has been explained in the Acharanga Sutra (5.100)

You are indeed he whom, you intend to hurt.

You are indeed he who, you intend to govern.

You are indeed he who, you intend to torture.

You are indeed he who, you intend to enslave.

You are indeed he who, you intend to kill.

It is also mentioned in Dasavealiyam Sutra (4.9) that he who treats living being as self and view-them with equanimity...escapes from the bondage of evil deeds.

Jainas also announced that all souls are similar, i.e. the faculty of accomplishing highest self-evolution equally lies innate in all the souls (every soul is potentially divine). This principle

here has clarified the position that “soul is supreme soul” i.e. there is no separate entity like creator. But the very soul when it accomplishes the highest evolution by disciplined conduct, attains the supreme status. The power of manifestation of self into absolute is in the man itself. Because of this excellence of man as proclaimed in Jain religion, God having all worldly power becomes quite unimportant. It is needless to mention that to achieve the absolute good man has been given importance in compassion to other living beings or even to god & Goddess. To achieve the goal of human dignity Jainism advocates establishing social equality. Against the glaring practices of social discrimination Jaina forged their opposition and gave full freedom to one and all without discrimination of caste, creed, sex and colour. In this way the society as envisaged by Lord Mahavira, was a society where social stratification was not hereditary and where complete freedom was granted to the man to change to the class of their own aptitude. As mentioned in Acharanga Sutra (2.49): “soul is neither high nor low, one should not therefore covet status”. The worldly soul (living beings) transmigrates from higher to lower pedigree and vice-versa; therefore, truly speaking, he is neither low nor high. In other words, the distinction of class is only arbitrary. It has been also said in Uttaradhyayan Sutra (25.29-31): “One does not become a ‘rama’ a by tonsure, nor a Brahmin by chanting the sacred syllable “om”, nor a Muni by living in the caves, nor a *Tapasa* by wearing clothes of grass and bark. One becomes a monk by equanimity, a Brahman by chastity, a Muni by knowledge and a Tapas by penance”.

In other words a man does not become great by birth, but he becomes great by his deeds. In this manner Jainism refutes casteism and class system and advocates for the dignity of man.

Jainism recognises the principle of interdependence also. It has been mentioned in Jaina scriptures that everyone and everything is interconnected as part of the living Earth. We are bound together in a web of mutuality. We need each other to survive and flourish - humans and all of nature. We are not alone

and are surrounded & sustained at all moments by the miracle of evolution and the great mystery of life. Therefore, we should respect all living beings. Through respect for all life, we can begin to restore our relationship with all living beings including man and nature and free ourselves from our narrow prejudices. The principle of "live and let live" also symbolizes that every being should so much restrict and limit his activity that he may not come into clash with any other's life and treat all others like his soul. When this dignity of self-soul as similar to other souls springs forth, then that man becomes vigilant to his responsibilities and turns affectionate and tender hearted to all the beings. Dr. L.M. Singhvi, Former High-Commissioner of India in U.K. says (in Jain Declaration on Nature): "the concept of universal interdependence underpins the Jain doctrine of knowledge, known as *Anekantavada* or the doctrine of manifold aspects. This doctrine trains mind to give due respect to the feelings and ways of life of other persons and communities. It makes one tolerant towards others' point of view thereby promoting interpersonal relation as well as dignity of an individual". "Jain cosmology recognizes the fundamental natural phenomenon of symbiosis or mutual dependence. The ancient Jain scriptural aphorism ParasparopgrahoJivanam (all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence) is refreshingly contemporary in its premise and perspective. Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance in a universe timing with interdependent constituents." Therefore everyone should be respected.

To maintain the dignity of man, Jainism applied non-violence in a positive way, that is, in the direction of increasing the welfare of human being as well as other living beings. Jainism always appealed to the people to bear good intentions about the property of others, to show active interest in the welfare of the needy persons, and to take steps to ameliorate the miserable condition of afflicted living beings including insects, birds, animals and human beings. This approach to lessen the miseries

of men includes vrata i.e. vow of *aparigraha*. *Aparigraha* involves avoiding the fault of *parigraha* which consists in desiring more than what is needed by an individual. Accumulating even necessary articles in large numbers, expressing wonder at the prosperity of others, excessive greed and changing the proportion of existing possessions are all forms of *parigraha*. The vow of *Aparigraha* is very noteworthy as it indirectly aims at economic equalization and eradication of poverty by peacefully preventing undue accumulation of wealth in individual hands.

It has been also said by Acharya Bhikshu (Anukampa 7.10-27) - man should not be means to acquiring wealth or other things. His dignity should be maintained. On utilitarian grounds a person should not be grouped as rich or poor and minority or majority because of his force and independent existence. Acharanga Sutra says (2.49): “frequently a soul is born with high, frequently with low - status. So it is neither high nor low. One should not, therefore, covet status”. “Knowing this truth about status, who would speak of his status, who would be proud of it and who would remain attached to a particular thing or object?” Acharya Mahaprajna says (AcharangaBhashyam, Sutra 49): “knowing that he himself as well as others have passed through high and low pedigrees, why should one uphold the position of pride? What should one covet for? This doctrine of pedigree relates to the caste, power beauty, acquisition and fortune. The doctrine of pride originates from the imaginary views of one’s personal qualifications and merits. One has already experienced all this in the past. Why should, therefore, one feel elated on getting to a high position or feel depressed when relegated a low status?” Such type of living and thinking pattern can get rid of the problem of dignity.

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