

Awakening of Social Consciousness in times of fight or flight situations

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Abstract

The two traditions Jainism and Buddhism, not only co-existed but also interacted closely assimilating and absorbing immensely from each other. It may be noted that the Jainas and Buddhist have carried spirit of asceticism into the sphere of art and architecture. Art has been the main vehicle for the wide and dynamic expression of spirituality along with the social-art history of India. In this article, I will not be reflecting on the art and architecture in Jainism but on the philosophical aspects of human values like tranquility or peace of mind considered as the core of *maitrī* or *mettā* practice reflected in the iconography of a Tirthankara which can awaken social consciousness. How can one practice tranquility or equanimity and compassion in times of Fight or Flight Situation? I have tried to provides knowledge and insight into why we experience fear (*bhaya saṃjñās*) and why sometimes our fears seem out of control. What paralysis does to the physical body, fear does to the mind (*bhaya saṃjñās*). Mahavira has given comprehensive assessment of fear in all of its ramification in Jaina texts with respect to fear factors and the cultivation of *Mettā /Maitrī Bhavana*. I have showed how the negative bhavana (contemplation) cause psychological pollution through the analogy of six travellers depicting ‘*Leśyā*’ (soul coloration) in Jainism. If we want a clean environment, we have to adopt a lifestyle that springs from a moral and spiritual dimension. This was the ethics of social awakening preached by Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira having universal relevance in the new millennium.

Keywords: Śramaṇa, Maitrī or Mettā, Bhaya-saṃjñās, Leśyā, Bhavanās, anuprekṣa, Dāna, Ācārāṅga Sthānāṅga sutra, *Namothuṇam* sutra.

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Introduction:

In this article, I will not be reflect on the art and architecture in Jainism but on the philosophical aspects of human values reflected in the iconography of a Tirthankara which can awaken social consciousness.

There has been two parallel development of thought in the main stream of Indian philosophy: Vedic and Non-Vedic. These two traditions, not only co-existed but also interacted closely assimilating and absorbing immensely from each other. The Śramaṇa tradition has two schools, viz.; Jainism and Buddhism. Both the schools interacted between them and also with Vedic tradition. The most important themes highlighted by them are close to the life of common man i.e., suffering, changing nature of life and the yearning for freedom from suffering.

The Jainas have been amongst the foremost in contributing to the cultural heritage of India. They have enriched the country's art treasure with numerous and diverse specimens of art and architecture. It may be noted that the Jainas have carried spirit of asceticism into the sphere of art and architecture. Art has been the main vehicle for the wide and dynamic expression of spirituality, the renunciation of all possessiveness and the ideal of non-violence, austerity and contemporary daily life are the important source of social-art history of India. A unique feature of Jaina art and thought was that the Acharyas never compromised on the basic tenets of Jainism. These tenets reflect idealistic expression in the images of the Jinas or Tirthankaras. The purity was uppermost in the Jaina consciousness, so much so that only the highest point of spiritual attainment was sought to be represented in art.

In Indian culture, philosophy and religion, view and way, theory and practice, are not divorced and segregated. Philosophy (*darśana*) is not mere reflection upon the nature of reality but also a quest for and a realization of values. The aim of human existence should be spiritual perfection through material progress. But material progress is only a means and not an end. The virtue of equanimity is the heart of Śramaṇa tradition. All other norms of ethics thrive on this attribute. According to the Śramaṇa thinkers, the ultimate goal of life is to attain peace or tranquility which is human's essential nature. In *Acharaṅga sutra* one of the earliest canonical Jaina texts, we find two definitions of religion one as tranquility and other as non-violence. Lord Mahavira mentions Arhats (worthy people) preached religion as tranquility or

equanimity. This tranquility or peace of mind is considered as the core of *maitrī* or *mettā* practice, because it is the real nature of all living beings. In another Jaina text known as Bhagavati sūtra there is a conversation between Lord Mahavira and Gautama. Gautama asked Mahavira “What is the nature of self? Mahavira answered “O Gautama! the nature of self is tranquility i.e. peace. Gautama again asked Lord what: is the ultimate goal of self, Mahavira answered “O, Gautama, the ultimate goal of self is also to attain tranquility or Peace”. In Sūtrakṛtāṅga sūtra, the term peace is equated with emancipation. Thus, for Śramaṇas peace, being an essential nature *sva-svabhāva* of self, it is considered as ultimate goal of life. The goal of every person was to evolve a way to escape from the cycle of rebirth. T. W. Rhys Davids rightly says that Samana connotes both asceticism and inward peace. It is asceticism (restraint) that promotes cooperative interdependence and peaceful co-existence and co-prosperity.

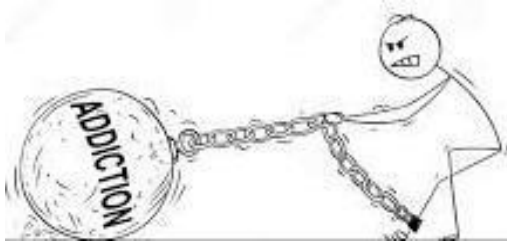
Now how can one practice tranquility or equanimity and compassion in times of Fight or Flight Situation.

Fight or flight situation arise due to fear. Fear is one of the most basic human emotions. Fear is an ordinary part of life. “F-E-A-R has two meanings: ‘Forget Everything And Run’ or ‘Face Everything And Rise’. The word itself derives from the old English word ‘*faer*’, meaning “a sudden calamity or danger.” Some fears may be overcome quickly; others may continue, in varying degrees, for a lifetime. From the time we’re infants, we are equipped with the survival instincts necessary to respond with fear when we sense danger or feel unsafe. Like all emotions, fear can be mild, medium, or intense, depending on the situation and the person. Science provides knowledge and insight into why we experience fear and why sometimes our fears seem out of control. It is programmed into the nervous system and works like an instinct. When we sense danger, the brain reacts instantly, sending signals that activate the nervous system.

Difference between Fear and Phobia

Fears and phobias are related, but they are quite different in some ways. A phobia is an intense fear reaction to a particular thing or a situation. Some phobias develop when we have a scary experience with a particular thing or situation. Anxiety experienced in such situation tend to become so strong that it interferes with the quality of life and its ability to function. Whereas Fear is an emotional response to a real or perceived threat.

Fear though a recognised emotional state, is viewed as an unwelcome emotion, caused by the threat of danger and thereby regarded as an obstacle to success. It causes more caution than is necessary. So, on the negative side, fears and phobias may be overwhelming for eg., an exam fear in a student may make him give up his/her studies or become addicted to drugs.



Mahavira has given comprehensive assessment of fear in all of its ramification in Jaina āgamas like Ācārāṅga, Sutrakrutāṅga, Sthānāṅga, Dasāśrutaskhanda, Vipāka etc., with respect to fear factors. Fear is a great enemy of success. Clinging to life and body or sensuous pleasure are the main causes of all fear.

पास लोए महबभयं- Ācārāṅga - 6.1.342

Mahavir is saying look! (perceive) world is full of extreme fear. When Mahavir got enlightened he saw through his omniscience (*kevaljñāna*) that everyone were within the periphery of fear!!

As per Jainism, fear is one among four *saṃjñas* mentioned in text Jivābhigam sūtra or ten *saṃjñas* as per the text Sthānāṅga sūtra. Among the four *saṃjñas* mentioned are *āhara* (food), *bhaya* (fear), *maituna* (sensual pleasure), *parigraha* (possession). In Sthanaṅga sūtra one finds ten types of *saṃjñas* which is extension to the common four *saṃjñas*. Fear is one among the four *saṃjñas*. *Saṃjñas* is an instinctual sensation. When we crave beyond the level of necessities of life, *saṃjñas* creeps in. We are never aware how we get succumbed to a foreign element which tends to become an inbuilt mechanism within us. This happens due to our deluded state of mind. So with respect to *bhaya saṃjñas*, what paralysis does to the physical body, fear does to the mind. It is a most destructive emotion. It breaks down the nervous system and undermines health. It creates worry and renders happiness and peace of mind practically impossible.

How to overcome fear ?

A therapist might teach relaxation practices such as specific ways of breathing, muscle relaxation training, or soothing self-talk. These can help people feel comfortable and bold enough to face the fears on their list. As somebody gets used to a feared object or situation, the brain adjusts how it responds and the phobia is overcome. When fear gets transformed in its opposite (*pratipakṣa*) '*nirbhaya*' state, it functions as a vital, life-saving force for eg., many successful leaders survived through the instinct with the fear of failure.

As per Jainism, *Nir-bhaya* and *A-bhaya* are both 'Fear Free Zones' where one experiences state of fearlessness but how to reach these states, what is the difference between the two?



Image of enlightened one in Abhaya Mudra and Jnana Mudra

To find out the real solution one needs to do *anuprekṣa* (mindfulness) and try to find permanent solutions.



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In order to come in the zone of *nirbhaya* one should develop the attitude of compassion, feeling of gratitude which is opposite (*pratipakṣa*) of fear. Indeed, fear itself may act as a

powerful motivator. ‘There is no courage without fear’ and transforming from the ‘fear barrier’ may be less frightening than living with our underlying and long-term fears. Meghkumar the son of king Srenika, faltered on the same night after taking initiation. Mahavira reminded Meghkumar of his compassionate act when he was an elephant in his previous birth and the hardship he had undergone and invited death to save a rabbit out of compassion. Meghkumar was lucky enough because Mahavira was there to show him the right path.

It makes more sense for us to co-operate rather than compete, in fact, our survival as a species depends on it. *Dāna* done out of compassion helps us in inculcating the virtue of sharing and giving. It also helps in developing our inner compassionate virtue. In 9th Sthānāṅga sūtra it is said that *dāna* (charity) if done out of fear then such a *dāna* is useless with respect to inculcating the virtue of compassion. The 18th chapter of Uttarādhyayāna sūtra which is considered as the last sermon of Mahavira, enlightens about cause of fear and technique to enter in the state of *abhaya*, the fear-less zone. We come across in *Namothuṅam* sutra, the seven *dāna* i.e. giving knowledge to others, saving someone’s life etc among which *abhaya-dayāṅam* is considered as the highest and the best of all merits and charity in freeing oneself and others from all kinds of fears. Similarly the Hindu text Bhāgawat Gita chapters 4th, 11th, 18th also reflects on the fear and how to overcome it. Though both *abhaya* and *nirbhaya* are states where there is no fear, but *nirbhaya* is restricted. It is relative. There are chances that we come back from *nirbhaya* fearlessness to the state of *bhaya* (fear). Whereas *abhaya* is that state where we do not return back to the state of fear. It is an absolute state of fearlessness.

Mahavir has given us key to enter into the state of *nirbhaya* in the present scenario.

पुरिसातुममेवतुमममत्तं, किं बमहया ममत्तममच्छमस ? Ācārāṅga 3. 3. 202.

Meaning : Man! You are yourself a friend, why search outside for a friend?

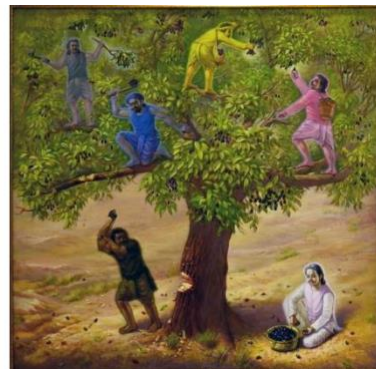
Today we truly not only understand but also experiencing this fear in the form of covid-19. If we can grasp the true meaning of this sutra, then we voluntarily can observe all the norms of covid like masking, maintaining social distancing etc. If taken positively we have been given the opportunity to delve within our self and find out who we are and what is our goal.

Cultivation of *Mettā /Maitrī Bhavana* in Jain Perspective.

There is a mention of four *Para Bhavanās* in Tattvārtha sutra, equivalent to *four Brahma Vihara*. These are means to purification of thought and incentives to liberation. There also mentioned the four *Āshuri Bhavanās* in Uttarādhyayāna sūtra. *Kandarpi* looking down upon others, *Abhiyogi* (self centric attitude), *Kilvishi* (critizing others), *Āsuri* (cruel act) which should be avoided. I have tried to show through the story and picture depicting the mentality of a person.

As per the picture¹, six travelers were lost in the central part of the forest, seeing a fruit laden tree, they thought of eating the fruit to quench their hunger and thirst.

Picture shows six men with different ‘*Psychological States*’ (see picture)



Black & White Pic.

Coloured Leshya characterising mental states.

- The first person actuated by black thought-point (*Krishna-Leśyā*), wanted to uproot the whole tree.
- The second person actuated by blue thought-point (*Neel-Leśyā*), wanted to preserve the roots but cut down the trunk.
- The third person actuated by grey thought-point (*Kapot-Leśyā*), wanted to cut only larger branches.
- The fourth person actuated by yellow thought-point (*Tejo-leśyā*), wanted to cut only the minor branches with fruits to avoid unnecessary damage.
- The fifth person actuated by pink thought point (*Padma-Leśyā*), wanted to pluck only the fruits.

¹ <https://mokshasadhana.blogspot.com/2013/12/six-leshya-colour-of-soul.html>.

- The sixth one actuated by white thought-point (*Shukla-Leśyā*), suggested to pick up the fallen fruits on the ground.

One must avoid the first three thoughts absolutely. The fourth and the fifth are respectful towards the tree but the best among them all is the sixth person's thoughts. Degrees of reflections as seen in the picture are due to *leśyā*'s result (*parināma*) and they are responsible for the bondage according to intentional bondage (*rasa bandha*). The result is intense or mild depending upon the intensity or mildness of reflections with which the karmas are contracted. The evil *leśyās* are due to the evil thoughts full of selfishness or self-centeredness. The pious *leśyās* are full of empathy, altruism, self-sacrifice and self-restraint. Thus, a wise man should know the nature of these *leśyās* and should avoid the bad ones and obtain the good ones. Modern science has now developed such highly sensitive cameras, which are capable of photographing the thoughts colored by passions. The instrument known as kirlian photography captures the Aura of ones' thought waves.

In the words of Lily de Silva, "We have to understand that pollution in the environment has been caused because there has been psychological pollution within ourselves. This psychological pollution is depicted through '*Leśyā*' (soul coloration) in Jainism. If we want a clean environment, we have to adopt a lifestyle that springs from a moral and spiritual dimension. This was the ethics of social awakening preached by Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira.

The analogy of travellers indicates the care one must take in one's behaviour. The non-violence towards all the creatures, the friendship towards all beings shows the concern and towards each species of the universe and towards environment. In Dasavaikālika sūtra it is said: "As the bee that sucks honey in the blossoms of a tree without hurting the blossom and strengthening itself, the monks take food from lay people such that they do not disturb them." Jainism teaches restraints in the consumption of material things, the regulation of desires and simplification of lifestyle, indulgent and profligate use of natural resources is seen as a form of theft and violence. Mahavira revived Jainism and declared that 'all beings of the natural world have equal potential for progress in the cycle of transmigration and all are dependent upon one another for their mutual survival. The Jain conviction of *parasparopagrah jīvanām* teaches that all forms of life are bound together in mutuality and interdependence. Dhammapada, Suttapitaka, Dighanikāya, majjhamnikāya, Jātaka even Vedic tradition in

Veda, Upanishad, Epics have stressed on values of ahimsa, benevolency, Kindness, friendliness, compassion, love etc., through which we can subdue our passion and vices. It is almost like waging a war on oneself in order to bring peace to others. Self-restraint complex with Brahma Vihara or Para Bhavana towards others develops the culture of living by need and not by greed, of taking less and less and giving more and more.

Conclusion:

By inculcating *Mettā* and expanding definition of the living, treating all life to be equal and then adopting non-harming as the supreme virtue, a profound shift in values is necessary, individually and culturally. Both Buddha and Mahavir's ethical values have universal relevance in the new millennium as they are based on recognition of the "Right to life" for all living beings and of equality and equity in their mutual relations. Their teachings have profound relevance to contemporary global scenario.

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