

THE *JĪVAS* ACCORDING TO JAINISM

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Abstract

Ancient India produced great saints who were not only embedded with power of cognition of the mysteries of the universe, but also were of great intellectual calibre and moral uprightness. They were role models for thousands of people to follow. Although many schools were based on Vedic principles, some great thinkers opposed the authority of Vedas. Such people were generally called atheists or *nāstikas*.

Cārvākas, Jains and Buddhists were considered as *nāstikas*. But there are many differences of opinion among them with regard to soul, Karma theory, and so on. In this paper a short note on the view of Jains on the *jīvas* (souls) is presented.

Jīvas in Jainism

The Jains say that all things in this world can be divided in to living (*jīva*) and non-living (*ajīva*)¹. They say that the life-principle is distinct from the body. It is only because of this life-principle that the body lives. This principle is called *jīva* or soul. The soul is directly perceived (*aparokṣa*) through inner knowledge.

According to them, the soul in its pure state possesses infinite perception (*ananta-darśana*), infinite knowledge (*ananta-jñāna*)², infinite bliss (*ananta-sukha*), and infinite power (*ananta-vīrya*). In ordinary human beings, the purity of the soul is covered with the veil of *karma* which it has accumulated through a course of time. But there are only few released souls- *muktajīvas*.

The Jains believe in the plurality of *jīvas*. They are infinite in number. They are eternal. The soul is neither *vibhu* (all pervasive) as in Advaita Vedāntan or *aṇu* (atomic) as in Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. But it is of limited size (*madhyamaparimāṇa*).

It is because of this view *jīva* is called *jīvāstikāya*. *Astikāya* means that which occupies the space or a body. *Jīva* expands or contracts itself according to the dimensions of the body it occupies. Thus it appears to be bigger in size in an elephant and smaller in an ant. Since it occupies all parts of the body, from top to toe, one feels the sensation in any part of the body.

The Jains divide the *jīvas* according to the sense organs they possess. Thus, plants are categorised as the lowest class as they possess only sense organs of touch. Then come the worms, ants, bees, other animals having the sense organs of touch, taste, smell, vision and hearing in that order. The higher beings, *viz.* Humans, possess inner sense organ, mind (*manas*) which make them *samjīns*. The lower beings are called *asamjīns*.

Jīvas and Karma

The *jīvas* are born as gods, men, animals, plants etc., on account of their merits and demerits. The *karma* acts as *āvaraṇa* or veil. That which obscures the right knowledge (*jñāna*) is known as *jñānāvaraṇīya* and that which obstructs the right perception (*darśana*) is known as *darśanāvaraṇīya*.

Vedanīya is that which obstructs the nature of bliss of the soul and thus produces pleasure and pain. *Mohanīya* is that which obstructs of soul its right attitude and right conduct.

In addition to the above, there are four kinds of *karma*, *viz.*, (i) *āyusya karma* which determines the life-span (ii) *nāma karma*, the particular body with specific characteristics and faculties, (iii) *gotra karma*, the nationality, caste, class family etc., and (iv) *antarāya*

karma, that prevents the individual from doing good things, even if there is a desire to do so.

Jains believe that by means of actions, words and thoughts, *bhāva-karma*, is produced which gets transformed into *dravya-karma*, covers the soul and remains there in the form of passions (*kaṣāyas*).

According to good, bad or indifferent actions, the soul experiences, pleasure, pain or feeling of indifference. After the death of individual, the soul, together with the karmic body (*karmaṇa-śarīra*) goes to another place, assumes a new body expanding or contracting according to its dimensions.

Āśrava and Nirjarā karma

The influx of *karma* into the soul is called *āśravain* Jainism³. Just like the water entering the pond or lake through channels, these *karmas* enter the soul through channels which are called *āśravas*.

These may be due to the activity of mind (*bhāvāśravas*) or *karmāśravas* which means the actual entrance of *karma*, matter in to the soul. These are further divided into subtle varieties⁴.

Nirjarā means the destruction of *karmas*. *Bhava-nirjarā* represents the change in the soul by which the *karma* particles are destroyed while *dravya-nirjarā* means actual destruction of the *karma* particles either by reaping the effects of *karma* or by performance of penance. When all the *karmas* are destroyed *mokṣa* or liberation is effected⁵.

Conclusion

From the above it could be seen that Jainism holds its own concepts with regard to the existence of soul, its transmigration and liberation. It may be pointed here that while the Śvetāmbara tradition holds the view that liberation is possible for all, Digambara says that women are not eligible for liberation.

Notes :

- ¹ *Dravyasaṅgraha*(1a):jīvamajīvaṁdravyam
- ² According to Jains, *darśana* is different from *jñāna* -- while the former consists of mere knowledge of a thing, say a pot, the latter means knowledge with details of the objects, i.e., what the pot is made of, whose pot it is, quality of the pot, etc..
- ³ *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccayap.* 46: *Yastairmithyādarśanādibhrbandhaḥkarma-bandhaḥsajinaśāsanaāśravovijseyah* |
- ⁴ *Dravyasaṅgraha* 29: *āsravatiyenakarmmapariṇāmenaātmanahsavijseyah bhāvasravaḥjinoktaḥkarmāsravaṇamparambhavati*
- ⁵ *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccayap.* 46 : *kṛtsnakarmakṣayamkṛtvāparamampadam samprāptaḥ* |

Bibliography

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3. *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* of Haribhadrasūri, with *Laḡhuoritti* com. of Manibhadrasuri, Chaukhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1967.
4. S.N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Vol. I), MLBD, Delhi, 2004.