

Research Paper 3

Relevance of Jain Karma Theory in Context of Self Improvement

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A philosophy so beautiful that teaches a human to be independent, answerable to the self, and fearless; as it conveys, ‘There is no God keeping the accounts of my karma, it’s only me, who is responsible for each of my life’s happening, its up to me what I choose to sow; no matter what, fruits of the tree sown by me have to be eaten by me, without an escape.

When an inner voice knocks at the doors of one’s conscience, one awakens and starts to look for philosophical answers like, who am I? What is the purpose of my being here, at this particular time, on this particular planet? As one’s contemplation moves further, one digs deeper into one’s inner self and tries to analyze one’s actions and their aftereffects. One may find if there are aftereffects, there must be something one has done in the past, result of which one is enduring now. According to me this is the beginning for one to understand the karma theory. As one can only find out a part of it, on one’s own. One looks out for different religious philosophies, to know more. Under this context I find the Jain Karma theory immensely satisfactory and rational.

The main virtues which Jainism wishes its followers to cultivate are ancient, they are based on principles which can be openly and rationally discussed within the framework of the quite logical karma doctrine.¹

Dependency makes us miserable, as, for each of our wrongdoing, we start to look up to someone we think, more powerful than us. Whether it’s a deity or God. But when one realizes it deeply that I am the only one who is the destroyer as well as the savior, we get up and take charge of our life. The beauty and purpose of Jaina Philosophy is the same and this, I feel, is the need of the hour.

When one moves ahead to understand Jainism, what intrigues one the most is its Karma theory. Where Karma is not an abstract concept, but a physical reality. It shows an innate relationship between the living and the non-living.

What is Karma: An Introduction

Whatever is done falls under the category of karma.² The journey of knowing, first starts from the self, often we feel lighter after completion of a task that gives us happiness and satisfaction, on the other hand a

¹ Dr. Zydenbos Robert, Jainism Today And Its Future (JTIF). (PDF of the original book) Munich, Manya Verlag, 2006 pp. 44

² Apte V.C., Sanskrit-Hindi dictionary, pp. 253 (As cited in The Jaina Doctrine of Karma and The Science of Genetics (TJDKSG) Dr. Tater Sohan Raj, Delhi, Readworthy Publications, 2009) pp.3

negative doing or a conflict creates a pressure on our mind, this is nothing but arrival and departure of different energies, or in a precise manner we can say this is the exchange of good karma particles with the bad ones or vice versa. Karma is a subtle concept; the soul cannot exist without, until it is bound in the worldly cycle of birth and rebirth. Whether a living being is sleeping, resting or not performing anything at all, still it's state falls under doing karma, as sleeping and resting are actions in themselves.

Whether good or bad, the real doer is the soul; when the soul proceeds to know itself, it falls under the category of spirituality, understanding karma and its post effects is a part of the same too. Whether we realize it or not but there is always a motive behind even the tiniest of our doing, every time. That objective can be good or bad but never be neutral.

Going further into the subtlety of karma, through the attachment and hatred-oriented activities of the soul, infinite subtle fine particles existing in the space rush magnetically to it and get associated to the soul and they are called karma.³

Jivas (spirit/soul) are conscious formless beings. The subtle filth glued to it is called karma. Karmas are inert material atoms. The atoms of which are called karmadala (Atom groups). The atoms of karma get glued to the soul owing to its adhesiveness caused by attachment and hatred and activities of association. These atoms are glued to the soul since time immemorial. If some of them get dissociated from the soul, the new ones get glued. Thus this activity goes on constantly.⁴

Karma in Jainism differs radically from its Hindu or Buddhist counterparts. Rather than an abstract cosmic law, it is seen as a substance, a form of subtle matter that weighs down and encases the soul. By so doing, it obscures true knowledge and understanding of reality.⁵ No matter to which philosophy one adheres to, one's logical mind doesn't stop bothering him until he gets a satisfactory answer. Life and its occurrences are nothing else but science. I always find myself mesmerised with its explanations in Jaina philosophy.

³ Paramatma Prakash 1.62 (As cited in TJDKTSG pp.17)

⁴ Mahaprajna Acharya, Jiva-ajiva, (As cited in TJDKTSG. Dr. Tater Sohan Raj, Delhi, Readworthy Publications, 2009 pp.18)

⁵ Mardia Kanti V. and Rankin Aidan D. Living Jainism. UK: John Hunt Publishing Ltd. 2013. pp. 34.

The beautiful interaction between the living and the non-living, how capable are a particular type of karma particles are, has been described by Kanti V. Mardia and Aidan D. Rankin, in their book *Living Jainism*, as, “Karmic matter consists of subatomic particles, which we shall refer to here as *karmons*. These karmons float freely and randomly in space but they do not interact with each other. Among subatomic particles, karmons are unique in the sense that they can only be absorbed by the soul, and cannot fuse by themselves. Thus karmic matter increases by absorbing new karmons and decreases by dropping some of its karmons in space.”⁶

‘Theory of karma’ stands at the centre of Jaina thought: the interaction of self and nonself, of consciousness and matter, is the focus of Jaina psychology, metaphysics, and much else. Any activity initiated by the soul, whether it is physical, vocal or mental, is described as a kind of vibration, by which an interaction with ajiva, all that is the nonself, takes place.⁷

Karma is a kind of force which compels the soul to bear the consequences of its right and wrong actions, and this force originates in the very action itself which is performed by the soul and at the very moment of its performance.⁸

Types of Karma

There is a basic classification of karma in four categories, the four ghati and the four aghati karmas, terms which can roughly be translated as ‘harmful’ and ‘not harmful’, the harmfulness referring to the effect that these particular kinds of karma have on the essential qualities of soul. The aghati karmas determine the longevity, the personal appearance, the social circumstances and sensitivity to pleasure and pain of the individual (these varieties of karma are termed ayu, nama, gotra and vedaniya), while the ghati karmas obscure knowledge, obscure faith, defile whatever bliss one experiences and obstruct the actions of the individual (gyanavarniya, darshanavarniya, mohaniya and antaraya).⁹

⁶ Ibid, pp. 68

⁷ Dr. Zydenbos Robert, (PDF) *Jainism Today And Its Future (JTIF)*, Munich, Manya Verlag, 2006 pp. 37

⁸ Jaina C.R. *The Key of Knowledge*, pp. 876-77 (As cited in TJKTSG, pp. 29)

⁹ JTIF, pp. 38

Seed of each of our present situation, relationship, state of mind, job, business and so on... has been sowed by us, some time or the other, recently or (may be) long back in the past. In context of karma we are here for two reasons, one is to shed some and the second is to accumulate newer karmas.

We have debts that must be paid. If we have not paid out these debts, then we must take them into another life... in order that they may be worked through. You progress by paying your debts. Some souls progress faster than others. There will be many lifetimes... to fulfill all of the agreements and all of the debts that are owed.¹⁰

Relationships are a living laboratory, a field test to determine how we are doing, whether our lessons have been learned, to discover how close we are to our pre-determined life plan.¹¹

This becomes really interesting when we contemplate about what can we take after death with us. When we die and our souls progress to higher dimensions, we take our behaviors, our deeds, our thoughts, and our knowledge with us. We will not meet our possessions in the afterlife, but we will meet our loved ones.¹² This thought slows us down in life and tells us to focus more on gaining knowledge, performing good deeds with good intentions.

Though most of our karma and their effects are endured in the same lifetime; like a daily life example can be: thinking of mowing the garden and after a few hours, you see it mowed or you are having a bad relationship, you think of improving it by having a healthy talk, you open your heart, you communicate with that person, take his feedback honestly and the relationship starts flourishing again. But still some incidents occur in each of us' life that make us think why is it happening to me? I have never done anything to cause this kind of suffering or vice versa? This can be understood by the following statement: The pattern of human actions is set originally during embryonic development under the control of DNA which in itself is partly inherited and partly karmic.¹³ For example, each child takes some of his parents' habits inevitably, but at the same time he has his own individual personality as well.

Fusion And Fission of Karmic Atoms With The Soul

P. S. Jaini describes the relationship between the soul and the karmons as: It should be made clear that Jainas view the souls' involvement with karma as merely an 'association' (ekakshetravagaha, literally, occupying the same locus); there is said to be no actual contact between them.¹⁴

¹⁰ Dr. Weiss Brian. Messages From The Masters. UK. CPI Mackays, Chatham, 2000. pp. 55.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 60

¹² Ibid, pp. 64

¹³ TJKSG, pp. 35

¹⁴ Jaini P.S. The Jaina Path of Purification pp. 113 (As cited in Living Jainism pp. 71)

When a bad person comes into the contact of a good human being, gradually the goodness of the other influences him, though the good one has his own journey that has nothing to do with the bad one, but still he influences him. And though the good person is not going to stay with the bad one forever but still he leaves a mark on the character of the previously bad person, for a long time. Similarly, “Although the karmic matter does not directly touch the soul, because the soul is a non-material substance, the presence of karmons around the soul exerts influence and can alter the soul’s character. Karmic matter, coupled with the soul’s perverted energy element, produces a karmic force-field (or karmic field). In turn, the force-field gives rise to karmic-influx. Both these effects are part of an aspect of reality known to the Jains as *Asrava*. This is the flow of karmons from all directions into the soul. Further, the karmic force coupled with the soul’s obstructed energy element fuse the incoming karmons: we will call this process karmic fusion, but in traditional Jain terms it is an aspect of *Bandha*. The total karmic matter fused to the soul is thereby revised, and this dynamic karmic process continues.¹⁵

Then there are different personalities each with a different impact, and a different intensity, on their fellow companions. Karmons exist in an undifferentiated form in nature, but the karmic force-field coupled with the obstructed soul energy introduces specific functions to the karmons, so that they are differentiated. The result is a variety of ‘karmic types’, exerting a wide range of influences over the soul. As Jaini explains: Karmic matter is said to be found ‘floating free’ in every part of occupied space. At this stage it is undifferentiated; various types (*prakruti*) of karma, classifiable by function, are molded from these simpler forms only after interaction with a given soul has begun.¹⁶

As each soul’s ultimate purpose is to attain emancipation, the soul needs to shed off each of its accumulated karma, as the degree of soul purity varies from zero to infinity, the density of the karmic matter will vary from infinity to zero, inversely as it were.¹⁷

The time to decay and the corresponding potential strength of each component is fixed by the degree of passions with which the activity takes place. Once the karmon had had its effect, it is emitted from the soul, returning to an undifferentiated state and thus to the infinite pool of free kamrons.¹⁸

¹⁵ Mardia Kanti V. and Rankin Aidan D. Living Jainism. UK: John Hunt Publishing Ltd. 2013. pp. 71

¹⁶ Jaini P.S. (1979): The Jaina Path of Purification. (As cited in Living Jainism) pp.72

¹⁷ Mardia Kanti V. and Rankin Aidan D. Living Jainism. UK: John Hunt Publishing Ltd. 2013. pp. 89

¹⁸ Ibid pp. 114

Each karma has a life and after that it separates out from the karma body. The shedding of karma from the karma body is known as nirjara.¹⁹

To understand the dynamic process of karmic fission, it should be clearly understood that as karmons are shed, there is an increase in the energy of the Jiva which allows further spiritual growth. It is assumed that future karmic influx will be checked, and there will be a further release of energy and knowledge elements which allow the soul to search for its true nature.²⁰

In Panchastikaya, referring to the long ago linkage between soul and karmic matter as 'soul-karmic matter cycle', it is mentioned that, 'the mundane soul which is bound in the cycle of birth and death, has the effect of love and hatred. These effects attract new karma. Karma leads to birth in various states. Birth produces a body, a body possesses senses, senses enjoy their subjects, interest in subjects give rise to love and hatred. Thus, with emotions of mundane soul arise karmic pudgalas, with karmic pudgalas arise emotions. This flow is beginningless and infinite with reference to non-awakened soul and beginningless and finite with reference to awakened soul.'²¹

A commentator of Tattvartha Sutra has illustrated the association of the self with karmic matter in the following manner--- 'Even as a lamp by its temperature draws up the oil with its wick and, after drawing up, converts the oil into its body (viz. glow), exactly so does a soul-lamp, with the attributes of attachment and material aggregates by the wick of its activities and, after attracting, transform them into karma.'²²

Degrees of Kashaya (Passions)

The strength of the main Kashaya or passion - anger (krodha), pride (mana), deceit (maya) and greed (lobha) - assigning to them five degrees: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4. Of course, these imply the proportional density of fusions of karmons, that is, the higher the degree, the larger is the fusion, the longer is it's time to decay, and the stronger is the karmic force.

The degrees of anger, pride, deceit and greed of 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be illustrated through the following metaphors:

Anger: Degree 1 is like a line drawn with a stick on water which almost instantaneously passes away.

¹⁹ TJKTSG, pp. 29

²⁰ Living Jainism pp.132

²¹ Panchastikaya, 29-30 (As cited in TJKTSG, pp. 32)

²² Tattvartha Sutra Bhashya Teeka, part-1, p. 343 (As cited in TJKSG pp. 93-94)

Degree 2 is like a line drawn on a beach which the tide washes away.

Degree 3 is like a ditch dug in a sandy soil which, after one year's weather, silts up.

Degree 4, the most serious or worst of all, is like a deep crack in a mountain side which will remain until end of time.

Degree zero, by contrast, implies serenity and tolerance.

Pride: Degree 1 is like a twig which is pliable and easily bent.

Degree 2 is like a young branch of a tree which can be bent by a storm.

Degree 3 is like beams of wood cut from a mature tree which may only be bent by being oiled and heated.

Degree 4 outdoes any analogy taken from a tree, being as unbending as a lump of granite.

Degree Zero implies humility.

Deceit (or crookedness): Degree 1 deceit can be 'straightened' as one could straighten a stalk of wheat bent by the wind.

Degree 2 is like the edge of a lawn which has been badly cut and requires much work to straighten it.

Degree 3 is like a crooked tooth which cannot be straightened after it has been left unchecked for a prolonged period.

Degree 4 is akin to a knot in a tree.

Degree Zero indicates straightforwardness, honesty and candor.

Greed: (In Jain tradition, greed is said to alter the color of human heart) Degree 1 will stain the heart yellow like water-based paint that can be easily washed away.

Degree 2 means that the heart will be soiled like cooking pans full of fat which can only be cleaned with great labor.

Degree 3 produces spiritual stain like the mark left by oil on clothing which is only removed after much dry-cleaning.

Degree 4 is like a permanent dye which cannot be removed.

Degree Zero implies contentment and a compassionate state.

These degrees can be related to the lengths of the time for which their effects are held to last:

Degree 4 of a major passion is of lifelong duration.

Degree 3 of a major passion is one year duration.

Degree 2 of a major passion lasts for 4 months.

Degree 1 of a major passion is the level called smouldering passions and is of a fortnight's duration.

Degree Zero of all major passions corresponds to a higher spiritual state.²³

Violence to oneself and others results in the formation of the heaviest new karmic matter, whereas helping others towards Moksha with positive non-violence results in the lightest new karmic matter.²⁴

To understand Karma and its importance on the path of spiritual upliftment, an analogy from modern life could be driving a car towards a given destination: we do well to remember here that a car is a vehicle with tremendous power that needs to be handled with both care and skill. Therefore, the way you drive and the degree of care you take is at least as important as the route that you take. A lapse of less than a second can be crucial.²⁵

²³ Mardia Kanti V. and Rankin Aidan D. Living Jainism. UK: John Hunt Publishing Ltd. 2013. pp. 115, 116, 117

²⁴ Ibid pp. 118

²⁵ Living Jainism pp.122

Leshya or Karmic Colorations

The mental and emotional garbage we carry inside surrounds us all the time, and definitely conveys some energy to others, this is the reason why we feel positive after meeting someone and drained of energy after meeting the other. Today, people may call it aura or vibes, but Jain philosophy has a deeper word for that, which is Lesya or thought colours.

Lesya can be defined as 'karmic stain of the soul.'²⁶ Karma can be performed through three ways i.e. thoughts, actions and deeds (mana, vachana and kaya), jointly they are called yoga (activity). As each of our action can not be without the four passions (anger, pride, deceit and greed), which own infinitely varying degrees of intensity. In mundane life yoga is inextricably woven together with passions. The one cannot be divorced from the other. Such an assimilation of one into the other has been styled as Lesya.²⁷

The six types of Lesyas which correspond to the six types of the intensity of passions --- the most intense, very intense, intense; mild, milder and the mildest --- are respectively called i) Krishna, ii) Neel, iii) Kaapot, iv) Peet, v) Padma and vi) Shukla.²⁸ The first three are inauspicious hence, are held to represent heavy karmic density; and the last three are auspicious, they represent lighter karmic density.²⁹ They may be respectively illustrated by the attitude of individuals who want to relish fruits i) by uprooting the tree, ii) by cutting the trunk, iii) by cutting big branches, iv) by cutting small branches, v) by plucking only the fruits, and lastly vi) by having those fruits that had fallen on the ground.³⁰

Lesya also highlights the importance of preserving the environment and working with nature rather than seeking to exploit or conquer it. The sixth individual, in the above example, preserves every aspect of the tree and does not interfere with it for his or her own ends. Thus the purest (in Jain terms) of karmic colorations is associated with the conservation of nature.³¹

²⁶ International Journal of Jaina Studies, Volume 7-9, Mumbai, Hindi Granth Karyalaya, 2014 pp. 62

²⁷ Dr. Sogani Kamal Chand. Ethical Doctrines in Jainism, Solapur, Jaina Sanskriti Sanrakshaka Sangha. 2001 pp. 53

²⁸ Shatkhandagam, Vol. 1 (Jaina Sahitya Uddharaka Fund Karyalaya, Amraoti) (As cited in Ethical Doctrines in Jainism, pp. 53)

²⁹ Gommatasara Jivakanda of Nemichandra (Rayachandra Jaina Shastramala, Bombay) (As cited in Ethical Doctrines in Jainism, pp. 53)

³⁰ Ibid. (As cited in Ethical Doctrines in Jainism, pp. 53)

³¹ Living Jainism pp.82

Karma And Personal Ethics

Being the most developed species on the planet we have it in our power to drag down all other species in an orgy of perverted karma, or to stop bothering them, killing them, driving them to extinction in so many ways--- from sheer butchery to the more subtle appropriation of whole ecosystems. With our own souls utterly dependent upon the cornucopia of life around us (which we alone are wiping out-- forever!-- at the current rate of several species per day) the Jain insights into Karma, and the possibilities of liberation, are remarkable timely. Here is a way of life that prompts and coddles every wild, and every refined soul; a source of universal salvation that strikes at the heart of ecological science. Remarkable, it is also an art form.³²

When one holds an apple in one's hand and then lets go of the apple, the apple will fall: this is only natural. There is no judge, and no moral judgment involved, since this is a mechanical consequence of the physical action. Jainism teaches that in the same manner consequences occur when one utters a lie, steals something, commits acts of senseless violence or leads the life of debauchee. No judge is necessary. Rather than assume that moral rewards and retribution are the work of a divine judge, the Jainas believe that there is an innate moral order to the cosmos, self-regulating through the workings of karma.³³

Just as I can harm my health in this life by certain unwise actions, I can harm the quality of my next life by certain other actions.³⁴ The psychological significance of the Jaina karma theory is great.³⁵

There is independence of such a greater extent in Jain philosophy that it doesn't leave any door for escape, for one to be dependent or blame anyone else. It is bitter, sometimes it hurts, but eventually it gets one acquainted with the truth. It declares, you don't live with consequences of other people's karma. You live with the consequences of your own.³⁶

(It is necessary) to develop a feeling of amity towards all beings, a feeling of appreciation towards the meritorious, a feeling of compassion towards those in

³² Tobias Michael. Life Force: The World of Jainism. California, Jain Publishing Company. 1991. pp.75

³³ JTIF, pp. 20

³⁴ JTIF, pp. 56

³⁵ JTIF, pp. 57

³⁶ Tripathi Amish. The Immortals of Meluha. Chennai, Westland Ltd. 2010. pp. 144

misery, and equanimity in instructing those who have lost the true values.³⁷ For this is the only way to make this world a better place.

Karma And Free Will

Each one of us think, what I am enduring today is the result of my past karma; it means my future has also been decided already, which everyone calls destiny. Then where do my present actions stand? What is the importance of my purusharth? Where does my free will stand? Without much elaboration, based on my own observations and experiences, I have understood free will as:

Experiencing the fruits of karma done in the past by reacting to a particular occurrence sows the seed for the future. In between these two, lies free will. There is no exact future; it always has a set of possibilities to choose from, which shapes one's destiny.

Free will is the ability to choose between different possible courses of action. It is closely linked to the concepts of responsibility, praise, guilt, sin, and other judgments, which apply only to actions that are freely chosen.³⁸ For example: either this or that or something else and so on... free will allows one to choose one out of these possibilities.

Conclusion

Karma is a complicated network of series of cause and effect, where each karma takes us further back in time, each present karma is the effect of some previous karma, that worked as a cause for the same and at the same time that previous karma was the effect of some other previous karma that must have caused it and so on...

In current times when dharma/god has been depicted as a fearful ghost, and the way religions are becoming chaotic; the Jaina Karma theory makes us feel free and independent.

The whole purpose of studying the karma philosophy is to apply this wisdom in our daily lives, where we are able to see the bigger picture under the vision of cause, that has been created by us back in time; and effect, the situation we are facing at present. When one gets hold of the karma theory, one understands it deeply that one's present circumstances has been laid down by oneself in the past and when one gets aware of it,

³⁷ Tattvartha-Sutra, Ch.7, v.6 (As cited in Living Jainism pp. 122)

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will (Retrieved on 13/11/2016 @ 11 AM)

one questions his agony, that seems pointless. Famous German scholar Dr. Robert Zydenbos has said, 'The core of Jainism is (a) the karma doctrine, (b) the metaphysical dualistic polarity, recognizing jiva and ajiva, (c) its very typical epistemology and ontology (which is the true basis of Anekantavada and Syadvada). Everything else is derived from this, including the Jaina system of ethics. This is very important to realize: ethics is not the starting point, but a consequence of other thoughts. The Jainas themselves have forgotten this and want to believe that their religion is non-violence and nothing else. If anyone who has been philosophically trained critically thinks about this for more than one minute, it will be clear why this cannot be true.³⁹

Hence I believe under the canopy of karma we can improvise ourselves and can, definitely lead a more peaceful and happy life. Especially the detailed description of karma in Jaina philosophy, is so logical that it leaves no query unanswered, rather it inspires its students to peep in for self introspection and make them understand that if anyone can be reformed, in the world, is 'me.' If each individual of our society would start working on self improvement through self introspection, healthy self-criticism and self-analysis, that day is not far when peace will prevail on our planet.

³⁹ As told in an email interview on 30.08.2016