

Vow of non-violence has not only been elaborated in theory in Jaina scriptures, but it has also been implemented in practice to a very large extent by the followers of Jainism - both ascetics and householders. The ascetics observe the vow of non-violence as a great vow very meticulously from ancient times to the present day. However, the Jaina scriptures, from the practical point of view, allowed Householders (the Shrawakas and the Shrawikas) to observe the vow of non-violence as an Anu vrata, a small vow. The householders are required to observe the vow of non-violence with comparatively less severity but at the same time without transgressing the basic tenets of Ahimsa. Naturally this fundamental requirement made it necessary for the householders to put a number of restrictions on their economic, social, cultural and other activities connected with their livelihood and maintenance. This kind of specific implementation of the vow of non-violence can be very clearly noticed from the practical restrictions and conventions actually followed by the Jaina householders in their activities like occupations and professions, food and drink, and dress and decoration.

Occupations and Professions

From the present state of Jains it appears that a predominantly large majority of them are engaged in some kind of business. They are known as Baniyas or Vaniyas and are included under the Vaisyas. The predominance of Vaisyas is, historically speaking, a comparatively recent development because in ancient times Jains were found in all classes and especially among the Kshatriyas. But due to various reasons the number of Jains in that class gradually dwindled and in consequence we now notice that the followers of Jainism are mainly Vaisyas.

The rules of conduct for laymen lay down that a person should follow some kind of business or profession in a just and honest way for the maintenance of his family. The only restriction he has to observe in the choice of his avocation is that it must not be of an ignoble or degrading nature in the sense that it should not involve wholesale destruction of life. The prohibited businesses are those of butchers, fishermen, brewers, wine-merchants, gun-makers and the like. The Jaina Scriptures mention fifteen varieties of business enterprises which involve great injury to living beings and hence the Jaina laymen are required to avoid them. They are such as those involving great use of fire, cutting of trees or plants, castrating animals, clearing of jungles by employment of fire, drying up lakes, rivers, etc.

The Jains follow practically all sorts of avocations but they are mainly money-lenders, bankers, jewelers, cloth merchants, grocers and recently industrialists. As they hold the key positions in all these occupations, it is no wonder that a large proportion of mercantile wealth of India passes through their hands. Apart from these occupations, Jains have taken to professional jobs like legal, medical, engineering and teaching professions.

Food and Drinks

The Jains are very particular regarding their food and drinks. Since the ethical code of the Jains is based on the main principle of Ahimsa, we find its thorough application in the matters of food and drinks also. It must be noticed that even householder is required to have eight fundamental virtues which are the observance of the five Anu Vratas and abstinence from the use of flesh, wine and honey. The reason against eating flesh of any living being is quite obvious. The Jains do not take food which involves the slaughter of animals, fishes, birds, or anything that has five or less sense-organs. That is why they do not eat underground roots (Kandamulas), they are underground stems and roots like potatoes, onions, garlic, reddish, turnip, carrot, beet-roots, etc., which are supposed to contain an infinite living beings under one wall. Similarly, they must not eat fruits of fig, Pipal, and Banyan which are the birth places of mobile beings and multi seeded. Further, it is necessary, for a Jaina to take his meals during daytime because Hinsa is inevitable when food is prepared or taken in the absence of sunlight. Therefore the Jains have to renounce night-eating throughout the year and those who cannot do so all the time, at least do it during the Chaturmas or the four months of rainy season when there is a large growth of insects. Again, the Jains are required to wipe most carefully anything that is to be used for food, with a view to exclude as tenderly as possible any of the tiny living creatures which might be found in or on it. In the same way as a precautionary measure in avoiding injury to very, small living beings, the Jains have been enjoined to strain or filter water, milk, juice, or any liquid drink before use. It must be said to the credit of the Jains that they do observe very scrupulously all these rules regarding food. It is the outstanding feature of Jains throughout India and out of India that they are strictly vegetarians, never eat at night, and always use strained water.

Along with flesh, wine and all kinds of intoxicants, or even stimulants, are prohibited. They are not considered necessary for the life and well-being of the body. Wine is the birth place of finite beings which are generated in liquor and hence those who are addicted to wine necessarily commit Hinsa. Further, it is stated that wine stupefies the mind, once whose mind is stupefied forgets piety; and the person who forgets piety commits Hinsa without hesitation. Similarly, pride, fear, disgust, ridicule, grief, sex-passion, anger etc. are all forms of Hinsa and all of these are concomitants of wine. Like wine, honey is also prohibited because it is considered that even the smallest drop of honey very often represents the death of bees. The Jains have been advised not to use stale butter as after a lapse of some time the butter becomes a birthplace of minute beings due to extreme fermentation.

As regards the question of food and drink one thing must be remembered, Jainism admits that only liberated souls are in a position to observe complete non-injury and that mundane souls have to commit Hinsa for their maintenance as life thrives only on life. Though Hinsa is unavoidable in the maintenance of life, Jainism tries to limit it for essential purposes only. The rules of conduct never sanction injury, but they try to restrict it to the lowest possible minimum, by taking into account the gradations of injured living beings. The higher the stage of development of the injured being, the heavier is the sin committed if they are injured. Thus, from the practical point of view, the sin of hurting a plant is smaller than that of hurting animals; the sin of hurting an

animal is smaller than that on hurting a human being, etc. From this standpoint, it can be understood why Jainism forbids flesh-eating while objects little to the eating of vegetables. Therefore, what is asked of Jains is simply this: "Do not destroy life, unless it is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the life".

Dress and Decoration:

The Jains are required to pursue the path of Ahinsa in the matter of dress also. They have not to wear the furs because they can not be obtained without torturing animals. For the same reason the use of silken and woolen garments is prohibited for all Jains. Jains are not supposed to use any leather goods either that means no leather belts, purses, straps for watches, etc. They do not use made of ivory either.