

VI CURRENT FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

1. GROWING RELIGIOUS DISSENSIONS

The important problem, which is undermining the strength of the Jaina community for the last so many centuries, is the existence of various religious divisions in the community. Up to the days of Lord Mahavira and even for some centuries later the Jaina Church remained one and undivided though some minor schisms had taken place during and after the time of Lord Mahavira. About the end of the first century A.D. the Jaina Church was finally split up into two rival sects which have vigorously maintained the rivalry to the present day. The two main sects, viz. the Digambara and the Shvetambara, were later kin split up into major and minor sub-sects some of which were revolutionary in the sense that they opposed the established practice of idol worship. Apart from the division of the Jaina Church into sects, and sub-sects, the Jainas were further divided, on a religious basis, into several sections and sub-sections like Sangha, Gana, Gachchha and Shakha.

The Jainas did not stop with the creation of a large number of sects, sub-sects, sections and sub-sections in the community, but persistently made and are still making them by various means to perpetuate these divisions. Only a few wend places an common to both be Digambaras and the Shvetambaras, while each sect

possesses its own numerous sacred places. Even those few common sacred places have, for all these years, become a constant bone of contention between the two sects as each sect tries to establish its claim of ownership over them by both fair and foul means. Crores of rupees have been spent and continue to be spent by both the parties on litigation. Generally the members of each sub-sect or sub-section build their own temples or places of worship. Thus among the Digambaras the Terapanthis and the Bisapan this have their separate temples and the Taranopan this their own Chaityalayas. The Murtipujaka Shvetambaras have their temples, while the Shvetambara Sthanakavasis visit their Upashrayas only. In big cities practically every important Gachchha possesses its temple where all the members of that Gachchha assemble on festival and, other ceremonial days. At Karanja in Vidarbha the members of Sena Gana and Balatkara Gana have their own temples. Further, A many plans the members of some important castes have their different temples. Again, the main sects have their own types of idols, methods of worship, places of pilgrim.. age, sacred books, Samskaras or sacraments, religious teachers and fasts and festivals. These differences have so much been magnified by both the -main sects that every sect considers itself as a true follower of Jainism, while it regards the other sect as fallen from the real path of Jainism.

The differences have penetrated into the social field also, Formerly, marriages used to take place between the members

belonging to different sects and sub-sects; but now there is a marked tendency to restrict the marital relations within the members of a particular sect or even a sub-sect. Each sect or sub-sect provides for its students facilities like boarding houses, scholarship funds, research grants etc. There is hardly any association which caters to the needs of students irrespective of sect or sub-sect. Even their religious educational institutions *like Gurukulas and Pathashalas* are separate for each sect or sub-sect. The members of practically every sect or sub-sect are being organised on an all-India basis. The Digambaras have organisations of an all-India character, viz. All India Digambara Jaina Mahasabha, Delhi, All India Digambara Jaina Sangha, Mathura and All India Digambara Jaina Mahasamiti, Delhi; and among the Shvetambaras each sub-sect has an all-India organisation, viz. All India Shvetambara (Murtipujaka) Jaina Conference, Bombay; All India Shvetambara Sthanakavasi Jain Conference, Bombay; and Sri Jaina Shvetambara Terapanthi Mahasabha, Calcutta. These organisations have their provincial branches and official newspaper organs through which they try to stabilise their respective positions. It is true that there are some organisations of national and local and regional character like Bharata Jaina Mahamandala, Bombay, and Bombay Jaina Yuvaka Sangha, Bombay, which are meant for all Jainas, but it is a fact that they are not popular as other sectarian organisations are.

Sometimes it is reported that even the religious pontiffs of different sects and sub-sects try to accentuate the religious differences and sever the social relations, if any, existing between them.

Thus it is quite evident that the Jainas have been segregated into different hostile camps on religious grounds. As a consequence we find that there is -nothing like religious unity among the followers of Jainism and this undoubtedly hinders the progress of the Jaina community. Since the Jainas have been spread throughout the length and breadth of India, there is a great divergence in their observance of various social customs and manners. In the circumstances the only bond that brings all Jainas together is the bond of religion, i.e. they are the followers of the same religion. It is, therefore, the paramount duty of the Jainas to see that the feeling of oneness is inculcated in the minds of the Jainas by several means. In fact, Jainism is one and undivided so far as its philosophy, fundamental principles and doctrines are concerned. The Jaina Church was united for a long time and its sects-and especially the sub-sects-arose at a comparatively late stage; in its history. There are not basic differences of a serious nature, from the point of view of the present age, between the sects and the sub-sects. According to the Jaina theory itself nobody, either male or female, can attain salvation in the current age. It is, therefore, quite futile to quarrel on points like '*Savastra-mukti*', i.e. whether one can achieve Moksha while one wears the clothes;

`Strimukti,' i.e. whether a woman can attain salvation; and `Kevali-Kavalahara', i.e. whether an omniscient needs food or not. These three are the major points of differences between the Digambaras and the Shvetambaras and when they are not applicable in the present age there is no reason, why the sects should give more importance to the minor differences and estrange their relations. The same can be said about the relations between the Terapanthis and the Bisapanthis among the Digambaras and between the Sthanakavasis and the Terapanthis among the Shvetambaras as there are not much differences between them. The non-idolatrous sub-sects among both the sects may be allowed to worship in their own way but they should, in no case, be considered as aliens to Jainism. Thus more emphasis, in the first place, should invariably be given on these points of common nature, so that the feeling of hostility may be completely banished from the minds of Jainas belonging to different sects and sub-sects.

With a view to foster this feeling several practical means will have to be adopted by both the sects. They should celebrate together the birth and death anniversary days of Lords Rshabha and Mahavira together instead of observing them separately. They should make it a point to visit the temples and places of warship of a11 sects and sub - sects and should join in the religious festivals of other sects. A11 sectarian organisations will have to be abolished forthwith and their place should: be taken by the organisations of all Jainas formed on local and regional and national basis.

Naturally all other facilities and institutions must be kept free to all Jainas. The field of social relations must also be widened. They should not be kept restricted within the members of a particular sect or sub-sect. Efforts should be made to publish the literature stressing the essential unity in the Jaina Church. The religious pontiffs should be made to concentrate their energies on cementing the differences and establishing the cordial relations between the sects and sub-sects. If possible, common Samskaras, fasts and festivals should be evolved, so that many opportunities will be created for bringing all people together and maintaining closer relations between them.

When concentrated and sincere efforts are made on above lines, it is hoped, the common religious bond will become firm and will foster the sense of unity among the Jainas, which is so essential for organising the Jaina community to continue its existence and to increase its prosperity.

2. LACK OF COMMUNITY FEELING

Another fundamental problem of a vital importance, with which the Jaina community is confronted, is regarding the social organisation of the community. In this respect the position of the Jaina religion is quite distinct. Jainism is not at all concerned with the division of society into classes or other groups. But for the facility of living the Jainas divided the people into four classes, viz. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. In dividing the

society into four classes the Jaina Acharyas made it abundantly clear that the classes are based on the differences in professions and that complete freedom is given to persons to follow any profession they like. The classes were neither considered as hereditary, nor were they arranged in the order of respectability. Thus all classes were placed on the same level and full mobility was assured between the classes. This was the social organisation of the Jainas at the time of Lord Mahavira and it prevailed for more than one thousand years after his death.

But afterwards slowly these four classes disappeared and their place was taken by many castes and sub-castes. The caste system of Jainas was practically modelled from the Hindu caste system. As a consequence the Jaina community has been divided into a large number of castes and sub-castes which through their councils control the social relations of their members. Contacts are not maintained among various classes. Inter-marriages are largely prohibited. Even though inter-dining is not banned, still it is not availed of freely at all. Caste organisations run the boarding houses, distribute the scholarships, hold annual conferences, conduct their papers, provide residential accommodation at cheap rents and do other things all for the benefit of their caste members only. At many places castes have built their own temples where members assemble for performing religious services and festivals. Naturally by these means, at the expense of community feeling, caste loyalty is fostered in the minds of the Jainas. The

caste system has created separatist tendencies in the Jaina community.

Thus on the social grounds, just as on the religious ground, the Jainas have been divided and sub-divided into small sections which care more for themselves than for the Jaina community as a whole. The strength of the small community has been very much weakened by the existence of these innumerable self-centered groups.

Apart from considerably reducing the vitality of the community, these social and religious divisions have very adversely affected the, marriage relations of the people. One of the prominent features of the caste system is its endogamous nature. Accordingly a member of a particular caste or sub-caste, as the case may be, is required to marry a person who belongs to that caste or sub-caste. The exact. number of castes and sub-castes prevailing in the Jaina community at present is not known but it is sure that the number is definitely more than one hundred. When a small community is divided into so many sections, it is obvious that the numerical strength of these sections must be meagre. That is why more than half the castes in the Jaina community possess the members who number less than five hundred. Naturally the field for choice of partners becomes very limited. Along with caste endogamy, religious endogamy is also to be observed. This means that the caste members belonging to the

same sect or sub-sect should have marital relations among themselves only. The members of a sub-caste, but not of the same sub-sect, are not expected to contract matrimonial alliances among themselves. Further, with these factors territorial considerations have also to be taken into account. Accordingly the partners to the marriage must not only belong to the same caste or-sub-caste and to the same sect or sub-sect, but also must be the residents of a particular locality. Thus there is practically no scope given to the Jainas in the important matter of the choice of their life partners. It is evident that in these circumstances the married life cannot be conducive to happiness and many a time marriages have necessarily to be contracted between not too distant relatives. Moreover, due to these three-fold restrictions the already existing deficiency of females is further heightened and comparatively many males are required compulsorily to remain unmarried against their wish throughout their life. All these things tell upon the growth of the population and create discontent among the people. It is, therefore, clear that the caste solidarity is tried to be maintained through restriction on marital relations even though they definitely go against the interests of the community as a whole.

In these circumstances it is quite obvious that the social organisation of the Jainas should not be based on the caste system, if the Jainas have to put a stop to their gradual decline. The Jainas must unhesitatingly reduce the role of the caste system

forthwith. In doing so they are, undoubtedly, not going against the religion because Jainism never sanctioned the caste system. It must be remembered that in the past castes were not found in the Jaina community at all. There is not even a slight evidence in the doctrines of Jainism, in the ancient history of the Jaina society or in the ancient Jaina literature regarding the existence of caste-distinctions in Jaina community. That is why concerted efforts will have to be made to give prominence to community feeling and to gradually reduce the influence of castes.

3. TENDENCY TO DISREGARD AHIMSA

Another most important current issue of a fundamental and very urgent nature before the Jaina community at present is the increasing tendency of showing persistent disregard in practice to the observance of the actual rules of behaviour pertaining especially to food and drink laid down by the ethical code of conduct based on the basic doctrine of Ahimsa as preached by Jainism. This objectionable tendency to consume prohibited items of food and drink is clearly seen among adolescent and young members of the community at present and there is a possible danger that in course of time it would spread to other sections also in near future. This is a very serious matter as it poses a virtual threat not only to the prestige and continuity of the Jaina community but also to the future of the Jain Religion in the sense that both the Jaina Religion and its followers the Jainas-are extremely valued in this world because of the utmost importance

accorded by them to actual observance of the basic principle of Ahimsa in all activities of life.

In this regard it can be asserted that of all religions of the world, Jainism is the only religion which has the principle of Ahimsa as its central doctrine. The other religions also speak of Ahimsa whenever convenient, but they never *offer* such loyalty to the principle of Ahimsa as is found in Jainism. In the history of world religions, Jainism alone has given a unique position to the doctrine of Ahimsa and has based its ethical code entirely on the complete observance of the tenet of Ahimsa in all its aspects. Jainism is the only religion in the world which has given maximum attention to the important practical aspects of the theory of Ahimsa so that Ahimsa, in its minutest details, can be actually observed both by the lay followers and ascetics in their day to day life. At the same time, Jaina Religion has got the unique distinction, among the other religions of the world, of ably presenting in a scholastic and scientific manner the theoretical and philosophical side of the doctrine of Ahimsa by discussing it thoroughly not only from internal and absolute points of view, but also from external and real points of view.

Similarly, among the five main vows prescribed by Jaina religion, the most fundamental position has been given to the *Ahimsa-Vrata*, i.e. the vow of Ahimsa, and it has been

convincingly shown that the remaining four main vows, viz. Satya-Vrata, i.e. the abstention from falsehood, Asteya-Vrata, i.e. the abstention from stealing, *Brahmacharya-Vrata*, i.e., the abstention from unchastity, and *AparigrahaVrata*, i.e. the abstention from the worldly attachments, are nothing but the details of the vow of Ahimsa. Further, along with making the vow of Ahimsa very comprehensive and all-inclusive in character and scope, extreme, carefulness in the actual practice of Ahimsa has also been strongly advocated and with this end in view the Jaina scriptures have particularly laid down the five kinds of *Aticharas*, i.e. transgressions, of each of the five main vows along with other vows and have specifically enjoined upon the householders to avoid these *Aticharas* so as to make the practice of Ahimsa as faultless as possible. Moreover, even though the theoretical dimensions of the vow of Ahimsa in all its aspects were made very wide and the extreme carefulness was insisted on the actual observance of the vow of Ahimsa, still every precaution was taken to see that the vow of Ahimsa can be definitely put into practice in the daily life of the followers of Jainism. At the same time for ensuring the practicability of vow of Ahimsa many prescriptions were laid down in regard to the actual observance of Ahimsa in accordance with. the respective capacities of followers of Jainism.

In addition, the doctrine of Ahimsa was not confined to its negative aspect, i.e. avoidance of injury only, but at the same

time great stress was laid to emphasise the positive aspect, i.e. increasing the welfare of others, which is inherent in the doctrine of Ahimsa and accordingly the Jaina scriptures gave encouragement to the grant of charities, extended support to the organization of welfare activities for the benefit of all living beings and strongly advocated the spirit of tolerance with reference to the other religionists.

Thus the philosophy and rules of conduct laid down in Jaina religion have been based on the solid foundation of Ahimsa, which has, throughout and consistently, been followed to its logical conclusion. That is why Jaina Religion has become synonymous with Ahimsa Religion and, the Jaina Cult-Lire is termed as the Ahimsa Culture. On this basis Jainism has also shown to the world in a perfect and convincing way the worth of the doctrine of Ahimsa by stating the basic principle, viz. *“Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah”*, i.e. Ahimsa is the greatest religion.

In view of these considerations it is quite imperative for the Jainas from the *point of their* continued existence in future as a distinct and respectable entity *in* the world to see that their internal religious and social differences are reduced *to* a great extent and to ensure that the detailed rules *of* behaviour especially those pertaining to food and, drink-as laid down by the ethics *of* Jainism based on the fundamental doctrine *of* Ahimsa are scrupulously observed by all sections of the community. If

these things are achieved there is no doubt that the Jaina community will continue to play a positive role and will retain its prestigious position in future also. In this connection it is worth quoting the considered opinion on the future role of Jaina community in India put forward by the eminent senior sociologist and thinker, Dr. R.A. Schermerhern, in his world recognised book “Ethnic Plurality in India” in the following words : “If the internal dissensions among the Jains are reduced, and if the inflexible conservatism of the Jains remains strong and is centered about the ideal of Ahimsa, the Jain Community will have a continuing function in the life of India that cannot easily perish”.