

## CHAPTER VII

### SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHAVIRA

Tirthankara Mahavira, after the attainment of omniscience at the age of forty-two, toured different parts of the country for a continuous period of thirty years, met people from various urban, rural and tribal societies, and preached the principles and rules of conduct as laid down by Jainism. The personality and preachings of Tirthankara Mahavira created a tremendous impact on the minds of all sections of people and especially on the down-trodden sections of the population. He not only revealed to them the path of Liberation i.e. the path to attain the eternal happiness, which was the main object of the people, but also showed the actual means through which all people, irrespective of any distinction of class or status, can achieve this objective. His sincerity of purpose, way of approach, method of explanation, divine speech and philosophical and ethical doctrines appealed to the people to such an extent that with a firm conviction of mind they began to adopt Jain religion as lay followers or as ascetics. The number of confirmed adherents to Jain religion began to increase steadily. In this way Tirthankara Mahavira ushered in a new era of hope and aspirations for the common people and succeeded in considerably changing the life, outlook and values of the people. He introduced various new concepts and ideas which revolutionised the entire course of life of the people. The significance of Tirthankara Mahavira lies in successfully effecting a social

change and in making institutional and other arrangements for the perpetuation of his new social order. In order to solve the pressing problems of the time, he made several important salient contributions from a social point of view which are briefly out-lined here.

### **(1) Establishment of Social Equality:**

The most significant contribution in the social field made by Tirthankara Mahavira was the establishment of social equality among the four *Varnas*, i.e. classes, prevalent in the society. Mahavira succeeded in organizing his large number of followers into a compact social order quite distinct from that of the Brahmanic social order of the Vedic period.

The Vedic society was composed of four classes, viz. Brahmana, Rajanya, Vaishya and Shudra. They were said to have come from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet of the Creator, Brahman. The particular limbs ascribed as the origins of these divisions and the order in which they were mentioned indicated their status in the society of the time. The fact that the four classes were described as of divine origin could be taken as a sufficient indication that they were of long duration and very well defined. Not only the four classes were distinct and separate, but they were also affected by the spirit of rivalry among themselves. Even in the early Rigvedic times the Brahmanical profession had begun to set up claims of superiority or sacredness for itself and, accordingly we find that different rules were prescribed for different

classes. Thus the Shatapatha Brahmana laid down different modes of address for the four classes, differing in degrees of politeness, *as ehi*, *agachchha*, *adrava* and *adhava*. The Taittiriya Brahmana recommended the spring season to the Brahmins for the performance of sacrifices, the Summer to the Kshatriyas, and the autumn to the Vaishyas. The Atharva Veda proclaimed in the strongest language sin, peril and ruinous consequences for insulting Brahmins and robbing them of their property. This inordinate extension of the pretensions and prerogatives of the sacerdotal class naturally created cleavages in the Society. The Kshatriya were assigned a position next to Brahmins, and Vaishyas and Shudras were comparatively neglected. Thus the Vedic Society was completely class-ridden in the sense that unusual importance was given to the Brahmin class to the detriment of other classes and that no body was allowed to change his class' which he had got on the basis of his birth it, that class.

Against these glaring practices based on the acceptance of social inequality and on the wide observance of social dis-crimination, Tirtharikara' Mahavira launched his attack. He recognized the division of society into four classes but based them on the nature of activities carried out by the people and not on the basis of their ' birth. He gave full freedom to one and all, including women and Shudras, to observe common religious practices prescribed for all and admitted them into his religious order: In this way Tirthankara Mahavira threw open the

doors of Jainism to all and gave equal opportunity to everybody irrespectives of his class or birth, to practice religion according to his capacity. Those who followed religion as householders were known as *Shravakas* and *Shravikas* and those who observed the religion fully by leaving their houses and becoming ascetics were called as *Sadhus* and *Sadhvis*.

After Mahavira, various Jaina Acharyas made no distinction whatsoever among people in the matter of following religion and conceived that the Varna system, that is, the division of society into four Varnas or classes, is based upon differences in professions. In their view birth played no part in determining the Varna or class of a particular person. As regards the division of Society into four Varnas, Acharya Jinasena states (in *Adi Purana Parva* 38, 45, 48) in the following manner :

मनुष्यजातिरेकैव जातिनामोदयोर्द भवा ।s

वृस्तिभेदा हि तद्मेदात् चातुर्विध्यमिहाश्नते ॥

ब्राह्मणा व्रतसंस्कारात् क्षत्रियाः शस्त्रधारणात् ।

वणिजोऽर्थार्जनान्नयायात् शूद्रण न्यम्वृत्तिसंश्रयात् ॥

The whole mankind came into existence due to the rise of *Jati-nama-Karma* ; and the mankind was divided into four categories of

**Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra according to the differences in the vocations they followed for their livelihood. Those who observed *Vratas*, i.e. religious injunctions, to a greater degree were known as Brahmanas, those who carried weapons as Kshatriyas, those who acquired wealth by just means as Vaishyas and those . who maintained bY resorting to low professions as Shudras. In the same way Acharya Ravishena"asserts (in his Padma Purana, Parva XI, 200, 203 and 205) that it is not birth but activities that determine one's class in the Society.**

ऋषिश्रृंगादिकानांच मानवानां प्रकीर्त्यते ।

ब्राह्मण्यं गुणयेकेन न तु तदृयोनिःसंभवात् ॥

न जातिर्गर्हिता काचित् गुणाः कल्याणकारणम् ।

व्रतस्थमपि चाण्डालं देवा ब्राह्मणं विदुः॥

चातुर्वर्ण्यं यथान्यत्र चाण्डालादिविशेषणम् ।

सर्वमाचारभेदेन प्रसिद्धिं भुवने गतम् ॥

**The Brahmanahood of best ascetics as well as of ordinary people is considered on their actions and not on their birth in the Brahmana class. No class has been despised. The actions alone lead to good prosperity. Gods regard a *Chandala*, i. e. an outcaste, as a Brahmana, if he follows religious mode of life. The epithets of classes and *Chandala*, which are**

applied to mankind are famous in this world due to differences in their ways of life.

Acharya Amitagati also attaches (in his Dharma-Pariksha, Parichchheda XVII, 24-25, 31-33) no importance whatsoever to birth and considers one's mode of life as the determinant of ,one's class.

आचारमात्रभेदेन जातीनां भेदकल्पनम् ।  
न जातिब्रिह्मिण्यास्ति नियता क्वापि तात्विकी ॥  
ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियादीनां चतुर्णामपि तत्त्वतः।  
एकैव मानुषी जातिराचारेण विभज्याते ॥  
शीलवन्तो गताःस्वर्ग नीचजातिभवा अपि ।  
कुलीना नरकं प्राप्ताः शीलसंयनाशिनः ॥  
गुणैः संघस्ये जातिर्गुणध्वंसैर्विपद्यते ।  
यतस्ततो बुधैःकार्यो गुणेष्वेवादरः परः ॥  
जातिमात्रमदः कार्यो न नीचत्वप्रवेशकः ।  
उच्चत्वदायकः सभिदः कार्यः शीलसमादरः ॥

The idea of differentiations of classes comes in only because of differences in the ways of life. No single class has been settled as that of the true or real Brahmana class. Really there is only one class of four divisions, viz. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaashyas and Shudras, and that is the class of human beings. They have been divided because of differences in the ways of life. People of good conduct had attained heaven evanthough they were born in low families and on the contrary men devoid of good conduct and restraint had gone to hell in spite of the fact that they

had taken birth in high families. A class is formed by following a particular mode of life and it perishes when that mode is left and that is why wise people should respect ways of life only. The good people should not have pride in any class as it leads to degradation but they should observe good conduct which might give them high position.

It is clear that the society as envisaged by Tirthankara Mahavira and other Jain Acharyas was a society where classes were not hereditary and like water-tight compartments and where complete freedom was granted to the people to change to the class of their own aptitude. The society was not divided into distinct separate sections and no differentiation was made in the status of the classes. All were considered as different ways of life and utmost importance was attached to individual character and mode of behaviour. There was no room for anybody to feel that he was neglected or degraded as he was free enough to follow any profession he liked and he could, observe, all religious rites and practices along with others.

Thus Mahavira's conception of Varna system produced social impact of great significance. The principle of social equality among the classes was firmly established and the social mobility among the classes was considerably increased as the criterion of birth for the membership of a class was straightway removed. This had a very wholesome effect on the conditions of the Shudras which were very deplorable in the sense that the Shudras were deprived of education, denied all rights, subjected to inhuman treatment and assigned the lowest position in society. Formerly, the Shudras were completely disregarded in religious matters-

and several binding restrictions were placed on their movements and ways of living. Tirthankara Mahavira's teachings proved a great solace to the Shudras as the practices of social discriminations against them were fully banned. - This resulted in the rise of social status of the down-trodden people. Obviously there was a distinct change in the social attitude towards the nonAryans and the common masses. Slowly there was a strong opposition to the continuation of the practice of slavery in any form. The feelings of contempt and reproach towards them also began to disappear. Naturally the general masses were tremendously benefited as the practices of social discriminations were completely banished and they were given opportunities to improve their lot.

At the same time Mahavira's teachings affected to a very great extent the privileged position enjoyed by the Brahmanas belonging to the priestly professions. From the Vedic period such Brahmana priests enjoyed high social status, political facilities, economic concessions, educational opportunities, cultural dominance and religious privileges to the exclusion of other classes. In view of this monopolistic condition the Brahmana priests held the position of prominence in society and freely made use of that position for the exploitation of the masses in different fields and especially in religious matters which were of highest-importance to the people. Obviously, the Brahmana priests were extremely keen on the perpetuation of their domination on the common masses and hence they did not hesitate to employ any means to keep the masses in their despised conditions and to make the masses entirely dependent on their favours. Naturally, the common masses were leading a very low life in an atmosphere of severe discontent and utter



frustration. Tirthankara Mahavira launched an open and forceful attack on the Brahmana priestly class and on their ingenious practices used for the excessive exploitation of the common masses. At the same time Tirthankara Mahavira made his religion easily accessible to the common masses, gave equal opportunities in the practice of religion to one and all irrespective of their class affiliations, and held out a sure promise for all persons to achieve Liberation, the highest goal in their life, by observing the rules of conduct laid down by the religion and not by merely getting the different kinds of sacrifices performed by the priests. This practical and ethical approach to religion vigorously and effectively enunciated by Tirthankara Mahavira made people independent of the priestly domination, created a feeling of self-reliance and appealed to the common masses. Thus Tirthankara Mahavira's opposition was to the priestly class of Brahmanas and to the several tactics employed by them for the exploitation of the common masses by managing to keep the masses virtually ignorant and entirely dependent on the favours of the priests. This strong opposition considerably reduced the influence and domination wielded by the priestly class over the other people. But it is obvious that the opposition of Tirthankara Mahavira was confined to the priestly class of the Brahmanas and not to the Brahmana Varna as such. In fact, Tirthankara Mahavira always appreciated the intellectual capacities of the Brahmanas, initiated many learned Brahmanas to the Jaina religion, admitted several scholars among the Brahmanas to his ascetic order and even appointed Indrabhuti Gautama, the most learned Brahmana teacher, as his first Ganadhara, i.e. the apostle or the Chief Disciple. It has already been mentioned that Tirthankara Mahavira delivered his first Sermon after 66 days of

attainment of Omniscience, only when he got the services of the most talented Brahmana teacher, viz. Indrabhuti Gautama, for the proper interpretation of his preachings to the people: In this way Tirthankara Mahavira always showed regard to the learning and education of the Brahmanas but invariably led a strong and consistent attack against the priestly class of the Brahmanas.

## **(2) Emancipation of Women:**

Another contribution of a distinctive nature made by Tirthankara Mahavira in the social field was in the direction of raising the status of women. In the latter part of the Vedic period women had practically been reduced to the status of Shudras. Like the Shudras, women were debarred from the right of initiation and investment with the sacred thread. They were considered to have no business with the sacred religious texts. In many passages we find that women and Shudra were bracketed together. The very sight of woman was considered as inauspicious and people were asked to avoid seeing women, Shudras, dead bodies, etc. Thus women had practically no place in the religious life of the society and as such she was neglected and degraded by the people.

This low position of women was definitely changed by Tirthankara Mahavira in many ways. He removed various restrictions imposed on women especially in the practice of religion. In fact Tirthankara Mahavira did not make any distinction between the males and females in the observance of religion. The rules of conduct rescribed

for the ' males and females were exactly the same. Both the sexes were given equal opportunities in different matters of religion like the study of sacred texts, observance of necessary duties, practice of *vratas*, i.e. vows, entrance into the ascetic order, practice of penance, making spiritual progress, etc. In the religious order of Tirthankara Mahavira the male householders were called *Shravakas* and the female householders were termed *Shravikas* and both were quite free to observe their common religious duties and to prepare themselves for adopting ascetic life in due course. Similarly, complete freedom was given to women, like men, to enter the ascetic orders. The female sex was no bar to the practice of asceticism. Tirthankara Mahavira always showed this attitude of equality towards women and admitted them freely into his ascetic order, no matter whether the candidates for admission were royal consorts, members of the aristocracy, and those belonging to the common run of society. Naturally many ladies availed themselves of this opportunity of achieving their salvation in due course by entering into the ascetic order. That is why in Tirthankara Mahavira's religious organization there were two orders of ascetics, like those of householders, namely, *Sadhus*, i.e. male ascetics and *Sadhvis*, i.e. female ascetics. It is stated that in Tirthankara Mahavira's fourfold religious order there were about 14000 *Sadhus*, 36000 *Sadhvis*, 1,00,000 *Shravakas* and 3,00,000 *Shravikas*. This shows that the female members outnumbered the male members in both the 'categories of householders and- ascetics. It is a clear indication that the females were very eager to take full advantage of the opportunity offered to them by Tirthankara Mahavira. In fact, many females from royal families and close relatives of Tirthankara Mahavira joined his ascetic order along with the other ordinary members. For example, Chandana and Jyeshtha, the

two younger sisters of Queen Trishaladevi, the mother of Mahavira, and Yashasvati; the wife of their maternal uncle, entered the ascetic order of Tirthankara Mahavira; and eventually Chandana assumed the' position of the head of the *Sadhvis*, i.e. the female ascetics. In this way Tirthankara Mahavira effected emancipation of women by giving them similar opportunities like men to achieve their highest objective in life, viz. Liberation. - Females made best of these opportunities and many of them distinguished themselves as teachers and preachers.

Further the religious independence given to women had its repercussions in other fields also. Equality of opportunity was accorded to women in several social spheres of action. In education they were given equal treatment with the males. The utmost importance of imparting education to females, along with males, was realised even in the ancient past by Rishabhadeva, the first Tirthankara, who had advised his two young daughters, Brahmi and Sundari, that “only when you would adorn yourself with education your life would be fruitful because just as a learned man is held in high esteem by educated persons, a learned lady also occupies the highest position in the female world.” According to Jaina tradition a woman is expected to know 64 arts like dancing, painting, music, aesthetics, medicine, domestic science etc. As a result of this high type of education received by women, we find, in Jaina tradition, that many women used to enter the teaching profession and to remain unmarried throughout the life in order to carry on their spiritual experiments unhampered. It is recorded in Jaina tradition that Jayanti, a daughter of King Saliasranika of Kaushambi` remained unmarried out of her love for religion and-philosophy.' When Mahavira-first'visited

**Kausha'mbi, she discussed With him' several abstruse ineta-physical questions and' eventually became a nun. Similarly, in later periods of history ` also Jaina women not only kept up the pace of female education' but at times made original contributions to literature. For example, along with men Jaina women also added to Kannada' literature. The greatest name among them was Kanti, who, along with the great poet Abhinava Pampa, was one of the gems that adorned the court of Hoyasala King Ballal I (A.D. 1100-11U6) in Karnatak. She was a redoubtable orator and poet who completed the unfinished poems of Abhinava Pampa in the open Court of that ruler. Similarly, a Jaina lady Avvaiyara, `the Venerable Matron', was one of the most admired amongst the poets in Tamil language.**

### **(3) Inculcation of Self-reliance:**

**Tirthankara Mahavira's contribution of a revolutionary nature consisted in completely changing the attitude of the people towards God and thereby inculcating the spirit of self-reliance among the minds of the people. The common belief held by the people according to the Vedic ideology was that as this world has been created by the God and that the work of controlling the events in this world is also carried out by the God. This' popular belief engendered a feeling of divine dispensation in the minds of the people because it was firmly held by the people that God can do and undo anything in this world in accordance with his wishes. Naturally this feeling created a sense of complete dependence on the God by the people in the conduct of their daily activities and in securing happiness in this world as well as in the next world. Obviously this sense of dependence on the God urged people to find out ways and**

means so as to obtain in abundant measure the favours of God in mundane and spiritual matters and also to avoid the displeasure or wrath of God which, it was thought, would not only bring several difficulties in the normal course of life but also would lead to complete disaster. As a result of this attitude, people began to place entirely blind faith on the omnipotent God and to secure his favours by practising certain rites and rituals laid down for the purposes. These prescribed rituals were so elaborate that they did require the services of priests who were supposed to have the special knowledge about these rites and who were also specifically authorised to perform these rituals in a proper manner. In this way the entire code of conduct of the people was fully dominated by the practice of various rituals throughout the course of life and by the priests whose help and assistance were considered most essential to work as intermediary between people and God for securing desired favours from God.

Tirthankara Mahavira launched an intensive attack on this attitude of complete submission to God by the people for attaining their final objective in life, viz. liberation. In this regard Tirthankara Mahavira firmly asserted that this world is eternal and has not been created by any power like God and that the happenings in this world are not controlled by God. He clearly proclaimed that nothing here or elsewhere depends on the favours of God but everything depends on the actions of the people. He confidently stated that all persons, irrespective of their class, family or position, have got a right to achieve salvation, their ultimate objective in life, by relying on themselves and through the observance of an ethical code of conduct and not by merely performing some rituals

with the help of others. , For this purpose he laid down a path to liberation which consisted Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct and appealed to the people to follow this path on their individual initiative and efforts and not on the help of any intermediary. Further, he impressed on the people the Theory of Karma which is based on the principle of self-reliance. This doctrine explains the reasons lying behind or causes leading to effects. It maintains that every happening in this world is the result of some antecedent causes. Since the individual soul is the doer of actions, it must bear the consequences of these actions sooner or later. There is no way out of it. The responsibility of consequences cannot be shifted nor exemption from the consequences be given by anybody. The soul has to enjoy the fruits of the Karmas in this life or in subsequent lives. There is no salvation until the soul stops the influx of Karmas and gets rid of existing Karmas and this it will have to do by its own deliberate efforts without expecting any help from an outside agency like God. There is no use in asking the favour of God or his representative because Gods have not the power of determining the consequences of the Karmas and have no authority to forgive people from future consequences of past actions.

This theory of Karma has been an original and integral part of the Jaina ideology and Tirthankara Mahavira convinced the people of the necessity of adopting this doctrine and of moulding their entire life on the foundation of this theory. Naturally Tirthankara Mahavira laid full stress on individual action and completely denied the existence of divine dispensation. He emphasised that man is the architect of his destiny and that there is no external power which can come in the way of getting the

fruits of one's actions, whether good or bad. He assured the people that the attainment of liberation, the ultimate objective in life, is within their reach and it depends entirely on one's, own efforts in the march on the path to liberation. In this; way Tirthankara Mahavira wanted every individual to become a true hero on the battle-field of self-conquest. Thus Tirthankara Mahavira inculcated a spirit of reliance among the people in place of the feelings of utter dependence on the God. This basic change in attitude brought an over-all change in the course of life of the people who began to lay stress more on the ethical aspects than on the ritualistic aspects of their conduct.

#### **(4) Emphasis on Non-violence:**

Tirthankara Mahavira's most distinctive contribution consists in his great emphasis on the observance of Ahimsa, i.e. noninjury to living beings, by all persons to the maximum extent possible. *Ahimsa* in its full significance was realised and preached by twenty-three Tirthankaras preceding Tirthankara Mahavira. In fact, 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 Jainism has become synonymous with Ahimsa and Jaina\*religion is considered as the religion of *Ahimsa*. The significance of this basic principle of *Ahimsa* was very powerfully reiterated by Tirthankara Mahavira as the practices of committing violence in the different pretexts had become rampant at that time.

During the Vedic period utmost importance was attached to the performance of sacrifices with a view to secure the favours of God and to



avert His anger. The sacrifices were very elaborate, complicated and hedged with various restrictions. The sacrifices became a regular feature of the religious life of the people. The peculiar characteristic of these sacrifices was that they were usually accompanied by the slaughter of animals. As the sacrifices were mainly animal sacrifices they involved the practice of *Himsa* to a considerable extent: Along with this practice, the flesh-eating or non-vegetarian diet was extremely popular among the different sections of the people. The Rigvedic people, including the Brahmins, were fond of meat-eating and practically all the important ceremonies were attended with the slaughter of animals. Offerings of flesh were frequently made to the Gods, and worshippers, including the priests, ate the offerings. The meat of cows and bulls does not seem to have been excluded. It was a custom to entertain a distinguished guest with the meat of a bull or a barren cow. At the wedding ceremonies oxen were slain, evidently for the feeding of the invited guests. In fact, the sacrifice of cow and bulls was not only optional as in the case of the arrival of a guest and marriage but compulsory on certain occasions and ceremonies. At *Shradhas*, or periodical oblations to the manes, the sacrifice of cows was recommended, as substances like rice, barley, sesamum, fruits, etc. keep the manes satisfied for a month, the flesh of goats for six months, while beef satisfied them for a year. Meat was almost compulsory at *Annaprashana*, i.e. the first feeding with solid food, ceremony of a child and from then till death and cremation, sacrificing of animals was necessary on most of the ceremonial occasions of life.

Tirthankara Mahavira launched a vigorous attack against meat-eating and the performance of sacrificial rites by propagating the

principle of *Ahimsa*, i.e. non-injury to living beings. In fact in all his preachings Tirthankara Mahavira invariably laid great stress on the observance of *Ahimsa* because the principle of *Ahimsa* is the logical outcome of the basic Jaina metaphysical theory that all the souls are potentially equal. He therefore asserted that as no one likes pain, one should not do unto others what one does not want Others to do unto one. Since all living beings possessed soul, the principle of non-injury was obviously extended to cover all living beings. He explained the doctrine of *Ahimsa* systematically and to the minutest detail. He considered injury or violence of three kinds : (i) physical violence, which covered killing, wounding and causing any physical pain, (ii) violence in words consisted in using harsh words, and (iii) mental violence; which implied bearing ill-feeling towards others. Further, he made it clear that violence or injury should be avoided in three ways, that is, it should not be committed, commissioned or consented to. Moreover, among the five main *Vratas*, i.e. vows, the first place was given to the observance of *Ahimsa*. In addition, *Ahimsa* was regarded as the principal vow, and the other four vows were considered to be merely details of the principal vow.

All these preachings of Tirthankara Mahavira regarding: the strict observance of the principle of *Ahimsa* to the maximum extent possible by every individual in society produced farreaching effects in social field. The practice of performing sacrificial rites and especially the slaughter of animals at the time of sacrifices considerably fell into disuse. Similarly, killing of animals for hunting, sports and decoration purposes was greatly reduced. Further, the slaughter of animals and birds with a view to use their flesh as a form of diet slowly became unpopular. In this

way injury to living beings was greatly reduced and the practice of vegetarian diet was adopted by large sections of population in different regions of the country. In this connection Dr. N. K. Dutt (in his book 'Origin and Growth of Caste in India') observes that "Animal sacrifice had been of so long standing among the Aryans and such was the respect for the authority of the Vedas which made it obligatory to sacrifice with flesh offerings, that the abolition of sacrifices, even of cows, became a very slow process, effecting only a very small minority, the intellectual section of the people, and might not have succeeded at all if Jainism and Buddhism had not overwhelmed the country and the mass of the people with the teachings of Ahimsa and inefficacy of sacrificial rites."

Thus Tirthankara Mahavira emphasised the basic fact that every living being has a sanctity and a dignity of its own and therefore one must respect it as one expects one's own dignity to be respected by others. He also firmly emphasised that life is sacred irrespective of species, caste, colour, creed or nationality. On this basis he advocated the principle of 'Live and let live; In this way Tirthankara Mahavira convinced the people that the practice of *Ahimsa* is both an individual and a collective virtue and showed that *Ahimsa* has a positive force and a universal appeal.

As the principle of *Ahimsa* permeates the life of the Jainas, the Jaina culture is referred to as *Ahimsa* culture. If the Jainas are known for anything it is for the evolution of *Ahimsa* culture since they practised and propagated that culture from ancient times. The antiquity and continuity of *Ahimsa* culture is mainly due to the incessant efforts of

the Jaina *Acharyas*, i.e. saints. Naturally wherever the Jainas were in great numbers and wielded some influence they tried to spread *Ahimsa* culture among the masses. That is why we find that the States of Gujarat and Karnataka, which were the strongholds of Jainas from the beginning, are largely vegetarian. In fact it is admitted that as a result of the activities of the Jainas for the last so many centuries *Ahimsa* still forms the substratum of Indian character as a whole.

#### (5) Insistence on Tolerance: ,

Advocacy of the principle of religious tolerance has been the characteristic contribution of Tirthankara Mahavira. When he promulgated Jaina religion, he never deprecated other religions and never tried to prove that other religions are false. In fact he propounded the doctrines of *Anekantavada*, i.e. many-sidedness, and showed that a thing can be considered from many points of view. That is why he always advised the people to find out the truth in anything after taking into account several sides or aspects of that thing. This obviously broadens the outlook of the persons as they are made to look at a thing from different angles. At the same time the principle of *Anekantavada* does not engender the feelings of enmity or hatred towards the, other, religionists because it believes that other religions also would be having some truths from their points of view. Hence by enunciating the principle of *ekantavada*, Tirthankara Mahavira advocated the principle of tolerance and asserted that it could be applied to intellectual, social, religious and other fields of activities. As a result we find that

*Anekantavada* has definitely a bearing on man's psychological and spiritual life and that it is not confined to solve a mere ontological problem. It has supplied the philosopher with catholicity of thought, convincing him that Truth is not anybody's monopoly with tariff walls of denominational religion: It also furnishes the religious aspirant with the virtue of intellectual toleration which is a part of *Ahimsa*.

Human beings have limited knowledge and inadequate expression. That is why -different doctrines are inadequate ; at the most they are one-sided views of the Truth which cannot be duly enclosed in words and concepts. Jainism has always held that it is wrong, if not dangerous, to presume that one's own creed alone represents the truth. Toleration is, therefore, the characteristic of Jaina ideology as propounded by Tirthankara Mahavira. Even the , Jaina monarchs and generals have a clean and commendable record to their credit in this regard. The political history of India knows no cases of persecution by Jaina Kings, even when Jaina monks and laymen have suffered at the hands of others religionists of fanatical temper. Dr: B. A. Salefore has rightly observed in this regard that "The principle of *Ahimsa* was partly responsible for the greatest contribution of the Jainas to Hindu culture-that relating to toleration. Whatever may he said concerning the rigidity with which they maintained their religious tenets and the tenacity and skill with which they met and defeated their opponent in religious disputations, yet it cannot be denied that the Jainas fostered the principle of toleration more sincerely and the same time more successfully than any other community in India".

## **(6) Encouragement to Social Welfare:**

Along with the maximum emphasis on the actual observance of *Ahimsa*, Tirthankara Mahavira greatly extended the implications of *Ahimsa*. He invariably stressed both the negative and the positive aspects of *Ahimsa*. He strongly advocated that the concept of *Ahimsa* should not be confined only to the negative side of it, that is, the avoidance of injury to the living beings of different categories, but should be consistently, applied in the positive way, that is, in the direction of increasing the welfare of all living beings. He always appealed to the people to bear good intentions about the prosperity of others, to show active interest in the welfare of the needy persons, and to take practical steps to ameliorate the miserable conditions of afflicted living beings including insects, birds, animals and men. This positive encouragement to social welfare activities has been the most useful and noteworthy contribution of Tirthankara Mahavira to Indian Culture.

This humanitarian approach to lessen the miseries of living beings was included in the *Yrata*, i.e. vow of *Aparigraha*, i.e. abstention from greed of worldly possessions. The vow of *Aparigraha* is the fifth of the five main vows which must be consistently followed by all persons. *Aparigraha* involves avoiding the fault of *Parigraha* which consists in desiring more than what is needed by an individual. Accumulating even necessary articles in large numbers, expressing wonder at the prosperity of others, excessive greed and changing the proportions of existing possessions are all forms of *Parigraha* i.e. worldly attachments. This

vow aims at putting a limit on the worldly possessions by individuals according to their needs and desires. That is why this *vow of Aparigraha* is many times' termed as *Parigraha-Parimana-Vrata*, i.e. the vow to limit one's worldly possessions.

This vow of *Parigraha-Parimana* is very noteworthy as it indirectly aims at economic equalization by peacefully preventing undue accumulation of capital in individual hands. It recommends that a householder should fix, beforehand, the limit of his maximum belongings, and should; in no case, exceed it. If he ever happens to earn more than that he must spend it away in charities, i.e. charities. The best forms of charities prescribed by religion are "*Ahara-abhaya-bhaishajya-Shastra-dana*," i.e. food to the hungry and the poor, saving the lives of people in danger, distribution of medicines and spreading knowledge. These charities are called the '*Chatuoldha-Dana*' i.e. the fourfold gifts, by Jain religion and it has been enjoined on the householders that they should make special efforts to give these charities to the needy-irrespective of caste or creed.

from the beginning the Jain householders made it one of the principles to give these four gifts to all persons who are in need of such help. In fact this help was extended to the protection and well-being of insects, birds and animals also. For this the Jainas established alm-houses, rest-houses, dispensaries and educational institutions wherever they were concentrated in good numbers. The *Annachhatralayas*, i.e. alm-houses, were conducted at pilgrim and other centres for the benefit of poor-people. In the *Dharrna-Shalas*, i.e. rest-

houses, lodging arrangements were provided without any charges or at nominal charges at important towns, cities and pilgrim places. The *Aushadhalayas*, i.e. dispensaries, provided free medicines to the afflicted persons. Along with the dispensaries for men, the Jainas conducted special institutions known as *Pinjarapols* for the protection and care of helpless and decrepit animals and birds. In unusual times of flood and famine these *Pinjarapols* carry out various activities for animal protection. There is hardly any town or village of Gujarat or Rajasthan, where *Pinjarapol* is not present in some form or other. In the spread of education the Jainas took a leading part in the education of the masses. Various relics show that formerly Jaina ascetics took a great share in teaching children in the southern countries, viz. Andhra, Tamilnadu, Karnatak and Maharashtra. In this connection Dr. A. S. Altekar rightly observes (in his book 'Rashtrakutas and their Times') that before the beginning of the alphabet proper the children should be required to pay homage to the deity Ganesha, by reciting the formula "Shri Ganeshaya Namah", is natural in Hindu society, but that in the Deccan even to-day it should be followed by the Jaina formula "Om Namah Siddham" shows that the Jain teachers of medieval age had so completely controlled the mass education that the Hindus continued to teach their children this originally Jaina formula even after the decline of Jainism. Even now the Jainas have rigorously maintained the tradition by giving freely these *ChaturvidhaDana*, i.e. four types of gifts, in all parts of India. In this manner legacy of Mahavira has been continued to the present day.



Thus there is an immense value attached to this vow of *aparigraha* or *Parigraha-Parimana* from social point of view. At the same time this vow has got a great significance in preparing a proper mental attitude towards material possessions, in forming a true scale of values, and in developing a right sense of proportion for individual possessions. This vow emphasises that one should not feel too much attachment towards his own possessions and should resist all temptations. It teaches that one may keep wealth and commodities to satisfy one's requirements but one should not lose oneself in the pursuit of material gain. In this manner it appeals that one should guard against greed, vanity, lust, etc. Thus the vow of *aparigraha*, inculcates a particular mental attitude of self-restraint in the face of pleasures, of stoicism before temptations and of detachment from superfluities and superabundances. This attitude of mind is perhaps more necessary today than ever before.