

Innovations

Environmentalism in Ancient Jaina Saṃskṛta Texts: An Indigenous Perspective in Acarya Amitagati's Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha

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Abstract: *Environmentalism is a philosophical and social movement which aims to protect, preserve and restore nature. It propagates for a lifestyle and development pattern that minimizes the harm caused to nature due to human activities. The Jaina Literature has a plethora of literary works which deal with principles and conduct that adhere to environment conservation and sustenance of its resources. These works are not confined to any particular community but are intended for all of humankind. The current paper delves into elements of Jaina principles and conduct, whose significance and observance can meaningfully contribute to environmental conservation. This study is based on a tenth-century Saṃskṛta text Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha, written by Ācārya Amitagati. The paper discusses the principles of Ahimsā, Aparigraha, and the vows of ascetics and householders prescribed in Jainism, in order to study their impact on the environment. The global hazards of mass alcohol, honey and meat consumption are addressed in the latter part of the paper which highlight the abstinence from the same in the Jaina Saṃskṛta canon.*

Keywords: *Jainism, Saṃskṛta, Environmentalism, Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha., Ahimsā, Aparigraha, Jain Conduct*

Introduction

Environmentalism is an ideology and social movement that deals with natural environment including living beings, their habitats, and surroundings. "Environmentalism is used as a general term to refer to concern for the environment and particularly actions or advocacy to limit negative human impacts on the environment" (Davies 169). Human impact on environment and the concerns pertaining to environmental pollution and degradation have a long history, running almost into the ancient ages. However, with the advent of industrialisation and modernisation, environmental concerns have become urgent global issues. Environmentalism functions as an act performed on individual level as well as a collective effort. Though environmentalism has

caught much attention in the recent times, it is apparent that a fraction of mankind has always been sensitive towards environmental issues. As long as humans lived in synchronisation with nature, environmental degradation was minimal. However, since the balance between humans and nature has disturbed, catering to this issue has become the need of the hour.

The Jaina principles and conduct of living, in this context are very relevant and can offer major solutions to the issues on environmental degradation. The entire literary canon of Jainism encompasses principles and practical methods that are capable to keep in check the ill impacts of human behaviour on environment on a personal and collective level. Its importance is acknowledged worldwide but there are certain dimensions that are not actively studied on the account of them being either orthodox or non-scientific. However, an extensive study of Jaina literary canon makes its logical and scientific approach very evident. Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha is a text by Ācārya Amitagati that has significant moral, social, historical and literary value, along with aspects of righteous conduct that should be practiced by human beings. An adherence to these principles and conducts would make them an asset to the environment, minimising the ill-impacts of human activities and behaviour on nature.

Ācārya Amitagati II (hereafter referred to as Ācārya) is one of the most prominent saints in Jaina lineage of saints and writers. He was a saint of the Mathur Sanga. The time period of the author is mentioned in some of his works including Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha, Dharmāparīkṣā and Pañcasamgraha. From the account of Indian Historian Vishveshwarnath Reu in his Bhārata Ke Prācīna Rājavamśa-Bhag 1 (1920) it can be deduced that Ācārya Amitagati wrote Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha in Vikram Samvat 1050 (993 A.D.) and Dharmāparīkṣā in Vikram Samvat 1070 (1013 A.D.) during the reign of King Munj (101). Hence, Ācārya Amitagati's time period can be traced to the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D.

Environmentalism in Jaina Scriptures: An Analysis of Ānuyogas

Jaina literature is broadly categorized into four genres or Ānuyogas namely Prathamānuyoga, Caraṇānuyoga, Karnānuyoga and Dravyānuyoga. Prathamānuyoga comprises of stories of kings, monks, eminent religious personalities, art, literature, poetry and history. Caraṇānuyoga contains texts that deal with right conduct, principles of observance, behaviour according to Jīva's guṇasthāna and similar literature. Karanānuyoga deals with description of the universe and entails geography, mathematics, astronomy, astrology and the philosophy of Karma and similar literature. Dravyānuyogawhich focuses on the philosophical doctrines, theories and tattvajñāna, is basically about the dichotomy between the soul and the other.

Critically analysing the contents of these genres through the lens of Environmentalism, it can be deduced that through Dravyānuyoga, where the equality of all souls is pivotal, considering them living beings, be it the biotic or the abiotic components of nature, one is encouraged to preserve them and try to

not harm them in any way. Prathamānuyoga, through its stories encourages the same philosophy by showing the good and bad consequences of ones' actions. Karanānuyoga, through the philosophy of karma gives an extremely vivid account of how Jiva itself is trapped in the cycle of birth and death, and becomes any of these living forms. Hence, it encourages one to abstain from such actions that lead to misfortune and also treat other living beings with due care. Caranānuyoga deals with right conduct that should be followed by humans and is the most relevant in this context, as it shows how the entire Jaina conduct is in adherence to nature preservation and minimum harm to any of its components. Subhāṣita Ratna Samdohah has several chapters dedicated to it. Chapters which are discussed in this paper include- "Samyak-CaritraVarṇana", "Jīva-Sambodhan", "Dāna-Nirūpaṇa", "Madhya-Niṣedha-Nirūpaṇa", "Māṃsa-Niṣedha-Nirūpaṇa", "Madhu-Niṣedha-Nirūpaṇa", and "Śrāvaka-Dharma-Nirūpaṇa"

Environmental Perspective on Ahimsā and Aparigraha

Two of the most prominent principles of Jainism, through which it is known on the world platform are Ahimsā and Aparigraha. Ahimsā and Aparigraha have very holistic and meticulously drafted definitions in Jainism which are much more encompassing than the general meanings associated with these terms. They are also two of the five vows that both householders (Śrāvaka) and ascetics must observe according to Jainism. Aparigraha is one of the virtues in Jainism.

The vow of Ahimsā actively entails non-violence against any living being- not just through actions but also through words or thoughts. The classifications of jivas in Jaina philosophy is very inclusive where not just the biotic components of the environment like plants and animals are considered to be living but also the abiotic components like water, air and soil are included in the arena of the living. Moreover, the emphasis on equity/ equality amongst all living creatures in Jaina philosophy makes it very evident that why their ways of conduct are most harmless to the environment and in the direction of its preservation.

Living organisms are categorized into five categories based on the sense organs they have. In "Śrāvaka-Dharma-Nirūpaṇa" Ācārya explains Ahimsā as non-violence against all these organisms. Moreover, organisms with one sense organ or ekendriya Jiva comprise of water, air, plants, fire and soil. Nonviolence against these to the possible extent is preached by the author. Also, in the chapter entitled "Samyak-CaritraVarṇana" verse 213, Ācārya Amitagatisummarizes the classification of jeevas according to the Jaina literary canon and writes that "all worldly living beings come under these five categories of living organisms and not making them suffer through one's thoughts, words or actions is the vow of Ahimsā" (75). Hence, it is evident that not harming the environment is very intrinsic to the Jaina philosophy and way of life.

Aparigraha means non-possession. It is a restraint from one's own greed, avarice and the habit of hoarding more than what is required for sustenance. It is the opposite of parigraha which means 'to amass', 'to crave', 'to seek', 'to seize', and

‘to receive or accept’ material possessions or gifts from others. It requires to keep in check or give up all such pleasures that come by harming, hurting or killing other living organisms according to one’s stage in life (guṇasthāna). This Jaina principle has two facets, one, of limiting one’s possessions or parimita-parigraha and second, limiting one’s needs and desires or iccha-parimana. Ācārya dedicates an entire chapter “Lobhadūrakarṇekāupadeśa” wherein he explains the demerits of greed and hoarding through several metaphors and asserts on giving it up (23). While looking at it through the frame of environmentalism, this is a pivotal principle as all the activities that cause the destruction of environment have human greed as their root cause.

In Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha, in the chapter “Samyak-CaritraVarṇana”, verse 222, Ācārya gives the definition of Aparigraha as “in this world the person who gives up living as well as non-living possessions, from thought, words and deeds, does not consider them to be his own either in thought, or says so through words or keeps them with himself physically, in any ways is said to be practicing the vow of Aparigraha.” (77). Hence, Ahimsā and Aparigraha are the principles or vows that are recommended in human life. Active participation in non-violence and non-attachment will certainly do away with the malpractices that are conducted by humans due to their unchecked desires and insensitivity.

The Conduct for Householders and Ascetics

Righteous Conduct is an elementary focus, along with right belief and knowledge, when it comes to Jainism. One out of the four Anuyogas, Caraṇānuyoga is completely dedicated to the right conduct, or behavior that should be practiced by human beings according to the role they are observing- domestic householder or sainthood. While critically analyzing these observances, it could be deduced that they are the most accurate and efficient ways of respecting and conserving environment. It would not be an exaggeration to state that a minute study and following practical application of these principles could minimize the environmental hazards to a great extent. While Jainism as a whole, and Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha in particular, offer detailed accounts of righteous conduct, the principles most relevant to the discussion include the five anuvrats prescribed for Śrāvakas, and the Mahāvratas, Samitis and Guptis prescribed for the ascetics, are discussed further.

The ascetic with the triple gems of absolute right faith, knowledge and conduct concentrates on the true nature of self. When he is not in that state of dhyana, he practices 28 primary virtues (mul guṇa) which require a mention in the current context. These virtues emphasize constant vigilance to avoid causing any harm to any living creature to the maximum extent humanly possible. Out of the 28 mulguṇas, relevant to the present study are the five Mahāvratas and five Samitis, and seven Śeṣa-guṇas.

In Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha, verses 212 to 222 define the five vows of ascetics or Mahāvratas, and verses 223 to 227 discuss the 5 samitis or carefulness observed

by the ascetics in order to protect living organisms(75-78).These Mahāvratas, Samitis and Śeṣa-guṇas show the extent of Ahimsā and Aparigraha practiced by Jaina saints. It is the most superior form of conduct for human beings and it is clearly evident how it is in synchronisation with nature and environment. This level of non-violence and non-possession is not practically possible by all human beings, but even an attempt to live up to it according to one's strength will prove to be very beneficial for the environment.

Ācārya Amitagati describes the five vows, five Samitis, and seven Śeṣa-guṇas in Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha. Firstly, there are 5 great vows that the ascetics adhere to which are studied as follows. The great vow of non-violence (Ahimsā Mahāvrata) for an ascetic is as follows: To kill or to inflict pain to the six types of living beings is known as material violence (dravya himsā). Six types of living beings are the five non-moving living beings like the water bodies, air bodies, earth bodies, fire bodies and plant bodies. The sixth one is the group of all the mobile living beings from two to five sensed living beings. To have anger, pride, deceit, greed, likes and dislikes etc are known as internal violence (bhāv himsā). Dispassionate ascetics do not engage in these two types of violence. In the great vow of truthfulness (Satya Mahāvrata) the ascetic does not speak lies from a minute point of view. In the great vow of non-stealing (Ācārya Mahāvrata) the ascetic, does not take anything from anybody including dirt or water without being offered. In the great vow of celibacy (Brahmacārya Mahāvrata) the ascetic observes celibacy and all the time remains engrossed in the true nature of the self. In the great vow of non-possession (Aparigraha Mahāvrata), the dispassionate ascetic is without fourteen internal and ten external possessions. The fourteen internal possessions are: wrong belief, desire for sexual enjoyment (with man, woman and both), laughter, indulgence, dissatisfaction, sorrow, fear, disgust, anger, pride, deceit and greed. Ten external possessions include living and non-living things, like cattle, servants, buildings, wealth etc.

Secondly, ascetics follow 5 carefulness of "samitis". During daytime, the ascetic walks carefully observing the earth four feet ahead of him so as not to harm any living beings. This is known as the 'carefulness in movements' (Īryā-samiti). When ascetic speaks, he is careful in speaking. The words are helpful in the welfare of worldly souls, destroy all types of vices, give happiness to the listener, destroy all doubts, and remove the disease of the wrong faith. The speech is like nectar emitting from moon. This is known as the 'careful speech' (Bhāṣā-samiti). Passionless Jaina ascetics accept alms in certain way. They go to the respected householder's home and accept alms, which is free of 46 faults. They make sure that there is no attachment of taste in the accepted alms. For that matter, ascetics may give up the taste of oil, salt, sweet, milk etc. The purpose of food is mainly to increase his strength for meditative purposes and not for making body stronger. This is known as 'carefulness in accepting alms' (Eṣaṇā-samiti). The ascetic is careful in picking up and placing the things that forms part of his monastic outfit (Upakaraṇa) like wood vessel (Kamaṇḍalu) for use of for sanitation

purpose, the scripture for knowledge and whisk of the softest peacock feathers (Picchī) for preventing accidental deaths of small insects. This is known as 'carefulness in taking and placing things' (Ādāna-nikṣepaṇa-samiti). Ascetics are careful in their disposal of excreta, urine, cough etc. They make sure that the place is clean and is free from any visible organism so that violence can be prevented. This is known as the 'carefulness in disposal of excreta (Vyutsarga or Pratiṣṭhā-sampanna-samiti)

Lastly, the 7 Śeṣa-guṇas or primary virtues include never taking a bath, not cleaning teeth, not keeping any cloth to cover the body, taking only a short sleep on the ground in one posture, taking food once a day in a standing posture and in hands, pulling hair with hands, and keeping themselves busy in the introspection of the soul.

Alcohol, Meat and Honey Consumption: Environmental Hazards and Abstinence

The rightful conduct prescribed for domestic householders or the Śrāvakas comprises of an abstinence from consuming alcohol, meat and honey. This, apart from its religious and philosophical dimensions, has environmental dimensions too.

In Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha Ācārya Amitagati dedicates three independent chapters to abstinence from alcohol, meat and honey consumption. Ordinary householders, called Śrāvakas, are also expected to stick to eight fundamental practices. These include and abstinence from consuming alcohol, meat and honey in any form. Abstaining from the use of wine and other intoxicating drinks is a fundamental attribute of the householder. Wine is manufactured from rotten and decomposed vegetables and fruits. Innumerable creatures are annihilated in the manufacture of wine. When one is intoxicated after drinking, one is out of one's senses and loses his mental balance. As such abstention from wine is necessary for a householder. Abstinence from consuming meat is preached because meat cannot be made without killing animals. Apart from this, innumerable small creatures are born in meat constantly. Meat-eaters, therefore, are responsible for the killing of innumerable moving living beings. Meat eaters become cruel in nature. Those interested in the realisation of their self should not take meat at all. Eggs are also bodies of living creatures and therefore fall in the category of meat. They should also not be taken. Honey is an impure substance. It is nothing but the secretion of the bee hive and involves violence of countless moving creatures. One should never take it as numerous living organisms are killed in obtaining it.

Studies have found the ill impacts of alcohol, meat and honey consumption on the environment which are looked into in detail in the following part of the paper. This section sheds light on the verses from Subhāṣita Ratna Samdoha, followed by contemporary researches that support the statements.

Firstly, discussing abstinence from alcohol consumption, in verse 507, Ācārya Amitagati mentions the infinite number of micro-organisms that reside in it and verse 508 mentions the physical, and psychological ill effects of alcohol consumption and how it leads humans to take reckless actions which are hazardous to their surroundings (178). Alcohol production and its impact on the environment. News reports and research posted in November 2022 in “Alcohol Issues, Alcohol’s Harm To Others, Human Rights, Obstacles to Development, Special Feature” have found out that alcohol fuels climate crisis. Amongst many issues, it highlights how mass alcohol production and industry causes water and food insecurity, environmental degradation, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. “Water and food insecurity, environmental degradation, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and green-washing are part of the alcohol industry’s sustainability footprint” (Alcohol Issues Newsletter). Water scarcity is caused as the industry requires excessive amounts of water for the production of alcohol which becomes a major concern for the local population. Moreover, it leaves the ground water table low and the pollutes the natural water bodies. Food scarcity is caused as farmers are required to grow cash crops, particularly the ones which are utilized in alcohol production, which in turns becomes taxing for the local soil as well. The same report has concluded that alcohol consumption is a huge threat to the sustainable utilization of natura resources. It requires intensive amounts of resources and about 92 percent of them are a waste after its production. Also, it degrades ecosystem and is a threat to the biodiversity. Also, beer manufacturing is one of the largest generators of plastic waste making it a major source of the corporate plastic pollution.

Secondly, The chapter pertaining to abstinence from meat consumption, in verse 533 defines that meat is the body of organisms with 2-5 sense organs and not of the ones with single sense organ (185). Verse 530 sheds light on how vegetarianism is better than consuming animal-based food because of the stark difference in the number of organisms residing in both their bodies (184). Verse 535 mentions the physical impacts of non-vegetarianism and how it causes lethargy, lust and induces greed and reckless behaviour (530). The meat industry has a significant environmental dimension associated with it. “Production of meat and other animal-based products is associated with a high environmental impact and is contributing to climate change” (Hedenus). According to a study published in “The Guardian” in 2021, “the global food production is responsible for a third of all planet-heating gases emitted by human activity. Out of this, meat production causes twice the pollution than plant-based food production.” The same study reveals the drastic difference in emission of greenhouse gasses between meat and plant production. “To produce 1kg of wheat, 2.5kg of greenhouse gases are emitted. A single kilo of beef, meanwhile, creates 70kg of emissions.”In order to rear animals, a lot of land is required. For this, deforestation is promoted and overgrazing takes place too. This paper goes further and shows that “the majority of all the world’s cropland is used to feed

livestock, rather than people. Livestock also produces large quantities of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas”(Milman).

There are a variety of practices employed in meat production which negatively impact the environment like pollution through fossil fuel usage, and excessive water and land consumption. Production activities involve inputs such as fuels, pesticides, growth substrates, pharmaceuticals, and the processes like soil emissions, emissions from enteric fermentation in animals, manure management, energy production release heavy amounts of environment pollutants. Moreover, the processes of slaughtering, processing and packaging, storage and refrigeration, transport and distribution take heavy toll on environment too.

Thirdly, abstinence from consumption of honey is discussed in the following chapter wherein verses 550 and 552 Ācārya mentions how honey is obtained through killing of numerous organisms, has several organisms living in it and procuring it is a cruel process as the secretion collected by bees through hard labour is snatched away unjustly by humans (189). Verse 560 and 562 Ācārya insists on giving up of the usage of honey by oneself, helping others in its production or utilization or appreciating others over its usage as any of these three acts promotes the production of honey and leads to miserable death of innumerable organisms (191). The honey industry and ill impacts of bee-keeping on the environment. Though honey is often seen as a natural and eco-friendly product, its modern large-scale production poses several environmental concerns. Major concerns include the decline in bee populations, and resulting threat to pollination and biodiversity. Commercial practices including, migratory beekeeping, antibiotic usage, and over-harvesting honey impact the bee-health drastically making them weak. Their immunity system collapses making their survival difficult. Moreover, the honey production industry contributes to deforestation and loss of habitats, as the beekeepers relocate hives causing disruption of natural ecosystems, affecting bees as well as many other species. Additionally, honey production causes disturbance in ecosystem as it carries major environmental footprint through greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, and pollution from synthetic chemicals. (“Environmental Impact of Honey Production”)

Researches have shown that with the advent of industrialization and human interference in the production of honey, much of it is now not-natural. Honey production industries do not run throughout the year; hence the owners ship the bees to other regions where pollination of crops is required. This disturbs the hibernation cycle of the bees and contributes to the spread of diseases. These diseases affect both, the wild bees as well as the industry bees, resulting in anomalies like deformed wings, reduced immunity and other pathogen effects. For the production of royal jelly, that tastes sweet and is used in the cosmetic industry, artificial bee hives are created by the producers which do not have a queen bee inside them. Bees, lured by these fake hives, collect their eggs and honey in them and fill them with nutrition. The producers then remove the eggs

before the eggs hatch, in order to collect the royal jelly which ultimately kills the larvae inside. Propolis, the compound created by bees by mixing their own secretions with evergreen sap, which gives them immunity is also taken away by the manufacturers, affecting their immunity and making the bees more prone to diseases. Hence, it is not just an unhealthy but a gruesome and cruel process too. Additionally, the biodiversity gets adversely affected by the excessive bee farming because bees are foragers, i.e., they capitalize and soak up the flora resources completely. Hence, the native wild bees suffer, who are responsible for maximum pollination activities. Hence, this industry is a threat to the health of the ecosystem.

Conclusion

Hence, it can be concluded that environmentalism, with its meaning- a philosophy that promotes preservation, protection and restoration of the environment could be witnessed in the Jaina literary canon, in its principles and conduct. Through its principles of Ahimsā and Aparigraha, it insists to give up greed and temptation towards desires that are fulfilled at the cost of nature. If the vows discussed in this paper are followed, one could lead a life that would support the sustainability of the natural resources and would cause minimal harm to the environment. Hence, the Jaina ethical and environmental principles align with sustainable environmental measures, emphasizing non-violence, self-restraint, equitable resource use, and compassion for all living beings.

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