



SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JAINA ETHICS

Mr. Sukanta Das

Research Scholar (Ph. D.), Dept. of Philosophy and the Life-world, Vidyasagar University, Midnapur, West Bengal.

Abstract

It is an age of highly developed science and technology. Men are trying to progress their socio-economic condition, but, not trying to progress of conscience. As a result, their morality is decreasing. The Jaina ethics teaches us two ways of moral rule- for rama a (ascetics) and r vaka (householders). In this course, both of them have to follow five vows viz. ahi s , satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha but when these are to be strictly followed, will go for homeless sanyasins as Mah vratas and when these will be easy or have limitation, go for householders as A uvrata. This paper is attempted to show how the Jaina ethics may take an important role for making an ideal society through the right direction of an individual like 'vindute sindhu' (drop of water pursue sindhu river).

Keywords: Society, Ethics, Morality, Ahi s , A uvrata, Highest Good.

Introduction

It is known to all that human being and society are closely related to each other like pages and book. Men are social being in born or they cannot live without society. Hence, Aristotle says in his book 'Politics': "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god". As a rational being men are higher than other lower animals. In this regard they rule and lead to another some persons then there will be created a hazard in the society; because, everybody is similar and has right to equality and right to freedom and live in the society. Sometimes, some persons act cruelty by the direction of immortality. As a result, the society becomes disharmonised. Hence, it proves that everybody should follow the way of morality and become moral from heart. It will be possible then when they could feel that we all have derived or manifested from that one and absolute self (God), there is no discrimination among us. We find it in the 'Upani ad': " nvsnttu vi ve am tasya putr , ye dh m i divy ni tasthu ".¹

Through this type of realization we shall be able to feel ourselves as a member of the universe family. There will be no 'I-feeling' must be 'we' feeling. We will do the work for the good of whole-this type of consciousness make an individual ideal in a common sense and in this manner when all individuals will think and do same, the society must take a form of heaven or ideal.

I
In general sense, ethics is a science which explains rightness and wrongness of conduct of men. We find various definitions according to different persons. Mackenzie defines ethics as "Ethics, then we may say, discusses men's habits and customs, or in other words their characters, the principles on which they habitually act, and wrongness of those principles, the good or evil of those habits".² The term 'Ethics' is derived from the Greek adjective 'ἠθικá' (ethik) which comes from the ἠθος' (ethos) that means character or customs or habits. Ethics is called in other name as 'moral Philosophy'. The term 'moral' is derived from the Latin 'mores' which means habits or customs. We shall try to understand here that what morality is. Though it is too difficult to define what the 'morality' is and what morality is not.

Ethics is the science of the habitual conduct of men and habits are the expression of settled disposition of the will or character. Character becomes produced from the permanent habit of willing, which is expressed in habitual conduct. It evaluates the character of men. Will of an individual indicates the character. If his will is good and act well for whole life, he will be called a good character person. We know that the tree is known by its fruit. Similarly, the good character necessarily expresses itself in good acts of will. In the present time, the term 'goodwill', 'good character', 'good conduct' etc. are vanishing from human mind in near about maximum cases. The development and growth of character depends on social and natural environments. Social influence contributes much to the development of the mental life of the individual. There are some social important factors which influence the growth of character:

1. Strength of will and habit of self-control,
2. Proper estimate of duty and a wider conception of the moral ideal,
3. Habit of regular performance of the duties of life,
4. Rational power and
5. Sincerity and earnestness in every work.



Self-control makes good character. Self-realisation is the supreme good of human being, which is attained through personal efforts. Character or conduct will be effected then when a man must apply it in this practical life; otherwise, no statement, book, publicity of ethics can change any individual and broadly a society. For this, we find a distinction between the theoretical ethics and practical ethics. In this regard, we can say that Indian ethics also is practical. Every systems of Indian Philosophy (except the C r v ka) advice us to hold various means for the attainment of main end (self-realisation). Indian Philosophers told that cognition which cannot purify mind of men, unselfish, developed the life, has no necessity. Hence, they refer to become compassionate, control of senses (*indriyanigrahas*) etc. in their theories. After all, the command of conscience takes a form of morality. The founder of Indian ethics ukrcarya says that you should do that work for others which will be applicable to you as yourself also. According to Jesus Christ, love your neighbour as yourself. These are maxims of ethics which indicates to do good for own action for own purpose that will be allowed as 'good' but if he acts for others good, that will be called 'supreme good'. The supreme good or social good becomes accomplished through the attainment of personal good (attainment of self-realisation through the self-sacrifice).

II

Let us see now how the ethics is closely related with the society.

Society is a complicated net-work of relationships among men. Each and every man is related to each other in various mental relations viz. teacher-student, customer-seller, police-criminal, leader-public etc. Society is composed of individuals and individuals always live in a society. The individual's good and 'common good' are ultimately one and the same; because, individual's end pursued common good or social good. Ethics tries to study the ideal from the standpoint of an individual who lives in a society. Hence, Mackenzie says, "The attempt to study the moral life of mankind without explicit reference to its social relations is necessarily somewhat futile".³ F. H. Bradley also says in his 'Ethical Studies' that the moral life of an individual depends on his having a particular 'station' in a social group, and finding the main significance of his life in the fulfilment of the particular 'duties' that belong to that station. In doing this, he is guided throughout by the 'Ethos of his people' - i.e. by the obligations that are generally recognized as belonging to the individuals who compose the group.⁴ The social ideal should fulfil the demands of morality. If the common good upheld by the social philosopher is opposed to the moral ideal of the individual, that will not be permitted by the society. Hence, any 'common good' should be morally approved. The moral life of an individual is developed in society, where the influence of ethical behaviour on social life cannot become underestimated.

All the statements mentioned above have proved the relation between individual good and common or supreme good and also prove that ethical explanation of man is possible in respect of society, again, no rule or custom will be allowed if those are not moral. We have known it theoretically but this type of knowing is not sufficient. Theory and practice are complementary to each other. In this regard, we find that Indian ethical system is fully practical in men's life. Almost all the systems of Indian Philosophy have adopted *mok a* as the highest good which leads a man to the moral way. On the contrary, it may be pointed out that all the moral actions lead to *mok a*. Each and every self has two sides viz. rational and transcendental, higher and lower, good-bad, material and spiritual etc. When a person works in a narrow sense i.e. for own well, that will not be called ideal self or social self. The social self can be realized by identification of a person with wider and wider social groups. If anyone can identify himself with the family, community, nation, humanity and their interests, lift himself above his narrow individuality. Love, cooperation, social service etc. lead a man to the realization of social self. Hence, Lord K a says in the 'G t ' that the wise should perform their specific duties without attachment for the sake of the good for humanity.⁵

In the standpoint of aforesaid explanation it may be pointed out that the Vedas, Upani ads, the G t are the basis of Indian ethics. These have explained how we have to hold or practice ethical actions for attaining highest good which we find in various Indian Philosophical systems as different forms. It advises us to be practical in our life's every footstep.

III

We shall try to see here the ethics of Jainism. Among all the Philosophical systems, Jaina has acquired an important place in course of ethics. Like the other systems the Jainism adopts that self-realization is the highest good. The self has innate qualities of infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite bliss etc. but due to association of karmic matter it becomes bound. When the veil of karmic matter becomes removed through right conduct i.e. vows, penances, meditation, *gupti, samiti, e a* etc., it realizes its innate perfection. Self-realization or perfectionism is attained by the practice of asceticism for householders. These five great vows are *ahi s , sun ta* or truth, *asteya, brahmacarya* and *aparigraha*. Among these, *ahi s* is basis and chief. Hence, J. N. Sinha says, "The Jaina ethics is pre-eminently ethics of *ahi s*".⁶ All the scriptures and religions have adopted the non-violence for purifying the mind. It has two ways viz. negative and affirmative. In the first attitude it prescribes us not to violent in any living being even trees and plants also. On the other hand, it told love all kinds of living being. *Ahi s* should follow in mind, words and deeds strictly for ascetics. The next is truth. An ascetic always is



restrained from unfavoured thinking, actions and talking. *Asteya* means 'not to stealing'. If anybody does not give anything gladly that should not be taken; because, it will be equal as stealing. The next step prescribes us to hold chastity strictly. 'Chastity' means 'sex-restraint'. Like the Yoga system Jainism has adopted chastity in wider sense viz. it has to follow in every moment in mind, words and deeds. The term '*aparigraha*' means 'not to possess any wealth or property unnecessarily; because, if it is done, a poor and a hunger will be deprived from own matter which is the form of violence. Jaina ethics has adopted more five great vows viz. 1) not to kill any living being who are not harmful; 2) not to commit suicide; 3) not to commit abortion; 4) not to attach with any association which is related to violent work; 5) not to behave cruel with others etc.

Similarly, in the course of truth he maintains-

1. Not to speak for any conspiracy;
2. Not to cheat customer in any case;
3. Not to make public other's secret words ;
4. Not to bear false witness to etc.

In the course of *asteya* he should follow the following rules:

1. Not to take anything without others consent;
2. Not to purchase any stolen goods;
3. Not to business of any prohibited goods etc.

Anybody must maintain '*brahmacharya*' in the following manner:

1. Avoid any kind of illegal sexual intercourse or prostitution;
2. Not to intercourse with wife for twenty days in a month;
3. Remained in firm chastity upto eighteen years.

In the course of *aparigraha* he must follow the codes given below:

1. not to preserve wealth which are not essential or necessary;
2. not to involve with any kind of bribe or gift;
3. as a doctor not to delay to cure ailment of patient;
4. not to have recourse to unethical practice in elections etc.

IV.

Let us see now how the *A uvrata* movement leads the society to the moral way.

Till now, we have discussed that how ethics is related to the society. Ethics of the Jainism is a pragmatic philosophy of life; because, it is not only say to follow the code of conducts to *rama a* but also applied for householders in easy form. The five great vows are strictly maintainable for ascetics and their aim is attainment of *mok a*, which is called *Mah vrata*. We know that the maximum number of people want worldly happiness which is natural due to instinct. But, if their demand take an extreme form, that will make difficult problem in the society. Those whose aim is *mok a* are fully detached from any kind of possession of worldly thing and it never creates any hazards in the society. Social problem is created by some who want everything more and more in anyway. The basic problems of the present society are violence, mental tension, desire for acquisition, delusion etc. Jainism has tried to solve these problems through the five small vows (*A uvrata*).

The Jaina Philosophy teaches us to respect all life and not to kill any living being even, insect, plants also which implies, live and let live. If anybody follows non-violence in his life, he must be free from cruelty. In this manner, we may get a violence free society, if all men are established in non-violence. A logical form is given below:

Ram will be established in non-violence,

Shyam will be established in non-violence,

Jadu will be established in non-violence,

Therefore, all men will be established in non-violence.

As a result, once society will be established in non-violence. We have already known that society is co-related to individuals. So, the development of inner being of any individual must make the society ideal in respect of number of many individuals. Same words will be applied for other four vows viz. truth, non-stealing, chastity and *aparigraha*. The establishment of truth must free anyone from any kind of cheating others. Nowadays, some political leaders, officers, police etc. are cheating public with the help of lies which is not desirable. The Jaina ethics prescribes that not to take anything without other's consent and not to purchase any stolen goods etc.; because, these are the form of stealing. In this context, some sentences of Appaswami Chakravarti regarding *asteya* may be quoted: "This principle also forbids indirect stealing in five different ways: instigating a person to go and steal in somebody's house, receiving stolen property, accompanying a victorious army in a military campaign with the object of looting the enemy's town, using fraudulent weights and measures and adulterating things in selling them".⁷ The next vow chastity restrains us from any kind of illegal or unsocial sex which is too important for an ideal society. Sex after marriage is valid in the society; because, in that course there will be no chance for any kind of fornication



(*vyabhic ra*), *Var asa kara* etc. The last vow *aparigraha* restrains us from unnecessary luxury and unbridled desire for possessing wealth and property. Though it is true that no worldly goods can provide contentment and real happiness, yet nowadays some men are directing for acquiring wealth, goods, property, money etc. more and more due to unbridled greed, delusion etc. As a result, they are looting, fraud even involving with various corruptions which are a curse for the society. Only the vow *aparigraha* can prevent this curse. Thinking good for society everybody should follow the A uvrata of Jainism individually which make the environment peaceful and harmonies. Hence, Prof. Santilal Mukherjee says in his article 'Reflections on A uvrata', "The A uvrata Movement seeks and builds a pragmatic philosophy of life in the sense that the code is observable, for it is not much of demanding nature. The A uvrata lays down a number of commandments for this; which are consonance of society's need at present moment".⁸

V.

Critical estimate and Conclusion

It is true that the concept of non-violence has been accepted in every religion and ethics. It is valuable for its own nature. But, we are the complexity of physic-spirituality. In this level it is not possible to maintain fully non-violence in our life till the body remains. We are bound to kill some living being for our life. But, if I think that nobody has right to take my life, on the similar ground it will be derived that I have also no right to take another's life. This argument proves that every living being's life is favourite to him and also right to live. Hence, we should become fully non-violent and maintain the rule live and let live. If killing of some vegetables, plants, lower living being for living human being, that will be granted but always our motto should be 'lesser killing is better living'.

We know that ethics leads us to the moral way. If we study some ethical books, listen in some statements from well-known teacher of Ethics, men will act morally, that is to say; he will be restrained from killing, telling lies, illegal sex, theft, snatching etc. But the question is: is it true and real? It has been objected to the study of Ethics that generally men are directed by their passions, not by philosophy. Again, it may be stated that there is no guarantee that one who understands by means of ethical study the difference between right and wrong may not necessarily follow the right.

It may be answered against above mentioned objections that though it is true men are governed by natural impulses yet philosophy always exercises powerful influence on our conduct and character. Again, a student of Ethics is more likely to be right in his application of the moral rules to a particular case than a man who has no knowledge of Ethics. Hence, everyone should read Ethics and follow the way of morality.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that in every fields of religion, politics, economics, education, business etc. should be based on right, justice, equality and morality which are derived from the command of conscience. Our duty is awaking of conscience. The political leaders should have a thorough knowledge of the true moral ideal so that they may be able to create congenial social and political conditions in which the citizens may realize their highest good.

The Jaina ethics contains *ahi s*, *satya*, compassion, *asteya* etc. for the common good which play an important role for making an ideal society. On the other hand, it leads us to attain highest good (liberation from bondage). In this regard, it says us to unite one with whole. It regards transcendental purity of the soul as the highest good beyond virtue and vice. The Jaina ethics of *ahi s* and universal love and good-will is a grand contribution to ethical thought which are applicable to all human beings.

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