

JAIN HOUSEHOLDERS PARTIAL VOWS

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Abstract:

The religions of the world can be divided into two major branches: Semitic religions and Aryan religions. Judaism, Christianity and Islam come in the Semitic category, while Pārsi, Hindu (Vedic), Buddhist and Jain religions come in the Aryan category. Then, there are religions of the Far East as those of Confucianism and Shintoism of China and Japan.

Key Words: Vows, Shrāvaka, Householders, Jaina ethics.

Introduction

Religion is as old as humanity and it has played a dominant role along the course of the history of human life and thought. Similarly, Jainism plays a significant role in guiding the living style of Jain householders and ascetics. In the category of Aryan religions, Vedic or Hindu religion is considered to be predominantly pravṛtti (action) centered while Jain and Buddhist religions are nivṛtti (renunciation) centered. This renunciation-centered tradition was known as Śramaṇa tradition or Arhat tradition. Both the Jain and the Buddhist religions belong to the Śramaṇa tradition. The main characteristic feature of Śramaṇa tradition is that it highlights the essential sufferings of worldly life and existence, and with the medium of renunciation and detachment the ultimate goal or Moksha or Nirvana is achieved. This tradition of the path of renunciation with its focus on spiritual endeavor and establishment of moral values in the names of śīlas and Vratas has given its special contribution to the history of basket of Indian religions. Jain Religion is an independent and one of the oldest religions. It has an independent, rich and glorious history. All

branches of Jain history are rich and interesting. Philosophy, principles, metaphysics and concepts are the fundamentals of any religion or religious tradition and culture. These original principles and basic concepts are also the grounds for independency and originality of any tradition or religion. Independency of Jain Religion is also due to its unique philosophy and principles. Concepts of Jīva (living being), Ajīva (non-living being), Moksha (liberation), Karmavāda, Anekānta (non-absolutism), Jain Ācāra (conduct) etc., prove that Jainism has very unique tradition continuing down the generations from time immemorial.

Jain Religion is a living faith and no living faith can remain untouched by the changes of time and place. No static religion can have a history. Only that religion which has changes and movement can have a history.

Principles and practices influence the traditions mutually. With the passage of hundreds of centuries, Jain tradition has upheld its exclusivity. Jain practitioners never deserted the path of Ahimsā even in the Tantra Yuga. They embraced positivity and stood with Ahimsā,

welfare of society and well-being of humanity. The path of liberation consisting of right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct, Jainism has also defined rules of conduct to be observed by the followers. The rules are designed so that everyone will be in a position to follow them. Accordingly, the rules have been divided into two categories: those prescribed for the Laity –the householders, and those prescribed for the Ascetics. Naturally, the rules for the laity – the *Aṇuvratas* are less rigid than the rules for the ascetics. This is because the laity has not renounced the world. They have their family and have social responsibilities. On the other hand, the ascetics giving up all the worldly pleasures disassociate family relations and have accepted the पंच महाव्रत – the *Pañca Mahāvratas* (five Great Vows).

Śrāvākācāra - the Jain ethics outlines the following twelve vows of limited nature to be performed by the lay people. Every Jain is required to adopt these vows according to one's individual capacity and circumstances with the intent to ultimately adopt the 5 *Mahāvratas*. Of these twelve vows, the first five are main vows of limited nature - *Aṇuvrata*. They are somewhat easier to follow in comparison with *Mahāvratas*. The next three vows are known as *Guṇa Vrata* (merit vows), because they enhance and purify the effect of the five main vows. These vows aid in governing the external/physical conduct of an individual. The last four are *Śikṣā Vrata* (disciplinary vows), intended to encourage the performance of the householder's religious duties. They govern one's internal life and are expressed in a life marked by charity. They are preliminary to the discipline of an ascetic's life. The three *Guṇa Vrata* and four *Śikṣā Vrata* together are known as the *Śīla Vrata* – the seven vows of virtuous conduct.

During *Pratikramaṇa*, lay people reflect on *Aticāras* – the minor violations of these vows that were inflicted in the past. They ask for forgiveness for past minor violations which may have occurred knowingly or unknowingly. He/she would reflect on each of these violations so that in the future they would not repeat the same errors and be more aware if such circumstances arise.

These vows are to be followed in thought, action, and speech, and others should be encouraged to follow them as well. The layperson should be very careful while observing and following these limited vows. These vows, being limited vows, may still leave great scope for the commitment of sin and possession of property.

VRATA FOR ŚRĀVAKA AND ŚRĀVIKĀ (TWELVE VOWS OF LAITY)

Five Aṇuvrata (Minor Vows)

Ahiṃsā Aṇuvrata (the Vow of Non-violence)

Non-violence is the **Supreme Religion** proclaims the slogan “अहिंसा परमो धर्म *Ahiṃsā Parmo Dharma*”. Among these five vows, *Ahiṃsā* is the cardinal principle of Jainism. The concept of *Ahiṃsā* is based on the fact that every living being wishes to be happy and tries to avoid pain. Therefore, in order to avoid giving pain, all should refrain from hurting others. Lord Mahāvīra urged everyone to be in peace with all, even one-sensed beings. Every being has a right to live and it is necessary to live with all other beings in perfect harmony and peace.

As long as one lives, he/she hurts many beings. The air that one breathes and the water that one drinks, is made up of *Ekendriya* - single sensed organisms. Even the vegetables that one eats, is obtained from live plants – the *Vanaspatikāya* also one-sensed beings. It is just not possible to observe complete non-violence because indulgence in one or the other sort of violence is inevitable for survival. Ācārya Umāswāti defines violence as ‘प्रमत्त-योगात् प्राण-व्यपरोपणं, हिंसा ॥13॥ *Pramatta-yogāt Prāṇa Vyaparopāṇam Hiṃsā*’¹, meaning - the deprivation of life because of non-vigilance is violence.

Lord Mahāvīra's sermon includes –“One should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture, or kill any living being including animals, insects, plants, and vegetation.”

To follow this vow, a person must not intentionally hurt any being, whether they are plants, animals, human etc. A person should avoid

¹ Jaini, J. L. (ed.). (1956). *Tattvārtha Sūtra – Chapter 7, Sūtra no. 13*. Barister Campatrai Jain Trust.

hurting the feelings of another being either, be it by *Mana-Vacana-Kāya* -by thought, word or action, by the self or through others or by approving such an act committed by somebody else करु नहीं कराउँ नहीं अनुमोदु नहीं – *Karu nahi, karau nahi anumodu nahi*. Here ‘Intentionally’ applies to selfish motives, sheer pleasure, avoidable negligence, etc.

Nature of Violence

- Anārambhi / Sañkalpi (Intentional / Premeditated Violence) - To injure or kill any being knowingly.
- Udyami (Vocational Violence) - To incur violence during execution of one’s work in society.
- Gṛhārambhi (Common Violence) - To commit violence towards mobile beings while conducting house-hold activities.
- Virodhi (Defensive Violence) - intentional violence committed while defending one self.

Prāṇātipāta (Violence or Himsā)

Intentional/premeditated violence is totally prohibited for everyone. Although common violence may be unavoidable for survival, one should still attempt to minimize violence in all daily activities such as preparing food, cleaning, etc. This attempt to minimize violence provides the basis for the Jain householder’s practice of filtering drinking water, vegetarianism, not eating meals at night and abstinence from alcohol. One’s agricultural, industrial or occupational living activity does involve injury to other beings, but one should take care to keep that injury to a possible minimum through *Yatnā* - the careful measures and precautions. If possible, a householder should choose an occupation that minimizes violence to other beings.

Sometimes, however, a householder may not have a choice but to use violence defensively and vocationally. A person may use force, if necessary, in the defense of his or her country, society, family, life, property, and religious institute. Violence committed without intention, through *Ayatnā* – the mere negligence, should also be avoided. At the end of the day, violence caused unintentionally is also a sin. One should

always be remorseful for any violence that may have been inflicted on others, whether it was avoidable or not.

This is the essence of religion. It embraces the welfare of all living beings including animals, insects, vegetation, beings in the air and water, etc. The Jain faith goes one radical step further and declares unequivocally that wasting things and creating pollution are also acts of violence.

Non-violence is also based upon the positive quality of universal love and compassion. One who accepts this ideal cannot be indifferent to the suffering of others. As follower of Ahimsā, one cannot hurt others, self or show insensitivity to the pain and misery that may be caused by other factors. A true observer of Ahimsā has to develop a sympathetic attitude. He/she should get rid of the feelings of anger, arrogance, animosity, jealousy and hostility that degrade the mind and generate violent instincts.

Mental tortures by way of harsh words and evil thoughts are considered Violence in Jainism. On the other side, to pursue the vow of non-violence actively, one must help the needy, care for and share with others and show compassion to everyone.

Ahimsā also has a deeper meaning in the context of one’s spiritual advancement. Violence imposed upon others leads to the acquisition of new karma, which hinders the Soul’s spiritual progress. In other words, violence towards others is violence to one’s own Soul because it impedes one’s own spiritual progress.

Non-violence is the sheer anchor of Jainism. It is also the main contribution of Jainism to humanity. It includes all other vows: *Satya* - Truth, *Acourya* - non stealing, *Brahmacarya* - chastity and *Aparigraha* - non-attachment.

Satya Aṇuvrata (Vow of Truthfulness)

This vow is about refraining from malicious lies, which are uttered with an evil intention and with the knowledge that the statement is false. In this vow, a person avoids all types of lies, including giving false evidence, cheating others, giving false witnesses in or out of court and forging/faking documents. Evading taxes and cheating in business is also a form of falsehood.

The secret to earning wealth is honesty and morality. The roots of one's own happiness, peace, mental health and welfare lie in morality. Falsehood can also be in the form of denial of a fact, the affirmation of that which does not exist, calling a thing something other than what it is and statements that are destructive to others. On the positive side, it also requires refraining from speaking any truth that may cause suffering to others. If the truth has the potential to harm others or hurt their feelings, it is better to remain silent. A householder should minimize the minor violations to this vow related to self-defense, protection of his family and country, business and job-related circumstances. He should be fully aware of these Aticāras (violations/transgression of the vow) and repent them continuously.

Truth should be observed in speech, thought and actions. One should not utter a lie, make others to do so or approve of such activities - करु नहीं कराऊँ नहीं अनुमोदु नहीं – *Karu nahi, karau nahi anumodu nahi*. Anger, greed, fear, pride, hatred and joking are the breeding grounds of untruth. Speaking the truth requires moral courage. Only those who have conquered greed, fear, anger, jealousy, ego and frivolity can speak the truth. This vow is about more than abstaining from falsehood; it is seeing the world in its real form and adapting to that reality. The vow of Truth puts a person in touch with his or her inner strength.

Acourya / Asteya Aṇuvrata (Vow of Non-stealing)

Stealing consists of taking the property of others without their consent or by unjust or immoral methods. This vow prohibits the acquisition of anything that may be unattended or unclaimed. The householder should refrain from smuggling, buying or accepting stolen property, using false weights and measures or substituting inferior items for the originals. Black-marketing, smuggling, evading taxes, changing documents and plagiarizing are also various forms of theft. One should observe this vow very strictly and should not touch even a worthless thing that does not belong to him or her.

When accepting alms or aid, one should not

take more than what is needed. To take or to earn more than one's need, is also considered as theft in Jainism. Using any resource beyond one's needs and misuse of any part of nature is considered a form of theft.

The vow of non-stealing insists that one should be very honest in actions, thought and speech. One must not cheat and use illegal means in acquiring worldly things by himself/herself, acquiring such items through others or by approving such acts committed by others - करु नहीं कराऊँ नहीं अनुमोदु नहीं – *Karu nahi, karau nahi anumodu nahi*.

Brahmacarya Aṇuvrata (Vow of Celibacy / Chastity)

In a spiritual sense, the word Brahmacarya means maintaining equanimity by being free from राग-द्वेष *Rāga-Dveṣa* - attachments and aversions. In a practical sense, it means celibacy i.e., avoidance of sensual activities. It is very easy to become privy to basic instincts, but for the sake of one's own health, well-being and self-control, it is important to remain celibate before marriage.

As an adult, one may lead a family life by getting married, earning money, raising children and fulfilling social obligations. Marriage is devised mainly for providing a sheltered sex life and procreation. Even for the householder, an unrestrained or lustful married life is not encouraged. Though mythology is filled with tales of polygamy, only monogamous relationships are encouraged.

Premarital and extramarital relations, indulging in illicit sensual activities, intensifying passions by consuming intoxicating substances like drugs and alcohol, watching provocative movies, reading provocative books and magazines, listening to provocative songs and conversations are all activities one needs to avoid. The basic intent of this vow is to conquer passion and to prevent the waste of energy. This vow is meant to impart a sense of serenity to the Soul.

Aparigraha Aṇuvrata (Non-possession / Non-attachment)

Until a person knows that happiness and peace that come from within, he or she tries to fill his or her emptiness and insecurity with material

acquisitions. Jainism believes that the more wealth a person possesses, the more he or she is likely to commit sin to acquire and maintain possessions and in the long run he or she will be unhappy. Wealth creates attachment, which results in continuous greed, jealousy, selfishness, ego, hatred, and violence. Lord Mahāvīra has said that इच्छाउ आगास समा अनन्तिया - **desires have no limit**. An attachment to worldly objects results in the bondage of karma, so desires should be reduced and consumption levels should be kept within reasonable limits.

One must impose a limit on one's needs, acquisitions and possessions, including land, real estate, goods, valuables, animals and wealth. The surplus should be used for the common good. One must also limit everyday usage of the number of food items and other articles.

The Jain principle of limited possession for householders leads towards equitable distribution of wealth and comforts in society. Generously giving charitable donations and one's own time for community projects are a part of a Jain householder's obligations. This sense of social obligation cultivated from religious teachings has led Jains to establish and maintain innumerable schools, colleges, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, relief and rehabilitation camps for the handicapped, old, sick and disadvantaged and hospitals for birds and animals.

Non-possession and non-attachment also are to be observed by speech, thought and actions. One should not possess excessive amounts of items, make others to do so or approve of such activities - करु नहीं कराउँ नहीं अनुमोदु नहीं - *Karu nahi, karau nahi anumodu nahi*. Non-possession, like non-violence, affirms the oneness of all beings and is beneficial to an individual in his/her spiritual growth and to society.

Three Guṇa Vrata (Merit / Supporting Vows)

Dik or Diśā Parimāṇa Vrata (Vow of Limiting the Area of Activity)

This vow limits one's worldly activities to certain areas in all ten directions: north, south, east, west, north-east, north-west, south-east, south-west, upwards and downwards. He/she sets definite boundaries and simply limits the radius

of his/ her movements to a specific number of miles. By doing this, he/she can at least prevent him/herself from committing violence in the area beyond the radius they have set for themselves.

The main purpose is to reduce transportation and other incidental activities that involve unnecessary/avoidable violence as well as other avoidable pitfalls. If this vow is observed, there will be a considerable increase in the scope for self-development and spiritual welfare.

Upabhoga Paribhoga Parimāṇa Vrata (Vow of Limited use of Consumable / Non-consumable items)

Generally, sins are committed by using or enjoying consumable (Bhoga) and non-consumable (Upabhoga) objects. Consumable (Bhoga) objects are things that can only be used once, such as food and drink. Non-consumable (Upabhoga) objects are things that can be repeatedly used, such as furniture, clothes, ornaments and others.

This vow is a self-imposed restriction on the use of consumable material like food and drinks and durable material like clothing, footwear, cosmetics, jewelry, furniture, vehicles, etc. The purpose of this vow is to restrict the indiscriminate use of goods. Any use of an item directly or indirectly involves some degree of violence. One has to first consider whether the purchase he/she makes is necessary and unavoidable and the degree of violence involved with that item. If the purpose can be served by using other material involving a lesser degree of violence, then that should be the choice of item used.

On the same grounds, the consumption of food, meat, alcohol, honey, root vegetables and eating at night are prohibited to decrease the degree of violence. By setting a limit by predetermining the number of items to be used, one can develop self-restraint and willpower. One should limit the use of these two types of items according to one's need and capacity by taking this vow. This vow expands upon Aparigraha Anuvrata.

This vow also forbids a layman from engaging in certain occupations that involve destruction of plants or other forms of life, cruelty to animals, polluting the environment, wasting

natural resources and dealing in intoxicating substances.

Anarthadaṇḍa Veramaṇa Vrata (Vow of Avoidance of Purposeless Sins)

One must not commit unnecessary or purposeless sins such as the examples below:

- Thinking, talking or preaching evil or ill of others.
- Being inconsiderate like walking on grass when a sidewalk or road is available, leaving the water running while brushing your teeth, etc.
- Manufacturing or supplying arms for war.
- Reading or listening to immoral literature.
- Being careless.

Four Śikṣā Vrata (Disciplinary Vows)

Sāmāyika Vrata (Vow of Equanimous State for Limited Duration)

This vow involves sitting down peacefully in one place for at least 48 minutes, not allowing passions of राग-द्वेष - attachment and aversion to take place in the mind and contemplating on the nature of the Soul. The householder examines the purity of life he/she has attained, reads religious works showing the path of self-development and spiritual evolution and concentrates on the supreme liberated Soul. During this period, one should observe equanimity towards all objects, thinking evil of no one and be at peace with the world.

The equanimous state of 48 minutes makes a person realize the importance of a life-long vow to avoid all sinful activities and is a stepping stone to a life of full renunciation. During Sāmāyika, one also meditates on the Soul and its relationship with karma. This vow may be repeated often in the whole day.

Deśavakāṣika Vrata (Vow of Activity of Limited Space)

This vow sets a new limit within the limitations already set by *Dik Vrata* and *Bhoga-Upabhoga Vrata*. The general life-long limitation of doing business in certain areas and the use of articles are further restricted for particular days and times of the week. This means that one shall

not, during a certain period of time, perform any activity or make any business deals or travel beyond a certain city, street or house. The objective of this vow is to further refrain from impure activities.

Pouṣadha Vrata (Vow of Ascetic-like Life for a Limited Duration)

The term *Pouṣadha* means ‘that which nourishes and fosters the Soul or its natural qualities.’ This vow requires that a person live the life of a monk for a day or longer. During this time, one should retire to a secluded place, renounce all sinful activities, abstain from seeking pleasure from all senses and observe restraint of body, speech and mind. A person almost follows five great vows (Mahāvratā) completely during this time. He/she passes his or her time in spiritual contemplation, performs meditation (Sāmāyika), engage in स्वाध्याय - self-study, reads scriptures and worship the Pañca Parameṣṭhī. This vow promotes and nourishes one’s religious life and provides training for an ascetic life.

Atithi Samvibhāga Vrata (Vow of offering Alms & Charity)

This vow encourages the offering of necessities of life: असणं पाणं खाइमं साइमं –food, water, etc., to monks. The offerings should be pure and given with reverence. Donating one’s own possessions to monks and others provides inner satisfaction and raises one’s consciousness to a higher level. It also saves one from acquiring more sins if he or she would have used the same item for his/her nourishment, comfort and pleasure.

Sallekhanā Vrata (Peaceful Death)

In the final days of life, a householder can attain a peaceful death if he/she truly follows the twelve vows above. Peaceful death is characterized by non-attachment to worldly objects and by a suppression of passions at the time of death. The last thought should be of a calm renunciation of the body and this thought should be present long before death.

Sallekhanā is a well-ordered, voluntary death, taken while in ultra-pure meditation and in a state of complete awareness. It is not inspired by any passion and involves gradual withdrawal from the

consumption of food in such a manner that would never disrupt one's inner peace, state of complete equanimity or awareness.

It allows the very spiritually advanced person to terminate his/her life by certain practices, principally fasting, under specified circumstances and under the supervision of an ascetic. This is sanctioned only when a person strongly feels that he/she is a burden to society and cannot progress further spiritually due to poor health or extreme old age.

The aspirant has no dissatisfaction, no sorrow, no fear and no dejection; the mind is calm and composed and the heart is filled with the feeling of universal love and compassion. It is also called 'death with equanimity'.

Sallekhanā is thus a spiritual process of renouncing one's passions and body by internal and external austerities. It involves giving up relationships, enmity and attachment to possessions with a pure heart, forgiving others and asking for forgiveness. It should be noted that Sallekhanā is not a form of suicide or assisted death. It is usually performed by those who have led a very spiritual life and is taken under the presence of a guru.

Therefore, there is a fundamental difference between suicide and Sallekhanā. Suicide is the result of the outburst of passions whereas Sallekhanā is the result of dispassion. Jainism does not sanction instantaneous termination of one's own life. It is considered suicide and it happens in the highest state of anger or depression.

conclusion

By practicing these twelve vows, a lay person may live a righteous life and advances towards a spiritual state where he/she works on conquering desires. While earning wealth, supporting his/her family and taking up arms to protect self, his/her family and country against intruders, a layperson is taught self-restraint, love and equanimity. By giving up attachments, he/she gradually prepares him/her-self for the life of an ascetic. The practice of limiting the number of things to be kept or enjoyed by oneself eliminates the danger of concentration of wealth and in turn will help to minimize poverty and crime in society. Therefore,

limiting the desires of individuals results in formation of an ideal society.

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