

JAIN EVOLUTION THEORY

Jainism states that the universe is without a beginning or an end, and is everlasting and eternal. Six fundamental entities (known as Dravya) constitute the universe. Although all six entities are eternal, they continuously undergo countless changes (known as Paryäy). In these transformations nothing is lost or destroyed. Lord Mahavir explained these phenomena in his three Pronouncements known as Tripadi and proclaimed that Existence or Reality (also known as Sat) is a combination of appearance (Utpäda), disappearance (Vyaya), and persistence (Dhrauvya).

The Jain philosophy believes that the universe and all its entities such as soul and matter are eternal, no one has created them and no one can destroy them. Jains do not acknowledge an intelligent first cause as the creator of the universe. Jains do not believe that there is a supernatural power who does favor to us if we please him. Jains rely a great deal on self-efforts and self-initiative, for both - their worldly requirements and their salvation. Jainism appeals to common sense. Jains accept only those things that can be explained and reasoned. Jains believe that each living being is a master of his/her own destiny.

Jainism is a religion of purely human origin. It is propagated by self-realized individuals who have attained perfect knowledge, omniscience, and self-control by personal effort and have been liberated from the bonds of worldly existence, and the cycles of all future life and death.

In ancient times Jainism was known by many names such as the Saman tradition, the religion of Nirgantha, or the religion of Jin. Jin is one, who has conquered the inner enemies of worldly passions such as desire, hatred, anger, ego, deceit and greed by personal effort. By definition, a Jin is a human being, like one of us and not a supernatural immortal nor an incarnation of an almighty God. Jins are popularly viewed as Gods in Jainism. There are an infinite number of Jins existed in the past. All human beings have the potential to become a Jin.

The Jins are not Gods in the sense of being the creators of the universe, but rather as those who have accomplished the ultimate goal of liberation of sufferings through the true understanding of self and other realities. The concept of God as a creator, protector, and destroyer of the universe does not exist in Jainism. The concept of God's descent into a human form to destroy evil is also not applicable in Jainism.

The Jins that have established the religious order and revived the Jain philosophy at various times in the history of mankind are known as Tirthankars. The ascetic sage, Rishabhadev was the first Tirthankar and Mahavir was the last Tirthankar of the spiritual lineage of the twenty-four Tirthankars in the current era.

In summary, Jainism does not believe in a creator God, however this does not mean that Jainism is an atheistic religion. Jains believe in an infinite number of Jins (Gods) who are self-realized omniscient individuals who have attained liberation from birth, death, and suffering. Jains believe that from eternity, the soul is bounded by karma and is ignorant of its true nature. It is due to karma soul migrates from one life cycle to another and continues to attract new karma, and the ignorant soul continues to bind with new karma. This way it provides a logical explanation of our sufferings on Earth. It is traced to jiva and ajiva, the two everlasting, uncreated, independent and coexisting categories. Consciousness is jiva. That which has no consciousness is ajiva.

There are five substances of ajiva:

Dharma - the medium of motion

Adharma - the medium of rest

Akasha - space

Pudgala - matter

Kala - time

Pudgala (matter) has form and consists of individual atoms (paramanu) and conglomerates of atoms (skandha) which can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted and/or touched. According to Jains, energy, or the phenomena of sound, darkness, shade, heat, light and the like, is produced by conglomerates of atoms.

The jiva (soul) has no form but, during its worldly career, it is vested with a body and becomes subject to an inflow of karmic 'dust' (asravas). These are the subtle material particles that are drawn to a soul because of its worldly activities. The asravas bind the soul to the physical world until they have brought about the karmic result when they fall away 'like ripe fruit' by which time other actions have drawn more asravas to the soul. With the exception of the Arihantas (the Ever-Perfect) and the Siddhas (the Liberated), who have dispelled the passions which provide the 'glue' for the asravas, all souls are in karmic bondage to the universe. They go through a continuous cycle of death and rebirth in a personal evolution that can lead at last to moksha (eternal release). In this cycle there are countless souls at different stages of their personal evolution; earth- bodies, water-bodies, fire-bodies, air-bodies, vegetable-bodies, and mobile bodies ranging from bacteria, insects, worms, birds and larger animals to human beings, infernal beings and celestial beings.

The Jain evolutionary theory is based on a grading of the physical bodies containing souls according to the degree of sensory perception. All souls are equal but are bound by varying amounts of asravas (karmic particles) which is reflected in the type of body they inhabit. The lowest form of physical body has only the sense of touch. Trees and vegetation have the sense of touch and are therefore able to experience pleasure and pain, and have souls. Mahavira taught that only the one who understood the grave demerit and detriment caused by destruction of plants and trees understood the meaning and merit of reverence for nature. Even metals and stones might have life in them and should not be dealt with recklessly.

Above the single-sense jivas are micro-organisms and small animals with two, three or four senses. Higher in the order are the jivas with five senses. The highest grade of animals and human beings also possess rationality and intuition (manas). As a highly evolved form of life, human beings have a great moral responsibility in their mutual dealings and in their relationship with the rest of the universe. It is this conception of life and its eternal coherence, in which human beings have an inescapable ethical responsibility that made the Jain tradition a cradle for the creed of environmental protection and harmony.