



Ethical Perspectives of Religion with an Emphasis on Jain Ethics

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Abstract

The socio-cultural, political, economic issues challenge the day today life of people in a society. The unethical attitude of people results disorder, convulsion, fray, intolerance, hatred etc in our society. The atrocity and inhuman attitude of people increases day by day and ultimately ends at chaos. The selfishness of people and the spirit of competence make people to more of jealous and prejudice in one's day today life. The physical, mental violence, sexual harassment, gender inequality, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, oppression is found more and more in the society. Injustice, inequality, bondage exists a lot among people in different forms. The corruption, bribery, dishonest, unfaithfulness is prevailing in our society.

In this context, ethical attitude and right conduct promote peace, harmony, spirit of tolerance, mutual appreciation in the society. The religious teachings emphasize on justice, equality, liberty, fraternity among people. The religious ethical teachings are against all kinds of exploitation, discrimination, oppression and marginalization. The spirituality creates a sense of faithfulness, accountability, responsibility, faithfulness in our professions, works to build a healthy society. The religious teachings are one of the foundations of ethics. It is an attempt to bring out the relationship between religion and ethics, to highlight the important ethical teachings of Jainism and to bring out its relevance in the contemporary society.

Key Terms: Ethics, Ahimsa, Satya, Ateya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha

Methodology

The methodology of study is primarily descriptive. The study is to highlight the importance of moral values and their relationship with fellow human beings, all other living creatures and the environment. The study is to bring out the Attitude, Behaviour and Character of human and his or her rapport with fellow human. In nature, it is an explorative study to explore salient features of Jain ethics and to highlight them how it will be used as a guide of ethics.

Etymology of the Term Religion

The English term Religion originates from the Latin Word *religio* which means reverence or respect to the holy. The Latin word *religare* means obligation. According to Cicero the Latin term *religare* means “to bind together” and “to re-read.” For him, the religious belief and ceremonies make people to come together at

one point though there are many differences among the beliefs and practices of religion. Further, Cicero describes that the devotee of a particular religion and its scripture to re-read to understand and interpret according to his/her context. The philologist, Max Muller defines the Latin term *religio* as to reverent the holy and scared. The respect for the Ultimate Reality and obeying the words of Supreme Reality is called religion for Max Muller.

Importance of Religion and Spirituality

Religion is important to an individual and to have a wholistic development. The wholistic development includes the development of Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ). All the three are equally important. Spirituality and Mental Health of human beings are inter-connected and inter-related with each other. The strength of human mind is built on one's beliefs and practices that is called "Spirituality." There are three important integral components of human beings namely; Intelligence, Emotion and Spirituality. They are called as Intelligent Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ). It is important to know that the human beings are essentially "Spiritual Being." Since the Spirituality of an individual is an integral component that one has to enrich and develop it through out one's life. One has to understand that all the three, IQ, EQ and SQ are inter-connected and inter-related with each other. The faith of an individual helps us to grow and develop our Intelligence, Emotion and Spirituality. These all God given faculty to have a stable growth and development of an individual. A complete Development or Holistic Development of an individual which is based on the growth of all the three that are IQ, EQ and SQ.

Origin and Development of Religion

The origin of religion goes back to the origin of human beings. In other words, the first human beings of the world started with worship of nature out of their fear and joy. The worship of nature is the starting point of religion in the world and further, it had been developed to the worship of spirit that is animism, worship of idols, temple worship and at last with scriptural worship. These are the five stages of origin and development of religion in the world. The worship started from the middle and later palaeolithic age of human beings. It is generally accepted that there are five stages of worship found in the life of early human beings. The stages of spirituality as follows; Worship of Nature, Worship of Spirit, Worship of Idols, Worship of Temple and Worship of Scripture. Further, the institutionalized religions were developed from time to time in the history of human kind. The rulers of the country, supported of their own religious traditions to build many temples, mosques, churches, gurdwaras and monasteries in the medieval and modern period in the world in general and in India particular. The institutionalized religious traditions became popular and part of life in the society. Mostly, the temple became the centre of human day today life of people.

Etymology of the Term Ethics

The term ethics is originated from the Greek word *ethos* that is understood as moral value. In other words, it is way of life. The term ethics is used and translated as follows;

- Ethics originated from the Greek word *ethos*
- From Greek (*ethos*) to Latin (*ethice*)
- From Latin (*ethice*) to Old French (*ethique*)

- Form Old French (*ethique*) to Middle English (ethics)
- *he ethike tekhnē* literally means “The Science of Morals”
- The word became popular from Aristotle's work on *Ta Ethika*

Definition of Ethics

The term Ethics is defined generally, as the way of life of an individual in a society. It is a relationship between individual to fellow human beings, all other living creatures and the environment. In other words, Attitude, Behaviour and Character of an individual in the society. Ethics is understood as moral values and principles to keep social order.

Origin and Development of Ethics

Ethics is a branch of Philosophy in which the way of life and individual behaviour has been discussed. The ancient Greek philosophers dealt with the concept of ethics in detail with different theories such as Deontological, Teleological ethics deal with different dimensions of ethics and its importance. The practical aspects of ethics dealt with not only the ancient Greek philosophers but also the medieval, modern and post-modern period of philosophers. The social order is just starting from the individual aspect of ethics and way of life. Hence, the individual ethics is a foundation for any social order in the world.

The Importance of Ethics

Ethics is most important to have the following aspects of human life in the society;

- To build a healthy individual
- To build a healthy family
- To build a healthy society

The above all inter connected with each other to have a meaningful life in the society and promotes peace and harmony, spirit of tolerance, and mutual appreciation. It warns the consequences of unethical attitude and behaviours of an individual which results in the family and society. Thus, the ethically healthy individual builds the healthy family and further builds the healthy society.

Healthy Individual

The healthy individual is having sound body, mind and spirit. He or she is able to behave and conduct in a pleasant manner. He or she will build a good rapport with one another within family and society.

Healthy Family

The healthy family is the result of healthy individual. The social relationship of people starts with an individual whom we find within the family. The healthy family is built with parents and children and how are they brought up in the family and how father and mother play a role model to their children within the family.

Healthy Society

The healthy individual and family results the healthy society. The law and order of society is kept how the citizens of the society have ethical values and principles in their day today activities. Depends on the individual values and family principles the peace and harmony of the society is assured.

Religion and Ethics

The relationship between religiosity and ethics is understood at the foundational level that is religion is considered as one of the foundations of ethics and theory of ethics. One of the sources of ethics can be called as religious faith, religious doctrine, beliefs and practices, in other words, spirituality would be a strong foundation for ethics and ethical teachings.

Religious teachings emphasize on justice, equality, liberty, fraternity among people. The religious ethical teachings are against all kinds of exploitation, discrimination, oppression and marginalization. The spirituality creates a sense of faithfulness, accountability, responsibility, faithfulness in our professions, works to build a healthy society. The religious teachings are one of the foundations of ethics. Both religion and ethics aim to discipline the individual, build healthy family and society.

Jain Perspectives of Ethics

The sacred scriptures of the religious and spiritual traditions teach about the ethical values and principles in the life of people. All the religious texts directly or indirectly insist on the following ethical values; Love, Compassion, Friendliness, Altruism, Accountability, Sincerity, Truthfulness, Generosity, Contentment, Gentleness etc All the above ethical teachings are found in almost all the religious and spiritual traditions in the world. The spiritual traditions motivate and stimulated the followers to have all the moral qualities in our day today life. One of the ancient Indian religious traditions is Jainism. The Jainism originates with Rishba Dev who is the first *Tirthankara* means attained *Kevala Jnana*. The 24th Tirthankara of Jainism is called Lord Mahavira who popularized Jainism. Jainism falls under the school of Heterodox that is not giving importance of Vedas and not having belief on Ultimate Reality in the Indian Philosophy.

The holy scripture of Jainism is known as Jain Agama. Jains strictly follow the *Angas* and *Upangas*. The teachings of Tirthankaras are considered as primary source which we find in the Angas. The Acharyas teachings are found in the scholarly writings from time to time. The *Tatvartha Sutra* or *Moksha Sastra* of Umaswati in which all the teachings of Lord Mahavir and the beliefs and practices were given in very brief. The ethical teachings of Jainism is understood as most important aspects of human life, because it is ever relevant to any individual and society. The ethical teachings of Tirthankaras particularly, Lord Mahavir's teachings promote peace, harmony and disciplined, healthy individual and society. In other words, the ethical teachings of Jainism are considered as the foundation of ethics.

Three Jewels (*Triratnas*)

The Jainism teaches about the bondage of soul that souls are under the bondage of karma. In the process of liberation, the Jainism teaches about how souls will be liberated from the bondage and one among them is the strict practice of *Triratnas* that are;

- Right Faith
- Right Knowledge
- Right Conduct

Right Faith (*Samyak Darsana*)

The faith of an individual is called the foundation of spirituality. The spirituality of people builds on the faith and belief what he or she believes. The Jainism addresses that he/she who has right faith will lead to

the right path of liberation. The Jain Tirthankaras insists on *Samyak Darsana* which is found within the individual, but it has been veiled because of karma of individual. Thus, one has to recognize oneself and have self-realization which helps to keep right faith.

Right Knowledge (*Samyak Jnana*)

The right knowledge is to rightly know, to rightly understand and to rightly interpret what one who knows, understand the faith, any concept. The ultimate objective of Right Knowledge in Jainism is to attain *Kevala Jnana* that is the ultimate, pure knowledge of soul. Acquiring knowledge is a long process of life of an individual and it takes for some individual after many births but for some others it may take within this birth too. The right knowledge of faith is most important to keep right faith in an any context.

Right Conduct (*Samyak Charitra*)

The result of Right Faith and Right Knowledge is found in Right Conduct. The right action of an individual is an effect of his/her faith and knowledge. According to Jainism, the right attitude, behaviour and character of people are determined by the right faith and knowledge. Hence, the right faith and knowledge are fundamentals for right conduct. The healthy family and healthy society is built on the right conduct of people.

3.1.2. Five Great Vows (*Maha Vratas*)

One of the popular ethical religions in the world is Jainism, because it teaches about the way of life. The day today life of people has been described to build a good rapport with one another and to the nature for a peaceful existence in the society. There are five great vows of Jainism is called *Maha Vratas* namely;

1. Non- Violence (*Ahimsa*)
2. Truth (*Satya*)
3. Non-Stealing (*Asteya*)
4. Chastity (*Brhamacharya*)
5. Non-Possession (*Aparigraha*)

3.1.2.1. Non- Violence (*Ahimsa*)

The Tirthankaras teach about the importance of non-violence which is the foundation of peace and harmony in the society. According to Mahavir, the violence is not just limited to killing of other human beings but also the evil thought, harsh words violence. Further, he advocates that the violence cannot be limited to human beings alone but also all other living beings and the nature. The promotion of peace and harmony is possible by keeping and strict practicing of non-violence.

Truth (*Satya*)

The qualities like faithfulness, truthfulness, sincerity, accountability are called the *Satya* that is truth. According to Jainism, speaking truth and living truthfully in any context is called truth. One of the other foundations of ethics is called truth which is essential to lead day today life. Most of the problems are found in the world very much related to untruthfulness in the work place, family and society. The insecurity and all kind of crimes are the result of untruthfulness. In this context, the truth is most important to have ethical and quality life in the society.

No-Stealing (*Asteya*)

According to Jainism, non-stealing is not just limited to taking something without the notice of others but also greed to accumulate more and more without sharing others. In other words, the spirit of contentment is advocated by Jain scholars to practice non-stealing. Jainism advocates that one should give up the greed and covetousness.

Chastity (*Brahmacharya*)

The *Brahmacharya* is defined as Chastity that is Purity of relationship between male and female. The relationship between husband and wife must be pure and faithful one. Most of the broken family, family crimes and violence that we find because of unfaithfulness of relationship among couples. Jainism insists and advocates for purity of relationship which will build peace and harmony in the family and society.

Non-Possession (*Aparigraha*)

There is a close relationship between non-possession and non-stealing. The greed of an individual to steal and keep the possession. Thus, Jainism supports to practice non-possession and non-stealing. Jainism teaches about the contentment of life promotes non-possession. According to Jainism, possession must be limited and encourages to share the passions and earnings with poor and needy. Thus, all the five great vows promote peace and harmony of the society and support a strong ethical life of people like charity, sharing and caring one another.

Other Important Ethical Principles of Jainism

Parasparopagraho Jivanam

The motto of Jainism is *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* which literally denotes three meanings Live and Let Live, Souls render service to one another, the lives are inter-connected with each other. The *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* promotes to protect the environment and rejects the environmental degradation. Loving the nature and protecting the nature are the responsibility of all people to keep ecologically sustainable society, and eco-friendliness to save the earth for the future.

Jiva Daya

Jiva Daya means “Compassion to all living beings” to take care of each other not only human beings and also all other living creatures and the environment. The compassion of human beings promote love, grace, compassion, sympathy, empathy among the fellow human beings, all living creatures and the nature.

Maitri

The literal meaning of *Maitri* means “Friendship.” It is the friendship helps us to build the society in a peaceful manner. The friendship is one of the most important solutions to solve most of our problems in our society. It helps us to comfort each other, counsel one another and makes very good moral support with each other. The Jain scriptures give a clear picture about human relationships with one another and all other living creatures and the nature.

Conclusion

The ethics helps us to build a healthy individual, family and society. All the ethical principles are inter connected with each other to have a meaningful life in the society and promotes peace and harmony, spirit of

tolerance, and mutual appreciation. Immoral and unethical attitude and behaviours of an individual destroys the very existence of human beings. Thus, an individual who is ethically sound builds a healthy family and further builds a healthy society. The ethical teachings of Jainism, particularly, the Three *Ratnas* help to build human Intelligent Quotient, Emotional Quotient and Spiritual Quotient and all the three makes the wholistic development of an individual. The Five Great Vows such as *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, *Asteya*, *Brahmacharya* and *Aparigraha* promotes peace and harmony in the family and society. The other ethical concepts like *Parasparopagraho Jivanam*, *Jiva Daya* and *Maitri* all the three promotes the environmental protection and encourages to have ecologically sustainable society and eco-friendliness. The ethical principles of Jainism help to strengthen the wholistic development, peace, harmony in the family and society and finally to protect the environment. All the ethical teachings of Jainism are relevant to any context of any society in the world. The ethical teachings of Jainism are not just limited to the followers of Jainism but also for everyone so that it may result the peaceful and co-existence existence of all in the society.

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