



“At the time of Mahavira, there was no environmental pollution, no global warming, no shortage of resources & no population explosion. Yet, Mahavir preached restraint on consumption, frugality in the use of resources and reverence for all life, because that is the right way to live. The Jain ecology does not arise from fear of pollution, but from love, respect and reverence for earth, for life, for the cosmos and for existence”

.....Satish Kumar

JAINISM & ENVIRONMENT



JAINISM & ENVIRONMENT

It is universally accepted that we are facing an environmental and ecological crisis. The Earth we inhabit is in grave danger, afflicted by rapidly increasing global ecological threats such as the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, massive deforestation, the extinction of many species and loss of biodiversity, poisonous toxic chemicals and nuclear wastes and exponential population growth. This are all as a consequence of **mankind's greed, ignorance, violent and unrestrained exploitation and use of the Earth's** natural resources. Centuries of rapacious exploitation of the environment has finally caught with us and radically changed attitude towards nature is now not a question of spiritual merit or condescension, but of sheer survival.

At the launch of the Stern Report, some years ago, Tony Blair said that “ it is not in doubt that if the science is right, the consequences for our planet are literally disastrous.” The Stern Report warned that a 2C rise in the temperature would wipe out 40% of all life on Earth and turn 200 million people into refugees. The Report also stated that it is down to our generation to take responsibility and action to combat global warming and environmental damage, other wise the consequences for future generations will be dire. **We have an obligation to leave a balanced environment for future generations - As Mahatma Gandhi said “ not to think of the future generations is also a form of violence”.**

Jainism concern for the welfare of every being in the universe and for the health of the environment makes it in essence a faith, of ecology and conservation, of a sustainable lifestyle and of reverence for all life forms. The solutions to the environmental and ecological crisis facing the earth are contained in the age old Jain concepts of ahimsa, aparigraha, anekantavada and jiva daya and the Jain Way of Life.



By Kishor B Shah

PARASPAROPAGRAHO JIVANAM
ALL LIFE IS BOUND TOGETHER
BY MUTUAL SUPPORT AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Jainism teaches that all matter - Living and non living - is bound together by mutual support and interdependence. Life is viewed as a gift, lived only with the support from the interdependent web of all creation. With this understanding, harming another living being inevitably means harming ourselves. In recent years, with increased awareness about our environment, this ancient but yet very contemporary in its promise Jain concept of Parasparopagraho Jivanam has gained relevance in this modern age and has been embraced by many environmental organisations in the world. Parasparopagraho Jivanam forms the basis of modern day science of ecology and ecological consciousness.

Mahavir, whose entire life was an example on how to live in perfect harmony with nature and the environment, stated a **profound ecological truth when said “ One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them”**. Mahavir considered reverence for nature as the highest virtue and destruction of environment as cruelty to nature. He said that **“one who knows the demerit of the destruction of plants and trees, knows the merit of reverence for nature”**.

“AHIMSA PARMO DHARMAH”
NON VIOLENCE IS THE SUPREME RELIGION

Jainism advocates harmony between self and the environment. Ahimsa or nonviolence is the cornerstone of the Jain philosophy and its way of life. Ahimsa in Jainism is not a negative virtue. It is based upon the positive quality of universal love, compassion and reverence for all living things. In Jainism, a person imbued with an attitude based on Ahimsa, makes that person humble and peaceful in co-existing both with fellow humans, all other living creatures and with the natural world. **His Holiness the Dalai Lama has stated that “preservation of the environment is related to many things but ultimately the decision must come from the human heart. The key point is to have genuine sense of universal responsibility based on love and compassion and clear awareness.” In Jain scriptures, the Tirthankaras have all proclaimed, “do not injure, abuse, or oppress, enslave, insult, torment, torture and kill any creatures or any living being. Mahavir said “ Nobody likes suffering. Therefore do not inflict suffering on anybody. This is ahimsa, this is equality.”**

Mahatma Gandhi said “we cannot have an ecological movement designed to prevent violence against nature, unless the principle of non-violence becomes central to the ethos of human culture.”



The environmental movement cannot be an external one; it must be an inward change towards the expression of ahimsa. Ahimsa is but an expression of love for all life, an understanding of the interconnectedness of all things and the realisation of the **fact that there is no 'I'**. **By realising that the actions we do**, whether by thought, word or deed affects the world around us, we can begin to change the way we relate to the world and respect the environment in which we live and upon which we depend so much on.

We, as humans, cannot avoid himsa (violence), whether consciously or unconsciously. The very fact of living, eating and moving involves destruction of one or other forms of life. Jainism teaches us to understand the inherent nature of ahimsa - Avoidance of Harm Intended by Mind, Speech and Action. Through this understanding, we can be more aware of all our thoughts, actions and words and start to manage them. Jainism shows that if we are to stop on our current path of environmental destruction, we have to return to our true nature by living a more positive and less destructive way, with a deep respect for all life. This is the path of ahimsa and is one of the greatest challenges for the human race.

APARIGRAHA (NON-POSSESSIVENESS)

LIVE BY NEED AND NOT GREED

The Jain concept of Aparigraha (nonpossiveness) is very relevant in an age where human greed, wasteful consumption **and waste of the Earth's precious resources has increased**. Mahavir said that **"aparigraha seve attai karanti prananam behanam"** - we destroy other lives because of our greed and possessiveness. To accumulate materials without limits, having

unlimited desires, greed and constantly thinking and striving to acquire more and more is improper. The unnecessary consumption of materials is considered as wasteful, abusive of **the Earth's resources and unethical in the Jain way of life**. The concept of aparigraha gives us an insight on how to gain more and more objective in life and rationality of approach by minimising our personal material consumptions, wants and possessions - Live by need and not greed.

Michael Tobias, in his book, Life Force - The World of **Jainism, states that "Jainism is a momentous example to all of us that there can and does exist a successful, ecologically responsible way of life, which is abundantly non-violent in thought, action and deed."** In a sense, as Jains, we have been entrusted with the task of protecting the world we live in, as from the beginning, ecology and the care of the environment, nature and other species has been at the heart of Jain doctrines.

We damage the Earth just by living on it. We burn fossils fuels - petrol, oil, coal - and huge amounts are burnt by those who supply us with goods and service. We create waste, which has to be buried, burnt or discharged into sea. We accept the profits of investments which exploit Third World poverty and put further strains on already over-stretched resources. In effect, we **all are the "polluter" and consequently we all have a responsibility to take extra steps to reduce waste, prevent pollution and conserve our resources.**





As Jains, we should be true environmentalists. But are we, in our everyday lives.

As individuals we can make changes at home, school, work and as **an community we can encourage and implement “green” policies** that will help preserve our resources for future generations.

Each of us can make an impact on the environment and on industry who rely on us to purchase their products. If we all modified our habits and chose our products with environment in mind, it creates a demand in the marketplace for environmentally friendly products.

RECYCLE -

TODAY'S WASTE - TOMORROW 'S RESOURCE

Recycling is usually a better alternative to either dumping or burning wastes. It saves money, energy, raw material and land space while also reducing pollution.

As individuals and as a community, we should actively pioneer, promote and encourage environmental activities such as :

- Raise awareness of Jainism and Environment.
- Support local recycling projects and at our community centres.
- Adopt good environmental practices in respect of our premises, equipment and consumption of resources.
- Practical and responsive environmental education.
- Environmental impact statements and actions.
- Support and encourage tree planting schemes.
- Plant a tree or two.

Article First Published in Oshwal News



**All living beings are souls,
alive and conscious, just like me.
As I like to be happy and do not like to be in pain,
in the same way, all living beings like to be happy
and do not like to be in pain.
By keeping this insight
at the core of my being,
I will not cause any harm, pain or
loss of life to any living being.**

Source: Yogashastra By Hemchandrāchārya



**“From the beginning,
ecology and the care of the
environment, nature and
other species has been at
the heart of Jain doctrines”**