



# A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON ETHICS OF BUDDHISM AND JAINISM WITH REFERENCE TO LIBERATION

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## Abstract

An attempt has been made to bring out the significant difference between Buddhism and Jainism on ethical principles in order to attain liberation. Both adopt their respective pathway to reach the goal. Based on this study, we try to analyse an appropriate ethical principles to be adopted in the modern society to uphold the values of non - violence as a means for liberation.

## Keywords

Four Noble Truth, Eight fold path, Moksa, Liberation, Nirvana, Guptis, Non-Violence, Tri-Ratna, Siddha-Shila, Salvation, Tirthankaras, Sramanism.

## INTRODUCTION:

Ethics is generally understood as the inquiry into the evaluation of human conduct, behaviour, goals, dispositions, intentions, ways of life and institutions.<sup>1</sup>it signifies a mode of philosophical inquiry which attempts to answer certain general questions about the meaning of moral terms and the criteria of moral evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

In this connection, Buddhism was considered as a system of thought, which developed the ethical code in all its aspects and paved way for the attainment of Nirvana or liberation, which is the highest goal to attain in this life. Similarly, in Jainism, the ethical code plays an important role for the attainment of Moksa or liberation through non-violence as a means.

By comparing both Buddhism and Jainism through ethical principles, let us analyse the difference between them in order to attain liberation.

## **Buddha's view of liberation**

According to Buddhism, mere theoretical knowledge is not enough for the attainment of perfection.<sup>3</sup> The Buddha was concerned with the sufferings and sorrows of life. For this, he uses "The four noble Truths" (catvari aryasatyani) as to deal with; they are:

### **1. Suffering (Dukkha)**

Man, who suffers in this world thinks that he can satisfy his wants and desires by the acquisition of different things. He identifies himself with various objects. He wants to engage himself with objects which are the causes of suffering. Thus, attachment is the matrix of different types of suffering.

### **2. The cause of suffering (Dukkha Samudaya)**

The origin of all evils of life is explained by the Buddha in terms of the laws of "Dependent origination" or "Conditional existence" (Pratitya Samutpada). According to this law, the existence or coming into existence of everything is dependent upon a cause.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing happens by chance. This law is more or less like the law of causation which states that every event has a cause and nothing happens accidentally (ex nihilo nihil fit).

### **3. The cessation of suffering (Dukkha Nirodha)**

Suffering is an effect of some causes or conditions. If the latter could be removed the former would necessarily cease. The removal of suffering can be achieved through the control of passions or cravings and contemplation of truth.

### **4. The path to the cessation of suffering (Dukkha Nirodha Marga)**

The four – noble truth tells us that there is a path (marga) by which man can avoid suffering of life and can attain salvation or nirvana. This path recommended by the Buddha consists of "eight - fold noble path" (**Ashtangika marga**). These eight rules are briefly stated below:

#### **(a) Right Views (Sammaditthi)**

Right knowledge alone can remove the ignorance which is the root cause of all suffering of the individual soul. Hence right knowledge is the first pre-requisite of the spiritual aspirant.

**(b) Right Intention (Sammāsankappa)**

The Buddha meant by right intention is that the aspiration for renunciation. It is only the intention or longing for renunciation that generates in man love for all living creatures.

**(c) Right Speech (Sammavaca)**

Right speech reflects the character of the individual. It requires an individual to restrain himself from falsehood, backbiting, curt language and frivolous talk.

**(d) Right action (Sammakammanta)**

Right action means according to Buddhism, unselfish action is the outcome of right knowledge, right speech.

**(e) Right Living (Samma ajiva)**

Right living means the transmutation or sublimation of the character of the individual.

**(f) Right effort (Sammavayama)**

Right effort means maintaining emotional equilibrium to form the habit of always choosing the right path and expelling evil ideas from the mind.

**(g) Right thought ( Sammasati)**

The purpose of cultivating right thought is to get enlightenment directly by controlling the emotion, because without the reign of reason over passion, no spiritual progress is possible.

**(h) Right Concentration ( Sammasamadhi)**

Concentration is thus the gradual effort of the aspirant to rise to the highest stage of existence where he frees himself from egoism and merges himself with the Universal truth.

**The Nature of Nirvana**

According to Buddhism, Nirvana is the unity of the individual self with the universal Self and that this unity is actually experienced by the aspirant who having attained that state in this life, in consequence begins to love all living creatures. He merges himself into the original source of existence.<sup>5</sup>

Buddhism is the doctrine which aims at the cessation of all pain through constant endeavour, spiritual discipline and righteous living culminating in the transformation of the finite and limited individual self into the infinite and unlimited eternal existence. It is the perfect state of existence which is called nirvana in the Buddhistic Philosophy.

According to the Buddha, the ultimate end of goal which every man should aim at is nirvana.<sup>6</sup> To Buddha, desirelessness of the mind is a necessary pre-requisite for the attainment of nirvana which means “obtaining rest” or “abolition of desires”. After attaining the final goal, there is no rebirth for the aspirant.

Buddhahood is the last stage attainable in this life and is therefore the state of perfection, brilliance, enlightenment, freedom and Nirvana. We have outlined the ‘eight - fold path’ and the ‘four- noble truth’ by which we have shown that the path explains the different stages of development of the individual soul towards the universal self.

### **Jaina’s view of liberation**

According to Jainism, Salvation (moksa) is the ultimate end of human life; it is the sole Summum bonum at which a man can aim. This ultimate goal is possible of realization through good conduct.<sup>7</sup> It means complete liberation of the soul from karmic matter.

Liberation is considered to be freedom from birth and rebirth and the restoration of the soul to its pristine purity and perfection. The state of liberation is taken into account a complete freedom of the soul from all kinds of karmas. According to Jainas, only an ascetic can follow the strict code of conduct because he gives up all worldly ties.<sup>8</sup>

The attainment of such a unique state cannot be accomplished without eschewing selfishness completely. This ascetic attitude expands the soul, frees the individual from narrow selfish desires, and leads him to adopt a life of love and sympathy for all human beings.

The purpose of the life of an ascetic is the uplifting of humanity and adopting the ideal state of attainment of full life. Such a goal is positive existence and not annihilation. Jainism is often called Sramanism and Jains believe that only an ascetic can attain moksa by following absolute non - violence.

According to Jainism, " moksa is not merely an abstract ideal that commands men to end their desires.<sup>9</sup> moksa brings about infinite knowledge, infinite bliss, infinite intuition and infinite power, thereby leads to perfection and automatic satisfaction of all desires. moksa is no doubt, a rational and conceptual notion which means self- realization, unites the soul with the universal self and this universal self-realization brings about a synthesis of reason and happiness.

According to Jainism, Non - violence is the highest virtue.<sup>10</sup> The ascetic adopts non-violence, which requires three principles and they are called the three Guptis. They are (a) Mental non-violence (b) Verbal non-violence and (c) Physical non-violence.

The above mentioned moral principles of Jainism indicates that this philosophy represents the practical application of an ideal life. Jainism is based on the three principles of (i) Right faith (Samyag-darsana) (ii) Right knowledge (Samyag-jnana) and (iii) Right conduct (Samyag-caritra). This three-fold path is known as Tri-Ratna or the three jewels. Jainism adopted the path of non-violence for ages and is still applying this ideal to practical life.

Jainism lays emphasis on the practice of the principles of non-violence in all individual matters, it is evident that its ultimate goal is the well- being of humanity and social progress.

Knowledge, faith and conduct are inextricably bound up with one another. All these three are indispensable to bring about salvation. This is final stage where moksa or liberation comes. At this stage, it attains the four-fold perfection (ananta catusttaya) namely infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite faith and infinite bliss. Here ends the cycle of birth and death. Since the soul has attained salvation (moksa). This according to Jainism, is the highest aim of life.

## The Nature of Nirvana

Nirvana or deliverance is not annihilation of the soul, but its entry into a blessedness that has no end.<sup>11</sup> The state of perfection is passively described as freedom from action and desire, a state of utter and absolute quiescence, a rest that knows no change or ending, a passionless and ineffable peace.<sup>12</sup> The energy of past karma is extinguished, and the spirit, though still existent, has no chance of re-embodiment.

The freed soul has a beginning but no end, while a bound soul has no beginning but has an end. These freed souls enjoy a kind of interpenetrating existence on account of their oneness of status.

Their soul substance has a special power by which an infinity of souls could exist without mutual exclusion. This ideal of freedom is manifested in the most perfect degree in the lives of the twenty-four Jain tirthankaras.

The liberated soul transcends samsara and goes straight to siddha-shila at the top of the world and dwells there in eternal knowledge and bliss. This siddha-shila is the abode of the omniscient souls, and may be called the spiritual eye of the universe. So moksha is said to be eternal upward movement.<sup>13</sup>

### Similarities between Buddhism and Jainism Ethics

1. Buddhism and Jainism laid emphasis only on Dharma (moral duty) and moksha (liberation)
2. Both strike a pessimistic note.
3. Both advocate strict adherence to non - violence (ahimsa)
4. Both give special importance to the ascetic order and are therefore known sramanic systems.
5. Both of them agree with each other to attain moksha.

### Dissimilarities between Buddhism and Jainism Ethics

1. The Buddha system believes that moksha means the total annihilation of the self. Whereas Jaina system believes that the attainment of moksha brings about infinite knowledge, infinite power and infinite bliss to the individual soul.
2. Buddhism does not believe in self-mortification whereas Jainism advocated penance as the means of self – realization.

3. Buddha ethics is more humanistic and more compassionate whereas Jaina ethics is rigorous.

## Conclusion

We have discussed the ethical principles of Buddhism and Jainism to pave way for the attainment of liberation (Nirvana). From the Buddha's point of view, four-noble truth and eight-fold path are prescribed as a moral guide, by which the aspirant can attain liberation. From the Jaina's point of view, three-fold path or three jewels is an important tool to reach the stage of liberation. Only ascetics are considered to be eligible to follow the moral code prescribed and non-violence is the means through which liberation can be attained.

By comparing Buddhism and Jainism from the ethical stand point to attain Nirvana, we consider Buddhism is more relevant and applicable than the Jainism in the modern society because Buddhism's ethical principles is more accessible to practice whereas Jainism's ethical principles is rigid.

## Foot Notes:

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2. Ibid – page: 1
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4. Balbir Singh, "Principles of Ethics", S. Nagin & Co., Jullundur - 1. 3<sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition, June 1971 – page: 277
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7. Ibid – page: 286
8. I.C.Sharma, "Ethical Philosophies of India", George Allen & unwin Ltd, London, First Published in 1965 – page: 134
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- 12.Ibid – page: 333
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