

Book Review

KARMA DOCTRINE AND REBIRTH IN JAINISM

Author: Dr. Subhash C. Jain

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Reviewer: Pragya Jain¹

Karma and soul are so intertwined in the empirical world like lemon and water in a lemonade. The transmigration of a soul from one life form to another also does not set the karma body apart from the soul. The soul, thus, starts to believe that it is the body and all bodily actions, like taking birth, aging, and dying are its own modifications. This is not the case according to Jainism. Taking birth, aging, dying, and all the other activities in between that involve a body are to be attributed to karma which is the agent of empirical changes in the worldly life. The karma theory is, therefore, unique in Jainism which allows the soul to behave as if it is the body itself.

The karma theory does not just come with its types and sub-types, but it brings with it the whole kinsfolk of metaphysical activities that take place between the soul and the matter. It is the system of the universe – the soul attracts karma by engaging in emotional-intentional turmoil making karma particles yield fruits in time. It is a vicious circle of the soul indulging in the fruition of karma, reacting according to the fruition, and attracting and binding further karma. Principally, there is no mix-up between the two substances – soul and matter – despite being together since eternity as they both function independently. But it causes a muddle when the soul starts to think that it is also performing the functions of the body. The material karma binds with the soul due to this false understanding. Once the soul realizes that the body functions on its own and that it has its own individual identity, the attracting-binding-fruition process with the karma is over and the soul gets liberated.

Karma undergoes many changes even after binding with the soul, but it does not change its nature, as in, one type of karma does not become another type of karma. Essentially, all empirical states of the soul are the outcome of its interaction with karma particles. A soul is not always a human, but it remains a soul in its sub-human forms as well. The period for which the soul stays in a life form is determined by a type of karma. The kind of body, voice, memory, understanding, etc. are all determined by some or the other type of karma. The karma keeps being attracted, binding with the soul, gives fruition, gets annihilated, attracts new karma, and the circle goes on. Material karma, being material in nature, is quite technical in understanding and can be best explained by someone who has scientific or mathematical knowledge.

¹ Pragya Jain is a research scholar of Jainism and works as a Research Associate at International School for Jain Studies 'ISJS,' Pune. Email pragyajain@isjs.in.

Karma Doctrine and Rebirth in Jainism: A Logical Perspective, authored by Dr. Subhash C. Jain, is a doctoral thesis by submitted to the University of Madras in 2020. He discusses karma as the agent of rebirth and brings forth the methodical details about how the karma system works. The University of Madras must be congratulated for allowing doctoral research on such a multidisciplinary subject. It encourages researchers to expand their horizons and bring out different perspectives to approach a subject.

The metaphysical background of the two substances formulates the introduction to the book. While doing justice to it, Dr. Jain discusses the ontological views of both Western and Eastern schools of philosophy. He tries to fill in the gap that the scholars of karma theory do not generally discuss rebirth as a scientific process. Consciousness is not the property of matter but the birth and death of the soul are associated with the material karma particles. His scope of study incorporates the consequences of actions governed by the law of karma, causes of fruition of karma, conceptual scheme of transmigration followed by a mathematical model of karmic load. These are discussed in the light of Free Will, good and evil actions, and the concepts of *bhavya* and *abhavya* in Jain philosophy. The thesis beautifully explores the *nimitta* and *upādāna kāraṇa* (effective and material causes) of actions along with the five factors of causality. The book defines the interactive karmic field in light of all these concepts. Rebirth is also discussed in terms of *puruṣārtha* (efforts) and *mokṣa* (liberation).

The author must have felt it to be his responsibility to mention the code of conduct of a Jain ascetic as well as of a Jain householder as observing of conduct is possible due to suppression or annihilation of *cāritra mohanīya* (conduct-deluding) karma. A short section of the thesis deals with developed and undeveloped life forms and thus leads to the discussion of transmigration into the four destinies. Here comes the process of change in karmic load. There are detailed discussions of the ten *prāṇas* (vitalities) in the mathematical formulations. The book concludes with the mathematical simulations of the governing equation and a plausible solution to it that also leads to the limitation of the mathematical model in explaining the complete karma theory of Jainism.

Ample charts and tables given by the author in the book help in explaining the theory of karma that plays a role in rebirth. Apart from the lists of tables and figures, there is a list of abbreviations that helps in understanding the usage of unlimited short forms in the book, for example, *dkkb* stands for *dravya*, *kṣetra*, *kāla*, and *bhāva* which is also mentioned in the table of contents, can only be understood from the list of abbreviations. There are indices including a glossary of Sanskrit words used on particular pages in the book followed by a detailed bibliography.

The research is emphatic for the readers of Jainism, in particular of karma philosophy. It also presents great support material for the scholars and students of mathematics as well as of Jain studies. There are a few instances where the author derives conclusions without referring to a source like “...we should refrain from unchaste sexual activities with other women as it harms them indirectly by augmenting their *moha*” (p.111). The reader would have to be responsible while reading such derivations. Overall, the efforts of the author and his research guide are commendable in bringing out such a comprehensive study in the field of Jainism.