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Speak Up

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH JAINISM

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What is Jainism?

Jainism is not only a religion but a way of life. Aptly said, it is an Art of Living. A human being lives with his or her society and environment. Jain *āgamas* (holy books or scriptures) are very conscious about preserving the environment. Their thoughts surpassed that of modern environmentalists. Jain sacred texts have large volumes that point to the environment.

What is Sustainability?



Sustainability is based on a simple principle: everything we need for our survival and well-being depends directly or indirectly on our natural environment. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in harmony, which permits fulfilling the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations. Sustainability is important to make sure that we have and will continue to have, the water, materials, and other resources to protect

human health and the environment. Sustainability has emerged as a result of significant concerns about the unintended social, environmental, and economic consequences of rapid population growth, economic growth, and consumption of natural resources.

What is Sustainable Development?

- Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Based on two underlying premises–
 - Symbiotic Relationship Between the Consumer Human Race
 - Producer Natural System and Compatibility between Ecology & Economy

Now let us look at the 2 vital elements of Sustainability for the Sustainable Development of the Society –

Economical Sustainability

- It's about understanding that economic growth is only sustainable if it simultaneously improves our quality of life and the environment, e.g. Voluntary giving, Profit sharing, etc.
- Economic Sustainability focuses on the importance of stable economic growth.



Environmental Sustainability



- Today's environmental problems like air pollution, are largely a consequence of the unsustainable consumption of natural resources and the mismanagement of waste products.
- Sustainable development is maintaining a delicate balance between the human need to improve lifestyles and feelings of well-being and preserving natural resources and ecosystems on which we and future generations depend.



Jainism & Global Warming

Some may say that Jainism did not say anything about the causes of global warming. Did people speak the phrase what is global warming in ancient times? However, Lord Mahavira knew the effects of global warming and depicted clearly that the earth would be too hot at the end of the current fifth time-cycle to come out of residence which is for 21000 years after him. He suggested global warming solutions and pathways to stop global warming. Jainism describes a lot of climate change issues that are to take place in the future and suggests acting reasonably for sustainable development. The Bhagwati Sutra discusses environmental issues and the global environment. Apart from the technological measures for the sustainability of the environment, it is also possible to sustain the environment through old traditions, faiths, and cultures. Jainism propounded that the environment can be sustained through the principles of *ahimsā* (nonviolence), including vegetarianism and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness).

Nature & Sustainable Environment

Jainism says that the five main elements of nature: *pṛthvī* (land, soil, stones, etc), *jala* (water resources including clouds), *agni* (fire), *vāyu* (air) and *vanaspati* (vegetation, trees, and plants including fungi) are living creatures and must be treated as living beings and should not be destroyed or killed. Jain scriptures say that a *jīva* (soul) harms or intends to harm anyone out of *rāga* (craving) and *dveṣa* (aversion). With this, Jainism goes into the root cause of all violence. The very first Jain scripture, *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, advocates strongly for protecting and preserving the environment. This basic concept of Jainism is unique. Lord Mahavira told this two thousand six hundred (2600) years back!!! No scientist before Jagadish Chandra Bose could conceive and prove life in green trees and plants. This very concept of Jainism restricts its followers Jains from harming any creature. This concept also limits their consumption and helps protect the environment. This is the most important aspect of sustainable environment and environmental conservation.

Environmental Sustainability is dependent upon loving nature and natural elements. Depletion and contamination of natural resources are the main causes of the present-day problems in the environment and sustainable development. Lord Mahavira lived in the forest most of the time during his asceticism. He attained enlightenment on the bank of River R̥jupālikā below a Śāla



Tree. It is noteworthy that Mahavira is the 24th and last *tīrthamkara* of Jains and all other *tīrthamkara* also similarly lived their ascetic life. All of them also got enlightenment under a tree. They lived their lives in hills and forests and understood Nature closely. Lord Mahavira has clearly warned in *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* that contamination of any natural resources is not desirable in any case.

Non-Possessiveness & Economical Sustainability

Consumerism promotes craving. It motivates people to consume more and more whether required or not. They have even made it a parameter of development and growth. This Western doctrine is the root cause of all environmental hazards in modern days. In fact, we are now at the threshold of total collapse due to consumer culture. Jain texts emphasize utility (*upayoga*) in place of consumption (*upabhoga*). Consumerism leads to the depletion of natural resources that in turn contaminate air, water, soil, and other valuable natural resources. This again accelerates greenhouse gases and carbon emissions which causes global warming.

Jain Lifestyle and Global Warming

Jain texts motivate people for minimal consumption. They emphasize on *tyāga* (renunciation). Jain *śrāvaka* or *śrāvikā* (laymen and laywomen) are advised to minimize their *bhoga* (consumption). The seventh vow for Jains is *bhogopbhoga parimāṇa vrata* which restricts them from unlimited consumption of materials and natural resources. Moreover, this vow is a *śikṣā vrata* (educational vow) that asks its observers to learn and educate themselves towards limiting their requirements of consumables. Jain *śrāvaka* or *śrāvikā*, who truly follow this vow, do not act against the environment in several ways. They limit their ambitions voluntarily and do not enter into a business or profession that damages the environment severely. Misuse of water resources, cutting and firing green forests, mining, etc. are not allowed for observers of this vow. Trading of ivory, hazardous chemicals, alcohol, drugs, etc. are also restricted for them.

The Jain community in India is mostly a business community. They have traditionally adopted businesses that do not harm the environment. Most people of the Jain community are in the Gems and Jewelry business. They are also in businesses like textile, food grain, banking, finance, etc. They have enormous credit in business because of their peaceful and nonviolent



nature and ethical practices. Jain *sādhu* and *sādhvī* (monks and nuns) are living with almost no *parigraha* (consumables). They do not use vehicles but rather travel barefoot. They do not use electricity or any modern amenities. They do not even cook, pluck flowers, or any green vegetables for any purpose. They do not possess any earthly things, no money, no bank account, no credit cards. All Jains including monks and laymen observe *pariyūṣaṇa* as their main festival. They do not even consume green vegetables in those days. Traditionally they do not eat in the night (after sunset). If more and more people adopt the Jain lifestyle, they will help reduce greenhouse gases and carbon emissions which cause global warming.

Consumption of Food Grain & Water to Produce Live Stock

Lastly, a few words for those who support the consumption of non-vegetarian food. Studies show that a vegetarian diet could feed more people than a meat-based diet. For example, only around 20% of the corn grown in the U.S. is eaten by people, with about 80% of the corn eaten by livestock. Additionally, approximately 95% of the oats grown in the U.S. are eaten by livestock. Approximately 25 gallons of water are needed to produce 01 pound of wheat whereas about 2,500 gallons of water is needed to produce 01 pound of meat. Studies show that the number of people who could be fed by the grain and soybeans that are currently fed to U.S. livestock is approximately 1,300,000,000.

So, check the facts and decide!!!
