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Speak Up

CONTINUITY OF INDIAN ETHICAL VALUES IN JAINISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SANT KABIR

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India has a long and rich tradition of values that guide how people live and support one another. Among the most fundamental concepts is *dharma*, which refers to doing what is right according to one's role and circumstances. The term 'dharma' is essentially a set of values that we engage with throughout life.

Within the Indic value system, several core principles stand out: *ahimsā* (non-violence) encourages kindness and avoidance of harm—an essential tenet of Indic tradition. Other key values include *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possessions), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *tyāga* (renunciation of selfishness). These values are not confined to any single tradition; rather, they are part of daily life, shaping how individuals live, understand and co-operate with one another.

Traditions such as Jainism and the poetry of Sant Kabir illustrate how core values can be embodied in diverse ways, guiding individuals toward thoughtful, compassionate, and balanced lives. Both Jainism and Sant Kabir's teachings uphold the purity of the soul, the principle of non-violence, and the ideal of social equality. Jain philosophy emphasises renunciation and spiritual discipline, while Sant Kabir's path is rooted in personal experience and heartfelt devotion. Together these traditions contribute profound depth and diversity to the landscape of Indian thought.

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There are many profound and insightful similarities between Jainism and the teachings of Sant Kabir, which illuminate the shared root of Indian spiritual traditions. Let us explore a few illustrative examples.

1. In Jainism, *Kaṣāya* refers to the passions or emotional defilements that bind the soul to the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). These inner disturbances are regarded as the primary cause of karmic bondage, hindering spiritual progress and obstructing the path to liberation. The *Daśavaikālika Sūtra* states:

koho pīṃ paṇāsei māṇo viṇayanāsaṇo |
māyā mittāṇi nāsei loho savvaviṇāsaṇo ||

Meaning: Anger destroys love and goodwill, ego erodes humility, deceit breaks friendship and greed annihilates all virtues.

Similarly, Kabir’s philosophy affirms:

udara samātā anna lahe, tanahi samātā cira |
adhikahi saṅgraha na kare, tāko nāma fakīra ||

Meaning: One who is generous easily let’s go of ego; one who remains attached to bodily identity remains entangled for long; and one who does not accumulate beyond necessity is truly called a *fakīra*—a renunciate, balanced, and soul-cantered being.

2. In Jainism, one of the foundational texts, the *Tattvārthasūtra* (2nd cent. CE), authored by Umāsvati/Umāsvāmī contains a very profound statement: “*parasparopagraho jīvānām*”. This aphorism means: all life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence. It affirms that living beings thrive through reciprocal care and collective well-being.

Similarly, Kabir’s *Bījaka* convey the same essence:

jīva binā jīva bāmce nahim, jīva kā jīva udhāra |
jīva dayā kari pāliye, paṇḍita karo vicāra ||

Meaning: Life cannot exist without other life; one’s existence is sustained by another. Show compassion and protect all living beings—this is the true wisdom of the learned.



3. In Jainism, it is emphasized that true knowledge lies in the realization of one's own soul. This insight is eloquently expressed in the *Yogasāra*, a profound work by Yogindudeva from the 6th century CE. He states:

sattha paḍhamtaha te vi jaḍa appā je ṇa muṇamti |
tiha kāraṇa e jīva phuḍa ṇa hu ṇivvāṇa lahamti ||

Meaning: Even those who study the scriptures remain ignorant if they do not know their own soul. Therefore, without self-realization, one cannot attain liberation (*nirvāṇa*).

Similarly, along the same lines, Jain text *Pāhuḍa Dohā* by Muni Ramsingh (11th century CE) states:

bahuyaiṃ paḍhiyai mūdha para tālū sukkaī jeṇa |
ekku ji akkharu taṃ paḍhahu sivapuri gammaī jeṇa ||

Meaning: False knowledge (*mithyā jñāna*) is futile if one does not grasp the true nature of reality. One may read extensively until the palate dries, yet remain ignorant; instead, read that one syllable through which one attains the abode of liberation.

A similar insight is found also in the *Kabir Granthāvalī*:

pothī paḍhi-paḍhi jaga muvā, paṇḍita bhayā na koi |
aikai aṣira pīva kā, paḍhe su paṇḍita hoi ||

Meaning: People read countless books, yet gain no true wisdom. Only the one who experiences divine love is truly learned.

4. In the Jain tradition, Muni Ramsingh in *Pāhuḍa Dohā*, offers a sharp critique:

muṇḍiyamuṇḍiya muṇḍiyā, siru muṇḍiu cittu ṇa muṇḍiyā |
cittaham muṇḍaṇu ṇim kiyai, saṃsāraham khaṇḍaṇu te kiyai ||

Meaning: He strongly condemns external appearances, particularly the act of shaving the head, when not accompanied by inner purification. According to his perspective, true renunciation lies in cleaning the impurities of the mind, only then one can effectively transcend worldly existence.



Sant Kabir also conveys this profound truth in the *Kabir Granthāvalī*:

kesom kahā bigāḍiyā, je mūṇḍai sau bāra |
mana kaum kāhe na mūṇḍie, jāmaiṁ viṣai vikāra ||

Meaning: what harm is there in keeping one's hair, even if the head is shaved hundred times. If the mind remains impure and filled with sensual defilements, such external renunciate is futile and meaningless.

5. In the Jain tradition, Muni Yogindudeva, in his *Yogasāra*, expresses a profound realization:

jo paramappā so ji haūm, jo haūm so paramappu |
iu jāṇeviṇa joiyā, atṭhā ma karahu viyappu ||

Meaning: Here he describes the state of union between the soul (*jīva*) and the supreme principle (*paramātmā*). In the state of oneness, the soul recognizes that the supreme principle is realized within itself. The supreme principle, pure undivided knowledge, is none other than the true self, and the true self is none other than that supreme principle. No dualistic distinctions should be made in this realization.

Sant Kabir, in his *Kabir Granthāvalī*, also expresses the same realization:

tūm tūm karatā tūm bhayā, mujha meṁ rahī na hūm |
bārī pherī bali gaī, jita dekhom tita tūm ||

Meaning: In uttering “Thou, Thou”, I become ‘Thou’ – no trace of “I” remained within me. The veil was lifted, and wherever I look, there is only ‘Thou’.

Here, following in the contemplative footsteps of Muni Yogindudeva, Kabir articulates the same realization of the ‘I’ as ‘Thou’—the identity of individual self and the supreme principle—in his own poetical idiom.

In conclusion, it can be said that Jainism and the teachings of Sant Kabir stand as enduring pillars of India's profound spiritual heritage. though they arise from distinct streams—Jainism from the Śramaṇa tradition and Sant Kabir from Nirguṇa Bhakti stream, both illuminate timeless values through their respective paths. Jainism imparts these principles through



disciplined practice, mindful living, and the belief that truth has multifaceted. Kabir, by contrast, conveys them through heartfelt poetry, inner reflection, and a fearless rejection of rigid rituals and social divisions. Together, they show that the same deep values can be lived in different ways: one through quiet austerity, and the other through bold insight. This is the beauty of the Indic tradition: it offers each individual a unique spiritual path, while nurturing a shared ethical and contemplative world.

We can say, just as the ocean absorbs all rivers into itself, the Indian value tradition—rooted in principles like nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, non-possession, celibacy, compassion, forgiveness etc.—has the capacity to hold diverse philosophies and faiths within its fold. This spirit of inclusivity is clearly reflected in Jain philosophy and in the teachings of Sant Kabir. It is this very consciousness—one that harmonizes unity within diversity—that forms the source of India's ethical and spiritual heritage.
