

Religious Response towards Ecological Crisis: Lessons from Buddhism and Jainism

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Abstract

Buddhism and Jainism are two ancient Indian religions, whose founders Gautama Buddha and Mahavira are considered to be contemporaries, which promote the values of compassion and concern towards the entire universe. This paper aims to explore the underlying ecological values and principles embedded in these religions. The ecological values of Buddhism and Jainism can inspire human society to preserve, protect, and nurture the earth's environment to restore ecological imbalances and decrease the alarming number of natural disasters.

Introduction

This paper deals with the principles and teachings of Buddhism and Jainism which promote conserving and preserving the environment; currently, ecological crises such as floods, global warming, and hurricanes, are increasing day by day. This is an exploration of whether religion, from the religious perspective of eco-philosophy in the context of the eco-crisis, could solve the ecological problems that we face today. There are ecologically favorable elements from Buddhism and Jainism which could serve as guidelines for human beings' relations with nature that would stop the spread of environmental damage. Religion is a phenomenon which gives meaning to the existence of human beings on the Earth, a universal phenomenon sustaining human life and existence. Culture is basically the way of life of a particular society. Since religion plays a pre-dominant role in the culture of most societies, religion, to a large extent, determines the way of life of human beings by providing guidelines, prescriptions, and instructions through its scriptures and traditions. Religion does not mean mere rituals and dogmas. It has eternal values having validity for all times to come. It provides the highest moral virtues, both obligatory and binding, which guide the lives of human beings to live in this world. In the context of the ecological crisis, these virtues and values of Buddhism and Jainism serve as guidelines to be followed for the well-being of the environment. The ecological elements presented in this paper show that Buddhism and Jainism have the potential to reduce the intensity of the ecological crisis and increase ecological consciousness to preserve and conserve nature.

Lessons from Buddhism regarding Ecological Welfare

Despite significant variations among the different Buddhist traditions that have evolved over a journey of 2,500 years throughout Asia and the West, Buddhists see the world as conjoined existentially, morally, cosmologically, and ontologically. At the existential level, Buddhists affirm that all sentient beings share the fundamental conditions of birth, old age, suffering and death. The concepts of *karma*¹ and rebirth add a moral dimension to this existential sense. The Buddhist doctrine of *pratītyasamut-pāda* (interdependent origination) serves as the model of a cosmology where everything is interdependent and interrelated. In later schools of Buddhist thought, the cosmological vision of interdependent causality evolved into a more substantive sense of ontological unity. Ontological notions such as Buddha-nature or *Dharma*²-nature, *buddhakāya* (Buddha's body), *tathagatagarbha* (state of enlightenment), *dharmakaya* (the essence of the absolute), and *dharmadhātu* (the expanse of phenomena) provide a basis for unifying all existent entities in a common sacred universe.

Ahimsa (non-violence) is considered to be the distinguishing hallmark of Buddhism. For Buddhists, *ahimsa* results from the virtue of *maitri*, which in the ordinary sense means 'friendliness,' but in Buddhism means 'loving compassion extended to all beings.' Buddhists focus on developing compassion for others by thinking of them in the same way one thinks of oneself. The following quote from *Dhammapāda*³ illustrates this point very clearly: "Everyone trembles at the whip; everyone is afraid of death. Everyone likes life. Considering others as yourself, do not kill or promote killing."⁴ Lord Buddha was against animal sacrifices. He was appalled by the sacrificial massacre of sheep, goats, poultry, pigs, and other animals required in the Vēdic ritual.⁵ Therefore, he campaigned against the *dummēdha* or evil sacrifice, in order to spare the lives of innocent animal victims. He was also against war, saying "War doesn't solve any question. Waging war will not serve our purpose. It will sow the seeds of another war... a man who despoils, is despoiled in turn..."⁶ The Buddhist theory of *karma* says that we reap the fruit according to the seed that is sown. The doer of good will gather good; the doer of evil, reaps evil. The present ecological crisis originates in the greed, selfishness, and the violence of human beings towards nature. Human beings should engage themselves in sowing the seeds of compassion, non-violence, and simple lifestyles which will nurture nature and preserve the environment. Buddhist thought holds that our actions decide our fate. To the question of why

¹ The concept *karma* in Hinduism and Buddhism means the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence viewed as deciding their fate in future existence.

² In Buddhism the word '*Dharma*' means the nature of reality regarded as a universal truth, taught by Buddha. *Dharma* consists of the teachings of Buddhism.

³ The *Dhammapāda* is a collection of sayings of Buddha, and it is one of the most widely read and best-known Buddhist scriptures.

⁴ Thomas Cleary, *Dhammapāda: The Saying of Buddha*, trans. (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), pp. 46-47.

⁵ Vēdic rituals are a coordinated and extended series of ritual actions performed either for the benefit of the patron or sacrificer (*yajamāna*) or for the prosperity of the entire world.

⁶ Julia Martin, *Ecological Responsibility: A Dialogue with Buddhism* (Delhi: Tibet House, 1997), p. 73.

some are short-lived or die prematurely, Lord Buddha answers that killing others in a previous life is the cause of short life and adds that compassionate abstinence from killing or injuring others results in long life.⁷ The notion of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) in Buddhism does not mean nothingness but the absence of inherent existence. Since everything is interdependent, nothing can be self-defining and exist inherently. Thus, the idea of intrinsic properties that exist in themselves and of themselves should be avoided. *Nirvāna* (enlightenment), the highest good in Buddhism, offers the promise of transforming karmic conditionedness into an unconditioned state of spiritual liberation, a realization potentially available to all forms of sentient life on the karmic continuum. That plants and trees or the land itself have a similar potential for spiritual liberation became an explicit doctrine in Chinese and Japanese forms of Buddhism.

Western Buddhist environmentalists see their worldview as a rejection of the hierarchical dominance of one human over another, or of humans over nature, and is based on the ethic of empathetic compassion that respects biodiversity. However, Alan Sponberb, in his article 'Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion', says that there is a hierarchical dimension in Buddhist doctrine, but it is not the hierarchy of privilege or domination but of compassion.⁸ Those who reach higher and higher hierarchically are required to show more compassion for others and nature. This promotes a positive consciousness towards ecological welfare.

Lord Buddha spent all the important events of his life in forested surroundings. He was born in Lumbini Garden, spent six years searching for spiritual enlightenment in the forest, and became enlightened under a *bodhi* (enlightenment) tree. As the forest was his natural surrounding for more than half of his life, it must have left a great impact on his thinking and his way of living. In the Jātaka stories⁹ regarding forest conservation, there are many references such as "Come back, O tigers! To the wood again, and let it not be levelled with the plain; for, without you, the axe will lay it low; you, without it, forever homeless go," and "The tree that gives you pleasant shade, to sit or lie at need, you should not tear its branches down, a cruel wanton deed."¹⁰ Even though the Buddhist monks had houses to live in the city, Lord Buddha exhorted them to live in the forests. Thus, against the present tendency of widespread deforestation, Buddhism preaches the conservation of forests.

The Middle Path of Buddhism, which exhorts the principle of moderation, is applicable to a great degree in many spheres of human life such as reproduction (to reduce overpopulation), consumption (to reduce the burden on the Earth and lessen ecological crises), possessiveness (to prevent death from starvation), etc. Steve Odin, in his article, 'The Japanese Concept of Nature in Relation to the Environmental Ethics and Conservation of Aesthetics of Aldo Leopold,' says that Japanese Buddhism attributes a salvific function to nature. This esoteric concept of nature in Japan is itself grounded in a Mahāyāna Buddhist metaphysic of emptiness

⁷ K. Sri Dhammananda, *Treasure of the Dhamma* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1994), pp. 122–139.

⁸ Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, ed., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Harvard: CWR, 1997), pp. 358–362.

⁹ The Jātakas (Birth Story) is a voluminous body of literature native to India which mainly concerns the previous births of Gautama Buddha in both human and animal form.

¹⁰ Julia Martin, *Ecological Responsibility: A Dialogue with Buddhism* (Delhi: Tibet House, 1997), pp. 129–130.

which fuses transcendence and immanence, absolute and relative, or sacred and profane.¹¹ In this way, Japanese Buddhism overturns all models of transcendence and is a radical change from ‘other-worldliness’ to ‘this worldliness.’ Thus, there is no supra-sensual reality above the natural world.

The Concept of Interdependent Origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*)

Pratītyasamutpāda (the concept of interdependent origination) is the Buddhist principle of causality. This notion forms the basis of all the eco-friendly concepts and attitudes in Buddhism. Lord Buddha says, “I will teach you Dhamma: if this is, that comes to be; from the arising of this that arises; if this is not, that does not come to be; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.”¹² *Pratītyasamutpāda* (the concept of interdependent origination) describes the chain of twelve links of interdependent origination. From *avidya* (ignorance), *samskara* (formation) arises; from *samskara*, *vijñāna* (consciousness); from *vijñāna*, *nāmaruṣa* (name and form); from *nāmaruṣa*, *sadāyatana* (six sense faculties); from *sadāyatana*, *sparsa* (contact); from *sparsa*, *vēdana* (sensation); from *vēdana*, *trīṣṇa* (craving); from *trīṣṇa*, *upādana* (grasping); from *upādana*, *bhava* (becoming); from *bhava*, *jāti* (rebirth) and from *jāti*, *jarāmaraṇa* (old age and death) arise.¹³ Thus, it says that nothing exists absolutely and unconditionally. Everything depends on everything else. Everything in the world is interrelated and interdependent. Nature and human beings are also interdependent and interrelated. Thus, the teachings of Buddhism have created an awareness among human beings that preserving the nature leads to preserving and protecting the human world.

The notion of *pratītyasamutpāda* is well-developed in the later forms of Buddhist traditions. The Huayan School of Chinese Buddhism brings out the interconnectedness or interrelatedness of all things in the universe with the metaphor of Indra’s net. According to this school, there are four types of *dharma-dhatu*s (a lived world). In the fourth realm ‘*shishi wu ai*’, one sees the mutual interpenetration and non-obstruction of all events. Everything is causally related to everything else. Huayan illustrates this with the image of Indra’s net, a vast net that encompasses the universe. A special jewel is found at the intersection of every horizontal and vertical weave in the net, special because each jewel reflects every other jewel in the net, so that looking into any one jewel one sees them all. Every event or thing can disclose the whole universe because all mutually interpenetrate each other without barriers (all in one and one in all).¹⁴ The Huayan philosophy considers relationship among things as more fundamental than things themselves. Things are different and yet identical. The Huayan argument is that the whole is nothing apart from the parts that make up the whole. The nose, an integral part of the body, is not only a condition without which there can be no perfect body,

¹¹ Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, ed., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, pp. 101–105.

¹² A. K. Coomaraswamy and I. B. Horner, *The Living Thoughts of Gautama the Buddha* (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 1958), p. 170.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Dan Lusthaus, “Chinese Buddhism,” *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London & New York: Routledge, Vol. 2.), pp. 87–88.

but also, we can say it is the body and also that the nose is only part of the body and not the whole body. The Lankavatara Sutra, a Mahayana Buddhist text, states that in the long course of *Samsara*¹⁵, there is not one among living beings with form who has not been mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter, or some other relative.¹⁶ Being connected with the process of being born, one is kin to all wild and domestic animals, birds, and beings born from the womb. Therefore, human beings have a responsibility to preserve the entirety of nature.

The Japanese Buddhist school of Shingon, established by Kukai in the 9th century, also emphasizes the notion of interdependence in a very profound manner. There are three important characteristics of interdependence of nature mentioned in this school which are as follows.

1. Nature is an ecosystem whose constituent elements exist in constantly changing, interdependent causal relationships. What an entity is, or becomes, is a direct function of how it relates to every other unity in the universe at every moment of space-time.
2. All living entities possess a life-force intrinsic to their own natures that is not imposed from other things or from God, but is derived from life itself.
3. The third principle is organic balance which means that all things and events at every moment of space and time, are interrelated bipolar processes that proceed toward balance and harmony between opposites. The following quote of this school clarifies the interrelatedness in the universe.

The Six Great Elements are interfused and are in a state of eternal harmony; the Four Mandalas are inseparably related to one another; when the grace of the three mysteries is retained, our inborn three mysteries will quickly be manifested; infinitely interrelated like the meshes of Indra's net are those we call existence.¹⁷

The Japanese traditional view of nature as a unity of *onozukara* (environment) and *mizukara* (self) is to be found in the concept of *esho funi* or oneness of life and its environment, found in the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. According to the mystic law of cause and effect (*myoho rengo kyo*), propounded by the Nichiren sect, life and nature are inseparable. Thus, we can see the powerful principle in Buddhism that a revolution within life (*shoho*) always leads to one in the environment (*eho*).¹⁸ The philosophy of interdependence is not just an intellectual exercise. It is an insight which evokes an ethical attitude, an attitude of responsibility and universal compassion. In this interactive universe, our actions have an effect like that of a pebble tossed into a pool sending waves out all around. Hence, there is the need for responsible action in our daily life. The Dalai Lama observes, "Today more than ever before, life must be characterized

¹⁵ Buddhists conceive of the world as a suffering-laden cycle of life, death, and rebirth, without beginning or end, known as *samsara*. Beings are driven from life to life in this system by *karma*, which is activated by their good or bad actions committed in this life as well as in previous lives.

¹⁶ Mary Evelyn Tuckcer and Duncan Ryuken Williams, ed., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–97.

by a sense of universal responsibility, not only nation to nation and human to human but also human to other forms of life.”¹⁹ Thus, each one has the responsibility to protect and preserve all forms of life in the universe. Stephen C. Rockefeller has commented that the anthropocentric and utilitarian approaches to environmental ethics take on a more biocentric character when they are combined with a scientific appreciation of ecological interdependence. Buddhism offers *pratītyasamutpāda* (the concept of interdependent origination) as the basis of this outlook. To say that one’s self-interest is served by realizing and enacting an ideal of no-self is to say that one’s own self-interest is best understood by realizing one’s location in a network of interdependence or interdependent co-origination. Sāntidēva²⁰ says that in a situation where one has to help either oneself or a larger group, the self’s greatest benefit comes from seeking the widest possible benefit for the network of all living beings. It is a practical centering of one’s concern on others in order to decenter the self.²¹ Though anthropocentrism is the cause of the ecological crisis, the solution is to follow ‘*pratītyasamutpāda*’ (the concept of interdependent origination). The following prayer, which is recited at the conclusion of all Buddhist rituals, echoes the universal loving kindness of Buddhism: May all beings be free from enmity; may all beings be free from injury; may all beings be free from suffering; may all beings be happy.²² There are two main Buddhist values that contribute to the welfare of the environment. They are showing compassion towards all beings including nature itself, and having the consciousness that the entirety of nature is inter-connected. The values of Buddhism have imprinted a strong ecological consciousness on human beings to protect all the beings in the universe.

Lessons from Jainism regarding Ecological Welfare

Jainism is one of the ancient religions of the world. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, “There is nothing wonderful in my saying that Jainism was in existence long before the *Vedas* were composed.”²³ Jainism is often classified as a philosophy, a way of life, rather than a religion. Jainism emphasizes various practices to realize one’s own essential nature, such as living a good life. According to Jainism, the guiding principle of one’s life should be ‘*mitti mē sarvabhūeṣu*’ (‘may I have a friendly relationship with all beings’). Once, Lord Mahavir was asked what religion was from a realistic point of view. Lord Mahavir said that realistic religion

¹⁹ Augustine Thottakara, ed., *Eco-dynamics of Religion: Thoughts for Third Millennium* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000), p. 32.

²⁰ *Śāntidēva* (which literally means “god of peace”) was the name given to an Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist philosopher-monk.

²¹ Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, pp. 342–343.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Swami Rishabhadas, *Mahavira the Merciful* (Madras: Jaina Institute of Metaphysical Culture, 1974), p. 168. The *Vedas* (Knowledge) is a collection of poems or hymns composed in archaic Sanskrit by Indo-European-speaking peoples who lived in northwest India during the 2nd millennium BCE. No definite date can be ascribed to the composition of the Vedas, but the period of about 1500–1200 BCE is acceptable to most scholars. Jainism was born before it.

consists of four parts: 1) equality of all living beings; 2) every living soul has the right to employ self-effort to improve itself and should not be stripped of that right; 3) no one should rule over other living beings; and 4) all views should be viewed with equanimity without like or dislike.²⁴ If one adopts even one of these four principles, the other three will automatically be adopted. These principles guide human beings to care for the environment. Thus, Jainism is considered to be a religion of the environment. Jain ecological consciousness is grounded in a judicious blend of divine holism and a vision of non-exploitative science and technology. The scientific approach, reasoning and practices prescribed by Jainism are highly relevant today when environmental concerns are at the top of the human agenda. The survival of the Earth along with all its species depends upon harmony among all the creatures on the Earth. Human beings are also one among the millions of species on the planet. Jainism treats all the species equally without ascribing any hierarchical position to human beings. Jainism admonishes human beings to respect and safeguard the divine balance of nature. The more we disturb nature by polluting the atmosphere and degrading the environment, the more we are moving towards our own annihilation. Jainism emphasizes that destroying nature eventually leads to destroying oneself. Jainism as a religion of the environment reflects ethical sensitivity towards nature. It focuses on reverence for all life and harmonious living with all beings on the Earth.

The Jain religion has analysed different aspects of the environment in great depth, with sound logic and a scientific approach. There are seven basic constituents of the environment in Jainism. They are: (1) Living beings; (2) Earth with its surface and underground properties and resource-potential; (3) The water resources in the form of vast oceans, lakes, rivers, waterfalls and underground water tables; (4) The air around us; (5) The sound factor; (6) Fire; and (7) Vegetation in the form of plants, trees, fruits, vegetables and herbs.²⁵ All these constituents are vital elements in the environment which supports and nourishes our lives. Thus, Jainism emphasizes the need for human beings to care for and nurture all the elements of nature in order to lead a harmonious life.

The core of Jaina faith consists of five vows that dictate the daily life of believers in Jainism, monks, and nuns. These five vows are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, sexual restraint, and non-possession. According to the vow of Truth (*Satya*), anger, greed, fear, and jokes are the breeding grounds of untruth. Speaking the truth requires moral courage. Only those who have conquered greed, fear, anger, jealousy, ego, and frivolity can speak the truth. One should remain silent if the truth causes pain, hurt, anger, or the death of any living being. According to the vow of non-stealing (*Achaurya* or *Asteya*), stealing consists of taking another's property without their consent, or by unjust or immoral methods. Further, one should not take anything which does not belong to one. According to the vow of celibacy/chastity (*Brahmacharya*), total abstinence from sensual pleasure and the pleasure of all five senses is called celibacy. Sensual pleasure is an infatuating force, which sets aside all virtues and reason at the time of indulgence. Monks should not enjoy sensual pleasures, ask others to do the same, or approve of it. According to the vow of non-attachment/non-possession (*Aparigraha*), the more worldly

²⁴ Nagin J. Sha, *Jaina Philosophy and Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Babarsidas Publishers, 1998), p. 433.

²⁵ N. P. Jain, "Global Relevance of Jain Religion," *International School of Jain Studies*, vol. 5, (November 2012), p. 16.

wealth a person possesses, the more he is likely to commit sin to acquire and maintain his possessions, and in the long run he may be unhappy. Worldly wealth creates attachments which will continuously result in greed, jealousy, selfishness, ego, hatred, violence, etc. Lord Mahavir said that wants and desires have no limit.²⁶ The vow of non-stealing can be used to reflect on the world's limited resources and prompt one to think of the needs of future generations. In their use of the Earth's resources, Jains take their cue from the bee, which takes honey from the blossoms of a tree without hurting the blossoms but strengthens itself. Sexual restraint might help minimize population growth. People must not procreate indiscriminately lest they overburden the planet and its resources. The discipline of non-possession is significant in the context of modern consumerism, the indulging in the acquisition of material goods, which is one of the root causes of current ecological concerns.

The worldview of Jainism is characterized by a bio-cosmology. Due to their perception of the "livingness" of the world, Jains hold an affinity for the ideals of the environmental movement. Dr. N. P. Jain, in his article, "Practice before You Preach,"²⁷ says that the Jain dictum *parasparopagraho jivanam* ("living beings render service to one another") offers an alternative to the modern Darwinian formula of "survival of the fittest." The life of a living being is a life of mutual co-operation and assistance. Jainism prohibits destruction of the Earth's life-support system, and it also proposes harmonious, balanced and mutually supportive relationships between all life-forms and nature. Jain scriptures say, "One who disregards the existence of earth, water, fire, air and vegetation, disregards one's own existence which is entwined with them."²⁸ 'Live and let live' is the philosophy of Jainism. Every minute part of the world is endowed with a self, with all souls being alike and potentially divine. None is superior or inferior. Thus, Jainism recognizes the equality of all beings and emphasizes preserving and protecting nature.

The Concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) in Jainism

The ecological philosophy of Jainism is in accord with *Ahimsa* (non-violence). It is the cardinal principle of Jainism, the principle of responsibility and compassion. Mahavira believed that everything has life and also believed in non-violence. Towards the end of his life, he practically avoided eating causing his death by self-starvation. He was also extremely ascetic and walked around completely naked because of his renouncement of life. He said that there is nothing so small and subtle as the atom, nor any element so vast as space. Similarly, there is no quality of soul more subtle than non-violence and no virtue of spirit greater than reverence for life. Jain literature repeatedly instructs us not to injure, abuse, oppress, enslave, insult, torment, torture, or kill any creature or living being. *Ahimsa* literally means 'non-injury to all beings.' *Himsa* means 'destroying the life-forces of a living being' either by oneself, or by urging and forcing others to do it or by approving the act. Therefore, following *ahimsa* results

²⁶ Ibid., p. 44-59.

²⁷ This paper was delivered by N. P. Jain, the former Indian Ambassador to the UN, at a Jain Conference at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Retrieved on 8 January 2023 from https://www.jainsamaj.org/content.php?url=Practice_Before_You_Preach:-By.

²⁸ K. P. Sinha, *The Philosophy of Jainism* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1990), p. 33.

in refraining from these acts of violence. To destroy or injure through negligence or ill-will one or more life-forces on one's own or through others is violence. From this, it follows that to hurt the feelings of others through negligence or ill-will, to insult others, to censure others, to speak ill of others behind their back, to cause fear or mental torture to others, in short, to do wrong to others or to wound their feelings, is violence. Therefore, violence should not be committed in thought, speech, or deed.²⁹ In Jainism, it is not a negative virtue. For the Jainists, *ahimsa* is *Jiva-daya*. *Jiva-daya* is compassion, empathy, and charity described by a great Jain teacher as the "beneficent mother of all beings." *Jiva-daya* means caring for and sharing with all living beings, as well as tending, protecting, and serving them. It entails universal friendliness (*maitri*), universal forgiveness (*kshama*) and universal fearlessness (*abhaya*). It is based upon the positive quality of universal love and compassion. One who follows this ideal cannot be indifferent to the suffering of others. It is to feel oneness with all living beings. Lord Mahavira said, "If you kill someone, it is yourself you kill. If you overpower someone, it is yourself you overpower. If you torment someone, it is yourself you torment. If you harm someone, it is yourself you harm."³⁰ Thus, Jainism emphasizes the fact that all beings are inter-connected and inter-dependent. Harming one being will in turn harm oneself. Hence, to care for the entire being we need to care for the welfare of the entire environment.

A Jain monk moves from village to village barefoot. He does not shave, but removes his hair by plucking it off. He does not take baths, for there is life in water, and the water itself is a living entity. He does not want to hurt anyone; he does not cook, because there is life in fire. He solicits his requirements by visiting several householders but accepts the equivalent of only a few morsels per family just as a honeybee gathers honey. He does not use vehicles, in order to protect the life in particles of dust on the road. His every tissue and texture of life beams with reverence for life, and this is the essence of Jainism. The Jain code of conduct is profoundly ecological. It is generally forbidden to keep animals in captivity, to whip, mutilate, or overload them or to deprive them of adequate food and drink. Domestic animals may be roped, or even whipped occasionally, but always mercifully, with due consideration and without anger. Except for allowing themselves the judicious use of one-sensed life in the form of vegetables, Jains would not consciously take any life for food or sport. They are strict vegetarians, consuming neither meat, nor fish, nor eggs. Jainism expects every Jain to venerate the sanctity of life, whatever that be a clod of earth, a drop of water or a burning charcoal or a branch of a tree. Jains fully respect every form of life, whatever it is or wherever it is. A Jain regards all souls as equal to his own.³¹ Therefore, Jainism emphasizes reverence to all levels of life, whether in the lowest or the highest form.

The Jains practice the vow of *ahimsa* for the following reasons.

1. *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* means that all life is bound together by the mutual support of

²⁹ Nagin J. Sha, *Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, p. 44-45.

³⁰ Christopher Key Chapple, *Jainism and Ecology*. Retrieved on 8 January 2023 from <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780945454342>.

³¹ Nagin J. Sha, *Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 108-113.

interdependence. Lord Mahavira proclaimed a profound ecological truth: 'One, who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water, and vegetation, disregards his own existence which is entwined with them.' Thus, *ahimsa* is based on spiritual and physical symbiosis.

2. *Ahimsa* is closely linked with the Jain concept of *karma*³². The animal's instinctive fear of death when driven to slaughter pens, augmented by the sight and odour of blood, is beyond human imagination. Animals, when being slaughtered, release some hormones in the midst of their struggle for life which are full of pain vibrations and affect the flesh of the animals being slaughtered. The Jains believe that eating such flesh would increase the influx of karmic particles into their souls on account of which they will be perennially chained to bondage.³³

3. Jains believe that everything has a life, and this also includes stones, sand, trees, and every other thing. All souls are alike and potentially divine. None is superior or inferior. There is equality of all living things. Every living soul has the right to expend self-effort to improve itself and should not be stripped of that right.

4. Violence is suicide. Hatred leads to destruction. So, a wise person does not kill, nor cause others to kill, nor consent to killing by others.

5. All living beings long to live. No one wants to die. Just as one dislikes pain, so all other beings dislike pain. Hence, Jainism shows compassion towards all living beings.

6. Jainism has classified all the living beings according to their senses. It is more painful if a life of the higher forms (more than one sense) is killed. Hence, Jainism allows lay people to use only vegetables as a food for survival.

7. As a highly evolved form of life, human beings have a great moral responsibility in their mutual dealings and in their relationship with the rest of the universe. It is this conception of life and its eternal coherence, in which humans have an inescapable ethical responsibility that made the Jain tradition a cradle for the creed of environmental protection and harmony.

8. Practically, it is impossible to survive without killing or injuring some of the smallest living beings. Some lives are killed even when we breathe, drink water, or eat food.³⁴ Therefore, Jainism says that the minimum killing of the lowest form of life should be our ideal for survival. There should be no negligence and carelessness in our activities. All avoidable and unnecessary violence is to be assiduously refrained from. Thus, Jainism propounded rationally convincing arguments for the practice of *ahimsa* in the outlook and treatment of human beings towards other forms of life. Jain saint Acharya Mahaprahnaji has very thoughtfully observed the interconnectedness of the environment as given below:

To establish harmonious coexistence behaviour with birds, animals, insects, earth, water, fire, air and vegetation is for human beings a devoted pursuit of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* comprises in protecting the legacy of nature. The creation of the universe is a mutually supportive web. If a single strand of the divine web is

³² The concept *karma* in Hinduism and Buddhism means the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence viewed as deciding their fate in future existence.

³³ P. S. Jain and R. M. Lodha, *Medieval Jainism: Culture and Environment* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1990), p. 118.

³⁴ Nagin J. Sha, *Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 114.

touched, it would sensitize the entire web. All the animate as well as inanimate elements in the universe are inter-linked precisely as pearls in a chain.³⁵

Mahaprahajai's words make human beings aware of the inter-dependence of human beings on nature and instil the consciousness of responsibility to protect nature.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad says, "Jainism has contributed to the world the sublime Doctrine of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). No other religion has emphasized the importance of *ahimsa* (non-violence) and carried its practice to the extent that Jainism has done. Jainism deserves to be a universal religion because of its doctrine of *Ahimsa* (non-violence)."³⁶ Mahatma Gandhi was very much influenced by the principle of non-violence of Jainism. His favorite prayer echoes Jaina ethics for life on earth: Not for any kingdom do I long; not even for the kingdom of heaven. Not even for freedom from the endless cycle of birth and death; for one and only one thing do I long; to free living beings from their agony and pain, and to wipe away their tears.³⁷ Mahatma Gandhi successfully used the potent instrument of non-violence in the Indian freedom-struggle. It implies that *ahimsa* (non-violence), when properly used, can become a powerful means for the propagation and justification of preserving and protecting all of nature. The farsighted vision regarding the well-being of the environment is very much ingrained in Jain philosophy from its early beginnings. It is very vivid in Mahavira's famous words, "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, fire, air, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them."³⁸ It is a very noble, farsighted vision from the founder of Jainism, which gives importance to nurturing nature and caring for the environment.

Conclusion

Both Buddhism and Jainism are religions promoting values of compassion and concern towards the entire universe. There are various ecological values and principles in both Buddhism and Jainism which emphasize the interdependent and interconnected nature of human beings and the entire universe. Buddhist ecology emphasizes that the entire universe is interdependent, and the harming of nature will eventually harm human beings. Recently the increase in calamities such as floods, global warming, hurricanes, acid rain and so on are the result of human beings' destructive actions towards nature. Hence, Buddhism promotes the value of compassion (*maitiri*) which fosters concern for ecological sustainability and the preservation of nature. Both Buddhism and Jainism consider non-violence (*ahimsa*) as the cardinal virtue of their religions and emphasize kindness towards all beings as core values. Jainism is also an eco-friendly religion. The followers of Jainism are very cautious not to kill any creature purposely; rather, they take utmost care to preserve and protect the life of all

³⁵ N. P. Jain, "Global Relevance of Jain Religion," p. 17.

³⁶ S. Rishabhadas, *Mahavira the Merciful* (Madras: Jaina Institute of Metaphysical Culture, 1974), p. 168.

³⁷ P. S. Jain and R. M. Lodha, *Medieval Jainism: Culture and Environment*, p. 119.

³⁸ N. P. Jain, "Global Relevance of Jain Religion," p. 17.

beings. Thus, almost all the followers of Jainism are vegetarians. The ecological ethics of Jainism aim at the liberation of human beings from their selfish and possessive nature and exhort human beings to conquer and control passions and desires which lead to the destruction of nature. The ethics of Jainism are ecologically sensitive. Both Jainism and Buddhism denounce materialistic or selfish attitudes, emphasizing simple living and the modest consumption of material goods, including the need to preserve and conserve nature. They urge followers to avoid all types of actions injurious to nature and leading to ecological imbalances and environmental crises. The eco-friendly and harmonious principles and practices of both Jainism and Buddhism inspire human beings to envision an interconnected and sustainable world which promotes preserving and protecting all of nature.