

# An Epistemology of Jainism: A Critical Study

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## Introduction

Jainism traditionally known as ‘Jain Dharma’. The word ‘Jain’ derives from Sanskrit word ‘jina’. It means a person who has overpowered his sensual vices and had obtained full control over his worldly desires. Vardhaman Mahavir was the founder of Jainism religion. The aim of Jain life is to achieve liberation of the soul. (Aug 31, 2013) There are three part to liberation: right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. Jainism believes in a cyclical nature of universe. It discourages superstition and blind faith and encourages free and rational thinking.

According to Jainism teaching, knowledge plays an important part in the conception of soul. Jain epistemology thus becomes vital in Jain philosophy.



Fig.1 Representation of Jina

(Source: <http://www.hinduwebsite.com/SudhirMShah/jainism>)

## Research Problem/ Objective

The main objective of this paper is to identify the main characteristics of epistemology in Jainism religion.

## Methodology

Research methodology used in the study was largely based on qualitative approach which analyses the relevant documentary sources from books, journals and web sites relating to this area. A descriptive research design with survey method was applied in this study.

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## Defining Jainism and Principles of Jainism

Jainism is a religion of self-help: without any outside agency, even God coming to the rescue of the soul. The soul is its own destroyer or liberator. Jain symbols can be shown the following illustrate.

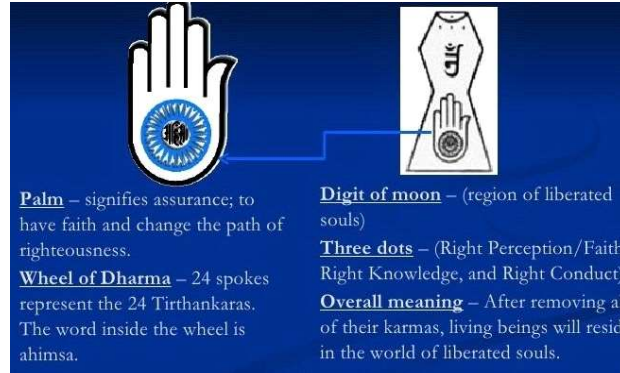


Fig.2 Jain Symbols

(Source: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/SudhirMShah/jainism>)

The Jain religion preaches the doctrines of Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha. It can be explain as follows.

- Ahimsa - Complete avoidance of harm.
- Satya - All living beings are equal.
- Asteya - Speak the truth in a harmless manner.
- Brahmacharya - Avoidance of greed and exploitation Chastity.
- Aparigraha - Monogamy and faithfulness are important Detachment from material things.

## Discussion

Jain beliefs can be identified as follows.

### · All soul are equal

There is (Jiva) even in everyplace. The soul in all worldly living beings. There is no difference in the soul of an ant and that of an elephant, though the very same soul (Atma) takes the form of an ant as well as that of an elephant.

### · Karma

Soul is bound with Karma from eternity. Until a soul is free of Karma bondage, there will be no liberation or Moksha. One must suffer or enjoy the consequence of bound Karma or must get rid of that Karma by austerity, penance or other desirable things. (Feb 29, 2016) It is shown by the following draft.

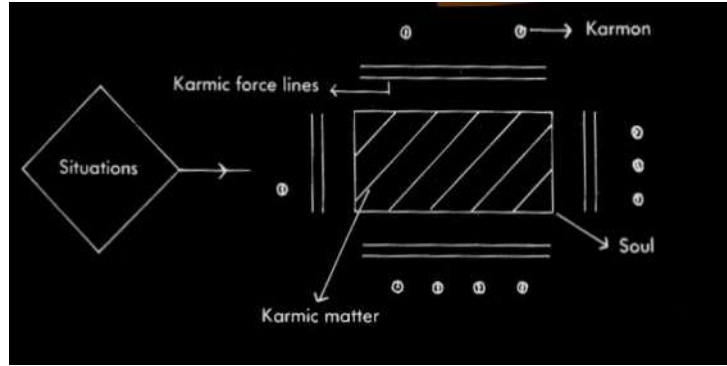


Fig.3 Analogy of Karma

(Source: <http://www.slideshare.net/SudhirMShah/jainism>)

## Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge)

According to the Jaina theory of knowledge, knowledge divided into two parts.

- Valid Knowledge
- Fallacious Knowledge

There are five means of knowledge in Jainism as Mati, Sruthi, Avadhi, Manaparyaya and Kevala. The first two kinds of knowledge are regarded as indirect knowledge and remaining three as direct knowledge. Of them the first three are imperfect means of knowledge and while the last two are perfect means of knowledge and convey the truth without error. The types of knowledge can be explained as follows.

- Mati - Mati is the knowledge of the mind gained through senses.
- Sruthi - When learn something from other sources, other people or beings, through the observation of signs, symbols or words, we call it sruthignana or the knowledge of sruthi or hearing.
- Avadhi - This is direct knowledge beyond the boundaries of your ordinary awareness.
- Manaparyaya - This knowledge is gained through the reading of others' minds and thoughts.
- Kevala - This is the highest knowledge called truth knowledge.

The three fallacious knowledge are the fallacious forms of Mati, Sruthi and Avadhi.

## The Doctrine of Nayavada and Syadvada

According to Jaina Philosophy the object of knowledge consist of substance, qualities and modifications. The ordinary human being apprehension of reality is partial and it is valid only from a particular point of view known as Naya. There can be a number of nayas as Paryaya naya, Dravya naya, Vyavahara-naya and Nischaya-naya.

It is not enough if various problems about reality are merely understood from different points of view. What one knows one must be able to state truly and correctly. While describing a thing seven possible statements can be made in the following way.

- Syad asti - in some respects, it is;
- Syad nasti - in some respect, it is not;
- Syad asti nasti - in some respect, it is and it is not;
- Syad avaktavya - in some respect, it is indescribable;
- Syad asti avaktavya - in some respect, it is not and is indescribable;
- Syad nasti avaktavya - in some respect, it is not and is indescribable
- Syad asti nasti avaktavya - in some respect, it is and is not and is indescribable.

## **Conclusion**

Jainism is growing and the Jain community is expanding in surprising ways. The Jain epistemology can be found to be quite consistent with its metaphysics, ethics and philosophy of soul. Epistemology in Jainism is a still critical doctrine in India which have discussed several different prevailing views.

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