

Kshamavani: Celebrating Forgiveness

Prof. Dr. Veenus Jain

Amity Institute of Social Sciences
Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract: The ‘Das Lakshan Parva’ or ‘Paryushan’ is a ten day long festival celebrated annually by Digamber Jains for self purification and uplift. Das Lakshan means ten virtues which are the bed – rock of Jain ethics. The festival is marked by a cheerful observance of Uttama Kshama (Supreme Forgiveness), Uttama Aarjava (Supreme Honesty or Straight Forwardness), Uttama Mardava (Supreme Humility or Tenderness), Uttama Satya (Supreme Truthfulness), Uttama Shaucha (Supreme Purity), Uttama Sanyam (Supreme Self-Restraint), Uttama Tapa (Supreme Penance or Austerity), Uttama Tyaga (Supreme Renunciation), Uttama Akinchanya (Supreme Non-Attachment or Detachment) and Uttama Brahmacharya (Supreme Chastity or Celibacy). It is believed that the strict adherence to these virtues puts us on the road to our ultimate destination i.e. salvation. This ten day long festival is followed by celebration of forgiveness known as Kshamavani. The unique feature of Jainism i.e. celebration of virtues and forgiveness and its impact on society and globe has been highlighted in this paper.

Keywords – Das Lakshan, Paryushan, Uttama, Kshama, Adherence, Kshamavani.

Introduction

Jainism believes in the right faith, right knowledge, right conduct, non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, non-adultery, non-acquisition of wealth, amity, appreciation, compassion, equanimity, forgiveness, humility, straightforwardness, purity of mind, control of senses, mercy, penance, renunciation, greedless, chastity, respect for other's viewpoints, etc. In addition to that, Jainism has advocated for all the best virtues required for peace and harmony for all living beings. Furthermore, it emphasizes on non-materialistic requirements for liberation of soul from the cycle of birth and death. Jainism has thought of every possible situation in life that has elaborately analyzed them and has guided its followers of all categories towards the righteous path.

Das Lakshan Parv

The Daslakshan (ten virtues) Parva or the Festival of ten virtues is celebrated by Digambar Jains annually for self-purification and soul upliftment. This parva ultimately leads us to our true destination i.e., salvation. All Digambar Jains celebrate the Dash Lakshan Parva for ten days. It is the festival for observance of ten universal virtues -

1. Uttama Kshama (Supreme Forgiveness) - To observe tolerance whole-heartedly shuns anger.

2. Uttama Mardava (Tenderness or Humility) - To observe the virtue of humility subduing vanity and passions.
3. Uttama Aarjava (Straight Forwardness or Honesty) - To practice a deceit-free conduct in life by vanquishing the passion of deception.
4. Uttama Shaucha (Contentment or Purity) - To keep the body, mind and speech pure by discarding greed.
5. Uttama Satya (Truthfulness) - To speak affectionate and just words with a holy intention causing no injury to any living being.
6. Uttama Sanyam (Self-Restraint) - To defend all living beings with utmost power in a cosmopolitan spirit abstaining from all pleasures provided by five senses - touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. Also, overcoming the five senses with an understanding of the purpose of life through the sixth-sense.
7. Uttama Tapa (Penance or Austerities) - To practice austerities putting a check on all worldly allurements.
8. Uttama Tyaga (Renunciation) - To give fourfold charities - Ahara (food), Abhaya (fearlessness), Aushadha (medicine) and Shastra Dana (distribution of Holy Scriptures), and to patronize social and religious institutions for self and other uplifts.
9. Uttama Akinchanya (Non-Attachment or Detachment) - To enhance faith in the real self as against non-self i.e., material objects and to discard internal Parigraha viz. anger and pride; and external Parigraha viz. accumulation of gold, diamonds, and royal treasures.
10. Uttama Brahmacharya (Chastity or celibacy) - To observe the great vow of celibacy; to have devotion for the inner soul and the omniscient Lord; to discard the carnal desires, vulgar fashions, child and old-age marriages, dowry dominated marriages, polygamy, criminal assault on ladies, use of foul and vulgar language.

This ten day long celebration of virtues is followed by celebration of forgiveness known as Kshamavani. It is on this day all followers offer prayers to seek the virtue of forgiveness. They forgive everyone and seek forgiveness from everyone.

Kshamavani

The word Kshama means patience, forbearance and pardon. '*Kshama virasey bhushanam*' - Forbearance is the ornament of the brave. Forbearance (Kshama) is the inherent virtue of soul. It is when the soul degrades from its real attributes to ill-nature; such a soul is called attached (raagi) or full of malice ill-will (dwaish) etc. The reason being soul is simple and forgiving by nature. It has been rightly said: 'To err is human; to forgive divine'. Discarding anger and getting stable in one's real nature is Kshama. Moreover, Kshama is soul's inherent wealth, which is being endowed with this real wealth and this living being (jeeva) is called forbearing in disposition. The conduct of a man, who does not get the least enraged even on finding obvious reasons for exciting anger, is in keeping with Kshamavani. To forgive one with evil perception (Mithya-Drasthi) or him / her who utters unpleasant words and makes efforts to cause anguish

and torture without any reason is the first category of Kshama. In addition to this, to pardon one who nourishes thoughts of oppressing and killing with no reason is the second category of Kshama. The term '*Kshamti iti Kshama*' is the one who practices forgiveness (Kshama) under all odds is entitled as possessor of virtue of forgiveness. In furtherance, *Krodhotpatinimita visimakroshadisambhave kalushyoparam Kshama* emphasizes Kshama as not to develop malice or ill-will despite, confronting with unbearable causes of anger like defiance, chiding and bodily torture. It has been well said; "The easiest and cheapest way of avenging an offence is to slight it, ignore it, forbear it, 'forgive it or if possible to forget it.'" While describing the true nature of Kshama, it has been stated that:

*Shrirsithitihetumargarth parkulanyugachhti bhikshordushtjnakroshprhstavgyatadn
Shrir vyapadnadinan snnidhane kalushyanutpti kshma*¹

Even when ill-natured persons heap abuses, ridicules, disgrace and beatings on the monks, who enter other regions to discover the cause of real state of body and indulge in twisting and torturing their body, the non-appearance of ill-will in these monks' minds is referred to as Kshama. This very thing has been said in this commenting remark of 'Niam-Saar'², which indicated to remain stable in supreme equanimitous thoughts on getting threat of being killed by persons given to evil perception (Mithya-Drasthi) for no reason, considering oneself formless Parma Brahma is Kshama. This has been attributed through the following couplet:

*Kokilanam swarorupam, narirupam pativrata, Vidyarupam kuruparan, Kshama rupam
tapasvinam*', which refers to emblem of a nightingale is her own melody; the emblem of a lady is her chastity, the emblem of wretched is their ignorance and the emblem of ascetics is forgiveness. The following memorable words are worth noting: "Humanity is never more beautiful than when praying for forgiveness or else forgiving another." Moreover, *Ya kshamyati kshamopyasu pratikatum kritagasa, Kritagasam tamichhanti shantipyushsanjush*³ refers to persons who observe Kshama towards those, who commit crimes against them even on being capable of quick retaliation are regarded by saints as drinking the nectar of forbearance (Kshama-Amrit) to be the destroyers of sins. Thus, noble persons should think as though, "I have committed no crime against him, even then this man or woman is showering his / her anger over me, abusing me; I am innocent. In considering Kshama, I must pardon him. He / she has accused me, yet no harm comes out of it to me. On the contrary I must take pity on him / her, in spite of he / she being angry; because this poor human being is reaping sins by falsely accusing me. This sin will bring him or her innumerable sufferings. He / she has only abused me and not beaten. Even if he / she had beaten me, then it must be thought that he / she has not

¹ Acharya Pujya Pad Swamy, 'Sarvarth Siddhi'.

² Jain Sri Maganlal & Shah Sri Himmatlaal Jethalaal, Sri Niam Saar, 1906, Online at <http://www.dli.ernet.in/handle/2015/495174>

³ Atmanushasan (Sanskrit - Hindi), Bhadant Gunabhara Suri, Hindi Exposition by Pt. Ashadharji, Ed. by Siddhantacharya & Pt. Phoolchandra Shastri, Shri Ganesh Varni Digamber Jain Sansthan, Varanasi; 1st Edition, 1983.

wounded me; on being wounded it must be thought that he / she has not parted body from life; even if he / she had parted the body, then one must understand that he / she has not harmed my Kshama virtue. One who thinks in this or bears miseries befallen on him / her with forbearance (Kshama) then no troubles and misfortunes will visit him again”. It is like ‘Just as the time of repaying debts one has to return the money of money lender. Similarly, one must understand that, I have committed sins in my previous birth and now I am reaping their fruits in the form of sorrow, which is proper and even if I suffer it with a spirit of forbearance, I shall be happy on getting rid of the debt of my sins.’⁴ This thinking process leads to a state that no anger should be displayed.

The ornament of a man or woman is his / her nature; the ornament of nature is virtue; the ornament of virtue is knowledge, the ornament of knowledge is forgiveness (Kshama). It has been said:

*Narasyabharan rupam, rupasyabharan guna,
Gunrsyabharan gyanam, gyanasyabharan Kshama*

Whenever the saints endowed with forbearance perform repentance (pratikraman) and meditation (Samayika), they read the following couplet:

Khamami savjivarnam, save jiva khamantu me miti me sav bhuteshu, veram majham rn kernvi

The saints beg pardon of all living beings right from one sensed (Aikendriya) i.e. having only one sense of touch, to five sensed beings (Panchindriya) and pray, “All living beings may forgive me; I should cherish friendly feelings for all; I bear no ill-will for anyone.” There is a wise and saintly saying; ‘Revenge is a kind of wild justice’⁵. Hence, Pardon all thy oppressors and enemies.

Suggestion

The ‘Kshama’ concept is a path to enlightenment in the Jain philosophy in its virtues. This may be practiced at work places to curb the ill-will acts and vested behaviours leading to dissociation. The future researchers may conduct a study on applicability of this virtue in professional domains for a wider understanding of possibilities of growth and prospects of workforces. Also, a comparative historical perspective on its practices through an ex-post facto research may throw newer dimensions of this Dharma.

Conclusion

The ten-day celebrations pertaining to the ten universal supreme virtues culminate in the practical observance of Annual Forbearance function. During these celebrations every Jain daily devotes most of his time in prayer and worship getting rid of mundane duties of practical life.

⁴ Jain Square, 2011, Jain Stories, Online at: <http://jainsquare.in/2011/04/page/3/>

⁵ Bacon Francis, (1561–1626). Essays, Civil and Moral, The Harvard Classics, 1909–14.

The celebrations extend from the 5th day of the bright half of the holy month of 'Bhadrapad' to the 14th day, which is the last day and fast day. This Das Lakshan Parv is followed by Kshamavani i.e., the celebration of forgiveness. On this sacred day every member of Jain community approaches his or her kith and kin, neighbor, colleague and co-worker in office, business and industry irrespective of his / her caste, creed and clan. He / she beg pardon of them for all faults or mistakes committed knowingly or unknowingly. He or she confesses his / her errors and apologizes for these to every compatriot and every follower of his / her own religion or other religions. Thus, he / she feels relieved of heavy burden hanging on his / her head of the sins of previous years. Henceforth, the person starts social life afresh living together in love and peace with all, following the noble principle of peaceful co-existence. In truth, on this auspicious day, the Jains dedicate themselves heart and soul to submit to their popular slogan 'Live and Let Live'. Thus, they give expression to their feeling that all creatures in the world are equal, endowed with same soul and aspire for peace and happiness. Indeed, this annual function is not only a mere traditional ritual, but also a first step on the path to attain liberation or salvation - the final goal of every human's life.