

Fourteen Stages of Spiritual Development in Jaina Philosophy

Nu Nu Lwin

Abstract

It is an attempt to answer the question: At which stage can one be called an *ariya* in Jainism? According to the literary survey, the twelfth stage at which one can be categorized as *ariya* in Jainism. To clarify these facts it will use the Descriptive Method and Evaluative Method. This paper can contribute to ones to have knowledge with regard to Jaina views on the attributes or qualities of one's mind who is practicing the path to liberation from *Samsara*.

Key Words: (1) *Gunathanas*

(2) *Visuddhi*

(3) *Ariyas*

Introduction

Jaina philosophy formulated the message of deliverance from suffering. In Jainism, to attain the liberation is to practice by way of asceticism in which the principles of non-violence and austerity or penance play an important role. In the *Heart of Jainism*, it is stated that 'It is owing to *Ajñāna* (ignorance) and when the soul by means of austerities and good actions has got rid of *Ajñāna*, it attains omniscience and remembers all the births it has undergone and all that happened in them.' It clearly indicates the Jaina belief that only through ascetic practice one could attain purity of mind and arrive at the path for liberation. For Jainism, the path has fourteen stages for spiritual development to attain liberation (*Moksha*).

According to the Jain literatures, there are fourteen stages for spiritual development to be passed to reach into the realm of liberation. They are as follows:

1. *Mitthyatva Gunasthāna*
2. *Sasadan Gunasthāna*
3. *Misra Gunasthāna*
4. *Avirat Samyaktva Gunasthāna*
5. *Deshvirat Gunasthāna*
6. *Pramatta Sanyat Gunasthāna*
7. *Apramatta Sanyat Gunasthāna*
8. *Apuravakaran Gunasthāna*
9. *Anivritti Karan Gunasthāna*
10. *Sukshama Sampraya Gunasthāna*
11. *Upshant Kashay Gunasthāna*

12. *Kshina Kashay Gunasthāna*
13. *Sayogkevali Jin Gunasthāna*
14. *Ayogkevali Jin Gunasthāna*²

1. *Mitthyatva Gunasthāna* – The stage of having only false view

The word *Mitthyatva* means untrue, perverse, false or contradictory. Thus, Jainism stated that 'Those who have no faith in substances such as the nature of the souls are on the stage of *Mitthyatva Gunasthān*. At this stage the soul does not have correct faith in spiritual experience as well as faith in God, the scripture and the monk. Jainism believes that at this lowest stage the soul is influenced by *karma* completely and thus it does not know the truth. This belief is stated in a Jaina *Sloka* (Jains' Sanskrit verse) that ' As a man blind from birth is not able to say what is ugly and what is beautiful, a man on the *Mitthyatva Gunasthāna* cannot determine what is real and what is false. According to Jainism, a soul at this stage makes mistakes and many souls, which have no ability to improve, never come out of this stage. Jainism assumes that irrational animals having one to five-sensed are in this class of beings.

2. *Sasadan Gunasthāna* – The stage having a little knowledge to distinguish between right and wrong

Jainism stated that when the soul wandering in *Samsāra* loses some of its crudeness and ignorance, it attains the state which is called *Granthibheda*. The soul reaches this state when it begins to distinguish a little between what is right and what is wrong. So, in this stage of *Sasadan Gunasthāna* the soul knows a distinction between right and wrong. However, the soul is unable to follow the right one due to weakness of memory. According to the belief of Jainism, the rational beings with five-sensed are beings at this stage.

3. *Misra Gunasthāna* – The mixed stage of right and wrong belief

Jainism stated that in this stage the soul of man's condition is uncertain. The soul has correct faith and incorrect faith as well. At one moment the soul knows the right but the next moment it doubts again. It statesd that no one will die in this stage of mixed condition, but will either slip back to the second step or proceed onward to the fourth step and that in this stage the developed rational activities of all types can be found.

4. *Avirat Samyaktva Gunasthāna* – The stage at which the souls lack diligence to keep vows

According to Jainism, due to the influence of his past good *karma* or by the teaching of his *guru* the soul of the man has right faith. A famous *Sloka* said thus: 'Liking for principles preached by *Jina* is called right faith, it is derived either from nature or from knowledge given by the *guru*.'

But the soul is still unable to observe the rules of conduct which is called *Anuvirati* (Small Vows) and *Mahavirat* (Great Vows). So, this stage is called *Aviratisanyagdristi Gunasthāna* (the stage of lacking diligence to keep the vows). Because of the right faith a man understands the intrinsic nature of the soul. Failure to keep vows man cannot destroy all bad *karma* sticking to the soul, thus its spiritual development necessarily falls back to the second stage through the third stage. But at this stage, according to the belief of Jainism, the soul knows five good things: the ability to control anger, the knowledge that the world is evil, and that since it is a place in which one has to reap the fruits of one's own *karma*, one should have little affection for it, i.e., *Samvega*: the soul realizes that his family and properties do not belong to him; and that he must try to relieve anyone who is in trouble; lastly he gets complete faith in all the victorious *Jina*. Jainism believes

² <http://www.jainpushp01@yahoo.com/>*The Fourteen Stages in Jainism*, Nemichandra Acharya.2010.

that due to lack of abstinence the soul cannot abandon harming to moving and non-moving living beings.

5. *Deshvirat Gunasthāna* – The stage at which the soul observes twelve vows

According to the belief of Jainism at the fifth stage which is called *Deshvirati Gunasthāna* the soul realizes the great importance of conduct and it can take the twelve vows which are the set of restraints prescribed for Jaina laymen. Staying at the fifth stage, the soul may progress to a stage that is a little higher. The soul makes effort to make money only in blameless ways. A famous *Sloka* (a couplet of *Sanskrit* verse) described thus: 'One must worship God, serve the *guru*, study the scripture, control the senses, perform austerities and give alms.' Moreover, the soul may advance to *Utkrista deshvirati* (The set of restraints prescribed for a Jaina layman), eating only once a day, keeping complete chastity leaving the society even of his own wife, eating nothing that possesses life and finally deciding to become a *sādu*. The soul begins to observe the rules of conduct in order to abstain from killing or injuring moving creatures. But it cannot accept to become monkhood in that it cannot abstain from killing or harming to non-moving creatures. Jainism states that at this stage moderate anger, deceit, pride and greed are controlled and sometimes destroyed.

6. *Pramatta Sanyat Gunasthāna* – Total restraint without overcoming carelessness in walking, sitting etc.

The sixth step is called *Pramatta Sanyat Gunasthāna*, which can only be ascended by the professed ascetic. At this stage the soul gets more purity than that of the fifth stage. Even slight passions can be controlled or destroyed, and only certain carelessness remains. A *Magadhi Sloka* (*Sanskrit* verse using language spoken some areas of India) described that- 'these five *Pramāds* (carelessness)-pride, enjoyment of the senses, passion, sleep and gossip- torment the soul in this world.' In this stage it is stated that purity of thought process is working.

Furthermore, the Jainas believe that 'if a soul is to mount the next step, he must never indulge any of these for more than forty-eight minutes at a time; if he does, he will not mount, but on the contrary will descend to the lowest step of all'.³

7. *Apramatta Sanyat Gunasthāna* – The stage of restraint not corrupted by carelessness

At the seventh step, *Apramatta Sanyat Gunasthāna* anger is either absolutely inactive or actually destroyed, and only a slight degree of pride,deceit and greed remains. In this stage the process of thinking does not occur. Since the bad qualities which lead to sleep are absent, the soul's power of meditation increases, and lastly it is free from all carelessness. It is stated that the soul is going up and down between the sixth stage and the seventh stage.

8. *Apuravakaran Gunasthāna* – The stage at which the soul feels joy that he had never experienced throughout one's life

Among the Digambasra Jains some say that women can only mount as high as the fifth stage; others believe that they can reach the eighth step, which is called *Niyatibādara Gunasthāna*. This eighth step is also called the *Apuravakarana*, because the man who has arrived at this step experiences such joy as he has never experienced throughout his life. Jainism stated that both anger and pride do not occur either for the short term or forever at this step. A man at this stage increased his powers of meditation by *Yoga*, and it loosens the fetters of *karma* within a short time.

³ Mrs Sinclair Stevenson.(1915). *The Religious Quest of India: The Heart of Jainism*. (J.N. Farquhar & H.D. Griswold (trans)). New York: Oxford University Press. Op. Cit., P. 188.

Consequently, the man attains freedom from deceit at this stage, and he becomes a person who has no sexual desire and practice as well. But before he became an ascetic he encountered the great difficulty for he is worried by the recollections of what he did and saw.

9. *Anivritti Karan Gunasthāna* –The stage of suppressing certain *mohaniya karmas*

The soul at this stage by the contemplation becomes quiet the twenty types of *Mohaniya Karma* (*karma* which makes one to be ignorant person) or destroys them and the thirteen of the *Namkarma* (*karma* that determines lineage and community). According to the belief of Jainism, the one who arrived at this step do not create opportunity for life producing *karmic* matter.

10. *Sukshama Sampraya Gunasthāna* – The stage at which the soul remains only subtle greed

According to the belief of Jainism, the tenth step, *Suksmasampraya Gunasthāna* is reached only by the highly developed ascetic. The ascetic always tries to destroy all kinds of *karmas* or to become quiet of them. At this stage only subtle greed in the mind of ascetic remains which needs to be removed. According to the belief of Jainism, those who manage entirely to annihilate all hints of greed will pass straight to the twelfth stage, although others have to halt at the eleventh step.

11. *Upshant Kashay Gunasthāna* – The stage at which all passions become inoperative

According to the doctrine of Jainism, when a person has reached the eleventh stage which is also called *Upasantanaha Gunasthāna*, he has reached a really important position. At this stage he destroys the remaining subtle greed and it becomes extinct to some degree. It is for him unsafe status, for he may fall back to either the sixth or seventh step, even to the lowest. However, if he can destroy it successfully, he becomes an *Anuttaravāsi Deva* and knows that he will become a *Sidda* after he has experienced one more rebirth as a man.

12. *Kshina Kashay Gunasthāna* – The stage of the soul's permanent dissociation from all *Karmas* and passions

The souls that have destroyed all passions completely and arrived at perfect detachment with the complete eradication of all the *karmas* reach this stage which is called *Kshina Kashay Gunasthāna*. The duration is at most forty-eight minutes. The saints with perfect conduct at this stage have annihilated the *Mohaniya Karma* and the remaining destructive *karmas*. Consequently, they have cessation and subsidence of karmic veil. They will destroy the remaining *karma* within forty-eight minutes. They get freedom forever from greed as well as from all the *ghatin karma* (life producing *karma*). The Degambara Jains believe that at this stage the first two factors of 'Pure Contemplation' are developed. According to Jainism, a soul, at death, passes immediately through thirteenth and fourteenth stage. After that it enters *moksha* immediately.

13. *Sayogkevali Jin Gunasthāna* – The stage at which the saint has activities of body, mind, and speech that cannot attract any *karmas*

Jainism stated that if a saint who reaches the thirteenth stage which is called *Sayogakevalin Jin Gunasthāna* preaches, and forms a community or *tirtha*, he becomes a *Tirthankara*. The soul has driven out the ignorance together with the rise of omniscience and attained Godhood. He first,

according to Degambara, obtains eternal wisdom, illimitable insight, everlasting happiness and unbounded skill. When the day of liberation comes, he tries to acquire the third factors of 'Pure Concentration'. Here, Pure Concentration in Jainism is as follows: 'The four factors of Pure Concentration are absorption in the different attribute of the soul, absorption in one aspect of the soul, concentrated upon the subtlest movements in the soul, and total absorption of the soul in itself.'⁴

14. *Ayogkevali Jin Gunasthāna* – The stage at which the saint has no activities

Jainism stated that the last factor of pure concentration follows when the fourteenth step is ascended. The moment a man reaches the fourteenth stage, all his *karmas* are purged away, and he proceeds at once to *moksha* as a *Siddha*. After the *Tirthankara* passes to the fourteenth step he has no interest in people and the soul leaves his body. This is called *Nirvāna* and after that the soul reaches *moksha*.

According to Jainism, a soul passes from stage to stages and gains the three jewels, and due to which he is sure to be *Siddha*. *Moksha* or *Siddhasila* in Jainism is the place where the liberated souls, *Siddhas* dwell forever. Although Jainism stated that it is located on the top of the universe no one can know where it is exactly.

Conclusion

According to the belief of Jainism, the soul at the first stage cannot distinguish right and wrong due to the influences of past *karmas*. For those who are born at this stage, it will be of great difficulty to uplift their spiritual faculty in accordance with its view. Moreover, Jainism states, the soul at the fourth stage cannot observe the vows even though they have complete faith to *Jinas* (who conquer the passion and suffering) and unfortunately, he can fall down to the second stage. Only the soul at the fifth stage can observe twelve vows lay down for laypersons and can make decision to become *sādu*. But he cannot accept monkhood since he cannot refrain from killing unmovable souls or *jivas*: earth, water, fire, air and plants etc. According to the belief of Jainism, to refrain from killing unmovable souls is the great obstacle for lay persons to follow its method.

Jainism stated that the soul at the sixth stage can follow the path of ascetic life which leads to liberation from world of sufferings. However it stated that the soul remains careless at this stage. Compare to Buddhism, it might be said that it is similar to Access Concentration in Buddhism. For Jainism, the soul at the seventh stage of spiritual development has no process of thinking. At this stage 'the soul frees from carelessness' means to observe mindfully in walking, sitting, lifting and laying and excreting etc., in order to avoid harming minute beings. So, it is radically different from mindfulness in Buddhism in this aspect. Again, the statement 'the soul is going up and down between sixth and seventh stage' indicates that the mind has not reached the state of full absorption. Moreover, Jainism stated that 'the soul at this stage experiences the joy that he had never experienced before'. This is similar to a stage of having higher degree of concentration in Buddhism

⁴ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore. (1957), *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton.p.260.

because it says that anger and pride do not occur to the soul, it does not say that they are completely destroyed.

Jainism stated that the soul at the ninth stage does not create opportunity for life *karmic* matter. At the tenth stage the soul has subtle greed only and can destroy this subtle greed, it can pass through to the twelfth stage. Otherwise, it stops at the eleventh stage. However, Jainism stated that from this eleventh stage the soul can fall down to the sixth or seventh or the lowest stage in which one cannot observe any vows. Only if the soul can destroy this subtle greed successfully, he becomes an *Anuttaravāsi Deva* and knows that he will become a *Siddha* (liberated soul) after he has experienced one more rebirth as a man. It may be concluded that according to the belief of Jainism the event — falling into the lowest otherwise ascending to the highest — is similar to one who attained a highest degree in mundane superpower concentration that may fall back into ordinary state like in Buddhism.

In Jainism, the soul at the twelfth stage is quite similar, by appearances, to the state of non-returner (*anāgāmi*) in Buddhism, who will be reborn only in the pure abode and not be reborn in this world. Afterward he will enter *parinibbāna*. In the twelfth stage, Jainism stated, the soul is free from all *karmas*. So, he passes up to the fourteenth stage and becomes *Tirthankara*. Afterward the soul enters *Moksha* where all *siddhas* dwell forever. However, one needs to analyze the descriptions 'When the day of liberation approaches, the soul tries to acquire the three factors of Pure Concentration' and 'The last factor of Pure Concentration follows when the soul reaches the fourteenth stage'. In Jainism the object of the contemplation is the soul and hence it is no doubt that it is a sort of *samatha* concentration which can lead a kind of *arūpa Brahma* world and not *Nibbāna*. Out of these four kinds of *arūpa jhāna samatha* concentration, the object of the second *arūpa jhāna* is boundless consciousness as meditation subject that is similar to the Pure Contemplation in Jainism. According to the Buddhist literature, *Arūpa Brahma* is one who has only consciousness and no body and hence formless. In Jainism, it is also stated that *siddha*, the liberated soul is also formless and has only infinite consciousness. In accordance with these facts, it can be concluded that *siddha* in Jaina philosophy is not different from the one who abides in the *Arūpa Brahma* world stated in the Buddhist philosophy. Moreover, Jainism stated that after death the soul reaches the *Moksha* where located at the top of the universe, the place for liberated souls (*Siddha*).

In the Buddha's philosophy, in relation with *Nibbāna* it is stated thus: 'If a tree inclining towards the east, sloping towards the east, bending towards the east were uprooted, it would fall to the side to which it was inclining, towards it was sloping, towards which it was bending'. It is natural that a trunk of the big tree bending towards the east would fall down towards the east when its roots perish. So also in Jainism, it is stated that in the thirteenth and fourteenth stage of spiritual development, before passing away, a saint has to concentrate upon the infinite attribute of the soul or consciousness that is similar to the meditation object practiced for second *arūpa Jhāna* in Buddhist philosophy. It will bring him to the respective realm in line with *arūpa Jhāna* he possessed as stated in Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha also gave a logical analogy that although the one who takes a poison with a sense of medicine it will not lead him to release from suffering. So also in Jainism, although the one who contemplate the soul with a sense of liberation, it will not

bring him to be freed from suffering although liberation in Jainism refers to a realm of the soul that is assumed to be eternal.

According to the belief of Jainism, the highest spiritual development cannot be reached by laypersons while, in Buddhism, liberation can be attained by laypersons and even the children whose ages are about seven or eight. By analyzing the stages of spiritual development in Jainism one can see that the one who attains the liberation is called *siddha*, the soul that dwells in *siddhasila* (the world of liberated souls). So, it leads to the doctrine of the soul (*atta*) whose existence cannot be proved by the Jains themselves.

According to literary survey, the twelfth stage in Jainism is categorized as *ariya* as in Buddhism. In Jainism, however, the liberation can be attained after passing the fourteenth stage (the last stage), i.e., after the death of the saint whereas the one at the last stage (of the seventh stage) attains liberation and can be categorized as *ariya*, depending on the purification of defilements, in Buddhism.

In accordance with the principles of Jainism, no one can live without causing any harm to them. Only the one who practices severe asceticism can reduce these harmful acts. So, it is very difficult to practise the method of Jainism for ordinary people in mundane life. This paper can contribute to ones to have knowledge with regard to Jaina views on the attributes or qualities of one's mind accepted in Jainism in order to make analogical study with others' philosophical views, especially Buddhist view on liberation.

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Online Resources

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moksha\(Jainism\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moksha(Jainism))
2. http://www.jainpushp01@yahoo.com/The_Fourteen_Stages_in_Jainism, Nemichandra Acharya.2010.

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ဂျိန်းဒဿန၏စိတ်အဆင့်ဆင့်မြင့်တက်ခြင်း

နုနုလွင်

စာတမ်းအကျဉ်း

ဤစာတမ်းသည် ဂျိန်းဝါဒ၏ဘဝသံသရာမှ လွတ်မြောက်ရေးကျင့်စဉ်၌ မည်သည့်အဆင့်တွင် အရိယာဟု ခေါ်ဆိုနိုင်သနည်းဟူသော ပြဿနာကိုဖြေရှင်းရန်ကြိုးပမ်းမှု တစ်ခုဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ဂျိန်းစာပေများကို လေ့လာမှုအရ ဂျိန်းဘာသာအယူဝါဒတွင် ဘဝသံသရာမှလွတ်မြောက်ရန် ကျင့်ကြံရာတွင် စိတ်အဆင့်ဆင့်မြင့်မားတိုးတက်မှု (၁၄) ဆင့်ရှိသည့်အနက် (၁၂)ဆင့်မြောက်သည် အရိယာဟု ခေါ်ဆိုနိုင်သော အဆင့်ဖြစ်သည်ဟုဆိုရပါမည်။ ဤစာတမ်းသည် ဘဝသံသရာမှ လွတ်မြောက်ရေးလမ်းစဉ်ကို ကျင့်ကြံနေသော ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်၏ စိတ်အရည်အသွေးနှင့် ပတ်သက်သော ဂျိန်း တို့၏ အမြင်ကို ဗဟုသုတ ရရှိစေရန်အထောက်အကူပြုပါသည်။

