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Jain Food and Food Spaces

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Abstract

Religion and food share an interesting relationship. While food is usually dependent on the geographical or regional factor, religion remains the most dominant influence on the food. Jain food illustrates this interconnection. Jains have been known as the trading community. The trading opportunities made the community travel and migrate to different places. The Jains were and have been particular about following dietary restrictions as per the religious injunction. Concept of Jain food has strong basis in the basic principle of Ahiṃsā. (non-harming) The paper explores the Jain food and food spaces created for the same in the historical context.

Keywords: *Jainism, food, Ahiṃsā, religion*

Introduction

Food is the basic necessity for the living beings. Choice or preference for the food depends upon the availability of the food items or eatables. Religion has been one of the most important influences on food. There are a wide range of dietary prescriptions found in Jainism. How Jainism and its principles have shaped the Jain food and have brought about Jain food spaces is explored in this research paper. My paper is divided into two parts, the first section deals with the food from the philosophical and religious perspective. The second part of the paper talks about its implications. Here the lived religion in community and collective paradigm has been investigated.

Ahiṃsā

Jainism has been *Sramana* religion. Self-control (*samyama*) is the central aspect of *Sramana* tradition. *Ahiṃsā* has been central principle of Jainism. One's living should be such that creating less or no disturbance to any other beings. Jains consider earth, water, fire, air, vegetables as living beings apart from animals, birds and human beings. Nature is animated, Animals, plants and elements of earth, water, fire and air consist of elementary individual souls. There is a prohibition of eating food which involves violence to living beings. Jain food is vegetarianism. There is a strong condemnation of taking life for food. (Acharya, 1994) Jains are forbidden to take meat, alcohol and honey. Jain view considers interrelation between food and behaviour. Jainism was instrumental in popularizing vegetarianism. However, the most appropriate description for the Jain food is minimization of violence.

Nonviolence is to be practised by three means- mind, speech and body. There are three levels of non-harming- doing, getting it done, supporting or encouraging any such act. Preparation and eating of food involves *himsā* (violence) and thereby sacredness is not attached to food. Rather this process is sinful.[1] Craving for food is considered an instinct which needs to be controlled and restricted for spiritual progress. Ideally preparation and consumption of food from the perspective of taste has to be avoided. Food should be taken as the rent or for the survival.[2] In that sense, Jain and food are contradictory terms.

Strict and precisely defined vegetarianism is the most important marker of the Jain identity. [3] Jain food particularly stands for not eating root vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, and carrots, to prevent harm to microorganisms and entire plants. These are considered *anant-kay* (infinite-bodied), meaning one plant hosts infinite microscopic lives, and uprooting them causes massive destruction.

Fasting

Fasting (*tapa*) has been considered the most meaningful and central practice of Jainism. *Tapa* is central to the spiritual goal of liberation

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(*moksa)*. The objective behind fasting is to be free from the inauspicious karmas.[4] There are different levels of penance. *Ektana* is taking Jain food for one time before sunset. The person doing *ektana* has to sit at one place and eat at one go. At times *ektanas* are done collectively at religious places. He/ she cannot eat after *ekasana* (one eating/ lunch) is over. During the rest of the day, he can drink boiled water till sunset. He can do *parna* (completion of *ekasana*) after the sunrise of the next day. On some of the festival days or for collective *ektanas* food will be prepared at *Bhojanahalas* attached to *derãsar* or *upãsraya*.

Ayambil

Ayambil is another category of penance. It is penance in which food is supposed to be consumed once before sunset. The person should not consume seven types of *vigaya*. *Vigaya* food is considered to be adding taste to the food. It leads to *pramãd*a (religious lethargy) Special *ayambil* food is prepared for those who do *ayambil.* This is available in *Bhojanahalas* attached to the Jain *derãsar* or upãsraya. At some pilgrim places special *Ayambilshalas* also exist. Serving the food to those doing *Ayambil* is considered a meritorious activity.

Bhojanshalas

Jains have constructed *Bhojanshalas* all over the country. *Bhojanashala* is specially found in *dharmashalas* built by the Jain charities. This is surely found in Jain pilgrim places of idol worship sect. Most *derãsars* and upasrayas also have *Bhojanahalas.* Preparation and serving of the Jain food is the feature of these *Bhojanahalas*. On the festival days the menu as per the prescription of the Jain injections is followed.

***Chouvihar* houses**

Chouvihar stands for eating before sunset and not to consume anything till the next day at sunrise. In contemporary times due to the long working hours it is at times difficult to reach home for dinner before sunset. These *Chouvihar* houses are created for the facilitation of *Chouvihar*. Usually, Chouvihar houses are built in the areas in vicinity of the work spaces of the Jains. These provide the Jain food at the nominal rate.

Jain Sanatoriums (aarogyadhams)

Jain sanatoriums (Aarogyadhams) are established by different Jain communities. These provide charitable accommodation facilities, often located in hill stations or pilgrimage sites like Matheran, Lonavala, Nashik, and Mumbai. They provide clean, budget-friendly lodging, frequently offering *satvik* food (Jain diet).

Jain Gruh Udyog - Jain Gruh Udyog are the food shops particularly catering to the sale of the Jain food items. Many or most of these may be connected or linked to pilgrim places or *derãsars* and *upãsrayas*. Here the snacks and food items are prepared in the Jain manner. Food products are sold at reasonable rates. Some of these Jain Gruh Udyogs have gained popularity for certain food items even among the population other than the Jains. Though the focus in the discussion is on the food items, the economic gains of the community are also equally impressive.

Jain ethos -In terms of food practices Jainism being crystallised out of a Hindu matrix, has many features in common with the Hindu ethos.[5] In modern times the Jain version of food items is being served at many places. Hotels, food stores, canteens have been preparing and serving Jain food. Even tours particularly to foreign countries feature the serving of Jain food. In recent times *Ayambil* is seen as a detox and diet exercise.

Doctrine of Karma

The Doctrine of Karma is the central guiding principle of Jainism. According to the principle of Karma, every action has its consequences. The Jain world view does not adhere to the God centered world. Hence the food is not seen as offering to god or as *prasad.* However, providing the suitable food to the monks and nuns has been the most important concern for the Jain laymen and laywomen. In fact, this interconnection has been responsible for the preservation of the strict Jain ethos in the Jain households.

Conclusion

Food habits are a major reflex of cultural evolution. In line with the Indian ethos and the Jain perspective too, the food is one of the decisive factors influencing the behaviour of the person. Field study of the Jain food spaces indicate, for the Jains the food and spiritual

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destiny is strongly linked. Due to dietary restrictions, Jainism is often referred to as the Kitchen religion. Jain food spaces also reflect the economic power of the community.

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