

## Abhaya Dana: Analysis of Dana for Protection from Fear

Dr. Veenus Jain

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

### Abstract

The beliefs of many religious faiths encourage charitable activity by its members. According to Cambridge dictionary, charity means a system of giving money, food or free service to homeless, poor and needy. In general, charity organization is defined as voluntary organizations into selfless service to people ill, poor, homeless or any organization that has the purpose of providing monetary support for their living. The reason and origin of this encouragement varies from one group to another, though there are similarities in the basis for charitable giving. It is a significant fact that charity has been advocated as a virtue by all religions. The Jain scriptures have laid down a well thought process of giving Dana (charity). They have widened the scope of Dana both for recipients as well as contents of Dana. Jainism mentions a four-fold charity known as *Chaturvidha Dana*, i.e. Ahara-Dana (gift of food), Aushadhi-Dana (gift of medicine), Abhaya-Dana (gift of shelter, protection from danger, attack or threat) and Shastra-Dana (gift of books and imparting of knowledge). According to Jain philosophy, violence primarily refers to injuring one's own self behavior and at the same time it also leads to harm others that ultimately results in harming one's own soul. Jainism extends the concept of non-violence not only to human beings but also to animals, plants, micro-organisms and all who have potential of life. Life in all forms is divine and has a right to live without fear. The Jain scriptures suggest that protection of life (Abhaya-Dana) is the highest form of charity. This concept emphasis on 'Live and Let Live' is the famous quote all followers of Jainism believe in which means that every living organism in this world has the right to live. This paper is an attempt to minutely study the forms of Dana as mentioned in Jain scriptures with special focus on Abhaya-Dana.

Keywords: Dana, Non-Violence, Religion, Abhaya-Dana, Life, Jainism, Charity.

### Introduction

All religious faiths encourage charitable activities by their followers. The word charity comes from the Latin word *caritas*, which means love. The major world religions believe in service to those in need. Also, charities and volunteering are the best examples of "love in action." Many people have a faith that they receive a lot by giving, too. There are a number of reasons and ways of charity that differ from one religion to another. For instance, Christians often use the term 'stewardship' for financial help given to the needy, while Jews use 'tzedakah' to refer to acts of charity. A general definition of charity is: A voluntary act of giving of money or other help to those in need. It is to be noted that one can do charity in different ways. Many religious groups

collect food and clothing to help refugees, who have been affected by natural disasters. They also help senior citizens and children. Charitable giving is a centuries-old tradition.

### **Charity According to Different Faiths**

**Judaism:** "Charity is equal in importance to all the other commandments in the Torah combined," reads an early rabbinic law code. The formulation comes from the Roman period, but the origin of this characteristically Jewish idea is much older.<sup>1</sup>

**Christianity:** For Christians, the role of charity is first built on the injunctions of the Hebrew Bible. But in the New Testament, Jesus's parables and actions also speak to the morality of charitable sentiments.<sup>2</sup>

**Islam:** In the Islamic tradition, there are different forms of giving. The one that is best known is zakat or almsgiving—one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It is usually defined as a mandatory way of redistributing wealth. In the days of Islamic empires, it was very much institutionalized, like a tax system, where citizens were expected to give a percentage of their income to satisfy the needs of the community. In the modern world, we see charity as a much more personal act, but in the ancient Islamic world it was much more a community duty.<sup>3</sup>

**Buddhism:** Traditionally, Buddhists have long practiced the giving of alms, food, medicine and clothing to monks and to monasteries in exchange for teachings and merit. This relationship is seen to be a sacred mutual dependence and merit is shared on both sides for the benefit of all. In addition to giving to the poor, generosity also includes sharing one's spaciousness of heart, such as sharing in the loss of a loved one or family member, offering a practice of loving-kindness through meditation, or being present with someone within their suffering.<sup>4</sup>

**Sikhism:** Sikhism is one of the youngest of world religions, founded by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region of South Asia in early sixteenth century. Guru Nanak has an interesting perspective on charitable giving. In the context of many South Asian traditions, a person's salvation is dependent on charitable acts. Guru Nanak provides Sikhs with a new ethical framework in which people who are fit to work are required to earn a living through honest means, while sharing the fruits of their earnings with sections of society that are the most needy. One of the institutions that come out of this ethical framework is *langar* (or free kitchen). The Darbar Sahib—also known as the Golden Temple—in Amritsar, Punjab, [serves free food daily](#) to

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<sup>1</sup> Levenson Jon D ,Charitable Giving in Judaism, Harvard Divinity School, online at <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity#>

<sup>2</sup> Rose Dudley C ,The Ministry of Healing in Christianity ,Harvard Divinity School, online at <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity#>

<sup>3</sup> Cesari Jocelyne The Many Reasons for Charity, Lecturer in Islamic Studies, ,Harvard Divinity School, online at <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity#>

<sup>4</sup> Berlin Chris ,Charity in Buddhism, Harvard Divinity School, online at <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity#>

100,000 people, regardless of their status or religious affiliation. As a consequence, it is said, no one in Amritsar has slept hungry in the last four centuries.<sup>5</sup>

**Zoroastrian:** In Zoroastrian scripture, it states that there are 33 ways to paradise and that, "he who is blessed on account of charity is able to go on all those ways."<sup>6</sup>

**Hinduism:** Hindus, *dana* (giving) is an important part of one's *dharma* (religious duty). In Hindu religion, *Dharma* has a wide variety of meanings such as: eternal law, duty, conduct, behaviour, morality and righteousness. Each person has a *dharma* towards family, society, the world and all living things. *Dharma* needs to be seen within the framework of traditional extended Hindu family, which plays the role of a welfare state. The wealth acquired by a person is not meant only for himself, but also for the welfare of the extended family and others. One has a responsibility towards those members of one's family who cannot maintain themselves. In some circumstances, an individual may have no option, but to give up or compromise his or her personal goals for the sake of family. In short, 'giving' begins at home but extends beyond home. Furthermore, any giving that is motivated by selfish considerations loses its value from the spiritual point of view.<sup>7</sup>

**Jainism:** The Jain religion recognizes the fundamental natural phenomenon of inter-dependence known as "Parasparopagraho Jivanam"- interdependence. The Jain scriptures have not only laid down well thought out conditions to be observed while giving *Dana*, but also considerably widened the scope and extent of *Dana* by recipients point of view ----- *Dana* and from contents of *Dana*. The *Dana*, with reference to its recipients' has also been divided into two classes – *Patra Dana* and *Karuna Dana*. The *Patra Dana* means gifts or offerings made with respect and devotion to worthy recipients and in accordance with necessary conditions laid down for observance by people. Such, worthy recipients are generally the Jain persons who have right beliefs and are continuously engaged in practicing vows prescribed for their stage in life. However, the *Karuna Dana* means gifts or offerings made out of compassion to any one who deserves it, being hungry, thirsty, diseased, distressed, disabled, helpless etc. Also, the *Karuna Dana* or the gift of compassion is extremely wide in its scope. In fact, it is not restricted to Jains alone but extended to human and even to other sub-human beings in need of it.

*Karuna Dana* is categorized in four kinds as below:

1. *Ahara-Dana*, i.e., Gift of food
2. *Aushadhi Dana*, i.e., Gift of medicines

<sup>5</sup> Singh Harpreet , The Sikh Perspective on Acts of Charity, Harvard Divinity School, online at <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity#>

<sup>6</sup> Messina Colleen, Religion and Charities ,2009, [http://edhelper.com/ReadingComprehension\\_42\\_73.html](http://edhelper.com/ReadingComprehension_42_73.html)

<sup>7</sup> Sugirtharajah Sharada, traditions of giving in Hinduism, Alliance for Philanthropy and social Investment Worldwide,2008,online at <http://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/traditions-of-giving-in-hinduism/>

3. Abhaya-dana, i.e., Gift of shelter, protection from danger, attack, intimidation or attack
4. Shashtra Dana or Vidya-Dana,i.e., Gift of books and imparting of knowledge

These four gifts together are termed as Chaturvidha–Dana, i.e., four-fold charity and it has been enjoined on householders that they should make special efforts to give these charities to needy beings belonging to both human and other sub-human categories.<sup>8</sup>

While giving charity the donor must remain in following mental conditions to make it more pure:

1. Aihikaphalanapeksha, wherein the donor must not expect any gain or reward in this world in exchange of the gifts given by him or her.
2. Kshanti, means the donor should have forbearance and should give calmly and without anger (It indicates the donor should not get excited if an unexpected or untoward thing happens, while he was engaged in the pious act of giving gifts).
3. Muditva, which refers to the donor must possess feelings of happiness and have joyous appearance at the time of giving the gifts.
4. Nishkapatata, explains that the donor must act in all sincerity and should give without deceit.
5. Anasuyatva, implies that the donor should have no feeling of jealousy or envy.
6. Avislladitva, indicates that the donor should not have any feeling of sorrow or repentance.
7. Nirahankartva, highlights that the donor should not have any sense of pride in giving gifts.

For the sake of utilization of charity, it has been commanded upon the donors to see that charity is always given only to proper people. The recipients of these Danas are referred to as Patras. These Patras are further classified into three categories depending upon their belief in the religion and the conduct in their life, namely:

1. Supatras are good recipients who are having the right belief and engrossed in practicing vows and would use charity wisely.
2. Kupatras are deficient recipients who are with proper external conduct but without real right belief.
3. Apatras are unworthy recipients who are neither having proper external conduct nor real right belief.

From the aforesaid Patras, it is quite obvious that, giving charity to Supatras has been highly recommended, charity to Kupatras should not be encouraged and lastly charity to Apatras have to be definitely forbidden.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sangave Vilas Adinath, Facets of Jainology: Selected Research Papers on Jain Society, Religion, and Culture, Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, 2001, p.157.

## Abhaya Dana

Jain religion gives importance to Abhaya Dana-life protection-of living being in non-violence. The very idea of non-violence is to living being is a reflection of pity, compassion and tender heart of human and their feelings. This is a great welfare in terms of friendship of living beings to men or women. There are numerous examples in history, wherein a ruler or individual has repented after the war or an act of massive violence has been done.<sup>10</sup>

## Basic Positivity of Ahimsa

It must be noted that the meaning of Ahimsa has not been confined only towards negative aspects, but extended to include the positive aspects within it. Hence, it has been strongly advocated in Jainism that householders should always strive to extend charity to others who are in need of help along with observance of restrictions levied on their conduct. It means that positive aspect has been made an inherent part on the doctrine of Ahimsa. Hence it has been enjoined upon the householders (i) to follow the practice of giving Dana, i.e., religious gifts or charity, (ii) to organize the welfare activities with the help of charities for benefit of not only to the weaker sections of society but also on different kinds of living beings like animals, birds, etc. and (iii) to inculcate the spirit of toleration towards the followers of other faiths or religions.

## Encouragement to Grant of Charities

On the basis of various conditions laid down for giving Dana pertaining to qualifications of donors and donees, Dana is classified into three types which are as follows:

1. Sattvika Dana, i.e., virtuous or righteous gift is the gift offered to worthy donee by a donor possessing the seven Datr-gunas, i.e., qualifications of a good donor.
2. Rajasa Dana, i.e., passionate or emotional gift, is the gift offered in self-advertisement for monetary display and in deference to opinion of others.
3. Tamasa Dana, i.e., vicious gift, is the gift offered through the agency of slaves or servants without considering whether the recipient is good or worthy or unworthy and without showing marks of respect.

Out of aforementioned types of Danas, the Sattivika Dana is regarded as Uttama Dana, i.e., best gift, Rajasa Dana as Madhyama Dana, i.e., moderate or secondary gift and Tamasa Dana as Jaghanya Dana, i.e., worst or detestable gift. It is to be noted that for the sake of giving Dana it is not required that Dana should necessarily be of a large quantity. On the contrary, the

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<sup>9</sup> Practicability of Ahimsa, Jain World, Jainism Global Resource Centre,2011,Online At <http://jainworld.com/education/senior10.asp>

<sup>10</sup> Shah, K R. The Philosophy of welfare economics of Dr. Amartya Sen and Jain Philosophy, Trafford Publication,North America and International,2011.p.101

householders are advised to extend even small gifts but they should take care that these small gifts are given to deserving persons.<sup>11</sup>

### **Suggestion**

The study of Jain philosophy shall be an integral part of learning towards understanding Danas and Dharmas. Hence, history subjects at high school and collegiate levels may include it as a portion under non-violence and religious practices to keep up human beings to ensure harmony, civility and orderliness. The future researchers shall conduct a comparative study on effect of Jain Danas and its impacts in the context of other religious practices to project a comprehensive framework for non-violence and ahimsa for mankind.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the Jain scriptures not only encourage the householders to give gifts to persons but also invariably stress that conditions laid down and considered proper for Donor (i.e., giver), Dana (i.e., gift) and Donee (i.e., recipient) should always be followed because these three things by means of mutual influencing definitely increase the sanctity of entire process. Thus, the purity of Donor gives sanctity to both Gift and Donee, purity of Gift makes both Donor and Donee sacred and purity of Donee sanctifies both Donor and Gift respectively. In this connection it is pertinent to note that as a part of implementation of the vow of Ahimsa including vow of Aparigraha, the Jaina householders for several centuries have made it one of their cardinal principles to give these four gifts to all persons who are in need of such help. In fact, this help has been extended to protection and well-being of insects, birds and animals too. For the sake of these principles, the Jainas have established alm-houses, rest houses, dispensaries and educational institutions, wherever they have been concentrated in good numbers. The Anna-Chhatralayas, i.e., alm-houses are being conducted in pilgrim and other centers for the benefit of poor people. In the Dharma-Salas, i.e., rest houses, lodging arrangements are being provided without any charges or at nominal charges at important towns, cities and pilgrim places. The Aushadhalayas, i.e., dispensaries, have been providing free medicines to the afflicted persons. Along with the dispensaries for men, the Jainas have been conducting special institutions known as Pinjarapols for the protection and care of helpless and decrepit animals and birds. In unusual times of flood and famine these Pinjarapols have been carrying out various activities for animal protection. There is hardly any town or village of Gujarat or Rajasthan, wherein Pinjarapols is not present in some form or other. In the spread of education, Jainas have been leading for many centuries by providing education of masses. Even today, Jainas have been vigorously maintaining the tradition of organizing welfare activities for the benefit of all concerned by giving these Chaturvidha-Dana freely, i.e., four types of gifts in all parts of India.

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<sup>11</sup> Mahapragya Acharya Jain Philosophy 2011,online at [http://www.jainworld.com/philosophy/basic\\_positivity.asp](http://www.jainworld.com/philosophy/basic_positivity.asp)