Jain vegetarianism

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Jain vegetarianism is the diet of the Jains, the followers of Jainism. It is the most radical form of religiously-motivated diet regulation in the Indian subcontinent.

Like in Hinduism and Buddhism, Jain objections to the eating of meat and fish are based on the principle of nonviolence (ahimsa, literally "non-injuring"). Every act by which a person directly or indirectly supports killing or injury is seen as violence (*himsa*), which creates harmful karma. The aim of ahimsa is to prevent the accumulation of such karma.[1] The extent to which this intention is put into effect varies greatly among Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. Jains consider nonviolence to be the most essential religious duty for everyone (*ahimsā paramo dharmah*, a statement often inscribed on Jain temples).[2] It is an indispensable condition for liberation from the cycle of reincarnation,[3] which is the ultimate goal of all Jain activities. Jains share this goal with Hindus and Buddhists, but their approach is particularly rigorous and comprehensive. Their scrupulous and thorough way of applying nonviolence to everyday activities, and especially to food, shapes their entire lives and is the most significant hallmark of Jain identity.[4] A side effect of this strict discipline is the exercise of asceticism, which is strongly encouraged in Jainism for lay people as well as for monks and nuns.[5]

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Practice [edit]

- For Jains lacto-vegetarianism (generally known simply as vegetarianism in India) is mandatory. Food which contains even small particles of the bodies of dead animals or eggs is absolutely unacceptable.[6] Some Jain scholars and activists support veganism.
- Jains go out of their way so as not to hurt even small insects and other tiny animals,[7] because they are convinced that harm caused by carelessness is as reprehensible as harm caused by deliberate action.[8] Hence they take great pains to make sure that no minuscule animals are injured by the preparation of their meals and in the process of eating and drinking.[9]
- Traditionally Jains have been prohibited from drinking unfiltered water. In the past, when wells or baolis were used for the water source, the cloth used for filtering used to be reversed and some filtered water was poured over it to return the organisms to the original body of water. This practice termed as 'jivani' or 'bilchhavani', is no longer possible because of the use of pipes for water supply.
- Jains make considerable efforts not to injure plants in everyday life as far as possible. They admit that plants must be destroyed for the sake of food, but they only accept such violence inasmuch as it is indispensable for human survival, and there are special instructions for preventing unnecessary violence against plants.[10] Some Jains don't eat plants and plant parts that grow underground, such as potatoes, onions, roots and tubers, because tiny life forms are injured when the plant is pulled up and because the bulb is seen as a living being, as it is able to sprout.[11]
- Honey is forbidden, as its collection would amount to violence against the bees.[12]
- Food items that have started to decay are prohibited.
- Traditionally cooking or eating at night was discouraged because insects are attracted to the lamps or fire at night. Strict Jains take the vow (called anastamitta or anthau) of not eating after sunset.

Influence on vegetarian cuisines in India [edit]

The vegetarian cuisines of some of the regions has been strongly influenced by Jainism. These include

- Gujarati Jain cuisine[13]
- Marwari Jain cuisine of Rajasthan
- Bundelkhandi Jain cuisine of central India
- Agrawal Jain cuisine of Delhi/UP

In India, vegetarian food is regarded to be appropriate for everyone for all occasions. This makes vegetarian restaurants quite popular. Many of the vegetarian restaurants and Mishtanna (sweet)shops (for example the legendary Ghantewala sweets in Delhi [14] or Jamna Mithya in Sagar [15]) in India are run by Jains.

Some restaurants in India serve strict **Jain** version of vegetarian dishes that leave out carrots, potatoes, onions and garlic. A few airlines also serve Jain vegetarian dishes[16] upon prior request.

The Japanese Shojin Ryori is similar to Jain cuisine in leaving out onions and garlic. The term *satvika* often implies Indian cuisine without onions and garlic, the strict Jain cuisine also excludes other root vegetables like potatoes[17].

Some Rajasthani dishes[18] such as gatte ki sabzi (or gatte ki kadhi [19]) and papd ki sabzi were invented for Jain festivals during which the orthodox may avoid eating green vegetables.

Historical background [edit]

When Mahavira revived and reorganized the Jain movement in the 6th or 5th century BCE[20], ahimsa was already an established, strictly observed rule.[21] Parshva, a famous Jain leader (Tirthankar) whom modern Western historians consider to be a historical figure,[22] lived in about the 8th century BCE[23] and founded a community to which Mahavira's parents belonged.[24] Parshva's followers vowed to observe ahimsa; this obligation was part of their "Fourfold Restraint" (*caujjama dhamma*).[25] Mahavira adopted it into his code of conduct.

In the times of Mahavira and in the following centuries, Jains criticized Buddhists and followers of the Vedic religion or Hindus for negligence and inconsistency in the implementation of ahimsa. In particular, they strongly objected to the Vedic tradition of animal sacrifice with subsequent meat eating and to the hunting.[26]

The early Buddhism discouraged eating animals that were slaughtered for the purpose of eating. The Buddha declared that

> ... meat should not be eaten under three circumstances: when it is seen or heard or suspected (that a living being has been purposely slaughtered for the eater); these, Jivaka, are the three circumstances in which meat should not be eaten, Jivaka! I declare there are three circumstances in which meat can be eaten: when it is not seen or heard or suspected (that a living being has been purposely slaughtered for the eater); Jivaka, I say these are the three circumstances in which meat can be eaten.
>
> —**Jivaka Sutta**, MN 55 [1]

In the Tamil classic Tirukkural, Valluvar, who is regarded to be a Jain by some scholars, criticizes the Buddhists for accepting the same of meat:

> 256 If the world not purchase and consume meat, no one would slaughter and offer meat for sale[27]

Many of the Brahmins in India, for example Kashmiri Pandit, Bengali Brahmin, Saraswat Brahmin have traditionally eaten meat. However in regions with strong Jain influence such as Rajasthan and Gujarat, or strong Jain influence in the past such as Tamil Nadu, the Brahmins are strictly vegetarian. Bal Gangadhar Tilak has described Jainism as the originator of Ahinsa. He wrote in a letter [28]: "In ancient times, innumerable animals were butchered in sacrifices. Evidence in support of this is found in various poetic compositions such as the Meghaduta. But the credit for the disappearance of this terrible massacre from the Brahminical religion goes to Jainism."

Some western authors have interpreted the texts in different way to show that ancient Jain ascetics accepted meat as alms if the animal had not been specifically killed for them.[29] If this is correct then they applied the same standard as early Buddhists. Some passages in two of the earliest Svetambara Jain texts, the *Acaranga Sutra* and the *Dasaveyaliya*, have been interpreted as regulations for specific types of meat and bones which were considered to be acceptable alms.[30] This can also be interpreted at references to fruits and seeds. Another Svetambara text, the *Viyahapannatti*, tells a story where Mahavira himself eats the "Kukutmansa" which may be interpreted as meat of a cock.[31] Kutkutmansa is also interpreted as a fleshy fruit of a plant. Medieval Jain commentators of these passages interpreted them in the literal meaning (meat eating), but also mentioned the opinion that the offensive words had different meanings, some of which did not refer to animals, and hence the contents were compatible with vegetarianism.[32] Jains point out the absurdity of such interpretations which are totally inconsistent with the ancient texts and practices. Jains, who are strict vegetarians, do not accept the interpretations of western scholars.[33]

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33. ^ Alsdorf p. 564, 568-569.

See also [edit]

- Ahimsa

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