

The Festival of Self-Uplift by the Holy Observation of Ten Universal Virtues

The Jain community like other communities throughout the world celebrates many social and religious functions annually. The superb Jain festival popularly known as '*Paryushan Parva*' organized every year in the auspicious month '*Bhadrapad*' of the Hindu calendar extends from the fifth day to fourteenth day of the bright fortnight. The festival ordains the Jains to observe the ten universal supreme virtues in daily practical life. Besides assuring a blissful existence in this world and the other world for every living being, it aims at the attainment of salvation - the supreme ideal for mundane soul. The non-Jains also express high reverence for this Jain festival. All members of Jain community- high and low, young and old, and males and females, participate with full vigor and zeal in the various religious rituals and cultural programs. They listen with rapt attention to the holy sermons of the saints and learned Jain scholars arranged during the ten-day festival. In these celebrations lie dormant the seeds of the well being, peace and happiness of the common man. On the eve of this festival all activities, which add to social discord or bitterness are declared taboo from the temple pulpits. These celebrations harbinger social harmony and amity and preach the lofty Jain motto 'Live and Let live'.

The '*Paryushan Parva*' celebrated annually for self-purification and uplift is meant to adhere to the ten universal virtues in practical life; and leads us on the right path, far from the mad strife for material prosperity, which ultimately leads us to our true destination i.e., salvation. Two popular titles of this festival, viz. (i) *Paryushan Parva* and (ii) *Dash Lakshan Parva* are in vogue; but the mode of performance and aim of the festival is same. According to *Sanskrit* grammar the underlying idea of the festival and its interpretation is given below:

"Parismantadushayante dhante karmani yasimannasau paryushnm"

I.e., The celebration through which the karmic matter attached to the soul is totally burnt or vanquished (both internally and externally) is known *Paryushan* i.e., self-purification.

Various meaningful and sublime titles have been assigned to this festival in different Jain scripture; e.g.,

Parva Raj - The festival which carries a special and greater significance; its celebrations spread over a longer duration and it is more soul-stirring than any other Jain festival.

Maha Parva - It is an ancient and chief of all Jain festival.

Dash Lakshan Parva - The festival for the observance of ten universal virtues; viz., forgiveness, contentment, and celibacy, which aim at the uplift of the soul and are vividly preached and practiced during the festival.

Paryushan Parva - The festival through which an attempt is made to put an end to all vices, passions and lustful desires in thought, speech and deeds.

Paryu-Prasa - The festival in which one meditates upon the inherent virtues of the soul in thought, speech and action; or one attains peace of soul i.e., celestial peace.

Paryupshamn or Pajjusvana - The festival in which an attempt is made to obtain peace discarding all passions and lustful desires through various means; and observe harmony in the soul through the study of scriptures.

Pajjushana - This word of *Prakrit* language carries the same meaning as explained in *Paryushan Parva*.

Samvatsari Parva - The festival which is celebrated annually to subdue all passions and lustful desires. This title is popular to the *Swaitamber* sect of Jainism.

Paryushan Parva gives expression to the perfectly purified trait of the soul, through which one gets rid of worldly discords and allurements and one gets fully absorbed in the eternal truth on experiencing and realizing the true nature of soul. In other words we can say that the natural realization of the trio 'the True, the Good and the Beautiful' is fully possible only through Paryushan. In fact the other name of the Jainism, which is universal religion, is Paryushan. This festival puts an end to all evils in man; gives him realization of the eternal bliss, and spiritualism becomes alive by the celebration of this festival.

Since times immemorial the living beings have fallen prey to the bewitching worldly allurements. They are involved day and night in such a poisonous environment of lustful desires and sensuous pleasures that despite being cautioned time and again, they fail to rid themselves from the bondage of the net work of worldly illusions. Jain *Acaryas* have, through their sermons and ideal moral code of conduct, inspired the mundane souls to keep aloof from the blemishes of the world, which breed nothing but sorrow and misery for the mankind. But the insatiable ambition of man for sensuous pleasures, material comforts and luxurious life has always allured him since antiquity. Consequently man has bitterly failed to make distinction between self and non-self, and to understand the real nature of soul.

This festival has its own age-old history, but nothing definite can be said about its origin and since when it is being celebrated. In fact, the celebration of this festival is beyond the scope of known history. The truth is that spiritual matters like self-purification and renunciation cannot be measured by Time scale. When the auspicious month of Bhadrapad comes every year, the whole Jain community celebrates this festival unitedly without any difference of high and low, rich and poor. The *Digambaras* and the *Swaitambers*, both sects of Jain community celebrate the self-uplifting festival with great enthusiasm. The fifth day of the bright fortnight of the holy month of '*Bhadrapad*' is auspicious for both. The *Digambaras* celebrate this festival annually for ten days, from the fifth day to the fourteenth day of the bright half of the month. Whereas the *Swaitambers* celebrate it only for eight days, and the fifth day is the main day of their celebrations held under the title '*Samvatsari Parva*'.

References about the celebrations of '*Paryushan Parva*' or *Dash Lakshan Parva* are available here and there in ancient literary books as well; which show that it has been a popular festival since ages. The householders celebrate it jointly suspending all their business, agricultural and commercial activities for the time being. A fine description of the closing ceremony of this festival is available in the '*Bhattarak*' era extending from 1350 AD to 1450 AD. In that age the house-holders got manuscript copies of the prominent holy books prepared by the scholars, and offered these to the '*Bhattaraks*' and their disciples with due devotion at the end of ceremonies. Even today '*Dash Lakshan Parva*' is the most suitable occasion for giving donations and charities; and on the last day of the festival the house-holders observe full day fast and make every attempt to donate to religious and social institutions in cash or kind some thing within their capacity. Very often the Jain scholars viz. poets and writers get their literary works initiated during the festival days and thus pay their homage to this grand festival.

'*Jin Datt Charit*' is an epic poem of Hindi language. The author of this literary work, the great poet Raj Singh finished this book on the holy day of 5th day, of the bright moon of '*Bhadrapad*' in *Samvat* 1354. The learned poet Raj Singh chose this day for the initiation ceremony of his great book simply to immortalize the glory and significance of this day. The following verse of the poem throws ample light on the special significance of '*Dash Lakshan Parva*' in the 14th century.

'*Samvat terven chauvane bhadav shudi panchami guru dine*'

- *Jin Datt Charit*

Similar to the modern age, the *Dash Lakshan Parva* was celebrated with great zeal and joy thousands of years ago as well; austerities viz. self-meditation, doing penance, fasting and study of holy scriptures were performed during that period. The householders purged their soul by keeping fast on the last day of the ceremonies and celebrated the closing ceremony with great pomp and show. When the ten day celebration are over, this festival leaves behind deep impress on the mind and heart of every Jain - young and old.

All Jains - *Digambers* and *Swaitambers*, will celebrate this sacred festival forever throughout India and abroad. The former appear to have the best pretensions to antiquity and cultural heritage and to have been most widely diffused; the later have only as yet been traced as far back as 5th century AD. The former are almost certainly the same as *Nirgrantha*, who are referred to in numerous passages of *Buddhist Pal Pitakas* and must therefore be as old as 6th century B.C. rather earlier. The *Swaitambers*' idea of exclusiveness appears to be one of recent growth. In fact, Jainism is a prehistoric religion propounded by the first *Tirthankara* Lord Aadi Nath. Upon all these grounds we think that the celebration of *Paryushan Parva* is a holy tradition coming down from the ancient past to the present times.

To sum up, *Paryushan Parva* is a grand Jain festival of self-introspection, self-enlightenment and self-achievement, which ultimately leads to the one and only one final goal, i.e., liberation or salvation.

Do not minimize the value of ideals. They appeal to the imagination, stir the heart, stimulate the noblest springs of action, but ideal and practical must be blended into one harmonious whole. There must be no divorce between the real and ideal.