

COMPLEMENTARITY OF MAN & WOMAN: *The Jain Perspective*

An international, interreligious colloquium
Organised by
The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican
17th - 19th November, 2014

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Dear friends:

Thanks to the departments concerned at the Vatican for organising this colloquium and for inviting the Jain perspective on the theme: *COMPLEMENTARITY OF MAN & WOMAN IN MARRIAGE*.

I will start by defining the title so that we are on level playing field.

In dictionary.com: Complement is defined as
“something that completes or makes perfect”

“either of two parts or things needed to complete the whole:
counterpart”

Complementarity: “the quality or state of being complementary”

In Wikipedia: “Complementarianism is a theological view held by some in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, religious leadership, and elsewhere.”¹

Based on that, there is nothing more perfect than the complementarity of man & woman. Although the definition above mentions only the Abrahamic faiths, it is equally applicable to Dharmic faiths and to that end this paper investigates the subject from the Jain perspective.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complementarianism>

The Jain doctrine of Karma, the natural law of causality, defines *karma* as the action/cause as well as the potential effect created by the action. *Karmas* are grouped into eight types and the one of direct concern to the subject is *Vedaniya Karma*: the potential which delivers pleasure and pain.²

In addition to the general pleasure and pain in daily life, Jainism recognises a special relationship of gender to pleasure and pain. In Jainism, there are nine quasi-passions; these include the three genders:³

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| 1. <i>pumliṅga</i> | male |
| 2. <i>strīliṅga</i> | female |
| 3. <i>napuṃsakaliṅga</i> | neutral |

Related to the three genders are the pleasures and pains suffered through their sexual dispositions:⁴

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|-------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>pumveda</i> | natural male desires |
| 2. <i>strīveda</i> | natural female desires |
| 3. <i>napuṃsakaveda</i> | unnatural desire in the state of impotence |

napuṃsaka is defined in the Monier-Williams Sanskrit dictionary as: “Not a man; a eunuch; neither male nor female, a hermaphrodite”.⁵

In Jain philosophy, the potential gender of a being is related to the type of birth. Birth is defined as of three types:⁶

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. By agglutination of physical matter ~ | without parents |
| 2. Through the womb ~ | copulation between man and woman |
| 3. By descent ~ | through a protean body |

² Tattvartha Sutra § II.5 p.37

³ TS § II.6 p.37

⁴ TS § II.50-51 p.61

⁵ Monier-William Sanskrit Dictionary online: P.523

⁶ TS § II.32 p.51

Beings with less than five senses born through agglutination, and beings in the hellish regions born by descent are always impotent.⁷

The celestial beings, born by descent, are never impotent.⁸ The rest, including human beings can have any of the three genders and sexual dispositions.⁹

Practice of Jainism is regulated through vows. In examining sexual relationship between man and woman it is necessary to understand the relevant vows.

Jainism has five vows administered at two levels:¹⁰

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Greater vows for the ascetics | Absolute observation |
| 2. Lesser vows for the laity | Partial observation ¹¹ |

The fourth lesser vow is relevant to the subject under consideration. It is the lay vow of celibacy defining abstention from sexual activity.

This is a narration from the scripture called Āvaṣyaka Sūtra or “essential text” in which the vows of the laity are delineated. English translation of the text is by the author of this paper:¹²

“The fourth lesser vow is for observing celibacy and abstaining from gross promiscuous behaviour. In sexual relationship, I shall be satisfied with my wife [husband] and I vow not to have sexual relationships with any other.

This paragraph clearly defines that sexual relationship has to be limited not only to a man and a woman, but should only be between husband and wife, defined as a man and a woman who are formally married in the presence of the congregation.

⁷ TS § II.50 p.61

⁸ TS II.51 p.60

⁹ TS II.52 p.60

¹⁰ TS VII.14 p.176

¹¹ TS VII.15 p.176

¹² Avashyaka Sutra, Section IV, Text No. 9:Fourth lesser vow of the laity

“For the lay practitioners who have vowed to abstain totally from sexual practice: I vow, until I die, not to get involved in any sexual activity ~

“In relation to celestial beings to refrain ~

in TWO ways: direct or indirect;
and in THREE modes: thought, speech, or deed;

“In relation to humans and animals to refrain ~

from direct activity;
in physical mode.

This paragraph gives the option to the laity to totally abstain from sexual activity, similar to the greater vow of the ascetic, and forbids sexual activity with all types of living beings.

“Of this lesser vow of celibacy, there are five blemishes which are worth knowing but not worth undertaking and I recite them as they are stated:

1. To have sexual relationship with one's wife of immature age
2. To have pre-marital sexual relationship
3. To have perverse sex ~ using other than the organs of sex
4. To interfere in marital relationships of people of no concern
5. To be obsessed with sexual desire

I seek forgiveness for all such sins.”

This paragraph clarifies that the sexual activity has to be legal, proper, ethical and well-controlled.

This vow, in essence, certifies that man and woman are complementary through natural biological differences, and exclusively because of these differences, are able to procreate.

It is similar to the dicotyledonous beans which consist of two halves. Without the presence of both, the bean cannot sprout. Hence they are in a complementary relationship as exclusive counterparts.

More an Indian tradition than related to any religion, the male in a marital relation is responsible for the upkeep and protection of the family whilst the female is responsible for looking after the home and the family. These are assigned responsibilities, and are complementary. This is the traditional way to balance responsibilities rather than seek equality in all manners.

It is generally accepted that the male is physically stronger and hence fit to protect the family whilst the female is mentally stronger and can hold the family together. This role of protector is perhaps the reason for the male superiority in Indian tradition. However superiority is not related to rights where rights are due. Women have had equal rights in India from prehistoric times. Lord Mahavir had monks as well as nuns and the nuns exceeded the monks in numbers.

The difference between the male and the female is not only biological. In Jain scriptures it is stated that a male can be so cruel in deeds that he can be born in the 7th hell, whereas a female for her softer nature can only go down to the 6th hell.¹³ This difference in nature can be considered to be *a tolerance relationship* which again makes man and woman complementary.

In the Hindu tradition, it is said that the universe is a creation in duality. There is nothing, except divinity, which is monistic. This confirms that man and woman are the complementary duality. The divinity which is expressed as monistic is also idolised as two halves: male and female called *ardhanārīśvara*¹⁴ literally half female and half male form of *Śiva*.

¹³ Pacchis Bol

¹⁴ Monier-William Sanskrit Dictionary online: p.92

In Jain ontological belief, there is no creator god; in line with the law of physics: “matter can neither be created nor destroyed” ~ the existence of the universe is from time immemorial.

Here is a quote from Wikipedia which defines the Jain philosophy very clearly:¹⁵

“Jain philosophy, a non-creationist philosophy based on the teachings of Mahavira (6th century BCE), states that the universe and its constituents such as matter cannot be destroyed or created. The Jain text Tattvarthasutra (c. 2nd century) states that a substance is permanent, but its modes are characterised by creation and destruction.”

Lord Mahavira is supported in this belief by later Greek scholars:

Empedocles (approx. 490–430 BCE)¹⁶

"For it is impossible for anything to come to be from what is not, and it cannot be brought about or heard of that what is should be utterly destroyed."

Epicurus (341–270 BCE)¹⁷

A further principle of conservation was stated by Epicurus (341–270 BCE) who, describing the nature of the universe, wrote that "the totality of things was always such as it is now, and always will be".

Contemporary Jain ascetics use simple logic to explain this phenomenon:

1. A son cannot be born without the existence of a father
2. The father was also born as a son
3. Hence there always was a father from time immemorial

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservation_of_mass

¹⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empedocles>

¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicurus>

In this belief, there was always man, woman and their progeny. This is how nature works and makes the universe eternal. Without the complementarity of man and woman, this would not be possible.

Woman, without her, man is nothing.
Woman, without her man, is nothing.

AND this is COMPLEMENTARITY!

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

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