

Anekānta and Madhyamā-Pratipad

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VARDHAMĀNA Mahāvīra started with implicit faith in *ahimsā* and austerities, while Gautama Buddha was impressed by the practice of meditation. The supreme problem of Mahāvīra was the conflict of ontological doctrines of his time, which led him and his followers to formulate the doctrine of *anekānta*. The Buddha was troubled about the psycho-ethical discipline, specially the final end of meditation and the rational adjustment of various codes of life, hedonistic and ascetic, which he characterized as *madhyamā-pratipad* (middle course).

The ontological pursuits of Mahāvīra and his followers led to the discovery of the conflict in the nature of things, and the resolution of such conflict in their theory of *anekānta*. A real must change and this change is impossible without a mode that has originated, a mode that has passed and also an aspect that continues to exist in order to make origination and passing possible. In other words, a real must have a persistent feature in order to appropriate change, that is, a real must be a substance capable of assuming modes. This is *anekānta*, that is, the doctrine which accepts many-sidedness of a real which is necessarily continuity and change rolled into one.

The Buddha singled out the moral aspect of life and discovered the causal doctrine of *pratītyāsamutpāda* which traced the final source of life and death in *avidyā*. This causal law determined the ontological

speculations of the Buddha and his followers. Substance, according to this law, was a myth raised up by imagination. The modes alone were real without any underlying unity. One mode replaces another in unbroken succession determined by causal nexus. The unity is replaced by an infinite chain of self-charged moments in this doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* which literally means 'origination depending on relevant causes and conditions'. Nothing is independent and self-sufficient in this view. The real is also *śūnya*, that is, devoid of a character which is self-explanatory without any reference beyond itself. The concept of unity is a composite act of imagination, called *upādāya-prajñāpti*, that is, a concept (*prajñāpti*) depending upon (*upādāya*) other constituent concepts. Nāgārjuna, a Mādhyamika Buddhist, equates *madhyamā-pratipad* with these three aspects of the real when he says :—

यः प्रतीत्यसमुत्पादः शून्यतां तां प्रचक्ष्महे ।

सा प्रज्ञप्तिरुपादाय प्रतिपत् सैव मध्यमा ॥

Another aspect of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *madhyamā-pratipad* is the non-acceptance of any of a set of two extreme concepts or views. Nāgārjuna pays homage to the Buddha as the promulgator of the negation of all sets of conflicting concepts in the following verses :—

अनिरोधमनुत्पादमनुच्छेदमशाश्वतम् ।

अनेकार्थमनार्थमनागममनिर्गमम् ॥

यः प्रतीत्यसमुत्पादं प्रपञ्चोपशमं शिवं ।

देशयामास संबुद्धस्तं वन्दे वदतां वरम् ॥

The Yogācāra Buddhist also eulogizes the Buddha's doctrine as the negation of the cognized (*grāhya*) and the cognizer (*grāhaka*).

Thus, the *madhyamā-pratipad*, originally a doctrine of life, came to be interpreted by later Buddhist thinkers as a doctrine of reality, from the ontological as well as the epistemological point of view.

Anekānta, on the other hand, was an ontological doctrine from the beginning. It was an attempt to explain causation and also a doctrine of relation. A substance can have different modes and yet preserve its unity and identity with those modes. The criterion of unity is inseparability. There can be distinction without difference. Modes are different among themselves and *distinct* from the substance, but they are not *different* from the latter. The relation between substance and modes is identity-cum-distinction. The Buddhist does not agree with the Jaina and consequently fails to find any unity in the knowing, feeling and willing of

the same person, which leads him to the denial of the entitative character of personality. Knowing, feeling and willing also are finally rejected by the Mādhyamika Buddhist as unreal. Thus, while the theory of *anekānta* was an attempt at the synthesis of the conflict apparent in experience and reason, the *madhyamā-pratipad*, as interpreted by later Buddhist thinkers, accentuated the conflict and denounced both the extremes as untenable and unacceptable. If *anekānta* gives an impression of eclecticism, the *madhyamā-pratipad* was made to play a role which it was perhaps not intended to do.

