Beyond Anékantavāda: A Jain Approach to Religious Tolerance

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A popular modern symbol of Jainism includes a representation of the loka—the universe as envisaged in Jain teaching—and the motto “parasparopagraho jīvānām” (there should be mutual support between all living creatures). An alternative image representative of the ethical ideals of Jainism might equally well be the samavasaraṇa, the assembly place magically created by the gods where, according to Jain tradition, every jīna, after attaining enlightenment expounds the eternal teachings of non-violence and compassion for the first time. The universal applicability of Jain doctrine is demonstrated by the fact that this sermon is listened to by a gathering of humans, animals and gods gathered in concord within an extensive circular network of corridors encompassed by jewelled balustrades which surrounds the dais from where the jīna preaches.

Who is eligible to enter this religious amphitheatre and attend the great event? This question was raised in the Senapraśna, a collection of responses made by Vijayasena Sūri, chief ascetic of Śvetambara subsect, the Tapā Gaccha, in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, to a variety of inquiries posed by lay and monastic members of his sect. Subsequently, these questions and answers were compiled by monk Subhavijaya Gaṇin. More

1 In this, for example, Vijayasena Sūri is represented to point out that while listening to the jīna’s sermon, female humans and divine beings stand and the male human and
pertinent to the theme of this essay, however, is the following question posed to Vijayasena: Do the 363 types of heretic (pakhandika), traditionally established by the time of early medieval Jainism, physically stand outside the samavasarana or remain within it? As a rule, replied Vijayasena, they remain outside but occasionally enter the samavasarana.2

This slightly equivocal judgement appears to indicate a possible tension within Jainism to which I intend to draw attention. The questions central to my inquiry are: What is the status of those who are not formally members of the Jain religion? Can they be in some way accommodated by the Jains? If not, are they fated to stay outside the samavasarana, noses metaphorically pressed against the soteriological window? In other words, to what extent is Jainism tolerant in its approach to other religious traditions?

Based on its philosophy of anekantavada, Jainism is frequently thought of having an innate sense of tolerance for other religious paths. Such a tolerance is regarded as a reflex of the religion’s deep preoccupation with ahimsa. However, concentration on anekamavada as presenting non-Jain teachings as partial versions of the truth and thus constituting a type of inclusivist sectarian tolerance has tended to deemphasize the extent to which Jainism has also consistently seen itself in exclusivist terms as the one true path. Recent scholarship has confirmed that anekantavada functioned in classical times as a technique which could promote the superiority of the Jain analysis of the world over other models of reality.3 Jainism’s apparent inclusivism and tolerance as supposedly resulting from

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2 Ibid. p. 61a.

anekāntavāda can in fact equally be interpreted as indices of its exclusivism. Indeed, the ancient scriptural evidence suggests that Jainism from the very beginning saw alternative religious paths as inadequate. For example, the Uttaradhyayana Sutra 23. 63 states, “The heterodox and the heretics have all chosen a wrong path; the right path is that taught by the Jinas; it is the most excellent path.” Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the Jains in general never, until the ecumenical twentieth century, subscribed to the possibility of all religions being in some way equal. Indeed, the classical texts generally excoriate such apparent liberalism as a specific form of false belief (mithyādṛṣṭi) called vainayika, a general, indiscriminating reverence towards objects and personages of worship in other sects which has been rendered by one translator as “misguided egalitarianism.”

However, there is another strand of opinion in Jainism which can most clearly be located in the writings of Ācarya Haribhadra. The dating of this figure is problematic but for our purposes the writings attributed to him can be said to fall between the late 6th and the mid 8th centuries CE. Haribhadra occasionally does not accept the possibility of any sort of approval of or accommodation with those who fail to conform to the ethical commands of the Jinas, even though they perform fierce austerities which Jainism claims are integral to genuine spiritual advancement. He also denies that those who are outside the command of the Jinas can have any sort of religious restraint in

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the first place. Elsewhere, however, Haribhadra allows for the possibility of other non-Jain sectarian leaders and teachings in conformity with Jainism. Furthermore, in his so-called yoga works, Haribhadra explicitly regards inner calm of any sort as a guarantor of a general orientation towards that one path which leads to mokṣa.

It must, however, be said that Haribhadra was no simple apologist for other faiths or tolerant irenicist. His writings appear as harbingers of the tensions which surfaced in an extended argument which preoccupied the Śvetāmbara Jain community during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here, I will eschew any reference to anekāntavāda as it is not relevant to the question, whether there is any possibility of correct moral behaviour on the part of those who do not follow the Jain path.

Perhaps, the best way to introduce this issue is by reference to a text which was written some time in the late 13th or early 14th century when the Śvetāmbara Jain community was fragmented into a variety of rival sub sects seriously divided over issues relating to lineage, ritual and the sacred calendar. It is against this background that one Nayaprabha Gaṇin, a teacher of the subsect known as the Tapa Gaccha produced the Gurutattvapradipa. This work’s alternative title, certainly the one by which it was known in the sixteenth century, was Utsūtrakandakuddāla, literally meaning, “A Spade to Dig Up the Roots of Heresy.” The title clearly conveys the purpose of the text which, in fact, was the first Tapa Gaccha text to engage in serious intra-Śvetāmbara sectarian polemic.

In this text, the objects of the author’s wrath range from opponents such as the Digambaras and the temple-dwelling

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8 Haribhadra, Upadeśapada v. 810 (Bhuleshwar: Śri Jinaśāna Āradhanā Trust, 1989).
9 Haribhadra, Upadeśapada, op. cit., v. 639.
10 Haribhadra, Yogadrṣṭisamuccaya v. 128 in Haribhadrayogabhārati (Mumbai: Divyadarsan Trust, 1989).
monks since the beginning of the common era, to sects which emerged after the eleventh century and are still in existence today, such as the Kharatara Gaccha and the Tristutikas. However, before categorising and denouncing these opponents, the author of Gurutattvapradipā considers the typical standpoint from which a Jain should approach alternative intellectual positions, namely that of being madhyastha, literally meaning, “standing in the middle.” According to the historian of religion, Peter van der Veer, there is no word in any Indian language corresponding exactly to the English word “tolerance,” which has its origins in the European Enlightenment and the decline of the universal authority of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{11} However, this term might well be taken as indicative of the supposed basic Jain virtue of intellectual irenicism and respect for other religions which modern apologists have presented as being one of Jainism’s main characteristics. But on further examination it appears to be slightly more nuanced than this would suggest.

Although the author asserts that his work, Gurutattvapradipā, has been written in the spirit of madhyasthya—remaining between the two extremes of strong attachment (rāga) and aversion (dveṣa)—he goes on to argue that there are two types of this quality of “being in the middle,” which are as different from each other as spiritual deliverance is from rebirth. The first type of madhyastha is an individual who has no attachment or hatred when considering issues relating to divinity, teacher or doctrine and, crucially, evinces the quality of right view or faith (samyagdrṣṭi). Consequently, he loses all possible doubt when he realises that the statements of the Jain scriptures and the direction of the path to liberation are one and the same.\textsuperscript{12} The second type of madhyastha, however, cannot abandon attachment and dislike


\textsuperscript{12} Gurutattvapradipā, vv. 3-8 with autocommentary. Edited by Muni Lābhasara (Kapadvānij: MithabhāiKalyāncand Pith, 1961).
and lacks the ability to discriminate between good and bad positions on the grounds that he doubts whether in fact he is genuinely madhyastha. Such a person consequently goes along with every idea, statement and mode of practice and his supposed neutrality or "tolerance" is rather a lack of intellectual discrimination as a result of which he cannot distinguish between substance (tattva) and non-substance (atattva). As the Gurutattvapradipa puts it, professional connoisseurs of jewels would not adopt a position of neutrality when forming their conclusion (samânubandhaḥ) in the case of judging both glass and a genuine precious stone. Following such excoriation of any sort of mealy-mouthed tolerance, the author of the Gurutattvapradipa embarks upon a lengthy exposure of all non-Tapā Gaccha types of Jainism as being utsūtra, heretical and representations of false beliefs.

Few manuscripts of the Gurutattvapradipa have survived. Like some other controversial Śvetāmbara Jain texts, it has had a slightly nebulous and marginal existence. Indeed, at the beginning of the seventeenth century the Gurutattvapradipa was publicly banned by the senior monastic leadership on the grounds that it was a source of factionalism. Its adoption by Dharmaśāgara14 led to sectarian debates as well as polarization within the Tapā Gaccha. Dharmaśāgara's writings were extension of the Gurutattvapradipa's concerns. They represent a strongly and subtly argued supremacist perspective on Jainism and are fiercely exclusivist in their refusal to accept the validity of any religious path different from Dharmaśāgara's own sect, the Tapā Gaccha. Furthermore, they remained a significant issue in the Śvetāmbara community well into the second half of the seventeenth century. While I do not intend to pursue Dharmaśāgara's arguments here, their existence should not be disguised by those who would wish to present Jainism in exclusively irenic terms and as promoting a

13 Gurutattvapradipa, op. cit., v. 11.

14 Dundas, The Jains, op. cit., pp. 163-64.
general intellectual tolerance based on the principle of *anekāntavāda*. Instead, I would turn here to an opponent of Dharmasāgara’s ideas and one of Jainism’s greatest intellectuals, Yaśovijaya (1624-88).

Yaśovijaya has become a near talismanic figure for the contemporary Śvetāmbara monastic community and is, in particular, identified with the quality of *mādhyasthya* or neutrality. A commemorative sign which invokes this can be glimpsed today through the dust and fumes in the old city of Ahmedabad at Yaśovijaya Chauk at the Relief Road end of Ratan Pol where Yaśovijaya lived for many years. Although Yaśovijaya’s scholarly reach extended over the entire range of Jain literature, his frequent reference to Haribhadra suggests that he considered the latter as his real and only intellectual equivalent in earlier Śvetāmbara tradition, and he saw himself as Haribhadra’s successor. It was the Haribhadra’s reputation for being influenced only by the logical cogency of doctrines and viewpoints (*anekāntavāda*) that appears to have shaped Yaśovijaya’s irenic but also critical attitude towards other sects and traditions.

Yaśovijaya’s broad perspective on the status of members of other religious paths was expressed in the *Dharmaparikṣa*, “An Examination of the Jain Religion,” a lengthy Sanskrit auto-commentary on 104 Prākrit verses produced in 1669. In this text, in which no serious reference is made to *anekāntavāda*, Yaśovijaya argues that it is pointless to take a negative stance towards a position found in another soteriological path if it is effectively no different from Jainism. Unquestionably (and Yaśovijaya quotes Haribhadra to this effect) the principled non-Jain derives his positive qualities precisely from his loyal adherence to his own scriptural tradition, this being in itself indicative of a morally upright position. The Jain, however, can take a *madhyastha* position, devoid of partisan passion, because Jainism is universalist in that it combines and encompasses all possible viewpoints. Here, then, at the outset Yaśovijaya’s ostensibly irenic approach can also be seen to reflect a view of
Jainism as inherently superior to those sectarian and religious paths which do not adopt such a perspective.

Yaśovijaya’s initial technique in confronting Dharmasāgara’s position is to assess the various types of false belief which have been traditionally identified in Jainism. These include not merely wrongheaded attachment to what is incorrect but also an indiscriminate attachment to all views as being true (anābhigrahika), effectively a kind of misconceived relativism. Individuals in thrall to such intellectual dysfunctioning should not be accommodated in any way. However, Yaśovijaya makes the general point that even those who through the power of delusion subscribe to false intellectual and religious positions may nonetheless have that quiescence or calm characteristic of the Jain path. This positive view of non-Jains is bolstered by reference to Haribhadra who had claimed that Hindus such as Patañjali, the author of the Yoga Sūtras, could be incorporated into the lower stages of the Jain path by virtue of possession of yogic insight (yogadṛṣṭī).

This gives rise to an inevitable question, how non-Jains can be in possession of the necessary moral qualities in the first place without direct participation within the Jain path? Yaśovijaya attempts to address this by discussing Jainism in terms of its inner (bhūva) and outer (dravya) characteristics. Non-Jains, even though lacking totally correct discrimination, can reach Jainism in the inner, spiritual sense simply through being servants of the jinas. As a purely internal perspective, however, this might be regarded as having the unwelcome result of doing away with the necessary socio-religious distinction between Jain and non-Jain, so Yaśovijaya insists that such individuals must be “free of the fault of attachment to what is untrue” (galitāsadgrahadosa). In other words, acknowledgement of the authority of the jinas is worthless if it still involves promotion and advocacy of views contrary to their teachings (a standpoint which, it must be admitted is slightly at variance with what Yaśovijaya has stated before). Yaśovijaya invokes once again the centrality of
madhyasthya as not so much a neutral quality as the *sine qua non* for Jainism: those whose minds are purified by it are Jains in terms of their internal, spiritual perspective and thus cannot disagree with the teachings of the jinas.

A community consisting of genuine Jains and those who are Jains in spirit, non-Jain Jains as it were, linked by a shared faith in the teachings and authority of the Jinas might be theoretically possible, but this still fails to address the issue that the latter group do not conform to outward visible Jain practice which, as Yaśovijaya points out, is necessarily interrelated with "inner" Jainism. In fact, while it may on the face of it be impossible for non-Jains to conform to the external obligations of Jainism because they follow the behavioural requirements of their own particular path, it is nonetheless sufficient that all these requirements relate to a morally upright person who does no evil and conforms to a morally appropriate mode of behaviour (*akaraṇaniyama*). In other words, following the actions prescribed by one's own religious path does not preclude being on the Jain path. For Yaśovijaya the obvious example of such an individual is, once more, Patañjali, the author of the *Yoga Sutras*, who as just mentioned was accepted by Haribhadra as having the necessary neutrality (*madhyasthya*) and absence of delusion and as having experienced the yogic "flash" characteristic of all genuine holy men. Such an individual thus falls into the category of what Jainism has styled since scriptural times as *deśāradhaka*, which is to say a "partial adherent," following the Jain path but lacking completely developed knowledge and faith. However, there has to be purity of intention: even acts of compassion are worthless if they are still permeated by intense false belief.

Apparently, Yaśovijaya willingly accepts the possibility of the spiritual commitment of members of other religious paths coinciding with the requirements of Jainism and avoiding the cardinal fault of one pointed perspective (*ekāntika*). If this were not the case, then the references in the Jain scriptures to members of other sects who had actually achieved liberation
(anyalīnga-siddha) could not be correct. It must therefore be concluded, claims Yaśovijaya, that individuals such as Patañjali follow a code of behaviour approved of both by their own path and that of the Jains. To advance on a religious path, one must have positive qualities and if another path does happen to concur with one's own in that respect, then that merely strengthens it.

According to Yaśovijaya, the Jain teachings are multifarious in as much as they instil various qualities in different types of individuals who have differing responses to such teachings. However, at the same time these teachings are founded on the solid unifying basis of watchful moral behaviour (apramāda). Thus, any statement occurring in another tradition which promotes a genuine spiritual stance and is at the same time in accord with Jain teaching must in actuality be interpreted as deriving from Jainism. What must be regarded as disbarring another view from accommodation within Jainism is not so much the view itself as some sort of passionate attachment towards it. Yaśovijaya, following Haribhadra,¹⁵ refers to the possibility of what seems to be a general category of religion (śaṁanya-dharma) which transcends sectarian boundaries:

Those others who [broadly] conform to the [Jain] path cannot be deemed to be heretical simply on the grounds that they do not understand ontological categories such as the soul in the manner approved by the Jains, for their position [does actually] end up in their understanding these categories correctly, provided there is abandonment of partiality towards any disputed part [of the doctrine]...This is not just a question of accidental resemblance to the Jain path...These individuals are in fact involved in śaṁanya-dharma.¹⁶

However, perhaps predictably, it is clear that śaṁanya-dharma in its basics corresponds to Jainism. Buddhism, for example,

¹⁵ See Haribhadra, Yogabindu v. 2, in Haribhadrayogabharat, op. cit.

cannot as an institutionalised and supposedly nonviolent religion, participate in this “general religion” because it claims an independent source of authority which only the jinas can have. Similarly, there can be no question of Jainism, which is the origin of all philosophical standpoints, incorporating morally inappropriate teachings such as Vedic injunctions about sacrificial killing. Jainism can be the source of all intellectual views only in the sense that it makes clear what its own teachings are and what are the teachings of others.

What I have been drawing attention to is a Jain argument not couched in terms of anekāntavāda, possibly unparalleled in Indian thought up to this time, which concentrates on the qualities and the validity of praising upright individuals, even if they belong to a different and manifestly false religious path. As discussed in this paper, there is one side of this argument, as represented by Dharmāsāgara, which is unwilling to acknowledge the possibility of mitigating qualities in non-Jains and Jain sectarians. Yaśovījaya, on the other hand, is more open to the positive qualities of non-Jains, no doubt as befits an individual who himself attempted in practical terms to smooth over sectarian differences within the Śvetāmbara community. Yet in his inclusivism Yaśovījaya never abandons a sense of the superiority of Jainism and can thus be seen to be applying the same sort of ranking perspective as found in Hinduism. It is Yaśovījaya’s image of Jainism which has become the dominant one today.17

17 A full treatment of this subject will appear in my forthcoming study, Sudharman’s Heirs: History, Scripture and Controversy in a Medieval Jain Sect.