

THE JAIN PHILOSOPHY

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The significant fact about knowledge is its communicability. When the knowledge is for one's own self, the question of communicability can be dispensed with : but when it is for the other, the question needs serious consideration. Communicability is accomplished through properly worded propositions. Thus knowledge to be communicable is to be reduced to propositions. This goes without saying that formulation of propositions is dependent on the content of knowledge. It is not idle to point out that if there is discordance between the content of knowledge and formulation of propositions, serious misunderstandings are bound to arise. Syadvada is the linguistic device to represent without any omission and distortion the content of knowledge. Thus in a way Syadvada and knowledge become the obverse and converse of the same coin.

Knowledge, according to the Jains, reveals itself and the object. In consequence, the Jaina thinkers propound that the object has infinite characteristics-some known, some in the process of being discovered and many as yet unknown. This is known as the doctrine of Anekantavada. Syadvada is the method of communicating the mani-fold characteristics of a thing to the other. In the absence of this technique, real knowledge of a thing cannot be passed to others without any discongruence. Thus Syadvada is the expression of Anekantavada in language. If Anekantavada is the mode of cognition, Syadvada is the mode of expression.

The significant point to be comprehended in regard to Anekantavada is that every characteristic of a multiphased thing is maintaining its identity through the existence of its opposite as its aspect. In fact, a thing cannot be the same thing without the negation of other thing in it. For example, a colour cannot remain a colour without the negation of other characteristics like taste, smell etc. in it. Thus non-existence is as much an essential aspect of the real as existence is. Negative propositions cannot be asserted without accepting non-existence as an element in the constitution of the real. Similarly, the characteristics of one and many, permanence and change, generality and particularity are reconciled in a thing without any incongruity. Thus when the Jainist is faced with the problem of expressing the complex content of knowledge in language in a way which can communicate to the other knowledge as such, he had to devise the method of Syadvada. The word 'Syat' when added to a proposition is indicative of the presence of multiple characteristics in a thing in addition to the characteristic referred to in the proposition under consideration. In the proposition 'Syat ghat is colourful' the word 'Syat' implies that the subject Ghata is a manifold of attributes, of which the attribute of being colourful referred to in the proposition is there in the Ghata as a matter of fact. This should not be understood, as it is generally done, to mean that the existence of colour in the Ghata is doubtful. In other words, certainty of colour alongwith the manifoldness of characteristics is indicated by the word 'Syat'.

The word 'Syat' can also be understood differently, though the difference is of expression and not of meaning already discussed. As already pointed out a thing is the repository of infinite attributes. Hence the apprehension of it from a particular angle of vision or point of view, technically called Naya, does not exhaust the whole of the multiphased thing. It is important to note that the Naya is objectively given and not subjectively given and not subjectively contemplated. So in order to avoid the possible misunderstanding that a thing is exhausted by a particular Naya, every predication should be preceded by the word 'Syat', thus making us aware of the possibility of other predications in regard to that thing. Thus 'Syadvada is the custodian of clarity, certainty and unambiguity in the field of philosophy. It is by no means the doctrine of doubt and

uncertainty.

Although an existent is possessed of infinite attributes, yet the knowing of it is not a simple affair. The question is what it is to know a thing and how many propositions are requisite to express the content of knowledge. The conviction of the Jaina is that seven distinct propositions, neither more nor less, are needed to express the content of knowledge in regard to an existent. The significant point to be noted here is that each proposition is not the result of mere subjective necessity but is traceable to an objective situation which actually possesses attributes as an ontological truth. All this implies that since the existents or their characteristics are infinitely in number, seven propositions can be expressed with reference to each. Consequently, there will be infinitely seven fold propositions without any inconsistency.

Let us now illustrate the doctrine of seven fold proposition by taking an example of the attribute existence or permanence or oneness etc. in respect of pen,

(1) The first proposition is : Syat pen exists. This means that the existence of pen is contextual, the content being, its own Dravya (substance), Ksetra (space), kala (Time) and Bhava (State). It is by virtue of this context that the pen derives its individuality and becomes meaningful. In fact this context is interwoven into the constitution of the pen itself, so it cannot be separated from the object. This proposition controverts the possibility of unqualified existence of a thing without the consideration of substance, space, time and state.

(2) The second proposition is : Syat pen does not exist. This proposition does not, as it seems, negate the existence of pen referred to in first proposition, but it states the non- existence of pen in respect of other Dravya, Ksetra, Kala and Bhava. Thus it strengthens the first proposition, rather than cancel it. The pen is pen only because it is not not-pen. In other words, the existence of pen in respect of its own Dravya, Ksetra, Kala and Bhava cannot maintain its identity, if non-existence of pen in respect of other Dravya, Ksetra, Kala and Bhava is not considered the concomitant aspect of pen. Thus both existence and non-existence are co-present in the pen without any contradiction. According to the Jaina, non-existence is as much constitutive of the nature

of thing as existence. The critics fail to see that contradictory statements can be made about a thing, if the context is changed. The conviction of the Jaina is that if this proposition is denied, it shall be difficult for us to account for the difference of things. Hence, by asserting this proposition, we come across a new aspect of a thing which is not given in the first proposition.

(3) The third proposition is : Syat pen exists and does not exist. In this proposition, the two attributes of existence and non-existence in their relevant contexts are successively predicated of the pen. Thus this proposition which appears to be merely the summation of the first two proposition, is not really so. It expresses a new effect of pen under consideration. This effect is not present either in the first or in the second proposition considered separately. If mathematics is our guide, the third proposition is nothing but a sum of first two. But the Jaina experience which is our sole guide tells us that the combination of separate units gives rise to a distinctive attribute. In the word 'go', though the two letters 'g' and 'o' are merely combined yet this combination gives rise to a distinctive meaning, not apprehended in any of its constituent elements.

(4) The fourth proposition is 'Syat pen is inexpressible'. In this proposition, the two attributes of existence and non-existence instead of being asserted successively, as in the third proposition, are asserted simultaneously. The need for simultaneous assertion of these opposite attributes is man's desire to express in words the apprehension of pen as such. Since words are incapable of expressing this apprehension of pen, the pen is inexpressible. It may be noted here that inexpressibility is a novel and factual characteristic of pen. The distinction between the third and fourth proposition is that in the former the novel attribute is the result of consecutive togetherness of the elements of existence and non-existence, whereas in the latter it is the result of simultaneous presentation of the two elements in question. It goes without saying that this inexpressibility is not absolute. It is only so in the context of the two opposite attributes being together synchronally. "The commonsense principle implied in its recognition is that what is given cannot be rejected because it is inexpressible by a single positive concept".

The fifth, sixth and seventh propositions are (5) Syat pen exists and is inexpressible, (6) Syat pen exists and does not exist and is inexpressible, (7) Syat pen exists and does not exist and is inexpressible. All these propositions, according to the Jaina, represent a new aspect of the real. It may be noted here that the Jaina texts have not discussed these propositions clearly.

Now the question arises: What is the basis of regarding the number of propositions as seven, neither more nor less than this? The answer of the Jaina is that since affirmation and negation are constitutive of the real, there are only seven questions possible in regard to any real. These questions are consequent upon the seven kinds of inquisitiveness of mind to know a thing which in turn is dependent on the seven objective aspects of the real. In fact, the enquiry starts upon the initial doubt, for example, does a pen exist or not? Or is a thing permanent or changing? And the answer is seven distinct propositions or Bhangas. What I feel here is that the Jaina in propounding the seven propositions is making use of mathematical knowledge which necessarily leads to the seven Bhangas. Out of these, the first four are empirically verifiable or understandable and the last three are mathematical possibilities confirmed by mathematics. So if one speaks of more than seven Bhangas, there will either be duplication or assertion of propositions neither confirmed by mathematics nor by experience. If one speaks of less number of propositions, there will either be omission or suppression of the aspect of the real given to us either mathematically or experientially.

It may now be argued that since Jaina philosophy is known as Anekantavada (non-extremism and non-absolutism) does the sevenfold predication apply to Anekantavada itself? The answer of the Jaina is in the affirmative. Syat Anekantavada, Syat ekantavada and so on will be the seven propositions (Saptabhingas). Knowledge which takes into account the nature of the real as consisting of an infinite plurality of attributes is called pramana and this is non-absolutism: knowledge which takes into account one attribute without negating the other attributes present in the real is called 'Naya' and this is ekantavada. In other words, the Anekanta cannot be sustained without admitting Ekanta as its opposite, just as a tree cannot be saved if the branches are taken out.

Of the many charges levelled against the doctrine of Syadavada, the most fundamental is that of self-contradiction. In other words, the charge is that the Jaina doctrine flagrantly violates the law of non-contradiction which says that A cannot be both B and not B at the same time. Thus how can a pen have the A characteristics of both existence and non-existence? Before answering this objection, let us first discuss the attitude of the Jaina towards the law of non-contradiction propounded by formal logic. The conviction of the Jaina is that the law of non-contradiction is a priori and thus does not state any facts about reality. If it is asked what is the criterion of contradiction, the reply of the Jaina would be that it is experience and not pure thought. It is by the former that the notion of contradiction should be decided. Two facts are contradictory, if they are not found to co-exist in experience just as light and darkness, heat and cold and the like. On the contrary, if experience confirms the co-existence of seemingly contradictory attributes in a thing, it should be regarded as valid. Thus the Jaina insists that the source of the law of non-contradiction should be sought not in a priori thought, but in experience of the behaviour of things. Following the mode of logic, the Jaina finds no empirical contradiction in asserting that the pen has the characteristics of both existence and non-existence, as has been explained above.

