

JAIN THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ANEKANTA

Theory of Anékāntavāda:

Let us first understand the term literally and then what it means philosophically. The term *anékāntavāda* consists of three terms: 'anek', 'anta' and 'vada'. The term '*anék*' means many, '*anta*' means 'aspects' or 'attributes' and '*vada*' means 'ism' or 'theory'. In its simple sense, to Jainas, it is a philosophy or a doctrine, it is a theory of manifold aspects. It has been described and translated by modern scholars variously. Prof. S.N. Dasgupta expresses it as 'Relative pluralism' against the 'Extreme absolutism' of Upanishads. Dr. Chandradhar Sharma translates it as "Doctrine of manyness of reality". Dr. Satkari Mookerjee expresses it as philosophy of doctrine of 'non absolutism'. Closely associated to '*anékāntavāda*'—*Syādavāda* which is also expressed as theory of 'Conditional predication' or "theory of relativity of propositions". Since the doctrine of 'anekantavada' is opposed to absolution or monism (*ékāntavāda*) we would prefer "doctrine of non-absolutism" to convey the meaning of *anékāntavāda*.

Let us now understand the philosophy or the theory of non absolutism in the Jain theory or reality from its metaphysical point of view. The Jaina approach to ultimate reality can be expressed in two words: Realistic and Relativistic. The universe is full of innumerable material atoms and innumerable individual souls. They

are separately and independently real. Again each thing (*vastu*) and each soul possesses innumerable aspects of its own. "A thing has got an infinite number of characteristics of its own."¹ Thus according to the metaphysical presupposition of Jainism, a thing with infinite characters exists independently. The Jain term for 'existent' is "Sat". It designates an entity comprised of substance (*dravya*), attributes (*guna*) and mode (*paryaya*). The qualities are free from qualities of their own and they invariably and continuously undergo modifications or changes. The substance and attributes are inseparable and the attributes being the permanent essence of the substance can not remain without it. Modes, on the other side, are changing. There are modifications "in the form of acquiring (*utpāda*) new modes (*paryāya* or *bhāva*) and losing (*vyaya*) old modes at each moment."² Thus a thing or "the conception of being as the union of permanent and change brings us naturally ¹ to the doctrine of *anékāntavāda* or what we may call relative pluralism as against the extreme absolution of the Upanishads and the pluralism of the Buddhists."³ In view of the fact, "Jainism points out that both the permanent (the one, the real of Brahmanism) and, 'the changing' (the many, the unreal of Buddhism), are the two sides of the same thing."⁴ "Considering on one side the human limitations to acquire the knowledge of a thing with all the infinite attributes and on the other side substance or the object of Knowledge possessing the three characteristics of production, destruction and permanence", nothing could be affirmed absolutely, as all affirmations could be relatively true under certain aspects or points of view only. "The affirmations are true of a thing only in a certain limited sense, and not absolutely"⁶

Dr. Y.J. Padmarajiah in his famous book "The Jaina theories of Reality and Knowledge" says that "the metaphysical presuppositions of *anékāntavāda*, animating all the spheres of Jaina philosophical thinking, recognises the objectivity of the material universe. The objectivity of the universe signifies the fact that the universe is independent of mind or consciousness. This independence, or the duality of consciousness and the material universe, necessarily presupposes the principle of distinction, which exerts a cumulative force until the logical goal of this principle is reached in the form of

the development of the Jaina concepts of reality and knowledge into the comprehensive scheme of *anékānta* realism..... The claim that *anékāntavāda* is the most consistant form of realism lies in the fact that Jainism has allowed the principle of distinction to run its full course until it reaches its logical terminus, the theory of manifoldness of reality and knowledge”⁷ The theory of non-absolutism clears that “reality, according to Jainism, is not merely multiple but each real in its turn, is manifold or complete to its core. Reality is thus complex web of manyness (*anék*) and manifoldness (*anékānta*)”⁸ The Jaina theory of non-absolutism or as it is also called the philosophy of — Anekanta, is the very foundation of the Jaina system of philosophy. In evaluating this philosophy let us first examine some of the main objection and comments as discussed by Dr. S.C. Chatterjee & D.M.Datta in their introduction to Indian Philosophy. Followed by this will be general appreciations by great personalities. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes, “Samkāra and Rāmānuja criticised the Saptabhangi view on the ground of the impossibility, contradictory attributes coexisting in the same thing”⁹ This change is mainly due to misunderstanding. In fact the Jains admit that things cannot have self-contrary attributes at the same time and at the same place. What Jainism emphasizes is the manyness and manifoldness of a thing the complete nature of reality. Dr. Radhakrishna himself answers and says, “Since reality is multiform and ever changing, nothing can be considered to be existing everywhere and at all times and in all ways and places and it is impossible to pledge ourselves to an inflexible creed.”¹⁰ The late Dr. Ganga Nath Jha, a great Sanskrit and erudite vedantist, remarked, “when I read refutation of this *Syādvāda* by Samkarāchārya, I came to the conclusion that the doctrine of *Syādvād* was very sound and that the Acharyas of Vedant failed to understand it. I am sure if Samkara had taken the trouble to study the Jain Scriptures, he would not have taken the pains to criticise this doctrine.”

Prof. Chatterjee and Datta discuss Jain doctrine of *Syādvāda* often falsely compared with the pragmatism of the West or with the theory of relativity or as agnosticism or scepticism. Prof.

Chatterjee says that inspite of some similirity between the pragmatism and Jainism, it should be noted that, "Jains are realists, but the pragmatists have distinct idealistic bias. According to the Jainas, the different judgement about object, are not simply different subjective ideas of the object, but they reveal the different real aspects of the object. The Jainas would accept, therefore, a realistic view of truth which is rejected by all thorough going pragmatists."¹² The Jain *Syādvāda* is sometimes compared to the Western theory of relativity : idealistic and realistic. The idealistic is represented by Protagoros, Berkeley, Schiller etc., and the realistic is represented by Whitehead or Boodin. " If at all, the Jaina is to be called relativist, he must be understood to be the realistic type." ¹³

There is also a great degree of misunderstanding due to the term 'Syāt' which means 'somehow', or 'perhaps', or 'may be' some thinkers form a sort of sceptic or agnostic view about the theory. It is not the uncertainty of a judgement, but its conditional or relative character, that is expressed by the addition of the qualifying participle 'Syāt'..... There is, therefore, no room for scepticism."¹⁴

Prof. M. L. Mehta also gives a detailed refutation to some objections against *Syādvāda* in his 'Outline of Jana Philosophy'. He discusses the objections regarding affirmation and negation, regarding locus and identity, regarding identitiy and difference etc. and says that "there is no logical justification for the emergence of doubt in a matter which has been definitely established."¹⁵

The positive and appreciative side of the theory of *Syādvāda* could be realised through the words of some of the great philosophers and thinkers, both of East and West. We find *Anékāntavād* even in Einstein's explanation as well as in Hegal : "All nature is a reconciliation of opposites" Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said, ... "but he who follows the Jaina concept adopt that kind of cultural regimentation". "Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have once said that he had a very high regard for the doctrine of *Syādvāda*, and that he practised it in his life." Jawaharlal Nehru said, "We have to realise that truth is many sided and it is not a monopoly of any group formation." Dr. Rajendraprasad, the first President of

India, observed, "The doctrine of *Syādavāda* is a valuable contribution of Jainism to Indian religions and world Philosophy." Prof. A.B. Dhruva puts as, "*Syādavāda* is not a doctrine of speculative interest, one intended to solve a mere ontological problem." Dr. H. S. Bhattacharya says, "*Syādavāda* is a theory presenting things as they really are, it is not a set of formal propositions, divorced from and unconnected with matters of experience." Dr. A.N. Upadhyaya writes, "It has supplied the philosopher with catholicity of thought, convincing him that truth is not anybody's monopoly with tariff walls of denominational religion, while furnishing the religious aspirant with the virtue of intellectual toleration which is the part of that *Ahimsā* which is one of the fundamental tenets of Jainism." Lastly, in the words of Dr. Y. J. Padmarajah "*Anékāntavāda* is the heart of Jaina metaphysics and *Nayavāda* and *Syādavādas* (or *Saptabhangī*) are its main arteries. Or, to use a happier metaphor, the bird of *anékāntavāda* files on its wings of *Nayavada* and *Syadavada*".

Syadavada and Omniscience:

The Jain metaphysics and epistemology with its logic or dialectic method has greatly contributed to Indian thought. It is more so, perhaps, due to its doctrine of Anekantavada, Syadavada and Nayavada. The very foundation of these theories is Jain maintain the reality to be dynamic and can consist only with relative or conditional predication. The theory of non-absolution is not simply a refutation or attack on absolutism. It is a solution to many problems due to Absolutism. Dr. S. Mookerjee in his 'The Jaina Philosophy of non-Absolutism' says, "If things were real in an absolute sense there would be no causation, as it is possible if only an event which was non-existence is brought into existence." "Again if things were held to be existent in an absolute sense, and if non-existence were denied the result would be equally disastrous. There would be no distinction of one thing from another, there would be no beginning, no end, there would be nothing like individuality. In other words, things would be nothing, entity would be reduced to non-entity".⁷

Thus we find that in *Anékāntavāda* and *Syādvāda* Jains bring a solution to the age old controversy between the Absolutism and Nihilism or between the one and the many or the real and the unreal. The theory of non-absolutism, which is the foundation of Jain Philosophy, holds that every proposition or assertion could be true, but only under certain condition hypothetically, it thus suggests that every proposition or assertion could be false, under certain other conditions. This apparently leads us to a contradiction when we think with reference to the concept of omniscience or *Sarvajnatā*. *Sarvajnatā* or omniscience is the complete or perfect knowledge, knowledge of all (*Sarva*) the modes or attributes. Dr. Ramji Singh in his thesis on "The Jain concept of Omniscience" observes that, "the jain theory of relativism does not go against the Jain theory of Omniscience".¹⁸

What is of utmost importance to us and a worth noting point is the fact that inspite of the great value of the theory of *Anékāntavāda* and *Syavada*, the Jainas have not ended or wounded up all with it. Truth, as a truth, must be in its totality a whole truth. And it is here that we find a vital difference between the *Syadavada* and *Sarvajnata*. Inspite of both revealing the truth. "In the case of *Keval Jnāna*", the knowledge is simultaneous". The Omniscience knowledge "is regarded assimultaneous rather than successive". Again we find that "the immediate result of the absolute knowledge (*Kevalajnāna*) is bliss and equanimity (*sukha, upéksā*), while that of practical knowledge (i.e. *Syādvāda*) is the facility to select or reject what is conducive or not, to self realisation".²¹ One more difference, between the two, though not a major one, is that one depends on sense perception the other i.e. *Kevala Jnāna*, "arises only after distraction of obstructions."²² Such knowledge is directly acquired by the soul, without the intervention of sense or signs. But then the most fundamental difference as Dr. Ramji Singh tells us, is that *Syādvāda* "leads us to relative and partial truth whereas omniscience to absolute truth." In short, to sum up, we can say that "while *Syādvāda* illumines the reality indirectly, the *kevalajnāna* does it directly."²⁴ besides one reveals the partial truth while the other reveals the whole truth.

Dr. Radhakrishnan's View

Pandit Dalsukh Malvania in his essay on *Anékāntavāda* in "Jain Dharma Chintan". has examined Dr. Radhakrishnan's view. He says that "Dr. Radhakrishnan is known for his comparative religion of East and West. It is quite possible that he may not have objection with non-absolutism of Jainism, but he has been highly impressed by the *Advaita Vedānta*. Dr. Radha Krishnan is criticising non-absolutism says that if at all there is any fault with non-absolutism it is only this that Absolute has no place in it. To this Pandit Dalsukh Malvania very humbly replies that to discard Absolute from non-absolutism, is not a fault but a feature. After all non-absolutism is meant to oppose absolute of so many different types and kinds. Moreover, one can not say that Absolute has no place in non-absolutism. The concept of Brahman as propagated by *advaita-vedānta*- the Absolute has been accepted by Jainas as partial truth in their *Sangraha Naya*. The theory of non-absolutism evolves only from such different imaginative Absolutes, and it determines their place in the whole Truth of absolute Truth. In fact, *anékāntavāda* does not evolve if such absolutes are not to be emphasized. Thus one can interpret Dr. Radhakrishnan's criticism only as his love for Brahman as explained by *Advaita Védānta*."²⁵

Pandit Dalsukh Malvania's View

Let us also take note of Pandit Malvania's view as reflected in the above referred essay. He says, "It is true that controversy is mainly due to the use of language, and in the higher state of *dhyāna* or meditation, where thought or logic has no scope, and where there is only self or only realised goal object, there is a realisation of 'whole' which is described as Absolute. But the same Absolute, when described, its alternatives (relatives) arise. Thus relative and absolute both are accepted in non-absolutism. In other words, non-absolutism accepts both effability as well as the ineffability of an object. From this point of view also, as per my (Pandit Malvania) humble opinion, it is worth considering before saying that absolute has no place in non-absolutism. In the theory of non-absolutism, absolute has its own place, but it is not so that only absolute has place. It becomes so only because of the nature

of the theory of non-absolutism. Not to reject the Reality of the object of Meditative state of mind or the object or Sensuous experience is the speciality of the theory of non-absolutism. To it the *Niscaya Naya* is true and so is the *Vyavahara Naya* also..... In Jainism *Parama Brahma* is accepted under *Niscaya Naya* and *Prapanca* is accepted under *Vyavahara Naya*. And both, *Niscaya* as well as *Vyahara* are accepted as true by the Jainism. Thus from *Niscaya Naya* point of view Absolute has a place in Jainism, but it is not absolute only that has a place. Non absolute has also a place in Jainism because it also accepts *Vyavahara Naya* as equally true".²⁶

Conclusion:

The logical background of Jaina philosophy, as earlier said, is not simply dry dialectics and uninterested intellectual exercise. It leads to very happy solution between "the nihilism on one hand and absolute monism on the other, as well as between the shallow realism of materialism and the ludicrous stand of the idealists. It fosters a rational outlook and an appropriate attitude of looking at things, conditions and relations, gives a breadth of vision, and helps a right and proper evaluation of ultimate realities."²⁷ Moreover, "Jain logic of *Anekanta* is based not on abstract intellectualism but on experience and realism."²⁸ In fact the integrity of truth consists in this very variety of its aspects, within the rational unity of an all comprehensive and rectifying principle"²⁹ To Jain logic in general and *Syādvād* in particular, "a thing is neither an absolute unity nor split up into an irreconcilable pluralit. It is both unity and plurality all the time. There is no opposition between unity of being and plurality of aspects"

If we agree that we have to be kind and tolerant to counter points or counter views, *Syādvāda* takes away the dogmatic one sidedness and makes room for the view that theism may be perhaps more suitable view to understand and to make more effective Jainism as religion and ethics.

Practice of Anekantavada :

In order to inculcate this theory of non-absolute or *anékānta* into practice, Bhagavan Mahavira's own example is worth noting.

He revealed the vision of non-absolutism by following these conditions in his own life and preached these conditions. They are as follows:

I. One should not submit himself to the psychic effects born of attachment and jealousy. This would mean the adoption of the lustrous feeling of being new-attached.

II. Let one keep one's self attentive on desire to know the truth and that only till this impartiality is not fully developed.

III. Let one not be frightened by any apparent opponent and respectfully ponder over the opponent like one's own self and become a strict critic of one's own views as of that of the opponent.

IV. One should practice liberty to bring about a discriminative co-ordination of all the elements that one finds to be true from one's own experience or those of others. It is necessary also to discard one's false pride, correct himself and progress on those lines when one finds that he was mistaken on a certain point.³¹ According to Jainism Soul is potentially infinite knowledge and infinite good, theoretical and practical. What is necessary to practice any great doctrine as non-violence or non-absolutism is the soul-culture which can be attained through a life of harmony through the practice of universal value i.e. *Maitri*, 'gladness at the riches of others i.e. *'Pramoda'*, compassion for the suffering of others i.e. *'Karunā'*, and overlooking and forgiving the faults of others i.e. *'Upeksā'*. These general rules to be practiced every-day as conditions to practice non absolutism.

Let us also note what Dr. Harisatya Bhattacharya, a great scholar of Jain Darshana says about the practice of non-absolutism or '*anékanta*'. Instead of suggesting the ways or keys to practice, in his conclusion, he explains why it should be practiced and says, "we must consider it in all its possible aspects, the utility of an undertaking may also be subjected to the same test. ... In all such matters the question which one is to put to himself is : What is the other aspect of it. ?"³² He further states that "the problems in social, political and religious domains - either in a nation or in an individual is sure to avoid conflicts and to lead to peaceful solutions."³³

Needless to say that the truth of *anékāntavāda* and its practice has also *anék* (many) ways. There are ways suggested in Jain scriptures as we have seen Lord Mahavira's suggestions, also are the ways discussed by many great scholars. Considering the conflicts of ideals and opinions of individuals, the moral conduct of the people and social, religious and political atmosphere of today ; in short, considering the complexity of life today, the following five ways to apply *anekantavada* can also be suggested. They are :

- (1) Knowledge of Truth and Reality
- (2) Clarity about the inter-relationships of the extremes or paradoxes.
- (3) Acceptance of *Ahimsā* in its Totality
- (4) Objectivity
- (5) Consciousness - awareness

Let us see each of the above ways in detail so as to be clear about it. (1). Leaving here all the big metaphysical or ontological discussions about Appearance and Reality or Facts & Truth, I wish one should know that our day-to-day routine is full of activities which could be broadly classified as Mental Activities, "Physical Activities, and Verbal or Speech Activities (Mansik, Kayik aur Vachik Karm). The substance of all these activities is material. According to Jainism even the Jiv is also a matter, or *dravya* i.e. matter has multi-faced characteristics. Matter has infinite attributes which, though matter is constant, change. The Truth or Reality, in our day-to-day life is with reference to a thing or person or event or idea. Such Truth when we describe can only be Absolute if our description covers all the infinite probable positions. This is not possible and therefore, we should know that what we consider to be true or real is so only with reference to one or some aspects and not wholly or absolutely true.

(2) From the above follows the clarity regarding the extremes or paradoxes. We have a wrong notion that extremes & opposites cannot be applicable to one and the same. We always think rich and poor cannot be applied to some one person, or short and long

etc. Since these attributes are relative a person in some respect or comparison may be rich and the same person from different points of views may also be poor. In order to practice *anekantavada*, the clarity of these extremes or opposites to be true for the same person or things is very necessary. One should get habituated to take as many examples as possible from daily life to strengthen the clarity.

(3) Acceptance of *Ahimsa* is the third and very important fundamental way to practice *Anekantavada* - Pt. Dalsukh Malvania says that the root of *Anekantavada* is *Ahimsa*. The very idea of not to hurt the others but to be kind and tolerant to others is the essence of Jainism. The frank, friendly and mutual co-existence is only possible if *Ahimsa* in our practice is accepted. How can you take note of others or other person's views if you are not kind to them. *Ahimsa* saves a person from cruel dogmatism, religious fanaticism and psychological egoism; and to save from these all is necessary to have objectivity in its true sense. The others or the opponent person may also be as true and correct in the light of his situation and circumstances as I feel myself. To attack on him with all arguments leading to charges is to hurt him, and hurting (physically, mentally or spiritually) is '*himsa*' - hurting is killing. Where there is an atmosphere of fights, of such disputes and such arguments and counter-arguments there is no peace, no solution. Thus the acceptance of *Ahimsa*, creating an atmosphere of love and friendliness, developing the power of tolerance and favourable situation of mutual co-existence, all these pave for *Anakantavadi* approach. *Ahimsa* in this way proves to be a very fundamental way of applying *Anekantavada*.

(4) The next fundamental and equally significant way is the 'objectivity'. By objectivity I means to be objective in our approach. Our life is full of events and happenings. There are a series of problems and issues we strive to solve or come out of them. The most painful fact about our problems and issues is that almost in all such cases our subjectivity, our prejudices, our partial and onesided conclusion etc. make the problems much more complex than what they actually are. In fact objectivity is one of the ways that can be developed by a person by practicing it daily in all his fields of experiences and

can thus become habitual. Objectivity is objective-approach; in other words, to deal with a situation without being personally attached to it. Philosophically we may say that when we are in the situation, but not of the situation or for the situation, it is objectivity. Such objectivity opens the doors facing all the different direction, and such objectivity prevents us from being attached to or belonging to a particular directions, to practice '*anékānt*' as to practice to respect others and consider them is no problem. Such objectivity, mainly to professionals and administrators, makes life smooth and blissful..

(5) Last but not the least, is an Awareness; a consciousness. Some one has said that majority of the battles in the world and quarrels in life are caused by senseless, irresponsible, stupid, statements or judgement uttered by man. If we want to be rewarded by *Anékāntavāda*, which has its moral and ethical implications, a conscious effort to look before we leap and to think before we speak is a must. To think before we speak means to remember the nature of Truth in its relative terms. This, again, is a way that can be mastered by constant and continuous practice leading one to become so habitual that such an approach with cautioneness becomes a part of his life.

The above five ways are the fundamental ways of applying *anékāntvāda* in our to-days day-to-day life. These ways are not and can never be the only ways or universal ways. In the light of the time through which the humanity passes, in the light of the problems and situations arising before us, and in the light of the innumerable germs causing a gross misunderstanding resulting into a life full of stress and strain, the above mentioned five ways will certainly prove to be fundamental ways to put *Anékāntvāda* into practice.

When we have talked so much of *Anékāntvāda* and its application, let me also humbly end with a note that this is also one-side of the Reality; there can be so many other sides and they can be as real and as true, as fundamental and as fruitful as these ways are.

Notes :

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4. Dr. Chandradhar Sharma, "A critical survey of Indian Philosophy" (1976) p.51
5. Tattvarthasutra v-29
6. Tattvarthasutra and Saddarsana Samuccaya
7. Dr. Y.J. Padmarajah, "Jain theory of Reality and Knowledge", (1963) p-274
8. Ibid-275
9. Dr. S. Rashakrishnan, "Indian Philosophy" vol I (1977) p-304
10. Ibid-304
11. Dr. J.P. Jain, "Religion and Culture of the Jains", (1977) p-7
12. Prof. Chatterjee & Dutta, "An introduction to Indian Philosophy" (1968) p-86
13. Ibid-p-86
14. Ibid-p-86
15. Mohan Lal Mehta, "Outline of Jain philosophy", (1954) p-132
16. Dr. S. Mookerjee, "The Jain Philosophy of Non-absolution" (1978) p-24
17. Ibid-p-29
18. Dr. Ramji Singh, "The Jain concept of Omniscience" (1974) p-164
19. Aptamimansa-101
20. Kumundcandra - "Nyaya" - vol. I p-88
21. 'Nyayavatara'-28
22. 'Pariksamukham' - II - II

- 23 Haribhadra, "Anekanta Jay a Pataka" -vol II- p-cxx.
- 24 'Aptamimansa'-105
- 25 Pt. D. Malavania, 'Jain Dharma Chintan' (1965) p-188-18
- 26 Ibid-p-188-191
- 27 Dr. J.P. Jain, "Religion and Culture of the Jains" (1977) p-73-74
- 28 Dr. Rmaji Singh, "The Jain Concept of Omniscience" (1974) p-165
- 29 M.D. Desai, "Nyayakarnika" p-25 (Introduction)
- 30 Dr S. Mookerjee, "The Jain Philosophy of Non-Absolution" (1978) p-27
- 31 Pandit Sukhalalji, 'Essence of Jainism' (1988) p-170
- 32 Dr. H.S. Bhattacharya, 'Anekantavada' (1953) p-188
- 33 Ibid-p-192.

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