

The Jaina View of Life

Dr. Ram Jee Singh

1.1 Life is a struggle for perfection. Philosophy should serve as the guiding light in this struggle. Hence, true philosophy, must be a philosophy of life. Our attention has uptill now been mainly directed towards the problems of reality and knowledge, God and Soul, etc, but we have neglected *Man*. However, arts and science, philosophy and culture have got significance only in relation to man. Hence, Vyasa correctly said : There is nothing higher than man (*nahī sresthataram kimchit manusat*). Chandidas perhaps went a little further to say : “Man is higher than everything and nothing is more important than him”. (Sabar uppare manusa satya, tahar uppare nai). Even the Greek sophists with his own interpretation regarded “man as the measure of all” (*Homo men sura*). True to this humanistic spirit, the Jainas even denied God because they beleived in the potential divinity of man. This reminds us of the famous Vedic saying : “Those who know Brahman in Man knows the Being who is Supreme”. (*Te puruse Brahma Viduste Viduh Parameshthinam*—*Atharva Veda*, X. VII. 17)

1.2. According to Jainism, man can attain divinity contained in the concept of Four-fold Infinities (*anantacatustaya*). Thus it shifted the emphasis from God to Man—an outcome of the development of inwardness. Hence, the interest of Jainism has been centred mainly around man, his morality and destiny. Of the seven fundamental categories of Jain philosophy, only two, the ‘self’ and the ‘Non-self’ are dealt with from a metaphysical point of view; the other five are mere corrolaries—*Asrava* (inflow of Karmic-matter) is the cause of mundane existence and *Samvara* is the cause of liberation. Everything else is only its amplification (आश्रवो भवहेतुः स्यात्संवरो मोक्ष कारणम् । इतीयमार्हती दृष्टिरन्यदस्याः प्रपञ्चनम् ॥) (*Sarva-darsan-samgraha*)

1.3 Our conduct cannot be isolated from our way of life. Truth and valuation are inseperable. Samantabhadra in his *Yuktyanusanam* (Verse. 15) goes to the extent that “without knowing the real nature of things, all moral distinctions between bondage and liberation, merit and demerit, pleasure and pain will be blurred.”

न बन्ध मोक्षे । क्षणिकेकसंस्थो
न संवृतिः सापि मृषास्वभावा ।
मुख्याहते गोणविधिर्न दृष्टो
विभ्रान्तदृष्टिस्तव दृष्टितोऽन्या ॥

1.4 For Plato, Sankar and Bradley, philosophy, broadly, is the ‘knowledge of reality’, for the logical Postivist, it is only ‘linguistic analysis’. However, for us, philosophy, to be true, must be philosophy of life, where we do not have a part-view but the whole-view or world-view.” Idealism was unable to see the trees in the wood, which empiricism could not see the wood in the trees”—said C.D. Broad (*contemporary British Philosophy*, Ed, J.H. Murehead, Vol, I, 1924). These are the two different ways of approaching the problem

but they are not the only ways. Hence, we should see the world steadily and as a whole. If we do not look at the world synoptically, we shall have a very narrow view of it. Purely critical philosophy is arid and rigid.

1.5 The Jaina view of life known as Anekanta (Non-absolutism) is nearer to such a synoptic view. To quote Whitehead, such a non-absolutistic approach is “an endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted,” (A.N. Whitehead : Process and Reality, 1929, p.4). The function of philosophy is not merely academic pursuit of knowledge and reality, it also serves as a way of life. It has the dual purpose of revealing truth and increasing virtue so that it may provide a principle to live by and purposes to live for. Hence, C.E.M. Joad opines that “we must achieve a synoptic view of the universe”. (C.E.M. Joad : A Critique of Logical Positivism, 1950, p.29).

2.1. The Jaina attitude of non-absolutism is rooted in its attitude towards life. Life is dear to all. To do harm to oneself. The Acharanga Sutra (I.5.5) declare “Thou art he whom thou intendest to tyrannise over”. Hence a feeling of immense respect and responsibility for human personality inspires Jainism. It has upheld the worth of life very much, hence its main emphasis is on Ahimsa or non-violence.

2.2 However, its concern for non-violence is more due to ideological consciousness than emotional compassion. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism does not view life as a transient and illusory phenomenon, nor it regards it as immutable as the Upanisad-Vedanta philosophers. Infact, both absolute permanence and absolute impermanence is absolute non-sense. Ahering to the common experience, Jainism regards the nature of reality as having the characteristic of origination, decay and continuance—giving a non-exclusivists view.

2.3 Secondly, Jainism believes in the potential divinity of man. Given freedom of development, every individual can attain the Supreme spiritual progress. Hence, any interference means spiritual degeneration. Violence is nothing but interference with life, hence it must be eschewed in thought, word and deed. In this context, Anekantavada (Non-absolutism) is an extension of Ahimsa in the realm of thought and so is Syadvada a logical corrolary in the field of speech. Anything should be viewed not from only one standpoint (*ekanta*) but from many angles of vision. The real is a variable constant, hence there must be variable angles of vision, which will negate dogmatism and imperialism of thought. ‘Ekanta’ means the ‘only’ point of view, whereas ‘Anekant’ implies the principle of reciprocity and interaction among the reals of the universe.

2.4 This Anekant—ideology is the spirit of synthesis (*Samanvya-drsti*) nurtured into the synthetic culture of India. In the Vedas and Upanisads, the ultimate reality is described neither as real (*Sat*) nor as unreal (*Asat*). Some described the reality as one, which others hold it as many. Infact, the ultimate reality is the same, though it is called by different names. Agyanvada or Agnosticisim of Sanjaya shows, reconciliatory spirit through his Four-fold or Five-fold formula of denial so the Vibhajyavada or the Critical Method of Investigation of Buddha is contrasted with the *Ekantavada*. This is his doctrine of Middle Path or the *Mdhyam pratipada* which induced Buddha to “treat prevalent opinions with all due consideration”. Nagarjuna’s Dialichis of Four-fold Antinomies (*catuskoti*) resembles Anekanta approach, The Bhedabheda system of Bhart prapancha is actually referred to as Anekanta, while the Bhatta—a Mimamsa and the Sankhya have an anekanta bias with respect to some of their ideas and methods. Therefore, Santarakshita attributes the concept of ‘vaicitrya’ to the Mimamsa as well to the Sankhyas. Even the critique on the right doctrines of Gautama resemble the Anekantavada in its spirit and form although they are not as pervasive as they are in Jainism.

2.5. Anekantavada is the heart of Jainism. It constitutes its most original contribution to the philosophical speculation. However, Anekantavad-syadvada has been more maligned than understood even

by the great Vedantic and Buddhist Acharyas. It is misfortune that system like Advaita Vedanta which realises the inadequacy of logic fails to appreciate the evidence of experience as well as the Probabilistic interpretation of multi-valued logics, which can reconcile the apparent contradictions in the Anekantavada. Anekanta implies twin functions of analysis and synthesis known as conjunctive and disjunctive dialichis respectively or Nayavada and Syadvada.

2.6. Viewed in the light of the doctrine of Anekanta, the reality reveals not merely as many (anantatmakam) but also as infinitely manifold (ananta-dharmatmakam). Though the reality is possessed of infinite number of attribute and human knowledge is limited until it attains omniscience. Hence we cannot have the complete grasp of the whole reality or an absolute affirmation or complete negation of a predicate. To know is to relate, therefore our knowledge is essentially relative and limited in many ways. In the sphere of application of the means of knowledge or in the extent of the know how, our thought is relative. The whole reality in its completeness, cannot be grasped by this partial Thought. The objectivity of the universe reveals that the universe is independent of the mind which implies principle of distinction leading to the recognition of non-absolutism.

2.7. In absolute sense, a thing is neither real nor unreal, neither permanent nor evanescent but both. This dual nature of things is proved by a reductio-ad-absurdum of absolutism. Further, this is also the basis of the Law of Causation, because an 'absolute real' can neither be cause nor an effect. However, an 'absolute flex' cannot be the basis of operation for the Law of Causation. Similarly, the controversy between unity and pharality can be easily solved by the Anekanta logic, which affirms attributes in a unitary entity. A thing is neither an absolute unity nor an irreconcilable multiplicity. Infact, it is both multiplicity-in-unity. Similarly, both absolute existence and non-existence are metaphysical abstractions.

3.1. To say that a thing is neither real nor unreal, neither eternal nor non-eternal, neither static nor mobile but partakes of the dual nature perhaps is an affront to the believers in the traditional Laws of thought. No body rejects them but these abstract turmulations are not suited to dynamic character of the universe. Our own observation and experience reveals that the two-valued logic seems to be unreal. So far that abstract turmulation of the Laws of Thought (A is A, Identity), A is not not A (contradiction), A is either A or not-A (Excluded Midoh). They may be right. But their concrete turmulations (A Radio is a Radio) admits of change. A real radio is constantly undergoing change hence this is change according to space and time. Similarly, even change is meaningless without the idea of persistence. Hence the contradiction (A Skylab cannot both be and not be) is only notional because 'A Skylab' is a Skylab so long it works as a laboratory in the Sky but when it takes as a debris after degeneration, it is not the same sky-lab in the same condition. Hence, a skylab can be both a skylab and not a skylab. There is no difficulty to accept in actual experience.

3.2. The denial of pre-non-existence and post non-existence as part of a real bads to the impossibility of all theoretical and practical activity. Similarly, the denial of non-existence of mutual-identity (numerical differences) and absolute non-existence is also impossible. If there is no difference, there will be no distinction, hence no independence between subject and object. If there is negation of identity, there is worse confusion. Hence the nature of reality can neither be exclusively *identity* nor *multiplicity*. As regards relations, no relation is meaningful if there is pure identity and no relation is possible between the two absolutely independent and different terms. Similarly, regarding causal effeciency, the real cannot be either 'absolute constant' nor can it be an 'absolute variant' but a "variable constant."

4.1. It is asked, whether this kind of non-absolutism is itself *absolute* or *not*. Former, there is at least one real which is absolute ; if it is not, it is not absolute and universal fact. Whether non-absolutism is itself absolute or relative depends upon the nature of proposition which is either complete (Sakladesa) or incomplete (Vikladesa). The former being the object of valid knowledge (Pramana) and the latter, two object

of aspectal knowledge (*naya*). This means that the directive of non-absolutism is not absolute unconditionally. However, to avoid the fallacy of infinity regress, the Jainas distinguish between the non-absolutism (*Sanyaka Anekanta*) and false non-absolutism (*Mithya Anekanta*). To be valid, therefore, non-absolutism must not be *absolute* but always *relative*. When one attribute is stated as constituting the whole nature of the real and thus implies the negation of other attributes, such cognitions are examples of the 'false absolute.' But *Naya* is not false though it is partial or knowledge from a particular standpoint.

4.2 The nature of unconditionality in the statement "All statements are conditional" is quite different from the normal meaning of unconditionality. This is like the idea contained in the passage "I do not know myself". Where there is no contradiction between *knowledge* and *Ignorance*, or in the 'I am undecided', where there is atleast one decision : "I am undecided". The unconditionality is not at the level of *existence*, which at the level of essence (*thought*) anything is alternative. We do not live in the realm of *thought* or *reason* above. Behind *reason*, there is always the watershed of *unreason* or *faith*. The Jainas, too have faith in that Scriptures as anybody else has in his order. Here is unconditionality. In each community, there is a special absolute. The absolutes themselves are alternation so far as they are possible (till we are on thought level), but I have chosen one and stick to it, it is more than possible, it is existent or actual. At this point, there may be a reconciliation between conditionality and unconditionality. On thought level, the statement "Everything is conditional", holds good but when we adopt the point of view of *existence*, we are bowed to rest with unconditionality.

5.1 Ideologically, we cannot make one-sided exposition. But in actual usage, whenever we make any particular statement (S is P or S is not P), it takes the form of a categorical proposition. Even a Hypothetical (If S then P) or a Disjunctive (Either S or P) is said to have a categoric basis and therefore, they can be converted into categorical propositions. But since our thought is relative, so must be our expression.

5.2 There is another problem also—how to synthesise the different angles of visions or internal harmony of the opposed predications (S is P, S is not P, S is both P and not P : S is neither P nor not P). It is therefore, the Jainas prefix *Syat* (somehow, in some respect) as a corrective against any absolutist way of thought and evaluation of reality. This is a linguistic tool for the practical application of non-absolutions in words. Because of this prefix *Syat* and the relative nature of proposition, it is called *Syadvada*. But words are only expressive or suggestive (*vachaka* or *junapaka*) rather than productive (*Karaka*). Thus the meaning is, however, eventually rooted in nature of things in reality and we have therefore, to explore a scheme of linguistic symbols (*vachanvinyasa*) for model judgments representing alternate standpoints (*Nayas*), or a way of approach or a particular opinion (*abhipraya*), or view-point (*apeka*).

5.3 This philosophy of Standpoints bears the same relation to philosophy as logic does to thought or grammar to language. We cannot affirm or deny anything absolutely of any object owing to the endless complexity of things. Every statement of a thing, therefore, is bound to be one-sided and incomplete. Hence the Doctrine of Seven Fold Predication (*Saptabhanga*) is the logical consummation of the doctrine of relative standpoints (*Syadvada*). If we insist on absolute predication without conditions (*Syat*), the only course open is to dismiss either the diversity or the identity as a mere metaphysical fiction. Every single standpoint designated in every statement has a partial truth. Different aspects of reality can be considered from different perspectives (*Nikohepa*). Thus *Naya* is the analytic and *Saptabhanga* is the synthetic method of studying ontological problems.

5.4 In these forms of statements, this doctrine insists on the correlation of affirmation and negation. All judgments are double-edged in character—existent and non-existent. The predicate of inexpressibility stands for the unique synthesis of existence and non-existence and is therefore 'unspeakable' (*avakatavya*). This three to predicates—'existence', 'non-existence' and 'inexpressibility' make seven propositions—which are seven exhaustive and unique modes of expression of truth.