

Exposures of a Nomad

experiments with my thoughts

Introduction to Jainism – Anekanta Vada

Jainism is not a religion as most of us confuse it to be, it is a philosophy on how to lead one's life; it is a way of life. It is believed etymologically 'Jainism' comes from the word 'Jaina' meaning conqueror'; since they believe that to attain *Moksha* one must conquer all passions (*Raga and Dvesa*) as their gurus (*Tirthankaras*) did.

As in most Indian philosophical schools, the exact date of Jainism's origination is not known; however most of the Jaina scholars believe it to have originated around 9 +/- 2 BCE. Jaina philosophy recounts of 24 *Tirthankaras*; the first of whom is believed to be *Rsabhadeva* and *Vardhamana* the last. *Mahavira*, a contemporary of Buddha, is believed to be the *Tirthankara* who best defined Jainism. As it always happens in all ideologies, the disciples disagree on some *Naya* (standpoint) or the other and thus create various branches to the main ideological stream. Jainism, in a broad classification recounts of two schools: the *Svetambaras* and the *Digambaras*. These two schools differ mostly in practice and in minor details of faith.

Jaina Theory of Knowledge

Jainism believes that consciousness is an inseparable essence of every *Jiva* (soul). The *Jiva* is conceived like sun light, capable of enlightening every substance unless some obstruction prevents it from reaching its object. Had there been no obstacles the *Jiva* would always be in a state of *Nirvana*. These obstacles have been created by the past *Karmas* of the *Jiva*; the *Manas* (mind or intellect), the *Indriya* (senses), the *Kaya* (body) are all constituted by *Karma* and depending on the *Jiva's Karma* these obstacles obstruct *Jiva's* consciousness by different degrees.

For the following reason Jainism has a three fold classification of knowledge:

- Mediate Knowledge: Knowledge acquired by authority or inference
- Relative Immediate Knowledge: The knowledge acquired by a *Jiva* through the mediums of *Manas* and *Indriya*
- Absolutely Immediate Knowledge: Knowledge acquired by the *Jiva* after removing all the *Karma* obstacles

Jaina Theory Of Substance

Jainism distinguishes between *Dharma* (the nature of a substance) and those which possess *Dharma*, known as *Dharmi*. The latter one is known as *Dravya* (substance). They consider a *Dravya* possessing two different kinds of *Dharma*: *Guna* (essential) and *Paryaya* (accidental). The *Guna* are part of the substance (they remain in it) as long as the substance exists, as consciousness in a *Jiva*. The *Paryaya* manifest themselves and fade away with time in a substance. In a substance's life *Paryayas* can manifest more than once. Desire, pleasure, pain are all *Paryayas*.

Thus substance can be defined as that which possesses *Guna* (qualities) and *Paryaya* (modes).

Vibhajya-Vada

The Buddha did not want to adhere categorically to any extreme viewpoint, thus he would not answer any metaphysical question directly. He would first analyze the question (*Vibhaga*) and its various presuppositions

and distinguish (*Vibhaga*) between the various interpretations. Following this method of analysis and differentiation, the method of breaking-up (*Vibhajya*) the whole into its components one could seek satisfactory answers to such metaphysical questions.

If the above is a reasonably correct interpretation of *Vibhajya-Vada*, then we can translate Vibhajya-Vada as **the method of analysis and differentiation**.

The Buddha classified philosophical questions under four groups.

- *Ekamsavyakaraniya* (questions directly answerable)
- *Vibhajya-Vadana Vyakaranya* (questions answerable by analysis and separation)
- *Prati-Prasnena Vyakaranya* (questions answerable by a counter question)
- *Sthapaniya* (questions answerable by silence or questions that should be set aside)

Vasubandhu explains the four-fold classification in one of his writings, out of which we will only discuss his explanation of the second and third questions.

'Will all beings be born (again)?' This question should be answered through separation and analysis: 'Those with defilements will be born (again), but not those without defilements'.

'Is man superior or inferior?' This question should be countered with a different question. 'With regard to whom are you asking?' If he says 'Is a man superior or inferior to the gods?' Then the answer is 'Man is inferior to god.' But if he says, 'Is man superior or inferior to the lower beings?' Then the answer is: 'Man is superior to the lower beings.'

Vasubandhu explains: The second question can be rephrased, 'Will those who die be born again?' Now this question is answerable only by dividing (*vibhajya*) the classes denoted by the subject term into two groups: those with defilements and those without defilements. The third question also belongs to the *Vibhajya* method. One can answer the question by dividing (*vibhajya*) the predicate-property, or rather by specifying (*visisya*) further the predicate-property. Speaking from the viewpoint of gods, man is inferior; but speaking from the viewpoint of lower beings, man is superior.

Thus we can see that Vasubandhu tacitly assumed the third category to be a sub-variety of the second: thus answerable by *Vibhajya-Vada*. From above we can say that there exist two sub-varieties of *Vibhajya-Vada*:

1. Operates by dividing the subject class into sub-classes
2. Operates by specifying or relativising the predicate.

From my understanding of Mahavira's writings, I can say that Mahavira chiefly adopted the second sub-variety of the *Vibhajya-Vada* method: and thus, developed into the Anekanta method.

Anekanta-Vada

'Is the world eternal or non-eternal?' Mahavira answered; 'the world is non-eternal. It did not cease to exist at any time, it does not cease to exist at any time and it will not cease to exist in any time. It was, it is and it will be. It is constant, permanent eternal, imperishable, indestructible, and always existent. The world is non-eternal. For it becomes progressive after being regressive (in a time circle) and it becomes regressive after being progressive.

The difference between Buddhism and Jainism lies in the fact that Buddhism rejects the extremes, eternal and non-eternal, and believes that the balance between the two, the middle path, is the truth, is real. This for the Jain is an *Ekanta* (a one side view); they would say that the Buddhist view is right, but it is only truth. The extremes are as true (right or real) as the middle path is; it depends from which standpoint we talk about it. Jainism, as a way of life, started as a *Sramana* movement (the non-Brahmanic ascetic tradition). The movement was a rejection of the Vedas, from its conception of the world, to its view on the path to *Moksha*. Jainism went against the violence, physical and psychological, which the Vedic school imparted in name of rituals and

religion. Jainism believes that it is the Ekanta (one sided view of reality) philosophy, which leads to violence. Each school asserting its thesis and claims to be the absolute truth, thus rejecting all the other *Nayas* (standpoints or viewpoints), leads to dogmatism and intolerance; which when further aggravated leads to violence.

Mahavira carried this concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) from the domain of practical behavior to the domain of intellectual and philosophical discussion. The Jaina principle of respect for the other life gave rise to the principle of respect for the views of others; thus to Anekanta-Vada. Non-violence was the goal; Anekanta-Vada became the tool.

There is an interesting Jaina story on Anekanta-Vada. Five blind men have never seen an elephant. When one day an elephant is brought to the village, the five approach, touch and attempt to describe it. One man, who is standing by the trunk, describes it as a thick branch of a tree. The man who feels the tail disagrees, insisting it is rather like a rope. The man who touches the side, in turn, submits that the elephant is actually like a great wall. But the man at the elephant's leg says it is like a pillar, and the man who gets hold of the ear describes it as a huge fan. Luckily, a wise sixth man is nearby to mitigate the dispute. He proclaims that, in fact, all are right, but only partially right. An accurate description of the elephant lies in combining the various partial views. Consequently, a complete understanding of any truth requires the consideration and acceptance of a variety of viewpoints.

Nayas

The different standpoints from which things (through possessing infinite determinations) can be spoken of possessing this or that quality or as appearing in relation to this or that are called *Naya*.

Infinite numbers of affirmations may be made of things from infinite points of view. Affirmation or judgment according to any *Naya* cannot therefore be absolute, for even contrary affirmations of the very selfsame things may be held true from other points of view. The truth of any of any affirmation is thus only conditional and inconceivable from the absolute point of view. To guarantee correctness therefore an affirmation should always be preceded by the word *Syat* (somehow, may be). This will indicate that the affirmation is only relative, made somehow, from some point of view and under some condition and not in any absolute sense. There is no judgment which is absolutely true and no judgment which is absolutely false. All judgments are true in some sense and false in another; this brings us to the Jaina doctrine of *Syad-Vada*.

Syad-Vada

The doctrine of *Syad-Vada* holds that since most contrary characteristics of infinite variety may be associated with a substance, affirmation made from any *Naya* cannot be regarded as absolute. All Affirmations are true (in some *syadasti* or "maybe it is or somehow it is" sense) and all affirmations are false in some sense (*syannasti*). All affirmations are indefinite, unconceivable or indescribable in some sense (*syadavaktavya*). All affirmations are true as well as false in some sense (*syadasti syannasti*). All affirmations are true as well as indefinite in some sense (*syadasti cavaktavyasca*). All affirmations are false as well as indefinite (*syannasti syannasti cavaktavyasca*). All affirmations are true, false and indefinite in some sense (*syadasti syannasti syadavaktavyasca*). Thus we may say 'the jug is' but it is more correct to say 'Syat the jug is'.

Being, not being and indefinite are called three-value logic. The Jaina logic is different from the two-value logic developed by Aristotle, which does not have the concept of indefinite. Graphically the seven different propositions can be shown as:

1. Syat S is P
2. Syat S is not P
3. Syat S is and is not P
4. Syat S indefinite
5. Syat S is P and is indefinite
6. Syat S is not P and is indefinite

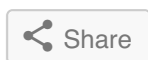
7. Syat S is and is not P and is also indefinite

The relation of the Naya doctrine with the Syad-Vada doctrine is that of any judgment, according to any and every Naya, to be represented in as many alternatives as the different classifications of the Syad-Vada. If a judgment is made solely according to a particular Naya, without any reference to other Nayas, then the judgment is always false thus called *Nayabhasa*.

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Ashish Shah on [May 10, 2011 at 4:02 am](#)

You have very well explained Jain philosophy in few words. And very few jains are knowing about this. Even jain monks might not be knowing this.

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faustoaarya on [May 18, 2011 at 8:41 pm](#)

Thank you so much Ashish for compliment. I feel it would be a bit too much to say that jain monks do not know about this, i'm sure they are aware of such things. The only problem is often philosophies are written a bit to complicatedly... and i tried to put them in more simple language



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Ashish Shah on [May 19, 2011 at 3:35 am](#)

You might be right:),



Someone Without Preconceived Notions on [February 2, 2014 at 4:32 am](#)

Yes, well put article. I have been much better understanding of the world and much calmer composure for many years since attempting to understand the philosophical depths of anekantavada.

Though, I regret to say that most people around us are unable to understand the contextual meaning, that includes a lot of jain monks.

Jainism certainly does not qualify to be a religion. It is more a culture than religion.

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V.Jinesh Kumar on [May 14, 2014 at 6:22 pm](#)

I am a south Indian Jain, and at so many religious discourses we were given the knowledge of Dashalakshan, Panchanu Vrat or Ahimsa and the like. Those are ritualistic part of Jainism. Anyways, excepting a learned few, most of the Shravaks have not heard about 'Anekantha vada', Syadvada or Nayavada. I think the roots of Jainism lies in these spiritual thoughts. Jina munis must strive to teach us these too.

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