

Anekāntavāda and its importance in our Contemporary Life

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Abstract: *Anekāntavāda*, a fundamental doctrine of Jainism suggests that ultimate truth and reality are complex and possesses multiple aspects. According to this theory no single specific statement can describe the nature of existence and the absolute truth. All knowledge is achieved through multiple perspective. The essence of this theory is every single perspective on reality is partial, and it depends on the viewers outlook, contexts and conditions. It rejects the concept of permanent truth, arguing that there are multiple points of view of reality. This method develops openness to different perspective. This doctrine is related to theories like *Syādvāda* and *Nayavāda*. This philosophy has a magnificent effect and it is relevant in today's world. It encourages intellectualism and non-violence by accepting and appreciating different perspectives. Despite criticism and challenges, it remains a relevant approach in society, offering important insight into interfaith, communication, multiplurality, conflict-resolution, and scientific inquiry.

Keywords: *Anekāntavāda*, Doctrine, *Syādvāda*, *Nayavāda*, Relativity of truth, Perspective, Manifold-nature.

Introduction

Anekāntavāda is a principal doctrine in Jainism about the metaphysical truth that rose in ancient India. The word *anekāntavāda* is a mixture of two Sanskrit words, one is '*anekānta*' and another is '*vāda*'. The word '*anekānta*' is also a compound of three radix words; these are- '*an*'-that means not, '*eka*' that means 'one' and '*ananta*' that means 'end' side. Together it implies "not one-ended, sided, or many-sidedness or manifoldness", and '*vāda*' means theory or doctrine. The doctrine of *anekāntavāda* explains the extreme truth and reality, that is complex and has various aspects. The word '*anekāntavāda*' may literally explained as 'the doctrine of 'non-one-sidedness' or 'the theory of not-one-side.'

The terminology '*anekāntavāda*' is not found in early śvetāmbara Jain canonical text. However, this doctrine is found in Mahāvīra's commentary, where he states that finite and infinite depend on one's perspective. The term *anekāntavāda* was invented by Ācārya Siddhasena Divākara to explain the teaching of Mahāvīra, that explains truth or reality can be revealed in various ways. The earliest comprehensive advice of the *anekāntavāda* theory is found in Ūmāsvāmi's *Tattvārtha sūtra*, which is considered as evidential documentary by all Jain sections. The tradition of the Digambara section also provides the core of this theory.

The Doctrine of Anekāntavāda

The doctrine of *anekāntavāda* arose to be a social attempt at equality and it gives dignity to all manifold views and ideologies through the philosophical explanation of the reality. The idea of the manifold nature of reality gets property in Jainism because it mentions no reality or truth cannot be the ultimate, it can have many dimensional forms. So, what is reality for one, may not be the reality for others. *Anekāntavāda* explains that reality has many sides or it is noticed by various

individuals in various ways. This is the progress of society's progress and through this way, peace can be established in society. The theory of *anekāntavāda* is also considered as '*anekāntavāda*' as it explains the truth or reality is complex and it has multiple aspects. It can be experienced but it cannot be revealed by languages. The doctrine of *anekāntavāda* premises that Jain is ancient because it is mentioned in the Buddhist text '*Samaññaphala Sutta*'. According to Jain-*āgamās*, Mahāvīra's answers to all metaphysical philosophical questions was a 'qualified yes or "syāt"'. These mentioned the key differences between the teachings of Lord Mahāvīra and Lord Buddha. By rejecting extreme answers Buddha taught the middle way 'it is' or 'it is not' to metaphysical questions. But in contrast, Mahāvīra taught his followers to accept both, 'It is' or 'it is not' with 'perhaps' qualifications to understand the absolute reality. In Jainism *syātvāda* and *nayavāda* expand the theory of *anekāntavāda*. Our universe is the composition of adverse pairs of pain and pleasure, knowledge and ignorance, life and death, and so on. Everything or all the groups in this world have their interest which makes imbalance and conflicts in thinking. Religious problems are supposed to be solved through the co-existence with society. The co-existence cannot be remained without relativity. The nature of Jain philosophy is based on reality which is argued through many-fold aspects or non-absolutism or *anekāntavāda*, according to this opinion, reality possesses infinite features, which cannot be realized or known by any common man. Individual people think about individual aspects of the same reality, and so their findings are also conflicting with one another. Therefore, they indulge in debates demanding that each of them is fully true. The Jain philosophers tried to solve this problem and express the whole truth. They created the doctrine of non-absolutistic stand-points or *anekāntavāda* with its two parts – *nayavāda* and *syātvāda*.

The theory of *anekāntavāda* is a basic concept of Jain philosophy. This also encourages the development of *syātvāda* and *nayavāda*. According to Karl Potter's opinion, the doctrine of Jain *anekāntavāda* emerged in the environment of Buddhists and Hindus in ancient and medieval India. The different schools of Indian philosophy like- *nyāya-vaiśeṣika*, *sāṃkhya-yoga*, and *mīmāṃsā-vedānta* accepted the soul as a permanent and unchanging entity. But various schools of Buddhist philosophy rejected it and they accepted that there is no permanent soul.

The early Jain texts were not compiled in Vedic or classical Sanskrit; they were composed in *Ardhamāgadhi prākṛt* language. According to the earliest Jain literature, the substantial and developing form of *anekāntavāda* theory is present in Sanskrit text, these were adopted by Jain scholars to contest their idea with Buddhist and other Hindu religions. These texts show an artificial development, the presence and receiving of terminology, concepts, and ideas from opponents' schools of Indian thought, but with novelty and real thought disagreed with their fellows.

But in the early śvetāmbara injunction and according to their teachings, they did not use the term *anekāntavāda* and *syātvāda* but took on teachings in their elementary form without giving its accurate form and without making it as an individual doctrine. In *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, the śvetāmbara Jain text contains references to *vibhāgyavāda* which is as same as *syātvāda* and *saptabhaṅgi*¹ in accordance with Hermann Jacobi. But the digambara Jains conflicted with this text and they did not accept this text as canonical and crucial or authentic.

The comprehensive teaching of *anekāntavāda* theory is seen in the book "*Tattvārtha sūtra*" of Ūmāsvāmī, which is considered as an authentic book by all

section of Jainism including śvetāmbara and digambara. The ultimate time of Śrīmad Svāmī Ūmāsvāmī was unknown, but according to various contemporary scholars, his period can be traced back to the 2nd - 5th century. Kundakunda, the digambara scholar, in his Jain mystical text, exposed the theory of *syādvāda* and *saptabhaṅgi* in *pravacanasāra* and *pañcāsti kāyasāra*. Kundakunda also used *na-yas* to discuss the summery of self in *saṁayasāra*. Kundakunda believed in the digambara tradition, and his time was probably 1st century CE, but by modern scholars, it has been placed in the 2nd or 3rd century CE². In opposition, it is said that the latest available minor literature of Kundakunda appears in about the 10th century or he may have lived in and after the 8th century. If the chronological reassessment of Kundakunda is accurate, it would place his comprehensive doctrine of *anekāntavāda* to the 1st millennium CE.³

The theory of *anekāntavāda* can be explained by the example of blind men and elephant. It is explained in many Jain texts. Suppose there are groups of blind men and they heard that there is a strange animal, named elephant, and it had been brought to the town, but none of the blind men were aware of the shape or size of it. Out of curiosity, they said they must observe and know it by touching, which they are able. So, they searched it out and when they found it, they felt about it. In the case of the first person, whose hand landed on the trunk of the elephant, shouted, this animal is the same as a thick snake. For another person, whose hand touched its ear, he said it is like a kind of fan, and another person, whose hand touched its leg, he said the elephant is like a pillar, and as for another person, whose hand reached the elephant's body he told elephant is like a wall, and another person who touched its tail, he described the elephant is like a rope, and the last person, who felt his teeth, he was stating that the elephant is hard, smooth and like a spear. In the Jain text, this is called '*Andha-gaja-nyāya*' maxim.⁴

Two Jain references are found in *Tattvārtha-śloka-vārtika* of Vidyānandi and *syādvādamañjarī* of Ācārya Mallisena. As per Mallisena's opinion, when someone takes a partial, absolute view of the ultimate reality, and refuses the probability of another aspect of that reality, it is an example of the above parable and imperfect view.⁵ After that Mallisena gave another reference, he states that all reality has infinite perspective and quality all statements can only be relatively true.

The same examples are found in Buddhist and Hindu texts to emphasize the need to be alert for partial points of view of a complex reality, the Jain text also applies it to isolated topics and all subjects. As an example, Jains take help from the principle of *syādvāda* which states the seven predicates as true. From a certain viewpoint—

- ◆ The pot exists.
- ◆ From a certain viewpoint, the pot does not exist.
- ◆ From a certain viewpoint, the pot exists and does not exist.
- ◆ From a certain viewpoint, the pot is inexpressible.
- ◆ From a certain viewpoint, the pot both exists and is inexpressible.
- ◆ From a certain viewpoint, the pot does not exist and is inexpressible.
- ◆ From a certain viewpoint, the pot exists, does not exist, and is also expressible.

Influence of Anekāntavāda

In ancient Indian philosophy, the Jain philosophical concept of *anekāntavāda* had made an important contribution in the fields of skepticism and comparative-ness or relativity⁶. In the development of Indian logic and philosophy, the episte-

mology of *anekāntavāda* had also a deep influence. At the time of applying *anekāntavāda* in the 17th century, the Jain scholar Yaśovijaya narrated that it is not an indiscriminate amalgamation of all views as being true or *anabhigrahika*, which is conclusively a type of misjudged relativism⁷. In the Jain concept, the theory of *anekāntavāda* goes beyond the various traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism.⁸

The theory of *anekāntavāda* played an important role in Jain history during discursive debates from Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians at different times. According to professor of Asian studies, John Koller this doctrine authorized Jain followers to sustain the validity of their theory while at the same time, criticizing the rival's views⁹. In another case, it was an instrument that was used by Jain scholars to face and debate Buddhist scholars in ancient India.

There is historical proof that associated with intolerance of non-Jains, in Jain –history also has been patient and liberal such as Buddhists and Hindus¹⁰. Their texts have never explained a theory for holy war. The Jain followers and their temples have historically conserved in the classical manuscripts of Hinduism and Buddhism, a potential exponent of acceptance and pluralism. At last, it is concluded that Jain's history and theory is a combination of kindness or amiability and tolerance towards others¹¹.

Anekāntavāda in our daily life

Although there are many causes in our daily activities, works and deeds. But each individual should select those motives that will improve his spiritual development and reduce his *kaṣāya*, such as anger, pride, greed, ego, lust, etc. Each being has both permanent and temporary features of life, they suffer fortune and misfortune according to their fate. When anyone suffers due to some misfortunes, they should think it is a temporary characteristic of being and their suffering is also temporary, similarly when one suffers good due to their good fortune, they should think the same. It is said that the permanent characteristics of any being – when anyone does something undesirable work, he should think that he will suffer badly in the future due to his bad work. Jainism illustrates the five causes; these are always present during our works and activities. These five causes are as below

- 1) *kāla* or time.
- 2) *svabhavā* or intrinsic nature.
- 3) *Niyati*, *Bhavitavyatā*, or predestination.
- 4) *Nimitta* or instrumental cause, it is two types – (i) Internal *nimitta* is karma or *prārabdha*, and (ii) External *nimitta*, that is another person or thing.
- 5) *Puruṣārtha*, self-effort or free will.

Although the five causes are always present in our activities, but an individual focuses on one basic cause, it is as follows –

- ♦ After the finishing of a work or activity, if the result is positive, then one should consider that it was due to the help from external *nimitta*.
- ♦ If the result comes negative, then one should think that it was the result of his previous karma or internal *nimitta*, that fetched the negative result.

But at the time of any works or deeds one should consider that it was his endeavour or determination.

Relationship to the theory of Syādvāda

The meaning of *syādvāda* is could-be-ism. It is an epistemological doctrine of Jain logic. In *syādvāda*, from its philosophical perspective, all propositions about reality are based on finite, confined contextual postulates. In other words, the doctrine of *syādvāda* is a theory of conditioned prediction that gives a manifestation to

anekānta by recommending that the adjective *syād* be linked to each and every expression. It is not only the propagation of the theory of *anekāntavāda*, but also it is an individual process of logic. It can stand on its power. The theory of Jainism demands that whereas reality is complex, so no single premise can reveal the nature of reality totally. For this cause, the terminology '*syād*' should be prefixed before each proposition and give it a conditional viewpoint.

The term *syādvāda* comes from the connection of two words – '*syād*' and '*vāda*'. The meaning of '*Syād*' is 'maybe' and '*vāda*' means 'assertion'. Togetherly '*syādvāda*' means assertion of what may be or assertion of possibilities. And according to Sanskrit's etymological root, the meaning of the term '*syād*' is 'perhaps' or 'may be'. But the theory of '*syādvāda*' implies – 'in some ways' or 'from a perspective'.

The Jain doctrine of *syādvāda* is revealed in the procedure of *saptabhanginaya*, the seven-fold prediction. This process assures that each statement is manifested from seven kinds of different relative viewpoints or conditional premises, thus it is considered the doctrine of conditioned predication. These seven types of propositions are as follows –

- 1) *Syād-asti*- it means "in some ways it is".
- 2) *Syād-nāsti*-it means "in some ways, it is not."
- 3) *Syād-asti-nāsti*-it means – "in some ways it is and it is not."
- 4) *Syād-asti-avaktavyaḥ*- it means – "in some ways it is and it is indefinable".
- 5) *Syād-nāsti-avaktavyaḥ*- it means – "in some ways, it is not and it is indefinable."
- 6) *Syād-asti-nāsti-avaktavyaḥ* – It means "in some ways it is, it is not and it is indefinable."
- 7) *Syād-avaktavyaḥ*- It means "in some ways it is indefinable."

In another way of revealing this seven-fold condition predictions are as follows—

- 1) *Syād- asti* – may be perhaps or possibility it is.
- 2) *Syād-nāsti*- may be or perhaps or possibility, it is not.
- 3) *Syād-asti-nāsti-ca*- maybe or perhaps or possibility, it is and it is not.
- 4) *Syād-avaktavyaḥ*-may be or perhaps or possibility, it is indeterminate or indefinable.
- 5) *Syād-asti-ca- avaktavyaḥ ca*- maybe or perhaps or possibility, it is and also indeterminate or indefinable.
- 6) *Syād-nāsti-ca avaktavyasca*- may be or perhaps or possibility, it is not and also indeterminate or indefinable.
- 7) *Syād-asti-nāsti-ca-avaktavyasca*- may be or perhaps or possibility, it is and it is not and also indeterminate or indefinable.

Each seven propositions experiment with the complexity of objects and multifaceted reality from a relative viewpoint of time, substance, space, and mood. To avoid the complication of the object is to commit the fallacy of dogmatism. The Jain theory of *syādvāda* is then desired to explain that among the different truths about a particular thing, one or another or both may be or not valid or invalid that results a qualified prediction, just as exhibited in the doctrine of manifold predictions.

Conclusion

The doctrine of *anekāntavāda* and *syādvāda* are interrelated, but it's are often criticized in the fields that they originate a degree of hesitancy and doubtfulness. This creates more complexity than solving the problem. It is pointed out that the epistemology of the Jain philosophy achieves assertibility for its theory but at the cost of being incapable of refusing contradictory theory. Moreover, it is also argued that this theory becomes self-corrosive while it is considered that if reality is complicated and nothing can explain it fully, then this theory itself is imperfect and incomplete, therefore it is an *ekāntavādi*¹². This criticism may have been expected by Ācārya Sāmantabhadra, while he describes "From the point of view of *pramāṇa* or means of knowledge, then it is *anekānta* or multisided, but from the *naya* viewpoints it is *ekānta* or *onesided*"¹³.

In its defence, Jains also indicate that *anekānta* manages to reconcile the protesting viewpoints more than simply confute them and helps in the abrogation of one-sided errors and puzzling that the *ekāntavādins* take care to make.

From the Vedāntists point of view, *anekāntavāda* is not above criticism, particularly from Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. He attempted to disprove some of the dogma of Jainism in his commentary of 'Brahmasūtra' (2.2.33 - 36), where he describes the considerable disregard for the theory of *anekāntavāda*.

It is not possible that contrary qualities or characteristics like being and non-being should at the same time belong to the same thing; such as our watching power teaches us that a thing cannot be cold and hot at the same time and same moment. The third variant reveals in the words, that they either are such or not such—results in knowledge of an indefinite nature which is no more an origin of true knowledge than doubt is. In this way the means of knowledge, the motive or purpose of knowledge, the theme of knowledge, and the act of knowledge, all become indefinite. How can its followers work on this theory, the matter of which is together unstable or indefinite? The results of their effort are perfect knowledge and imperfect knowledge. The observation signifies that, only when a course of action is known to have a particular result, people set about it except any hesitancy. Therefore, a man who promotes a theory of altogether indefinite content is not eligible to listen any more than an intoxicated man¹⁴.

However, Śaṅkarācārya failed to hold the real position of *anekāntavāda* into account by identifying *syādvāda*, that is considered as *saṁśayavāda*, that is known as agnosticism, once—which was expressed by Sanjaya Belatthaputta¹⁵. He was also plucked to take into discretion that the confirmation of the existence of an object is in respect to the object itself and its refusal is in the respect to what the object or topic is not, by giving an object the characteristics of positivity and negativity at the same time without any incoherence.

Dharma Kīrti, the other Buddhist logician taunted *anekāntavāda* in *Pramāṇavārttikakārika*. According to him with the dissociation removed, all things have dual characteristics, thereafter, if somebody is requested to eat curd, then why does not eat camel¹⁶?

The insinuation is clear, if curd exists from the attributes and nature of curd and does not exist from the characteristics and nature of camel, then one is supported in eating camel because by eating camel, he is only eating the retraction of curd. Ācārya Ākalaṅka also accepted the opinion of Dharma Kīrti, he agreed that Dharma Kīrti may be right from a point of view, and took it upon himself to issue a protestation.

“The person, who condemns without understanding prima facie outlook, is performing like a funster and not a critic or arbitrator”.

There are conventions like this that Bhagvān Buddha was born as a deer and deer is born as Buddha, here Buddha is venerable and deer is only a food. As same as for the cause of the strength of a being, with its similarities and dissimilarities specified, no one would eat camel if he requested to eat curd¹⁶.

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