

## ANEKĀNTAVĀDA AS SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF SOME WESTERN VIEWS

Altruism of Jaina philosophy emerges directly out of the Jainas' ethics of *ahimsā* 'non-violence'. Man as man must protect and respect the life of all kinds of living creatures. Mallisen, while endorsing the views of the Sāṃkhya in support of 'ahimsā', rejects the weak plea of the Mimāṃsakas and the Vedists that *himsā* 'violence' though ordinarily a sin, is not so when prescribed by the Vedas.<sup>1</sup> This strong advocacy for the practice of non-violence is not confined to physical life; rather it extends to the intellectual outlook of the Jainas. This is one of the main reasons why the Jainas entertain all kinds of views held by other systems of philosophy; for they believe that if the other systems of philosophy "see things from the point of view of the opponent as well as from their own, there would be perfect harmony all around"<sup>2</sup>. The implementation of this principle is not very difficult for the Jainas who, being a thorough-going empiricist and realist, rely upon sense-data as given to experience, although the latter may vary from person to person even with respect to the same thing. This intrinsic faith in the sense-data is based not on any dogmatism, but on a sound logical ground. Thus as a solution to the manifold conflicting views regarding the nature of reality, the Jainas offer their metaphysics of Anekāntavāda. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is firstly to discuss the conflicting claims of the absolutists regarding the nature of being and to point out wherein they err; and secondly to elaborate the tenet of Anekāntavāda in the light of some modern Western views.

### II

To begin with, the Jainas' doctrine of Anekāntavāda stands in a sharp contrast to the eternal and absolute views of the Advaita Vedāntins, the Buddhists and even the Vaiśeṣikas. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad<sup>3</sup>, the changing states and forms are condemned as mere illusions of the senses, mere *nāma-rūpa* 'objects of name and, therefore, mere appearances' for their true nature cannot rationally be ascertained. But what remains

stable and permanent in the midst of these changing modes and forms, is alone true and real and this we know as substance. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad<sup>4</sup> too supports this and considers the whole creation as the work of *māyā* contrived by the ultimate reality, Brahman.

As against this, the Buddhists go to the extent of denying the reality of all existent entities. Since all things and beings are found to be momentary, changing and impermanent, what we ordinarily think to be a permanent substance must also remain vitiated. For, according to the Buddhists, there can be no substance devoid of qualities which the Upaniṣadic seers regard as real. In short, there can be no permanent reality underlying change, rather one change is continually determined by another.

In the like manner, the Vaiśeṣikas err in admitting *Sāmānya* 'universality' and *viśeṣa* 'particularity' as distinct realities over and above '*dravya*', '*guṇa*', '*karma*', etc.—"distinct inter se and distinct from the things in which they are supposed to inhere".<sup>5</sup>

### III

Thus the above schools of thought advocate views which conflict with one another. The Jainas, therefore, repudiate the claims of all those who either believe that somethings are eternal and some are evanescent, or that all is evanescent or all is eternal.<sup>6</sup> As a reconciliation between the conflicting claims of the above thinkers, the Jainas introduce their celebrated doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* 'Relative Pluralism'.

The Jainas find the views of the Vedāntins, the Buddhists or the Vaiśeṣikas as one-sided and partial, for each one of them lays emphasis either on the permanent nature of being or on the changing modes. But the truth of the matter is, as the experience shows, that in everything that changes some qualities remain *druva* 'permanent' that some new qualities are found to be *utpāda* 'emerging' and finally there is a *vyaya* 'loss' of some old. In view of this, everything that we experience is found to possess this triple character. Thus the nature of being *sat* as Mallisena describes it, is "that which is possessed of origina-

tion, destruction and permanence.... And that is the acceptance of a single entity variegated by plurality of attributes, namely eternal, non-eternal, etc., that is what it comes to.”<sup>7</sup>

It would be clear then, that triple is the development of all ‘subjects of attributes’. Thus when we take a lump of gold, its development in the shape of a dish or an ornament etc., is a form of its character-development. When the goldsmith, having melted up the gold-dish, makes ornaments out of it, the dish having been deprived of its marks of presentness, ‘assumes the mark of pastness; whereas the ornaments, having abandoned the mark of futurity, assume the mark of presentness.’<sup>8</sup> This shows therefore, that modes and substance exist together and neither is possible without the other; for both are primarily two relative aspects of one and the same thing and not absolutely opposed. In view of this character that most ostensibly belongs to a thing, the Jainas, while condemning the unequivocal and absolute stand-points that their opponents adopt with respect to a thing, remark:

“Whosoever, through seeing before his eyes one lasting thing, equipped with momentary origination and destruction, looks down, O Jina ! upon Thy precepts, he is madman, O Lord, or demon-possessed.”<sup>9</sup>

This gives, in a nutshell, the main metaphysical tenet of Anekāntavāda, which the Jainas advocate, regarding the nature of reality. This doctrine, which gives due importance to the variegated nature of reality, later on forms the basis of Jainas’ *syādvāda* and the principle of *naya* replacing admirably the rigorous and rigid unequivocal views of philosophers by a humanistic and pragmatic *darśana* ‘outlook’.

#### IV

Now, since everything is *anantadharmātmakam vastu* ‘equipped with infinite attributes’, no categorical or unequivocal assertion can be made about it. All affirmations can be true only under certain limitation or reservation. It is only when the forces of Karmas ‘actions’ that obstruct perfect knowledge have been removed, which is possible only when one has over-

come *rāga* 'attachment', *dveṣa* 'hatred', *irṣā* 'jealousy', *moha* 'infatuation' etc. that one can have *kevalajñāna* 'absolute knowledge'.<sup>10</sup> Since for an ordinary human being this is not possible, he has to satisfy himself only with the knowledge that is conditional and relative. This is why the Jainas are compelled to adopt the principle of *naya*, according to which the mind is thought to approach reality differently from different points of view. This doctrine of *naya* refers particularly to the context in relation to which "we define and separate our stand-points by abstraction".<sup>11</sup> Thus in a positive sense disease cannot be affirmed of a healthy man, but in a negative sense it can safely be held that 'the healthy man has no disease'. In this connection it may further be held that, it is because of this conditionality and relativity of knowledge that the Jaina thinkers favour the view of asserting the existence, non-existence and unutterable characters of things, as is reflected in their doctrine of *Syādvāda* or *Saptphanginaya* having seven-nuance-views<sup>12</sup>—*syāt asti, syāt nāsti, syāt asti ca nāsti ca, syāt avaktyvyam, syāt asti ca avaktavyam ca syāt nāsti ca avaktavyam ca, and syāt asti ca nāsti ca avaktavyam ca*. These views of Jainas with seven-nuances reveal the possible shades of affirmations necessitated by the manifold nature of reality and are perfectly in conformity with their "intellectual *ahimsā*. Just as a right-acting person respects the life of all beings, so a right-thinking person acknowledges the validity of all judgments. This means recognizing all aspects of reality."<sup>13</sup>

## V

In this connection it may be mentioned that this peculiar feature of Jainas' logic of *Anekāntavāda* has a great similarity to the views of some leading contemporary Western thinkers, who also seem to have been guided by the principle of relative pluralism and empiricism in ascertaining the nature of reality, as the Jainas.

Bertrand Russell, for instance, while discussing the 'Nature of Matter'<sup>14</sup>, makes a sharp distinction between physical objects in their private spaces and those that are in public spaces. According to him, in the sphere of epistemology, we are ordinarily concerned with the existence of objects in their private

spaces and their true nature, as is given to experience, is ascertained in accordance with the different stand-points of the observer, although their intrinsic nature "which is what concerns science must be in real space, not the same as anybody's apparent space".<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, an existent entity in the real space, which is primarily public, transcends a percipient's view. What one is ordinarily concerned with is, therefore, a thing in its private space which varies according to the different points of view or *nayas* as the Jaina might say. Thus Russell remarks :

"A circular coin, for example, though we should always judge it to be circular, will look oval unless we are straight in front of it.... In different people's private spaces the same object seems to have different shapes."<sup>16</sup>

The ordinary percipient beings, are concerned only with the sense-data concerning knowledge of physical objects. The relative positions of physical objects 'more or less correspond to the relative positions of sense-data'. However affirmations of percipient beings regarding the nature of objects are bound to vary. And this substantiates the Jainas' view that no unequivocal or absolute assertion can ever be made about a thing.

In a like manner Prof. H. H. Price, while refuting the claims of the Naive Realists<sup>17</sup> that perception makes no difference to what is perceived and that there is a complete unanimity between the sense-data and the object perceived, supports our above contention that perception or conception of things are largely determined by many other conditions with the result that, unless we take account of those conditions, our views regarding their nature are likely to be erroneous. As Prof. Price observes :

"A stone feels heavier when you are tired, and lighter when you are fresh.... the way it appears, the sensuous qualities, it appears to have, depend partially on us, on the state of our bodies and minds—are as it were plastic, and vary with alterations of those states."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly the realistic relativistic theory of Prof. A. N. Whitehead or the idealistic relativistic trend in the systems of W. James and F. C. S. Schiller can further be mentioned in support of Jainas' Anekāntavāda.

Whitehead develops his epistemological theory in the study of nature, as a thorough-going phenomenologist, in the most scientific manner and takes account of the manifold details like electrons, protons, the spatio-temporal relations, the perceiving mechanism etc. all of which go a long way in determining sense-perceptions.<sup>19</sup> According to his dynamic view of nature, the perceiving mind and the object perceived are not separate and independent of the environmental changes incessantly occurring in nature so that each 'actual entity' is like a cell-fission, a microscopic organism. Knowledge of a thing, therefore, is the net result of a reciprocal interaction between the perceiver and the perceived leading to a variegated view of it. And this dynamic view of reality is not different from the view held by the advocates of Anekāntavāda.

In a like manner, the pragmatic empiricist James observes that in course of perception sensations are, as it were, forced upon us and the minds 'exert an arbitrary choice' in arranging and selecting the sense-data. Our knowledge of reality, therefore, "depends on the perspective into which we throw it. The 'that' of it is its own; but the 'what' depends on the 'which'; and the 'which' depends upon us. Both the sensational and the relational parts of reality are dumb."<sup>20</sup> So the reality can be taken to be an ambiguous stuff and can be conceived in many ways relative to the percipient's purpose, propensity and choice. This initiates a novel method of approach towards objects of knowledge which James calls radical, "because it is contended to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypothesis liable to modification."<sup>21</sup>..And this reminds us of Jainas' attitude towards things and beings which is subject to change, according to different points of view.

Lastly, we may refer the views of the British pragmatist, Schiller, whose 'Humanism' is an application of James' study of nature. Schiller adopts a similar experimental and biological principle as James', though in a more rigorous manner, to the extent that even mathematical truths, the validity of which cannot ordinarily be questioned, are conditional and tentative, according to him. Thus two plus two, according to him, can be four only under certain conditions, i.e., if and only if the entities

added together retain their respective characters, but not otherwise. This means that there can be no absolute and necessary truths, as what the Jainas' Anekāntavāda or *Syādvāda* is committed to.

These and many other such illustrations which we come across in philosophy simply strengthen our faith in the Jainas' Anekāntavāda. What we mean to suggest, therefore, is that the Jaina thinkers were not blind to what the present-day scientific theories of perception and phenomenology advocate regarding the nature of things seen and perceived. It was because of such considerations as these that led the Jainas believe in Anekāntavāda and for that matter in *Syādvāda*.

## VI

Several objections have been raised, especially by the Advaita Vedāntins, Buddhists and Rāmānuja, against the view of Anekāntavāda. They object as to how the nature of reality (*sat*) can be considered to be inclusive of attributes both existent and non-existent, which obviously are contradictory to each other.<sup>22</sup> According to Rāmānuja, although the alternatives envisaged by the Jainas like "May be, is; May be, is not; May be is, and is not; etc. describe the particular states of things, yet this is not tenable on account of the impossibility in one (entity)—on account of simultaneous existence of contradictory things"<sup>23</sup> As a consequence of these objections, there can be no such relation as *Samavāya* 'inherence' in which variegated attributes are thought to co-exist in a substance.

In reply to such objections, the Jaina thinkers remark that the real is simply composed of infinite attributes and what is not considered so, is also not any existent entity. Thus what is equipped with origination, falling off and permanence is alone existent; for "existence otherwise than so is not easily justified."<sup>24</sup>

In this connection it may be mentioned that the Jainas' view of reality comes very close to the views of some Western idealists like Hegel and Bradley, who too do not find any contradiction when qualities of opposed nature co-exist in a thing. For, what they consider as real is an individual or a concrete universal indicative of an identity in the midst of multiplicity. The only diffe-

rence between the Jainas and the idealist thinkers lies in this that the view of the former are governed by their ontology of realistic pluralism, whereas the views of Hegel or Bradley stem out of their monistic idealistic thought. But so far as the nature of reality is concerned, whether it is one or many, or even ideal or real (in the sense in which the real is an extramentally existing entity), it can never be abstractly simple or devoid of complexity.<sup>25</sup> Although different attributes belong to the reality, yet they are compatible and conjoined. In so far as they are diverse, they may be incompatible and disjoined. As Bradley observes :

“The object possesses this diversity, so far, all together and at once. The qualities thus seem simply joined and are called compatible.... The object has these qualities. It has them now one and now another, according to the conditions.”<sup>26</sup>

In view of the above considerations, every thing and being must comprehend and reconcile differences within it, though of course, the contrary and contradictory qualities cannot exist in one and the same thing at the same time and in the same part of it. Thus there is no absurdity or incompatibility when attributes that are of opposed nature co-exist simultaneously in a thing in different relations. As Mallisena observes :

“In a single man, through difference of such and such conditions, even mutually contradictory attributes, father-ness, son-ness, maternal-uncle-ness.... etc. are familiar, what is to be said ?”<sup>27</sup>

Further, since the reality in every respect comprehends differences within it and is a unity of inter-related reals, no categorical or unequivocal assertion can be made of a thing. All affirmations can be true only in the *syād asti* ‘may be it is’ sense. Referring to the views of the absolutists like the Advaita Vedāntins or Buddhists, who find contradictions in the doctrine of Anekāntavāda and for that reason in any equivocal assertion, the Jainas remark :

“Not contradictory, when conditioned by differences of conditions,

In things is non-existence, and existence and unutterability.



Simply from not having awoken to this, afraid of contradiction,  
The stupid fall slain by that 'unequivocal' view".<sup>28</sup>

Thus it would be utterly wrong to hold that the Jainas' Anekāntavāda is subject to contradiction and for that matter their *Syādvāda*, having seven-nuance-views, stands vitiated. Prof. C. D. Broad, the eminent British philosopher, thinks that there can be no contradiction when 'sensible appearances' of physical objects vary and appear differently under changing conditions or relations. As he says :

"There is no incompatibility between the mere facts that something appears to you to be circular and that something appears to me to be elliptical at the same moment... still there is felt to be some important sense in which a physical object can remain unaltered, whilst some of its appearances change".<sup>29</sup> And this also answers the question as to why when some existent, non-existent and unutterable attributes are conceived to be conjoined together in an entity, there seems to be no contradiction at all.

In short, the Jainas' doctrine of Anekāntavāda or Relative Pluralism, arising out of their view of reality, is a commendable step to reconcile the one and the many, the universal and the particular and the Vedāntic Substance and the momentarily evanescent attributes of the Buddhists. In this sense, this doctrine visualizes the 'whole truth', while other systems "possess only the gleams of the broken light".<sup>30</sup> Indeed, this effort, on the part of the Jainas, to create harmony among the conflicting claims of philosophers, by introducing the doctrine of Anekāntavāda, is a natural consequence of their attitude towards life aiming to foster world-brotherhood and the ethics of *ahiṃsā*.

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#### NOTES

1. Cf 'vedavihitā tu hiṃsā pratyut dharmahetuḥ' etc. *Syādvādamanjari*, stanza 11.,3.
2. A. B. Dhruva, Mallisena's *Syādvādmanjari*, Poona, 1933, Intro., P. LXXIII.

3. 'yathā samyaiken mṛtṛpiṇḍena sarvaṁ mṛṇmayam vijñātāṁ  
syād vācārambhaṇaṁ vikaro nāmdheyaṁ mṛttiketyeva satyam,  
Chāndogya, Chap. VII.
4. Cf 'māyāṁ tu prakṛtiṁ viddhimāyinaṁ tu maheśvaram;  
tasyāvayavabhūtaistu vyāptam sarvamidam jagat.'  
Svetāśvatara, Chap., IV. 10
5. A. B. Dhruva, Mallisena's Syādvādmañjarī etc., Intro., p. LXXXiv.
6. Cf 'that, they say, is in one case simply eternal, in another  
simply non-eternal.'  
Thus the chatterings of the foes of Thy precepts. 'Mallisena, Syādvāda-  
mañjarī, Trans., F. W. Thomas, Motilal, Delhi (India). Verse 5, P. 22.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
9. *Ibid.*, Verse XXI, p. 129.
10. See Umāsvāmin, Tattavārthadhigamasūtra, Chap. I, Verse 9.12.21.
11. Radhakrishnan, Indian Phil., Vol. I, Allen & Unwin, 1951,  
p. 298-99.
12. Cf Mallisena, Syādvādmañjarī, Trans. F. W. Thomas, etc., pp.  
145-46.
13. G. B. Burch, 'Seven-valued Logic in Jain Phil.', International  
Phil. Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 1, Feb. 1964, pp. 71-72.
14. See Problems of Philosophy, Oxford Univ. Press., 1959, pp. 27-36.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
16. *Ibid.*
17. See his article, 'Reality and Sensible Appearance', Mind, Vol. 33,  
1924, pp. 20-43.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
19. See especially his 'Nature and Life', Cambridge.
20. W. James, Pragmatism, Paperback, Longmans, Green, 1958, p. 161.
21. W. James, The Will to Believe and other Essays, New York,  
Longmans, Green, 1896, p. VII.
22. Cf Dharmakīrti, Pramāṇa-Vārtika, I, 182-85.
23. Rāmānuja, Śrībhāṣya (ed.), R. D. Karmarkar, University of  
Poona, 1962, Vol. I, Part II, Verse 321, p. 687.
24. Mallisena, Syādvādmañjarī, Trans. etc. Verse XXII, p. 132.
25. Cf. "The fact, which is given us, is the total complex of qualities  
and relations which appear to sense," F. H. Bradley, Principles of Logic,  
Vol. I, Oxford Univ. Press., 1967, p. 94.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
27. Syādvāda Mañjarī, Trans. F. W. Thomas, etc., p. 143.
28. *Ibid.*, Verse XXIV, p. 144.
29. His article 'The External World', Mind, Vol. 30, 1921, p. 386.
30. A. B. Dhruva, Mallisena's Syādvādmañjarī, Poona, 1933, Intro.,  
p. LXXiv.