

Anekantvada: Debunking Absolutism

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ABSTRACT

The universe is the composite of groups consisting of adverse pairs like knowledge and ignorance, pleasure and sorrow, life and death and so on. Interestingly, life depends on such adverse groups. All the groups have their own interests, which create clashes and conflicts in thinking and viewing to aspects among themselves.

Keywords: Knowledge, ignorance, clashes, conflicts

Introduction

The religion is supposed to pacify these clashes through co-existence on socialistic pattern of society. The co-existence cannot be remained without relativity. According to McEvilly, the Jain theory of knowledge is not a phenomenon, but realistic in a correspondence view. [1] Jainism has propounded three doctrines of relativity used for logic and reasoning, which are indicated below:

Anekāntavāda - the theory of relative pluralism or manifoldness or non-absolutism.

Syādvāda - the theory of conditioned predication

Nayavāda- the theory of partial viewpoints

These aforementioned Jain philosophical concepts made very significant contributions to the ancient Indian philosophy, especially in the areas of skepticism and relativity. For instance, **Anekantvada** - Anekāntavāda, meaning "non-absolutism," is one of the basic principles of Jainism that encourages acceptance of relativism and pluralism. According to this doctrine, truth and reality are perceived differently from different points of view, and no single point of view is the complete truth. [2]The word anekāntavāda is a compound of two Sanskrit words: Anekānta "manifoldness" and vāda "school of thought." [3]

Syādvāda - Syādvāda advocates that predications are conditioned and an expression to anekānta. It recommends that the epithet Syad should be attached to all the expressions. Syādvāda not only extend Anekānta philosophy, but also it is a separate system of logic which has its own strong force. The Sanskrit etymological root of the term Syād is "perhaps" or "maybe," but in context of syādvāda, it means "in some ways" or "from a perspective." Hence, concept of reality is a complex phenomenon and no single proposition is capable enough to express the nature of reality as a whole. This theory says that "syād" should be prefixed before each expression so that a conditional point of view can be given in the statement to remove dogmatism, since it ensures that each statement is expressed from seven different conditional and relative view points or propositions, it is known as theory of conditioned predication. The following seven propositions are also known as saptabhāgi are: [4]

- syād-asti—"in some ways it is"
- syād-nāsti—"in some ways it is not"
- syād-asti-nāsti—"in some ways it is and it is not"
- syād-asti-avaktavya—"in some ways it is and it is indescribable"
- syād-nāsti-avaktavya—"in some ways it is not and it is indescribable"
- syād-asti-nāsti-avaktavya—"in some ways it is, it is not and it is indescribable"
- syād-avaktavya—"in some ways it is indescribable"

Each of these seven propositions examines the complex and multifaceted reality from a relative point of view of time, space, substance and mode. [5]

Nayavāda – The theory of partial view points or standpoints is known as Nayavāda. Nayavāda is made of two Sanskrit words—Naya- which means "partial view point" and vāda – which means "school of thought." Nayavāda is the system of Jain philosophy which is used to come to a certain *conclusion* from a point of view. All objects may be having infinite aspects but it is observed that when one describes it, one speaks of only relevant aspects, and other irrelevant aspects are ignored. For example, when one talks of a white Mercedes one simply considers the brand and color of the car but that does not mean that the car is not having other attributes like engine type, navigation panel, speed, price and choice. While operating within the limits of language and seeing the complex nature of reality, Māhāvīra used the language of nayas. Naya, being a partial expression of truth, enables us to comprehend reality part by part.[6]

Conceptual Framework: The Blind Men and an Elephant

The Jain concepts of Anekantvāda and Syādvāda are often explained with the parable of Blind Men and an Elephant. It is also known as andhaganyāyah, which is translated as "the maxim of blind (men) and elephant." The following parable (and many of its variants) is used by Jain authors to explain the multifold nature of truth: "A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch of which we are capable." So, they sought it out and when they found it they groped about it. In the case if the first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said "This being is like a drain pipe." For another one whose hand reached its ear expressed, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, "I perceive the shape of the elephant to be like a pillar." In addition to that, the one who placed his hand upon its back said "Indeed, this elephant is like a throne." Now, each of these presented a true aspect when he related what he had gained from experiencing the elephant. None of them had strayed from true description of the elephant. Yet they fell short of fathoming the true appearance of elephant." [7] According to Anekāntavāda the beliefs of all opposing parties and rivals are also to be considered. The advocates of this philosophy apply this principle to all religion and philosophies. They even remind themselves that even clinging too rigidly to theories of Jainism even is not less than committing an error as it will be based on its limited stand point. In this application, anekantvāda resembles Western principles of cultural and moral relativism. The principle of anekāntavāda also influenced Mahatma Gandhi's principles of religious tolerance, ahimsa and satyagraha.[8]

Synchronization of Varying and Unchanging Reality

Mahavira has widely used Anekanta to explain the philosophical concepts of Jainism. In one of his work named Bhagvatisutra, wherein he has provided responses to many questions, which are recorded. Furthermore, it can be traced from his expressions that there are multifaceted and complex aspects to reality and truth, which cannot be explained by a mutually exclusive approach:

Gautama: Lord! Is the soul permanent or impermanent?

Māhavīra: The soul is permanent as well as impermanent. From this point of view, substance it is eternal and in the point of view of its modes it undergoes birth, decay and destruction, hence impermanent.

Jayanti: Lord! Of the states of slumber or awakening, which one is better?

Māhavīra: For some souls the state of slumber is better and for some, states of awakening. Slumber is better for those who are engaged in sinful activities and awakening for those engaged in meritorious deeds. [9]

Cerebral Non-Violence and Religious Open Mindedness

The philosophies of non-absolutism and conditioned prediction allows the followers of Jainism to accept the reality in other religions from their perspective and thus bringing about a tolerance and open mindedness for other stand points. Anekantvāda is manifoldness and pluralism and firmly opposes all rigidness, even including any affirmation that only Jainism is the accurate religious path to follow indicating cerebral non-violence or non-violence of mind. Moreover, Māhavīra encouraged his followers to study and understand the rival traditions as evidenced in Acaranga Sutra:[10] According to the philosophy of non-absolutism there is no combat of ideas, as it is considered to be a form of cerebral violence or injury, which may rationally lead to physical hostility and battle. In present era, the restrictions of the adversarial, "either with us or against us" form of dispute is more and more evident, which leads to conflicts in all spheres like social, emotional, religious and political. The reason being, there are various judicial systems prevalent throughout the world, freedom of speech is granted as a right by various constitutions, secularism, which perfectly exhibit the rationality of Anekantvada. Many authors advocated that along with non-violence, non-absolutism or Anekantvada, which have been worthy enough to provide a solution to a multitude of issues that world is facing like religious intolerance, terrorism, exhaustion of natural resources, wars so on and so forth? The blatant truth is that innumerable possibilities are hidden in all scriptures and entities. For instance, wheat is the first stage of a cake or wheat can be converted into a cake. This is what the philosophy of Anekantavada wants to prove. It certainly indicated that one should not inflict ones' own thoughts, ideas or standpoint on others, but should make an effort to try to accept the ideas or standpoints of the opponents also.

Implications

This philosophy may be sincerely put into practice, which may facilitate everyone in removing the short-sighted approaches, self-centered and incomplete viewpoint. Thus, it teaches us how to

get rid of disagreement, disharmony and institute harmony and concord in existence, by being broad minded and forbearing in our attitude and behaviour towards others. The future researchers may vent into the facets of integrated aspects to draw philosophical conclusions on Anekantavad Philosophy.

Conclusion

The philosophy of non-absolutism should be implemented in all spheres of life. It guides the followers how to reconcile with the candid opinions of all human beings on the globe and therefore, the ancestry of contemporary democracy could be seen in this principle of Jainism. It symbolizes diversity in unity and unity in diversity. It paves the way to settlement of difference of opinion, contradictory statements, different belief systems, view points etc. The Jain philosophy of non-absolutism or Anekantavada, if followed may pave a way to peaceful co- existence and may become an instrument to bring about global harmony.

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