ANEKĀNTAVĀDA AND AHIMSĀ : A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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Though some commentators, like Uno Tantinen, do not wish to relate the principle of *Ahiṁsā* to ontology as ontological differences are "irrelevant for the practice of non-violence"[1], it seems to me that one's view of reality has got ethical implications and as such, obviously affects one's social practices. That is why, the concept of *Ahiṁsā*, though advocated by many traditions, is conceptually different in each of them. No one can deny that Jaina view of *ahiṁsā* is not what Buddhists or Advaita-Vedāntins imply by it. Therefore, it seems important to find out whether or not *Anekāntavāda* provides a valid and consistent ontological basis for the practice of *Ahiṁsā* and how it compares with other Indian traditions. It would also be interesting to reflect upon the relevance of such understanding for initiating inter-religious dialogue for the purpose of getting rid of religious violence. This paper is modest effort in that direction. It comprises of three sections. Section one deals with the relationship of the Jaina concept of *anekānta* with that of *ahiṁsā*. In section two, Jaina framework for inter-religious dialogue is elaborated with instances from the past and section three focuses on efficacy of the Jaina framework in solving religious conflicts, besetting in many parts of the present world, compared to some other approaches.

I

Before one begins inquiring into the relationship between *anekāntavāda* and *ahiṁsā*, one needs to have a fairly consistent understanding of the concept of *anekanta* for the purpose. Without going into the details of the controversy related to various formulations of the concept, we can safely state that the concept of *anekānta* is central in

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Jain philosophy. Mahavira is usually accepted as the original propounder of the *anekānta* doctrine. It is a unique contribution to the philosophic tradition of India. Literally put, the word *anekānta* means 'not one' or 'more than one'. Therefore, the term '*anekānta-vāda*' means the theory of non-onesidedness or, to be more precise, 'the theory of many-sided nature of reality'. The basic connotation is, that reality is essentially anekāntic in character. Thus the doctrine of *anekāntavāda* can be briefly described as acceptance of the manifoldness of reality[2]'. No philosophic proposition, as it claims, can be true if it is simply put without any qualification. If a proposition is asserted unconditionally, it excludes other rival possibilities and then it becomes *ekānta* one sided. Such unconditional assertion violates the principle of *anekānta* and thus, it is to be regarded as false.

What usually happens in philosophic disputes is that a thesis propounded by a particular school is rejected by a rival school by putting forward a contradictory thesis. Each school claims its own thesis to be the absolute turth and does not wish to understand the point made by the opposite school. The arguments and counter arguments made by the rival schools only lead to dogmatism in philosophy. All one-sided philosiphies are open to this evil of *ekānta*. But, according to *anekāntavāda*, rival propositions can be integrated together as they may all contain some element of truth. Only thing to be done is to present these rival propositions with proper qualifications. Thus, *anekāntavāda* is a philosoiphy of synthesis-an attempt to synthesize different ontological theories of ancient India. But any such attempt to synthesize the opposite viewpoints in philosophy will alway present some problems. Being aware of such problems and in order to solve them, Jaina philosophers developed a philospohic methodology consisting of *naya-vāda* (the doctrine of stand points) and *syād-vāda* or *sapta-bhangi* (the seven fold predication). By this dual doctrine, Jainas tried to defend their *anekāntavāda.*

To make it more clear, *anekāntavāda* is to be contrasted with *ekāntavāda* which stands for a definite categorically asserted philosophic position. But aneka 'many' is not diametrically opposite to eka 'one', for many includes one. Different *ekāntavadās* may thus be only constituents of the *anekānta* doctrine[3]. Also aneka does not stand for indefinite or infinite, for, as any Jaina scholar would point out, *anekāntavāda* is certainly

not a philosophy of indetermination[4].

However, it is useful to make a distinction between the two senses of *anekāntavāda*. First, the term is used to denote Jaina view of reality, the metaphysical doctrine that reality is manifold and each reality consists of diverse forms and modes, or innumerable aspects. Secondly, term *anekānta-vāda* is also used for the Jaina philosophic method which allows for reconciliation, integration and synthesis of conflicting philosophic views[5]. Thats why, sometimes *anekāntavāda* is called *syād-vāda*[6], although the latter term is usually reserved for 'the dialetic of sevenfold predication.'

Now, we can disuss how *anekāntavādaā* as a metaphysical doctrine as well as a philosophical method, leads to an ethic of *ahimsā*. Since reality is manifold, an ordinary person is not expected to know all its characteristics. This means many limitations, many extensions, many relations, many points of view. A thing may be known from various angles and all such views may be correct in their own limitations. Thereforee, *anekāntavāda* is a doctrine which keeps a knower in his own limitation. So, whenever he crosses his own limitation and declares his knowledge as right and complete one and that of the other being as totally wrong and incomplete, he commits *himsā*. This *himsā* can be seen in two ways:

1. *Sva-himsā* (self-injury) : The person who presents his partial and incomplete knowledge as a full and complete one, he commits his own injury caused by egoism.

2. *Para-himsā* (Injury to other) : When he proclaims that only he possesses correct knowledge because of its completeness and other person has wrong knowledge because of its incompleteness, he commits *para-himsā*, i.e., injury to other by pinching his heart. For nobody wants to be declared as a person with wrong knowledge[7].

We have seen above how *anekantavada* as ontological doctrine saves one from self-righteousness and thus from committing *himsā* to himself as well as to others. But, *anekāntavāda* when expressed as method leads to *syādvāda* which guides how to present the limited knowledge so that knower may save himself from committing injuries. Adding a word 'syāt' to a proposition makes it to be considered as limited. This saves one from presenting his incomplete knowledge as complete. He does not try to

impress upon other persons wrongly. Other persons do not feel threatened. At the same time, other persons do not feel that they are wrong and the person who has expressed his knowledge knows the whole truth. Thus, both sides try to understand views of each other and can enter into a dialogue, resulting into the tolerance and respect for the views of others. This creates an intellectual atmosphere where in conflicting propositions of rival schools may be presented with qualifications so that they may lead to, if possible, a new synthesis, if not possible, to a peaceful coexistence.

We may not be sure whether or not the doctrine of *anekāntavāda* was present in rudimentary form in Jaina philosophy from the very beginning, but we know with considerable certainty that Mahavir was a contemporary of the Buddha, while Parśvanāth must have appeared before the time of the Buddha. It was Parśvanāth who propounded the four fundamental rules of ethics which were accepted by both Mahavir and the Buddha, but he did not seem to uphold any philosophical thesis such as *anekāntavāda*. Thus, Jaina notion of ahiṁsā is more ancient compared to *anekānta* doctrine, the beginning of which can be traced in the teachings of Mahavira. However, Mahavir added a new dimension to the meaning of *ahinsā* as we shall see now.

Jainism offers us, unarguably the most extreme conception of ahiṁsā. Although the requirements for the householders are not as strict, Jain monks must adher to severe restrictions on thier actions and observe extraordinary precautions so that they may not harm anybody with intention of harming[8]. According to Jain philosopher, N.D. Bhargava, *ahiṁsā* must be totally unconditional and unrelational, its practice is successful only by disengaging from the world of 'give and take[9]'. He fruther contends that non-violent action is 'independent of society[10] ! Non-violence is possible and possible only without interrelationship because interrelationship is dependent on others and cannot be natural[11]. This is surely a call for extreme asceticism. For the purpose, Jains insert upon totally autonomous, self sufficient and isolated view of the self.

Mahavir, too, was a man of vary strict principles, never soft on the *ācāra*. He did not regard self-mortification as violence done to self. He preached that we may not even dream of killing a living being. This does not mean that killing of any kind is sinful. However, we should live in this

world in such a way that we do not have to kill living being. We should cultivate a feeling of kindness and compassion for all living creatures, and killing, or inflicting pain upon others will be allowed when and only when it is unavoidable[12]. This is possible only when one accepts all the living creatures as equal to one's ownself and therefore tries not to harm anybody with the intention of harming.

The uniqueness of Mahavira's contribution lies in carrying the above concept of *ahimsā* from the domain of practical behaviour to the domain of intellectual and philosophic discussion[13]. Thus, it seems, as Kapadia has pointed out, Jaina principle of respect for the life of others gave rise to the principle of respect for the views of others[14]. He further contends:

".....this doctrine of *anekāntvāda* helps us in cultivating the attitude of toleration towards the views of our adversaries. It does not stop there but takes us a step forward by making us investigate as to how and why they hold a different view and how the seeming contradictories can be reconciled to evolve harmony. It is thus an attempt towards syncretism[15].

Thus, simply put, *anekāntvāda* is another name of *ahimsā* in thought. This philosophic doctrine of Jainas is characterized by toleration, understanding and respect for the views of others. This does not mean that one holds no position of one's own but the most admiring thing is that a sincere attempt is made to understand the position of the adversary, in accordance with the ontology one holds dear. This does not, however, absolve us of the responsibility of finding out whether the fundamental assumptions of *anekāntvāda* are correct, or not. But the close relationship between *anekāntvāda* and *ahimsā* in thought and the resulting catholocity of Jaina outlook can not be denied.

II

As seen in the previous section, for the Jaina tradition, the personal application of non viclence extends to how one forms and holds opinions about others, fully acknowledging that differences exist in the world. If one assumes a posture of rigidity in defence of one's views, others may find this offensive. But if one holds no view of one's own, or has no sense of propriety, then one would be groundless, without purpose or identity. In such case, he may presumably accept even violent actions. Both these

extremes are *ekāntic* in character and therefore violate the principle of *ahiṁsā*. Thus, rather than developing a form of absolutism or utter relativism, the Jaina outlook towards the ideas of others combine tolerance with a certainty in commitment to Jaina cosmological and ethical views.

In this section, we shall discuss how Jaina approach towards traditions that do not share their world view, can be used as an effective device to initiate inter-religious dialogue and reduce religious violence. Much violence in the world today emanates from fundamental religious disagreement. If persons with divergent cosmologies and ideologies can be given a framework through which to tolerate one another, peace can prevail.

The Jaina tradition may be considered 'fundamentalist' in the sense that its cosmology and ethics have not been subject to revision. The fundamental teachings of Jainism state that the world is divided into living and non-living components, that innumerable life forms have existed since beginningless time, and that life can be liberated through a fourteen fold process. The emergence of two groups, Digambaras and Śvetāmbaras can be traced to other historical issues since both exhibit a "remarkable unwillingness to depart from their basic doctrine and practice[16]." However, this fundamentalism is tampered by a fervent concern that the points of view held by others are not be dismissed but rather that they be explored, understood, and then contextualized in the light of Jaina doctrine. With this in mind, the Jainas have exercised great care in articulating how their position differs from those of others, while not condemning alternate views as incorrect...only incomplete.

The Jainas have shown great care to understand and respect the position of others. For the purpose, they have been engaged in a form of dialogue with other traditions that has broadened their knowledge without altering their own faith and commitment. Record of it is found in the earliest texts of the Jaina canon. The *Sūtrakrata* included in the second section of Jaina canonical literature, critiques of other systems of Indian thought in the light of Jainism. In the fifth century, Siddhasena Divakaras' *sanmatisūtra* investigates various view points as being non valid when asserted in an absolutist manner. And in the thirteenth century, Mallisena's Syādvādamanjari offers a comprehensive critique of non-Jaina philosophical

schools and religious practices. Buddhists and Hindus are also known for referring to positions of others to clearly articulate their own views. However, these traditions have also developed new forms that integrate and synthesize preexisting traditions. Jainism, by contrast, did not develop substantially new forms, holding fast to its teachings on karma, jīva and ahiṁsā.

On the basis of our foregoing discussion, we can now delineate salient characteristics of the Jaina frame work for inter-religious dialogue.

a) Reality is manifold in character *(anekāntvāda)*

b) Notion of partial truth. Each truth is a partial one (naya) and no one statement can ever account for totality of reality (doctrine of stand points)

c) Seven fold analysis of reality (*Saptabhangi*) that specifically disallows the holding of any extreme view.

d) Intellectual *ahimsā* (tolerance for the views of others).

Jaina philosophers, like Mallisena as mentioned earlier, applied successfully the above framework in their dialogue with other systems of thought, acknowledging their partial truths and hence validated, though not applauded. Given the fact that India has long grappled with an issue that has come to the forefront in the West during the last thirty years: how to deal with plurality of world religions coming regularly into contact with one another, the validity of the Jaina framework cannot be minimized among the various models suggested.

III

Today, when we are witnessing religious fundamentalist viloence in various parts of the world and some emminent thinkers of the West are propounding the thesis of clash of civilizations in the years to come, the questions naturally come to the mind: will the traditions more clearly define and maintain their integrity in light of their contact with other traditions or will traditions begin to melt together? Which approach is most valid for inter-religious dialogue?

Paul Knitter[17] provides us a comprehensive survey of a host of positions taken up by Western thinkers on the above questions, which include:

a) all religions are relative (Troeltsch),

b) all religions are essentially the same (Toynbee),

c) all religions share a common psychic origin (Jung),

c) Christianity is the only true religion (Barth),

d) revelation is possible in other religions, while salvation is not (Tillich),

f) all religions are ways to salvation (Rahner),

g) theocentric model (Knitter)

Comparing the various above models with that of the Jainas, the combined positions of Jung, Barth and Tillich seem closest to that of Jainas. Like Jung, Jainas see a commonality amongst *Jīvas*, all hold the potential for liberation. Like Barth, the Jainas are convinced of the sole effectiveness of their own tradition in achieving their goal. And like Tillich, they agree that partial truth is found elsewhere as well.

Solutions given by Troeltsch, Toynbee, Rahner and Knitter himself are more problematic from the Jaina perspective. Radical Relativity would negate the efficacy of the Jaina system. Commonality of traditions (Toynbee) is in direct contrast to the perceived content of the respective traditions as well at the idea that all religions are ways to salvation (Rahner). Jaina would find theocentrism as most troublesome to accept because it would remove the religious process beyond human control as the Jainas refute the notion of any external devine force and assert that all religious experience comes from one's own initiative.

Three potential approaches can be discerned from this survey of inter religious encounters: conversion, accomodationist syncretism often in the form of a super inclusivistic metatheology and tolerant or flexible fundamentalism.

Conversion is the first real option. No doubt, some persons get converted consciously, some unconsciously and nothing seems to be wrong with it. But when such conversions take place on a large scale they not only create suspicion about the real motives of those aiding such activities but also make communities feel insecure about losing one's religious identities. This results into much hatred and violence as can be seen in the recent cases reported from Orisa and Gujrat in India. It is an exercise of

religious domination, not toleration that ultimately leads to break in inter religious dialogue.

Accomodationist syncretism has been long standing tradition throughout Asia. In China, Korea and Japan, we find interpenetration of Taoism, Buddhism and Confueianism. Successive religious adaptations were made in India when Sramanic and Vedic traditions merged, when Shankara infused Hinduism with Buddhism, when Guru Nanak brought Islam and Hindu Ideas together. The same trend can be easily seen in the efforts of Akbar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekanand too. One difficulty with such an approach (this should also include inclusive ideologies such as benevolent humanism) is that the rigorous study and logical consistency that characterizes the 'great traditions' becomes tenuous, though these matters should not be the litmus test for spiritual experience.

Tolerant or flexible fundamentalism, preferred by the Jainas, allows and in fact requires that the religiously informed person be well acquainted with how different traditions have approached the basic issues of human limitation and transcendence. It encourages respect for others perspectives and yet allow one's primary comitment to remain rooted in that which one feels most authenticated. This approach allows for various possibilities, but does not deny or relativize the validity of one's own position. It also allows traditions and persons to discover commonalities without heralding those commonalities as absolutes. For example, The World Wild Life Fund has brought together religious leaders and scholars from various faiths to conceptually deal with the pressing problem of environmental decay. The solutions may proceed from different ideologies, often non-religious ones yet there need be no assumption that the ideologies themselves need to be changed.

Fundamentalism is often viewed disparagigly as a blind devotion to a fixed set of beliefs to the point of excluding all other views. however, in order for a religious tradition to perform effectively, certain world views need to be agreed upon by its adherents. These world views of different religions, understandably at times, come into conflict with each other. A solution to this dilemma is found in the Jaina logical frame-work, as discussed in the previous saction, that allows for and respects innumerable positions yet holds to its own cosmological and ethical view. Thus, the Jaina model

of flexible fundamentalism offers one option for validating a fundamentalist devotion to basic teachings while still acknowledging the validity of divergent views within their own context.

The Hindu approach to multiplicity has often been termed as inclusivist[18]. This may seem to indicate that the variant positions included are part of an over arching schematic, or answerable to some sort of central diety of monistic absolute. To the contrary, if we examine some of the many ideas included in what some characterize as Hinduism there seems to be no such possible absolute. Just as the many gods of the Vedas are effective in different situations, so the many yogas are prescribed in the *Geetā* without compromising or subordinating one to another. Mutual paths are allowed to exist in complementarity. If one needs ot act, one uses Karma Yoga, if one needs to meditate, one uses Dhyana Yoga. This text is written with a gentle tolerance, allowing various practices and positions to be pursued, but unlike Jainism, without insisting upon a unified or even consistent view.

Similarly, in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patanjali, various paths are announced, but no judgements are pronounced. no teaching is said to be higher or better. Differences between the various systems of practice are not denied, nor are they even discussed. His techniques coexist as compliments, not as competitors.

The juxta positional accommodationist model of Hindus, like multiperspectival tolerance of the Jainas, allows one to account for and to respect the other without denying, contradicting or converting. But does it lead to inter religious dialogue or acceptance of another's view point? Mere Juxta position of different view points may lead to an uneasy, indifferent dolerance. Equality of status to other view points is not denied but in case of dispute unlike the Jaina model, no logical device is proposed to resolve it.

In most violent acts of religious fundamentalist variety, an underlying superiority of one's own position and non-acceptance of another's view point is easily discernible. It seems impractical, in contemporary situation, to expect people to shed their belief in superiority of their respective religions. But religious bigotry can surely be curtailed if they are made to

understand partial truth content of opponent's belief systems. The Jaina framework of intellectual non violence serves the purpose better, compared to other models, as it requires a commitment to one's own belief system accompanied with an ability to tolerate the positions of others. But can it celebrate the difference? Perhaps then it will have to accept the partial truth value of one's own religious belief system. That requires thinking about the issue of *anekāntika* afresh from the way Jain thinkers have thought about it. Are we ready to accept the challenge[19]?

NOTES

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3. *Ibid*, 24
4. Acarya Maya Pragya, *Anekānta Ka Arth* a private paper personally made available by Prof. Daya Krishna
5. B. K. Mati Lal, *op. cit*, p. 25
6. Mallisena, *Syādvād - Manjari*, ed. by A. B. Dhrva, Bombay University, Bombay, 1933, p. 13
7. B. N. Sinha, *Philosophical Aspect of Non-Violence*, in Śhramaṇ Ap. June 1996, Vol. 4-6, Pārśvanāth Vidyapitha, Varanasi p. 89
8. *Acaranga Sūtra*, Ed. by H. Jacobi Pt.1, London, *Sacred Book of the East*. XXII: 36
9. N. D. Bhargava, 'Some Chief Characteristics of the Jain Concept of Non-violence' in *The Contribution of Jainism to Indian Culture* Ed. R. C. Dwivedi, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 1975 p. 124
10. *Ibid*
11. *Ibid*
12. D. Malvania, '*Jain Theory and Practice of Non-violence*, Sambodhi, Vol. 2 No. 1 p. 3
13. B. K. Matilal, *op. cit*. p.6

14. *Ibid*, p.6
15. Kâpadia, H. R., Introduction to Haribhadra's *Anekāntasaya patka*, Ed. by H. R. Kapadia, Baroda Oriental Institute, 1940, (vol.1) p. CXIV
16. Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, University of California, Press, California, 1979. p. 88
17. Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Mary Knoll, New York, Orbis, 1985
18. See Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe*, Albany, State University of New York Press, New York. 1988
19. Daya Krishna, *How Anekāntika is Anekānta? Some Reflections on the Jain Theory of Anekāntavāda*, JICPR, Vol. XVI, No. 2 199, p. 128