

Jainism

Introduction

Jainism, derived from the word 'Jina' meaning 'conqueror,' refers to those who have conquered their passions, desires, and karmas to attain liberation. This ancient faith recognizes 24 Tirthankaras or 'Founders of the Faith,' with Rṣabhadeva as the first and Mahavira as the last. Although Mahavira isn't the founder, his teachings greatly influenced modern Jainism, which emerged around the 6th century B.C., coinciding with his time and the Buddha's era. The 23rd Tirthankara, Parshvanatha, who preceded Mahavira, is also a historical figure, living in the 8th or 9th century B.C.

Anekantavada

Jaina metaphysics, known as Anekantavada or the doctrine of manyness of reality, presents a realistic and relativistic pluralism. In this perspective, matter (podgale) and spirit (jiva) are considered separate and independent realities. There exist countless material atoms and individual souls, each possessing numerous aspects of their own. These aspects are infinite in number, making it impossible for ordinary people to know all the qualities of a thing. Human knowledge is inherently limited and relative.

The Jaina epistemological and logical theory, called 'Syādvada,' complements this metaphysical view. It emphasizes that we can only know some aspects of reality, and consequently, all our judgments are relative. Anekantavada and Syādvada are two facets of the same teaching – one highlighting the manifold nature of reality, and the other focusing on our limited understanding of it.

Substance (dravya) is a key concept in this philosophy. It is the foundation of reality, persisting through all attributes and modes. Substance is defined as that which possesses qualities and modes, with some being permanent and essential (attributes or guna), while others are changing and accidental (modes or paryaya). Substance and attributes are inseparable, as attributes are the permanent essence of substance. Reality, from this perspective, is both a unity-and-difference or difference-and-unity.

Jainism strikes a balance between Brahmanism and Early Buddhism, acknowledging both the one and the many, the permanent and the changing. Substance is defined as possessing the characteristics of production, destruction, and permanence, as it has an unchanging essence but also changing modes. This comprehensive view prevents the fallacy of Ekāntavāda, which is the mistake of considering any one-sided view as the whole truth. Jainism, by considering all these partial views, is appropriately called Anekantavāda

Syadvada

Syadvada, also known as Sapta-bhangi-naya, represents the theory of relativity of knowledge. Sapta-bhangi-naya translates to 'dialectic of the seven steps' or 'the theory of seven-fold judgment.' The term 'syät' signifies possibilities, perhaps, or maybe. Syādvāda is sometimes interpreted as the theory of probability or the doctrine of the 'may-be,' but it doesn't imply skepticism or agnosticism. In this context, 'syät' conveys relativity. Thus, the accurate translation of Syādvāda is the theory of Relativity of knowledge.

Reality possesses infinite aspects, all of which are relative, and we can only comprehend some of these facets. Consequently, all our judgments are inherently relative, conditional, and limited. The term 'Syät' or 'Relatively speaking,' viewed from a particular perspective related to other viewpoints, must precede all our judgments. Absolute affirmation and absolute negation are both incorrect. All judgments are conditional. This isn't self-contradictory because reality's nature is indeterminate and infinitely complex, and affirmation and negation aren't made from the same standpoint.

The challenge of making predications is resolved by recognizing that the subject and predicate are identical from a substantive standpoint but different from a modal standpoint. Hence, categorical or absolute predication is deemed erroneous. All judgments possess dual aspects; affirmation presupposes negation, and vice versa. The infinitely complex reality (ananta-dharmakam vastu) allows for opposing predicates from different viewpoints. It is real and unreal, universal and particular, permanent and momentary, one and many, depending on the perspective.

The Jainas often reference the tale of the six blind men and the elephant. Each blind man touched a different part of the elephant and tried to describe the entire animal based on what they felt. They disagreed, with each claiming their description was accurate. However, someone who can see the whole elephant understands that each blind man perceives only a part of the elephant, which they mistake for the whole creature.

Jaina logic employs Syādvāda, known as Sapta-bhangi-naya, which distinguishes seven forms of judgment. These seven steps are as follows:

Syādasti: In a relative sense, something is real.

Syannāsti: In a relative sense, something is unreal.

Syādasti nāsti: In a relative sense, something is both real and unreal.

Syadavaktavyam: In a relative sense, something is indescribable.

Syādasti cha avaktavyam: In a relative sense, something is both real and indescribable.

Syānnāsti cha avaktavyam: Relatively, a thing is unreal and is indescribable.

Syādasti cha nāsti cha avaktavyam: Relatively, a thing is real,unreal and indescribable.

Certainly, when considering something from its own perspective, it exists, but from the perspective of others, it does not. We can understand an object as a positive reality in terms of its own characteristics like matter, form, space, and time. However, when viewed in relation to the characteristics of other objects, it takes on a negative nature. By acknowledging these two different viewpoints, we arrive at a third judgment: something is both real and unreal, albeit in distinct senses. When we simultaneously affirm and deny the existence and non-existence of something, or when we assert and negate its different aspects of being and non-being, it becomes impossible to describe. It becomes either both real and unreal at the same time or neither real nor unreal. This represents the fourth judgment. The remaining three judgments are combinations of the fourth judgment with the first, second, and third, respectively.

Bondage and liberation

Karma serves as the connection between the soul and the body in Jainism. Ignorance, along with four passions (anger, greed, pride, and delusion), referred to as kasaya or sticky substances, attracts karmic particles that adhere to the soul, leading to the flow of karmic matter towards it. This process of karmic matter beginning to flow towards the soul and subsequently infiltrating it is termed Asrava or flow and Bandha or bondage, respectively. Ideal bondage (bhava-bandha) occurs when the soul has a negative disposition, while material bondage (dravya-bandha) happens when karma actually enters the soul, merging intimately with it, similar to how water mixes with milk or fire with a red-hot iron ball. This integration is why life and consciousness are found throughout the body. Right faith, knowledge, and conduct help stop the influx of new karma, known as samvara or stoppage. Then, existing karma must be exhausted, which is Nirjara or wearing out. When all karma is depleted, the partnership between the soul and matter dissolves, and the soul radiates its innate qualities of infinite faith, knowledge, bliss, and power, achieving Moksa or liberation, accompanied by omniscience (kevala-jñāna). The liberated soul transcends samsāra and resides eternally in knowledge and bliss at siddha-shila. In summary, bondage signifies the union of the soul with matter, while liberation signifies their separation. Jainism is fundamentally an ethical teaching aiming to perfect the soul. Asrava causes bondage, and samvara leads to liberation, with the other teachings in Jainism elaborating on these principles. These five states, along with Jiva and Ajiva, constitute the seven principles of Jainism, while sometimes virtue (punya) and vice (papa) are included to make up the nine categories of Jainism.

Passions, rooted in ignorance, attract karmic matter to the soul, making ignorance the true cause of bondage, aligning with Sāṅkhya, Buddhism, and Vedānta philosophies. To eliminate ignorance, one must acquire knowledge, emphasizing the importance of right knowledge. This right knowledge is derived from faith in the teachings of the omniscient Tirthankaras,

emphasizing the necessity of faith. Right conduct complements knowledge, as theory without practice is empty, and practice without theory is blind. Right knowledge emerges when all karmas are eradicated through right conduct. Consequently, right faith, right conduct, and right knowledge collectively constitute the path to liberation, forming the three Jewels (tri-ratna) of Jainism, with their perfection being intertwined.