UNIT 12 : JAINISM : THEORY OF SYĀDVĀDA

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives
12.2 Introduction
12.3 A Brief Account of Jainism
12.3.1 Jaina Epistemology
12.3.2 Jaina Metaphysics
12.4 Syādvāda or the Sapta-bhangi-naya
12.5 Criticism of Syādvāda
12.6 Let Us Sum Up
12.7 Further Readings
12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
12.9 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain jaina epistemology
- describe jaina metaphysics
- analyse syādvāda or sapta-bhangi-naya
- discuss some critical comments on Syādvāda.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you the theory of syādvāda in jainism. But before we go into the concept of syādvāda we have to discuss the concept of epistemology and metaphysics. Jaina epistemology and metaphysics are dealt with the jaina concept of syādvāda. Therefore, this unit informs the Jaina epistemology and metaphysics. Like other Indian systems, jaina system also deals with the sources of knowledge. Jaina epistemology talks of the three sources of knowledge, perception, inference and testimony. Apart from this, it holds that it is not possible for ordinary people to know all

the qualities of a thing. It indicates that people can know only some qualities. That is why, people can get relative knowledge. This relative knowledge of a thing is called syādvāda. So, syādvāda is the relativity theory of knowledge. On the other hand, The Jaina metaphysics is realistic and relativistic pluralism. The Jaina holds that reality consists of the manyness of reality. Therefore, the Jaina metaphysics is known as anekānatavāda. So, metaphysics and epistemology are the two aspects of the same teaching in Jaina system.

12.3 A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF JAINISM

The origin of the Jaina faith can be traced out in the pre-historic time. The Jaina system believes in 24 Tirthankaras or the liberated propagators of the faith. Mahāvira, the last Tirthankara, is not regarded as the founder of the system, because even before him Jaina teachings were existent. Although Mahāvira is not regarded as the founder of the system, still his teachings gave a new outlook to Jaina system. Mahāvira, who is also known as Vardhamāna, was contemporary to Gautam Buddha.

12.3.1 Jaina Epistemology

The Jainas admit three sources of knowledge. They are respectively: Perception, inference and testimony. The Jaina shows that inference produces valid knowledge when it obeys the logical rules of correctness. Like inference, testimony also produces valid knowledge when it is the report of a reliable authority. From these sources of knowledge, it can be held that Jainas admit two kinds of knowledge. They are immediate and mediate or direct and indirect.

According to Jaina system, knowledge is again, divided into two kinds. The first one is Pramāna. It imeans knowledge of a thing as it is. The second one is Naya. It means the knowledge of a thing in its relation. Naya means a standpoint of thought about a thing. Nyaya, as a Pramāna, holds that we can get partial knowledge of a thing. So, Partial knowledge of different aspects of a thing is called

Naya. It is not at all possible to get complete knowledge of a thing. Therefore, according to Jaina, truth is relative to our different standpoints of thought about a thing.

The Jaina system holds that there are seven nayas. The first four nayas are called 'Artha Naya', because they relate to objects or meanings. The last three are called 'Sabda Naya', because they relate to words. Nyaya involves a fallacy, when we take it as absolute (final statement of a thing). This fallacy in Naya is called nayabhāsa.

12.3.2 Jaina Metaphysics

The Jaina metaphysics holds that reality possesses innumerable qualities. So, an object possesses infinite number of characteristics of its own. Therefore, it is not possible for ordinary people to comprehend all the qualities of a thing. People can know only some qualities. Therefore, the Jaina metaphysics is relativistic pluralism. It is also called anekāntavāda in the sense that an object or a thing includes infinite number of characteristics. Ordinary people cannot cover all the aspects of a thing. So, different standpoints or statements of a thing is called anekantavada.

Again, Jaina metaphysics is relativistic in the sense that no statement or a standpoint of a thing can claim to be absolute. Therefore, all truths are relative in comparison to others. Every standpoints or statements are partially true. So, the Jaina metaphysics is called anekāntavāda or many ness of reality.

From Jaina metaphysics it can be derived that knowledge is relative. In this context it can be said that human knowledge is relative and limited regarding an innumerable characters of an object. From the epistemological standpoint we can know only some characters of an object; this is called 'Syādvāda'. Again, from the metaphysical standpoint this is called anekāntavāda, because an object has infinite number of characteristics. Indeed, the two doctrines like Syādvāda and Anekāntavāda are the two sides of the

same coin. We commit a mistake in Jaina metaphysics when we regard a statement or a standpoint as an ultimate or absolute view regarding an object. Then we commit a fallacy of ekāntatavāda.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Q.1. What are the sources of knowledge in Jaina system?

.....

Q.2. What are the two kinds of knowledge in Jaina system?

.....

Q.3. What is naya, according to Jaina system? (Answer in about 40 words)

.....

.....

Q.4. What is anekāntavāda? (Answer in about 50 words)

.....

.....

.....

Q.5. State whether the following statements are True or False :

a) Jaina metaphysics is relativistic (True/False)

b) Jaina epistemology is called Syādvāda (True/False)

c) Jaina metaphysics is called anekāntavāda. (True/False)

d) The Jaina system holds that there are eight nayas. (True/False)

12.4 SYĀDVĀDA OR THE SAPTABHANGI NAYA

Syādvāda is the theory of relativity of knowledge. It is also called saptabhangi naya or the seven fold judgment. The word 'syat' literally means 'may be', 'probable', 'perhaps'. Therefore, it is also known as the probability theory of knowledge. Jainism through the theory of 'syādvāda' holds that reality has infinite number of characteristics. People cannot know all the characteristics of a thing. Therefore, human knowledge regarding the

absolute nature of a thing is probable. People can get partial knowledge of a thing. This indicates that Jainism advocates the probability theory of knowledge. But it does not mean that Jainism leads to skepticism or the impossibility of knowledge. Reality has infinite characteristics. It is not possible to bring out the complete nature of reality from one standpoint or angle. Therefore, all judgments are relative or conditional in relation to other judgments from different standpoints or perspectives.

We can take an example here to describe the nature of relativity or probability theory of knowledge. When we say "this mountain exists", we do not mean that this mountain exists absolutely or unconditionally. Here, human knowledge of the mountain is necessarily relative, because we think that the mountain exists in a particular shape, length, breadth, height and also in a definite time and space. But the mountain does not exist in another form, matter and at other space and time. It is clear that we can make a judgment that the 'mountain exists' from one standpoint, and also make a judgment that 'the mountain does not exist' from another standpoint. Therefore, Jainas say that judgements are relative or conditional.

The theory of Syādvāda holds that all judgments are conditional, relative and limited. No judgment can be absolutely wrong or true. This indicates that judgments are partially true or partially false. It means that all affirmative judgments presuppose negations as well as all negative judgments presuppose affirmation. Affirmation and negation are the two edges of a judgment.

In case of explaining the nature of Syādvāda, Jainas put forward a story of the six blind men and an elephant. The blind men put their hands on the different parts of the elephants in order to describe the whole animal. The first blind man who touched the ear of the elephant opined that the elephant was like-a-country made fan. The second blind man who caught the leg of the elephant viewed that the elephant was like pillar. The third blind man who touched the trunk of the elephant said that the elephant was like a python. The fourth blind man who caught the tail of the elephant viewed that the elephant was like a rope. The fifth one who touched the side said the elephant was like a wall. The last one who touched forehead

opined that the elephant was like the breast. From the story of the six blind men and an elephant it is derived that each blind man thought that his explanation regarding the elephant was correct. But he, who can see the animal, can view that each explanation regarding the elephant was partially correct. Therefore, the syādvāda theory of the jainas shows that our judgments or standpoints bring out the different aspects of reality. Our judgments express only partial truth. No judgments are absolutely true. The word 'syāt' should be incorporated to all judgments to point out the conditional character of judgments. There are seven different ways of expressing judgments by the word 'syāt'. These seven different ways are known as syādvāda or sapta-bhangi-naya. These are as follows:

1. Syādasti : Relatively, a thing is real. It can be symbolically expressed as 'Perhaps S is'.
2. Syādnnāsti : Relatively, a thing is unreal. It can be symbolically expressed as 'Perhaps S is not'.
3. Syādasti nāsti : Relatively, a thing is both real and unreal. Symbolically expressed as, perhaps S is, is not.
4. Syādavaktavyam: Relatively, a thing is indescribable. Symbolically expressed as, perhaps, S is indescribable.
5. Syādasti cha avaktavyam : Relatively, a thing is real and is indescribable. Symbolically expressed as, perhaps S is and indescribable.
6. Syādnnasti cha avaktavyam : Relatively, a thing is unreal and is indescribable. Symbolically expressed as, perhaps S is not and indescribable.
7. Syādasti cha nāsti cha avaktavyam : Relatively, a thing is real, unreal and indescribable. Symbolically expressed as, perhaps S is, is not, and indescribable.

Now, we can explain the seven fold judgments of Syādvāda.

1. Syādasti (Perhaps S is) : This is an affirmative judgment. From the point of its own substance, place, time, and nature, a thing exists. The pot exists as an earthen substance possessing red colour in summar at Guwahati.

2. Syādnnasti (Perhaps Sis not) : This is a negative judgment. From the point of view of substance, place, time, and nature, a thing does not exist as other things. The pot does not exist as watery substance possessing dark colour in spring at Nagaon.
3. Syādasti nāsti (Perhaps S is, is not): The third is an affirmative and negative judgment in succession. The pot exists as its own substance in its own place at a particular time with its own nature. It does not exist as substance in another place at another time with another quality.
4. Syādavaktavyam (perhaps, S is indescribable) : This is simultaneously both affirmative judgment, and negative judgment. The present nature of the pot as an earthen substance with its red colour and absence of its watery substance with dark colour inhere in a substance. But it cannot be expressed. But in another sense it cannot be absolutely indescribable. Like the concept of maya of Advaita Vedānta it includes both the thesis and the anti-thesis at the same time.
5. Syādasti cha avaktavyam (perhaps, S is and indescribable) : This is an affirmative judgment combined with simultaneous affirmative judgment and negative judgment. This indicates that when a predicate is affirmed of a thing with reference to its substance, place, time, and nature, and a predicate is affirmed of it as decribed above and denied of other things as different substances in other places and times and with different natures simultaneously. Hence, we get affirmation and indescribability.
6. Syādnnasti cha avaktavyam (perhaps S is and indescribable) : This is a negative judgment combined with simultaneous affirmative and negative judgment. It shows that when a predicate is denied of other substances in different places at other times and with different natures and a predicate is simultaneously affirmed of the thing and denied of other things. Hence, we get negation and indescribability.
7. Syādasti cha nāsti cha avaktavyam : (Perhaps S is, is not, and indescribable) This is successive affirmative judgment and negative

judgment combined with simultaneous affirmative and negative judgment. It indicates that when a predicate is affirmed of a thing as its own substance in its own place at its own time and with own nature, and the same predicate is denied of other substances in other places at other times and with other natures. So, affirmation and denial are made simultaneously. Here, we get affirmation, negation, and indescribability.

From these seven fold judgments it is clear that an affirmative judgment holds that a thing exists in its own substance, its own place, its own time, and with its own nature. On the other hand, a negative judgment holds that a thing is non-existent in its other substances, other places, other times, and with other natures. The five other judgments are the combinations of affirmative and negative judgment. Affirmation implies negation and negation implies affirmation. It shows that a thing is existent with its own nature and non-existent with other natures. Therefore, it is clear that Jaina's concept of Syādvāda advocates relative pluralism or a many-sided of reality.

Although Syādvāda seems to be the correct view of Syādvāda, still it creates some confusing states in mind, some of which are really subject of discussion critically.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.6. Fill in the blanks :

a) Jainas say that judgments are ..... or conditional.

b) The word 'Syāt' means .....

c) The seven different ways are known as .....

d) The fallacy in naya is called .....

Q.7. What do you mean by the theory of relativity of knowledge? (Answer in about 70 words)

.....

.....

.....



ACTIVITY 13.1

a) Does the theory of relativity of knowledge or syādvāda lead to the impossibility of knowledge? What do you think? Discuss.

.....

.....

.....

b) Are the seven standpoints of Jaina enough to critically discuss a reality? What do you think? Discuss.

.....

.....

.....

12.5 CRITICISM OF SYĀ DVĀ DA

A) According to Buddhists and Vedāntins, the word 'syāt' in the theory of Syādvāda involves a problem. They hold that Syādvāda is a self contradictory doctrine. It asserts that the contradictory attributes like existence and non-existence belong to the same thing in the same context. Against this self contradictory doctrine it can be held that light and darkness cannot be present in the same thing at the same time. In this context Dharmakirti points out that Jainas make a contradictory statement like a mad man. Shankārachārya views that unity and plurality, existence and non-existence, momentariness and permanence, affirmation and negation, lightness and darkness cannot remain in the same thing at the same time. Similarly, Rāmānuja holds that we cannot combine contradictory attributes like existence and non-existence, unity and plurality, momentary and permanence, lightness and darkness in the same thing at the same time.

B) The relativity theory of knowledge or Syādvāda holds that all judgments are relative or conditional. Every affirmative judgment presupposes negation. And every negative judgment presupposes affirmation. All truth is partially true or partially false. In this context, it

can be held that if truth is partially true or partially false, the theory of Syādvāda will be probable or partially true or partially false. But the Jainas by the theory of Syādvāda do not mean the theory of probability. Shankarāchārya holds that relativity of judgments presupposes an Absolute. Relativity of judgments cannot sustain without an Absolute in which all judgments fall and through which they are manifested.



12.6 LET US SUM UP

- Jainas admit perception, inference and testimony as the sources of knowledge.
- Jainas divide knowledge into two kinds: Pramāna and Naya.
- Naya means knowledge of a thing in its relation.
- Pramāna means knowledge of a thing as such or as it is.
- Jaina metaphysics holds that all judgments are relative.
- From the epistemological standpoint knowledge is relative in the sense that we can know only partial nature of reality. It is called Syādvāda.
- From the meaphysical standpoint reality has innumerable characteristics. It is called Anekāntavāda.
- Syādvāda is the theory of relativity of knowledge. It is also called saptabhanginaya or sevenfold judgment.



12.7 FURTHER READINGS

1) Chatterjee, S. C. & Dutta, D. M. (1968). *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, University of Calcutta.

2) Hiriyanna, M. (1993). *Outlines of Indian philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

3) Radhakrishnan, S. (1923). *Indian Philosophy* (2 volumes). Oxford: University Press.

4) Sharma, C. D. (1973). *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass.