# UNIT 13: JAINISM: ANEKĀNTAVĀDA

## UNIT STRUCTURE

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## 13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- define Anekāntavāda
- discuss what change is
- explain meaning of positive and negative characters of an object
- explain positive and negative characteristics of an object
- analyse Anekāntavāda with concrete examples
- discuss ekāntavāda

## 13.2 INTRODUCTION

The Jaina philosophy is an important branch of Indian philosophy. It is a non-vedic philosophy, Nāstika darshana or what we call as heterodox system. The Jaina philosophy can be traced, to the present stage through the twenty-four teachers or tirthankara, and the origin of the Jaina system is not adequately established. The first tirthankara was Rsabhadeva, and, the last among them was Vardhamana, referred to as Mahāvira or the 'Great

Hero'. It is believed that Mahavira lived around 6th Century B.C., during the time of Gautama Buddha.

It is said that the word 'Jaina' is derived from the word 'Jina'. The literal meaning of 'Jina' is conqueror. 'Jina' refers to all the twenty four tirthankara. 'Jina' means one who has been able to conquer all passions (raga and dvesa). By conquering passions, he is able to raise above all emotions and feelings, and attain liberation or Moksa.

Jaina philosophy is characterized by common-sense realism and pluralism. This means that there are objects in the universe and they are real and many. There are two kinds of reality in the world, living and non-living. Jainism believes that every living, even the imperfect one, possesses a soul or Jiva. They, therefore, advocate the practice of Ahimsa or avoiding injuring all life. Another important element in Jainism consists in respecting the opinion of others. This element is presented by them through their metaphysical theory of reality, as being many-faced (Anekāntavāda). The logical doctrine which state that every judgement is conditional, that is, it is made from relative standpoints and conditions is known as Syadvada. Syādvāda may be said to be a consequent logical doctrine from Anekāntavāda. The Jainas advocates various theories like, Epistemology or theory of Epistemology which includes logic, Metaphysics and Ethics and Religion. These theories help us to have an idea about the philosophy of the Jainas. However, from an academic point of view, Anekāntavāda and Jaina Metaphysics have been seen to have held the attention of both the scholars and researchers. Anekantavada is being discussed in this chapter.

Anekāntavāda is one among the three Jaina doctrines of relativity used for logic and reasoning. The other two doctrines are: (i) Syādvāda or the doctrine of conditioned predication, meaning that all judgements are conditional; (ii) Nayavāda or the theory of partial judgement. Anekāntavāda refers to the principles of pluralism and multiplicity of viewpoints. This theory may be understood as advocating the view that reality can be perceived from different points of view and no single point gives us the complete truth. Yet, if these single points of views are taken together, they comprise the complete truth.

## 13.3 LITERAL MEANING OF ANEKĀNTAVĀDA

The literal meaning of Anekāntavāda lies in the compound root of two Sanskrit words: anekānta ("manifoldness") and vāda ("school of thought"). The Sanskrit word anekānta is a compound word and is derived from the Sanskrit negative prefix 'an', 'eka' (one), and 'ante' meaning attribute. Hence, anekanta may be literally understood as "that which does not have a single (sole) attribute". The Jainas emphasise on Samyaktava, meaning rationality and logic. The Jainas insist that the ultimate principle should be always logical, and need to be based on reason.



**ACTIVITY - 13.1**

Why do you think the Janias advocated Anekāntavāda? Discuss.

Answer : .....

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**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** Who is the founder of Jainism?

Ans : .....

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**Q 2:** How many tirthankaras are there is all?

Ans : .....

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**Q 3:** From which Sanskrit word, the word Jaina is believed to have originated?

Ans : .....

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**Q 4:** Write the meaning of anekantavada?

Ans : .....

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**Q 5:** Write the meaning of the word 'Jina'

Ans : .....

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**Q 6:** What are the kinds of reality, according to Jainism?

Ans : .....

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**Q 7:** What is Syādvāda?

Ans : .....

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## 13.4 EXPLAIN CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ANEKĀNTAVĀDA

The Jainas assert that reality is complex in its nature. In order to understand the complex nature of reality, we must view an object from all possible standpoints. An object may be judged according to one of its particular aspects and from a particular standpoint. We fail to understand that an object has innumerable qualities and it can be judged from uncountable standpoints. It is due to our finiteness that we have limitations to judge an object with all its characteristics and from innumerable standpoints. But when we fail to realize this fact and regard the judgments about objects to be unconditionally true, then we commit error. When we regard the partial aspects of an object to be the object itself, our knowledge of the object becomes incomplete, partial and untrue. In the Chandogya Upanishad, change is described as unreal. Underlying, all change lays the real. What we mean by 'variety' or 'many' is found in name and form only. Therefore, name and form are unreal. But for the Buddhists, nothing is permanent. All things in the universe are changing and becoming. Whatever attributes we can experience are also changing conditionally. The Buddhists

say that there is no reality which is permanent. But the Jainas say that both these views are partial since each of these views gives accounts of reality from one among many of its (reality) viewpoints. Hence their views are 'ekanta'. A view which is one-sided and given from partial standpoints is known as Ekāntavāda.

## 13.5 ANALYSING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CHARACTER OF AN OBJECT

The Jainas assert that every object has innumerable characters. By 'innumerable' we mean here that the characters cannot be counted; in other words, they are 'countless'. This is what they mean by ananta-dharmakam vastu. Here, we must give a little more explanation in order to understand the full implication of the Jaina view. Every object in the universe viewed as what it is, because of its positive and negative characters. For example, by positive characters of an object, say, man, we mean, his colour, size, shape, weight, heredity, family, race, employment, education, nationality, place of birth, date of birth, age, habitation etc. Positive characters are those 'defining characters' that makes the object what it is. These characters help us to define the object in the positive sense, meaning that these characters are possessed by the object concerned. Along with these characters, he may have innumerable relations with countless number of other objects of the world. By negative characters of man, we mean those characters which are not possessed by him. Man, as described in the example, will be known in his fullest content, only, if we distinguish him from everything else. We should know what he is not - that he may not be an Indian, nor an American, nor coloured; he is not a Mohamedan, nor a Hindu; again, he is not dishonest, nor shrewd, nor cunning, etc. These negative characters of man are such distinctions that help to distinguish man from all other objects in the universe. In this sense, the negative characters are far more in number than the positive characters. The negative characters are equally important. It tells us about those characters which are not possessed by the object concerned. Thus, we can distinguish the object in relation to other objects of the universe. Just as the positive

characters have been described as the "defining characters" of an object the negative characters may be described as the 'distinguishing characters' of the object. Thus, the object, in this case, man, possess positive characters present in it, and the negative characters absent in it. Thus the two sets of characters together prove that the object is not a simple one, having limited characters. The object may appear to be simple, possessing limited qualities, because of our limitations in viewing it. But in reality, the object is a complex one, possessing infinite number of qualities and characters. Even, when the element of time and change are taken into consideration, the object is understood to have taken new characters. Thus, the Jainas believe that the object in this sense has innumerable characters (ananta-dharma). Therefore, it can be rightly said that the Jainas have advocated Anekāntavāda by analyzing positive and negative characters. This analysis proves that all objects possess infinite characters and that all objects of the universe can be described from infinite number of standpoints.

## 13.6 UNDERSTANDING ANEKĀNTAVĀDA WITH THE HELP OF A CONCRETE EXAMPLE

The Jaina concept of Anekāntavāda and Syādvāda are often described with the help of the story of "The Blind men and an Elephant". The Jainas describe this story as 'Andhagajanyayah', which when translated mean "the maxim of blind men and elephant". This story may be understood as follows: A group of six blind men touches a strange animal called an elephant. None among them is aware about its shape and form. The first blind man, who touches the trunk of the animal, says that it (the elephant) is like a pipe. For another one, who reaches up to the ear of the animal, the elephant, says that the animal is like a fan. Again, another blind man who touch the leg of the animal, said, that the elephant is like a pillar. For the blind man who touched the back of the animal, the elephant is like a throne. In this way, each of the blind men describes the animal, the elephant, differently. But, each of these gives a true picture about the elephant, gained from each of their experiences. For every one of them, his own knowledge is correct and absolute, while

the views of others are wrong and contrary to facts. Yet, their descriptions fall short of describing the true appearance of the elephant.

The Jainas say that the elephant has been described differently because each of the blind man described the elephant from different standpoints, one from the standpoint of the trunk, another from the standpoint of the ear, yet, again, another from that of the leg, etc. Though, in this sense, their descriptions are true, these descriptions are not complete. In a similar manner, an object can be known from diverse standpoints. Yet the characters of the objects, though true from individual standpoints, do not give us knowledge about the infinite number of characters of the object. The Jainas, therefore, say that there are innumerable numbers of objects in the universe, possessing infinite characters and these objects can be described from uncountable number of standpoints.

## 13.7 EKĀNTAVĀDA

The Jainas accuse the other systems of Indian philosophy of committing the fallacy of mistaking a relative truth to be the absolute truth. This view is called Ekāntavāda. Every object in the universe has many characters and it exists independently. It is called substance (Dravya). Substance is that which possess qualities and modes. Some qualities are permanent and essential; they are gunas or qualities, while others are accidental and changing and they are called paryaya or modes. Reality is defined as a unity-and-difference or difference-and-unity. Brahmanism laid emphasis on that which is one, the permanent and the real. On the other hand, Early Buddhism advocated the Many, the changing and the unreal Jainism says that these two views may be referred to as being same, they being two sides of the same coin. Substance is that which possess the characteristics of production, destruction and permanence. Substance is permanent because it possesses an unchanging essence. But substance has origin (i.e. production) and is subject to decay or destruction since substance possesses changing modes. Both the above views are true from their individual standpoints, but not the complete truth. To accept any one-sided and partial view to be the whole truth is to commit the fallacy of

Ekāntavāda. In contrast to Ekāntavāda, Jainism believes that there may be many partial views about objects of the universe. But only when these innumerable views are compiled, can we have a real and true knowledge about the objects of the universe. All the partial views. In this sense, the Jainas advocate Anekāntāvada, that is reality can be viewed from the 'anek' or innumerable view points.



**ACTIVITY - 13.2**

Why do you think the Jainas have brought in concept of positive and negative characters while describing Anekāntavāda?

Answer : .....

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**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 8:** State whether the following statements are True or False

a) For the Buddhists, nothing is permanent. (True / False)

b) Positive characters are those 'defining characters' that makes the object 'what it is' (True/False)

**Q 9:** What is 'ekāntavāda'?



## 13.8 LET US SUM UP

- Mahavira Jaina or Vardhamāna, the last one among the twenty-four tirthankaras is generally believed to be the founder of Jainism. The word Jaina is derived from 'Jina' meaning conqueror. Here conqueror means one who can conquer all emotions and feelings, and attain liberation or Mokṣa.

- The Jainas put forward various theories of Epistemology which includes logic, metaphysics and Ethics and Religion.
- The word "Anekāntavāda is derived from two Sanskrit words – Anekānta meaning manifoldness, and Vada meaning school of thought.
- The word 'Aneka' is derived from the Sanskrit prefix 'An' and eka (one) and 'anta' meaning attributes.
- Anekāntavāda is based on the common-sense Realism and Pluralism.
- The Jainas assert that reality is complex in nature. Therefore, no single account of reality can be given.
- The Jainas talk of change. Underlying all change, lies that which is real.
- About change, the Chandogya Upanisad says that change is unreal.
- The Buddhists say that nothing is permanent. The universe is constantly changing and becoming.
- Jainism says that every object has innumerable characteristics.
- Every object in the universe can be viewed as having positive and negative characters.
- Positive characters are those characters which an object possess those defining characters which makes the object what it is.
- Negative characters are those characters which are not possessed by the object; they are 'distinguishing characters' and help to distinguish the object concerned, from other objects in the universe.
- The Jainas describe Anekantavada through as story of "The Blind Men and an Elephant".
- Substance exists independently. It possesses qualities and modes.
- Reality is unity-and-difference or difference-and-unity.
- Jainism say that all other systems of Indian philosophy commit the fallacy of Ekāntavāda.
- The fallacy of Ekāntavāda is committed when a partial or one-sided view is taken as the whole truth.