

# Jainism- Epistemology

## Introduction

The word Jainism is derived from 'Jina' which means 'conqueror —one who has conquered his passions and desires. It is applied to the liberated souls who have conquered passions and desires and karmas and obtained emancipation. The Jainas believe in 24 Tirthankaras or 'Founders of the Faith through whom their faith has come down from fabulous antiquity. Of these, the first was Rsabhadeva and the last, Mahāvira, the great spiritual hero, whose name was Vardhamāna. Mahāvira, the last of the prophets, cannot be regarded as the founder of Jainism, because even before him, Jaina teachings were existent. But Mahāvira gave a new orientation to that faith and for all practical purposes, modern Jainism may be rightly regarded as a result of his teachings. He flourished in the sixth century B.C. and was a contemporary of the Buddha. His predecessor, the 23rd Tirthankara, Pārshvanātha is also a historical personage who lived in the eighth or ninth century B.C.

## Immediate and Mediate

The Jainas classify knowledge into immediate (*aparoksa*) and mediate (*paroksa*). Immediate knowledge is further divided into *Avadhi*, *Manahparyāya* and *Kevala*; and mediate knowledge into *Mati* and *Shruta*. Perceptual knowledge which is ordinarily called immediate is admitted to be relatively so by Jainism and therefore included in mediate and not immediate knowledge. It is included under *Mati*. Pure perception in the sense of mere sensation cannot rank the title of knowledge. It must be given meaning and arranged into order by conception or thought. Perceptual knowledge therefore is regarded as mediate since it presupposes the activity of thought. *Mati* includes both perceptual and inferential knowledge. *Shruta* means knowledge derived from authority. Thus *Mati* and *Shruta* which are the two kinds of mediate knowledge have as their instruments perception, inference and authority, the three *Pramānas* admitted by Jainism. *Avadhi-jñāna*, *Manah-paryāya-jñāna* and *Kevala-jñāna*, are the three kinds of immediate knowledge which may be called extra-ordinary and extra-sensory perceptions. *Avadhi* is clairvoyance; *Manahparyāya* is telepathy; and *Kevala* is omniscience. *Avadhi* is direct

knowledge of things even at a distance of space or time. It is called *Avadhi* or 'limited' because it functions within a particular area and up to a particular time. It cannot go beyond spatial and temporal limits. *Manah-paryäya* is direct knowledge of the thoughts of others. This too is limited by spatial and temporal conditions. In both *Avadhi* and *Manahparyäya*, the soul has direct knowledge unaided by the senses or the mind. Hence they are called immediate, though limited. *Kevala-jnäna* is unlimited and absolute knowledge. It can be acquired only by the liberated souls. It is not limited by space, time or object. Besides these five kinds of right knowledge, we have three kinds of wrong knowledge—*Sarhshaya* or doubt, *Viparyaya* or mistake and *Anadhyavasäya* or wrong knowledge through indifference.

Knowledge may again be divided into two kinds, *Pramäna* or knowledge of a thing as it is, and *Naya* or knowledge of a thing in its relation. *Naya* means a standpoint of thought from which we make a statement about a thing. All truth is relative to our standpoints. Partial knowledge of one of the innumerable aspects of a thing is called '*naya*'. Judgment based on this partial knowledge is also included in '*naya*'. There are seven '*nayas*' of which the first four are called '*Artha-naya*' because they relate to objects or meanings, and the last three are called '*Shabda-naya*' because they relate to words. When taken as absolute, a '*naya*' becomes a fallacy— '*nayäbhäsa*'.

The first is the '*Naigama-naya*'. From this standpoint we look at a thing as having both universal and particular qualities and we do not distinguish between them. It becomes fallacious when both universals and particulars are regarded as separately real and absolute, as is done by Nyäya-Vaishesika. The second is the '*Sangraha-naya*'. Here we emphasize the universal qualities and ignore the particulars where they are manifested. It becomes fallacious when universals alone are treated as absolutely real and particulars are rejected as unreal, as is done by Sänkhya and Advaita Vedanta. The third is the '*Vyavahära-naya*' which is the conventional point of view based on empirical knowledge. Here things are taken as concrete particulars and their specific features are emphasized. It becomes fallacious when particulars alone are viewed as real and universals are rejected as unreal, as is done by Materialism and Buddhist realistic pluralism. The fourth is called

*'Rjusūtra-naya*. Here the real is identified with the momentary. The particulars are reduced to a series of moments and any given moment is regarded as real. When this partial truth is mistaken to be the whole truth, it becomes fallacious, as in some schools of Buddhism. Among the *nayas* which refer to words, the first is called *'Shabda-naya'*. It means that a word is necessarily related to the meaning which it signifies. Every word refers either to a thing or quality or relation or action. The second is *'Samabhirūda-naya'* which distinguishes terms according to their roots. For example, the word *'Pankaja'* literally means 'born of mud' and signifies any creature or plant born of mud, but its meaning has been conventionally restricted to 'lotus' only. Similarly the word *'gauh'* means 'anything which moves', but has conventionally become restricted to signify only a 'cow. The third is called *'Evambhūta-naya'* which is a specialized form of the second. According to it, a name should be applied to an object only when its meaning is fulfilled. For example, a cow should be called *'gauh'* only when it moves and not when it is lying down.

Each *naya* or point of view represents only one of the innumerable aspects possessed by a thing from which we may attempt to know or describe it. When any such partial viewpoint is mistaken for the whole truth, we have a *'nayābhāsa'* or a fallacy. The *'nayas'* are also distinguished as *'Dravyarthika'* or from the point of view of substance which takes into account the permanent nature and unity of things, and as *'Paryāyāthika'* or from the point of view of modes which takes into account the passing modifications and the diversity of things. When a thing is taken to be either as permanent only or as momentary only, either as one only or as many only, fallacies arise.

## **Syadvada**

*syādvāda* which is also called *Sapta-bhangi-naya* is the theory of relativity of knowledge. *Sapta-bhangi-naya* means 'dialectic of the seven steps or 'the theory of seven-fold judgment. The word *'syāt'* literally means probable, perhaps, may be. And *Syādvāda* is sometimes translated as the theory of probability or the doctrine of the may-be. But it is not in the literal sense of probability that the word *syāt* is used here. Probability suggests scepticism and Jainism is not scepticism. Sometimes the word *'syāt*

is translated as 'somehow'. But this too smacks of agnosticism and Jainism, again, is not agnosticism. The word 'syāt' is used here in the sense of the relative and the correct translation of Syādvāda is the theory of Relativity of knowledge. Reality has infinite aspects which are all relative and we can know only some of these aspects. All our judgments, therefore, are necessarily relative, conditional and limited. 'Syāt' or 'relatively speaking' or 'Viewed from a particular view-point' which is necessarily related to other view-points must precede all our judgments. Absolute affirmation and absolute negation both are wrong. All judgments are conditional. This is not a self-contradictory position because the very nature of reality is indeterminate and infinitely complex and because affirmation and negation both are not made from the same standpoint. The difficulty of predication is solved by maintaining that the subject and the predicate are identical from the point of view of substance and different from the point of view of modes. Hence categorical or absolute predication is ruled out as erroneous. All judgments are double-edged. Affirmation presupposes negation as much as negation presupposes affirmation. The infinitely complex reality (*ananta-dharmakam vastu*) admits of all opposite predicates from different standpoints. It is real as well as unreal (*sadasadātmakam*). It is universal as well as particular (*vyāvṛty-anugamātmakam*). It is permanent as well as momentary (*nityānitya-svarupam*). It is one as well as many (*anekamekātmakam*). Viewed from the point of view of substance, it is real, universal, permanent and one; viewed from the point of view of modes, it is unreal, particular, momentary and many. The Jainas are fond of quoting the old story of the six blind men and the elephant. The blind men put their hands on the different parts of the elephant and each tried to describe the whole animal from the part touched by him. Thus the man who caught the ear said the elephant was like a country-made fan; the person touching the leg said the elephant was like a pillar; the holder of the trunk said it was like a python; the feeler of the tail said it was like a rope; the person who touched the side said the animal was like a wall; and the man who touched the forehead said the elephant was like the breast. And all the six quarreled amongst themselves, each one asserting that his description alone was correct. But he who can see the whole elephant can easily know that each blind man feels only a part of the elephant which he mistakes to be the whole animal. Almost all philosophical,

ideological and religious differences and disputes are mainly due to mistaking a partial truth for the whole truth. Our judgments represent different aspects of the many-sided reality and can claim only partial truth. This view makes Jainism catholic, broad-minded and tolerant. It teaches respect for others' point. We can know an object in three ways through *durniti*, *naya* and *pramāna*. Mistaking a partial truth for the whole and the absolute truth is called '*durniti*' or 'bad judgment', e.g., the insistence that an object is absolutely real (*sadeva*). A mere statement of a relative truth without calling it either absolute or relative is called '*naya*' or 'judgment, e.g., the statement that an object is real (*sat*). A statement of a partial truth knowing that it is only partial, relative and conditional and has possibility of being differently interpreted from different points of view is called '*pramāna*' or 'valid judgment. Every *naya* in order to become *pramāna* must be qualified by *syāt*. *Syāt* is said to be the symbol of truth. It is relative and successive knowledge. It removes all contradictions among different points of view. To reject '*syāt*' is to embrace unwarranted absolutism which is directly contradicted by experience.

Everything exists from the point of view of its own substance, space, time and form and it does not exist from the point of view of other's substance, space, time and form. When we say 'This table exists', we cannot mean that this table exists absolutely and unconditionally. Our knowledge of the table is necessarily relative. The table has got innumerable characteristics out of which we can know only some. The table exists in itself as an absolutely real and infinitely complex reality; only our knowledge of it is relative. For us the table must exist in its own matter as made of wood, in its own form as having a particular shape, length, breadth and height, at a particular space and at a particular time. It does not exist in other matter, other form and at other space and time. So a table is both existent and non-existent viewed from different standpoints and there is no contradiction in it.

The Jaina logic distinguishes seven forms of judgment. Each judgment, being relative, is preceded by the word '*syāt*'. This is *Syādvāda* or *Sapta-bhangi-naya*. The seven steps are as follows:—

(1) *Syādsti*: Relatively, a thing is real.

- (2) *Syännästi*: Relatively, a thing is unreal.
- (3) *Syädasti nästi* : Relatively, a thing is both real and unreal.
- (4) *Syâdavaktavyam* : Relatively, a thing is indescribable.
- (5) *Syädasti cha avaktavyam*: Relatively, a thing is real and is indescribable.
- (6) *Syânnâsti cha avaktavyam*: Relatively, a thing is unreal and is indescribable.
- (7) *Syadasti cha nästi cha avaktavyam* : Relatively, a thing is real, unreal and indescribable.

From the point of view of one's own substance, everything is, while from the point of view of other's substance, everything is not. As we have just remarked that we can know a thing in relation to its own matter, form, space and time as a positive reality, while in relation to other's matter, form, space and time it becomes a negative entity. When we affirm the two different stand-points successively we get the third judgment—a thing is both real and unreal (of course in two different senses). If we affirm or deny both existence and non-existence simultaneously to anything, if we assert or negate the two different aspects of being and non-being together, the thing baffles all description. It becomes indescribable, i.e., either both real and unreal simultaneously or neither real nor unreal. This is the fourth judgment. The remaining three are the combinations of the fourth with the first, second and third respectively.