

The Concept of Vibhajjavada and its Impact on Philosophical and Religious Tolerance in Buddhism and Jainism

Buddhism and Jainism both belong to the same Śramanic tradition of Indian Culture, Gautama, the Buddha and Vardhamāna, the Mahāvira were contemporaries. The philosophical awakening was the main feature of their age. The various religio-philosophical problems and questions were put before the religious leaders and thinkers and they were expected to answer and to solve these. The various answers were given to the same problem by different thinkers, and owing to this difference of opinions on the philosophical problems, the various philosophical schools emerged in that age. According to the Pali *Tripitaka* there were sixty two schools or sixty two different views held by different teachers on the nature of man and world, and according to Prākṛta Āgamas there were three hundred sixty schools. Each one of them was claiming that his view was the only right view (*samyagdr̥ṣṭi*) and other's views were false views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*). But according to Buddha and Mahāvira all of them have one sided picture of the reality or the phenomenon which is a complicated one. Both of them found that these various philosophical and religious schools and sects were conflicting with each other without understanding the problem itself and cling to onesidedness. This onesidedness, is due to the absence of analytic approach towards the problems and improper method of answering the questions. If philosophical questions are answered categorically or absolutely they present only onesided picture of the fact or phenomenon and thus create a false notion. According to the Jaina thinkers the onesidedness (*ekānta*) and the claim that my view is the only right-view (*āgraha*) are considered as false notions (*mithyātva*).

For Buddha and Mahāvira both, the true method of answering the philosophical questions is the method of analysis. Only an analytic approach towards the philosophical problems can give us a right vision. Both of them suggested that the philosophical questions should be answered after analysing them. This method of analysis was called as vibhajjavāda in both the canons. Buddha and Mahāvira both claimed themselves as vibhajjavādins. In Buddhist order at the time of Aśoka only the Vibhajjavādins were considered as the true followers of Buddha. In Aṅguttarnikāya it is mentioned that there are four methods of answering a question -- (i) answer to a question en-toto

i.e. absolutely (*ekāmsāvāda*), (ii) answer to a question after analysing it into various parts (*vibhajjavāda*), (iii) answer to a question by raising a new question and (iv) to keep silence.¹ Buddha and Mahāvira both preferred the second method i.e. *vibhajjavāda*, though Buddha sometimes used the first, third and fourth methods also. It is mentioned in the texts that Buddha himself claimed as Vibhajjavādin. Prof. S.Dutt in his book *The Buddha and Five After Centuries* says "perhaps the word Vibhajjavādin originally meant one whose method was to divide a matter posited into its component parts and deal with each part separately in his answer and not with the whole matter in en-toto fashion." This method of *vibhajjavāda* i.e. the method of analysis is well illustrated in *Subha-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*. Śubha asked Lord Buddha, 'whether a busy life of a man of the world is to be preferred or a monk's reposeful life?' Buddha answered - 'the busy life may be a failure or success and so too the life of repose.' Similarly in the Jaina text *Bagavatisūtra*, Jayantī asked Mahāvira whether sleeping is good or awakening is good? Lord answered that for a sinner sleeping is good and for a saint awakening is good. This analytic approach towards the problems shows that the relative answer is the proper method to deal with the problems, whether they are philosophical, religious, ethical or the problems of everyday life. Absolute or categorical answer explains only one aspect or the part of the problem and other aspects of the problem remain unexplained.

Thus, we can say that analytic approach towards the problems gives us broader outlook to understand them and we are more nearer to the truth.

It is due to *vibhajjavāda*, an analytic approach, the theory of *anekāntavāda*, in Jainism and *śūnyavāda* in Buddhism came into existence. The positive analytic approach of Lord Mahāvira gave birth to *anekāntavāda* and *syādvāda* and the negative analytic approach of Lord Buddha later on gave birth to *śūnyavāda*. Both are, in fact, the offshoots of *vibhajjavāda*, or analytic method. Here I am not going into the details that how the theories of *anekāntavāda* and *śūnyavāda* emerged from *vibhajjavāda*. It is a matter of an independent paper. Here my submission is that this method of analytic approach towards the philosophical, ethical and other problems, has given a

broader perspective to understand the things. Buddha and Mahāvira, both condemned onesided narrow outlook. For both, it is the main cause of religious as well as philosophical quarrels leading to intolerance. It is said, "one, who sees only one aspect of the reality is ignorant, a real scholar sees hundreds of aspects of it."² "The person who possesses only onesided view quarrel with each other."³ In *Suttanipāta* Lord Buddha says, "He, who does not acknowledge an opponent's doctrine (*dhamma*), is a fool, a beast, a person of poor understanding. All those who abide by their own views, are fools with a very poor understanding".⁴ "One who is firm in his own view and holds that his opponent is a fool; thus he himself brings on strife calling his opponent a fool and impure."⁵ Further, Buddha says "There are two results of a dispute, first it is incomplete (picture of the truth) and secondly it is not enough to bring about tranquility. Having seen this, let no one dispute understanding *khema* (i.e. peace). It is the place where there is no dispute."⁶ "Those who maintain their own *dhamma* as perfect and other's *dhamma* as wretched, say that their own views (opinions) are the truth and so having disagreed, they dispute. One becomes low by the condemnation of the others. There will be no one distinguished amongst the *dhammas* if they condemn other's views."⁷ Here I have mentioned only a few passages of Lord Buddha in support of religious tolerance. For further details in this regard, the study *Culla-viyūha* and *Mahā-viyūha-suttas* (i.e. chapter 50 and 51) of *Suttanipāta*, is suggested where these points are further elaborated.

Jainism believes in the theory of *anekāntavāda* which means that the views, the ideologies and the faiths of others should be respected. Mahāvira like Buddha mentions in *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*. "Those who praise their own faiths and ideologies and blame that of their opponents and thus distort the truth, will remain confined to the cycle of birth and death."⁸ It is further maintained that "all the *nayas* (view-points) are true in respect of what they have themselves to say, but they are false in so far as they refute totally other *nayas* (i.e. the view points of the opponents). Those, who take different view points (*nayas*) together and

thus grasp all the aspects of a thing (fact or phenomenon) have a right understanding, just as those who with eyes, are able to grasp an elephant as a whole and not like the blindmen, who take one particular part of an elephant as a whole elephant."⁹ It is this broader outlook which can establish harmony among the apparently conflicting views of various religions.

This broader outlook for religious tolerance is maintained in Buddhism till the period of Asoka, because we find so many evidences about religious tolerance and religious co-existence from the inscriptions of Asoka. But I do not know, whether this outlook of religious tolerance and harmony was further maintained or not by Buddhism in India. I request the scholars of Buddhism to enlighten us in this regard. Though it is true that Buddhism has shown this broader outlook every where outside India and remained there co-existing with the earlier religions of those countries.

So far as Jainism is concerned this religious tolerance and harmony is maintained by the later Jaina Acaryas also. In one famous Jaina text of 3rd B.C. namely *Isibhāsiyāim* the views of different teachers of Śramanic and Brahmanic trends like *Nārada*, *Bhāradvāja*, Gautama Buddha, *Maṅkhalī* Goṣāla and many others, have been presented with regards. They are called as Arhat Ṛṣis and their preachings are regarded as *Āgamas*. I would like to conclude my paper by quoting these two beautiful verses of religious tolerance of Haribhadra (C. 8th A.D.) and Hemacandra (C. 12th A.D.) respectively. Haribhadra says --

*na me pakṣapāto vīre na dveṣo kapilādīṣu /
yuktimadvacanāṃ yasya tasya kārya pari-graha //*

I have no bias towards Lord Mahāvira and no disregard to Kapila and other saints and thinkers. Whatsoever is rational and logical ought to be accepted.

Hemacandra says --

*bhava bījānkurajanā rāgadyakṣayamupāgatā yasya/
brahmā vā viṣṇurvā haro vā jino-vā namastasmāih//*

I bow all those who have overcome the attachment and hatred which are the cause of worldly existence, be they Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva or Jina.

*sabbe bala sunihina panna sabbevime ditthi parivvasana
- Suttanipāta, 50/3(880)*

5. *sakayane capi datthaham vadano kamettha bala ti para
daheyya
sayameva so methagamavaheyya param vadam balama-
suddha dhammam*

-- Suttanipāta 50/16(893)

Reference

1. *Aṅguttarnikāya, Vol. II, p. 47.*
2. *Theragāthā, 1/106.*
3. *Udāna, 6/4.*
4. *parassa ve dhammamanujanam bala mago hoti nihina panno*

6. *appaṃ hi etaṃ na alaṃ samaya dube vivadassa phalāni
brūmi
evaṃ pi disva na vivadiyetha khemami passam abibada
bhumim*

-- Suttanipāta 51/2(896)

7. *sakam hi dhammam paripunna mahu annassa dhammassa
pana hinamahu
evaṃ pi viggataha vivadiyanti sakam sakam sammuti mahu
saccam*

*parassa ce vambhayitena hino na koci dhammesu visesi assa
puthu hi annassa vadanti dhammant nihinato samhi
davvahaṃ badana*

-- Suttanipāta, 51/10-11(904-905)

8. *sayam sayam pasamsamta garahamta param vayam
je u tattha viusamti samsare te viussiya*

-- Sūtrakṛtāṅga, 1/1/2/23.

9. See, Samaṇasuttam, 728, 730 and 731.

