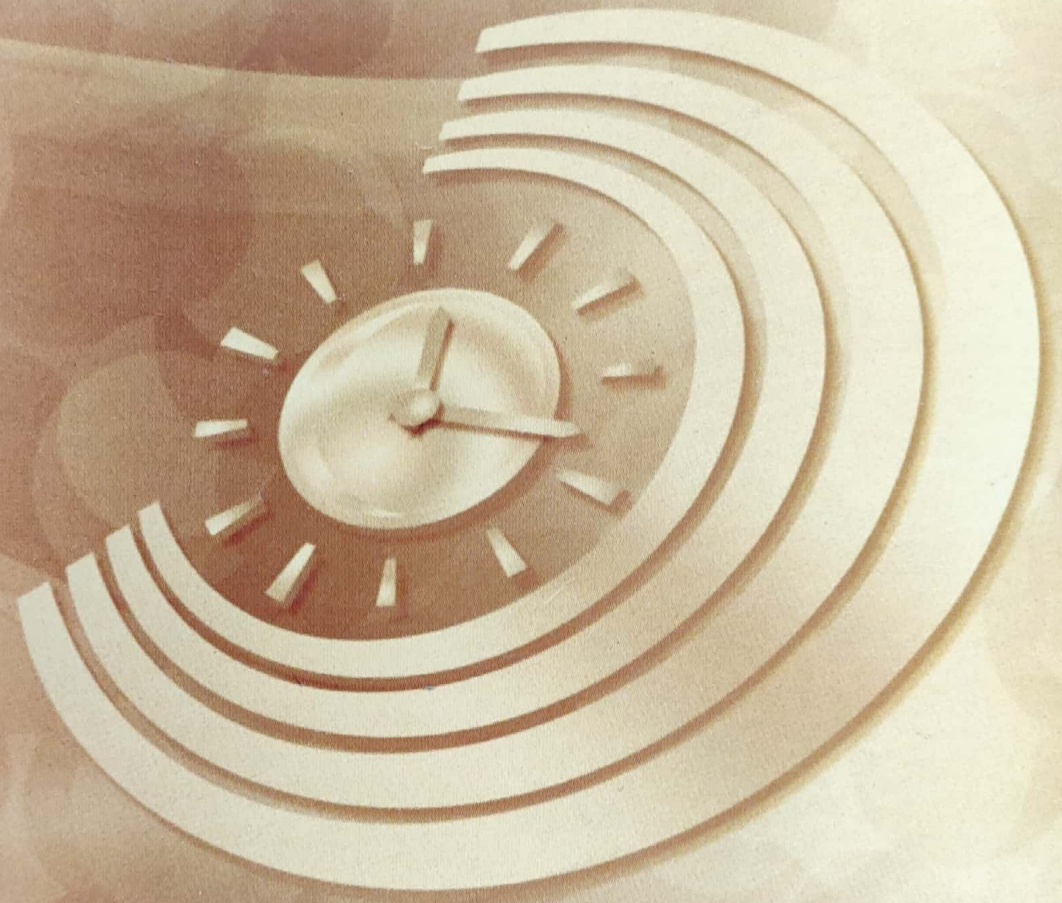


JAINISM IN MODERN PERSPECTIVE

**An Enquiry into the Relevance of Jainism
in the Modern Context of the World**



Editors

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Anekānt as the Ever-opened Gateway to Intercultural Dialogue and Peace

Samani Dr Aagam Prajna

India today is a multi-cultural, multi-religious society. Cult is a system, which is especially expressed in rituals. It differentiates one religion from the other. It is the very emotion of a religion although some takes culture as intellectual and artistic production. In a wider perspective all men and all groups are the vehicles of culture, without which they can not exist. G. Rocher (1968) defined culture as "a related whole of more or less formalized ways of thinking, feeling and acting which, learnt and shared by a number of people, serve, both objectively and symbolically, to make of these people a specially distinct collectivity."¹ Culture, being the emotion of religion, is intimately related to it.

The problem today doesn't lie in the differences in cultures and 'isms' but in the understanding of other as 'the other' and intolerance towards 'the other'. This feeling is the root cause of many conflicts and violence, which take place frequently. Scientific analysis of conflict has become a major feature of contemporary society. In an unprecedented way India witnessed conflicts and tensions, which put great strains upon the social fabric and at the cost of the much cherished traditions, beliefs and practices of the society. Some areas of the major conflicts may be identified as follows :

The first major conflict is due to neo-colonizers of the country. The second major area of conflict of the country is the recurrent communal tensions. This eventually led to violent eruptions, bloodshed and loss of life and

property. The third major area of conflict is centered on land. Industrial unrest and labour problem, with accompanying strikes, lock-outs, often lead to violent conflicts. Further, economic issues also dominate the scene.

Besides these, there are many other areas of conflict, viz. that of political, racial, individual, social, structural, ethnic violence and conflicts. In recent times, cultural and religious violence have caused much concern and anxiety to the collective consciousness of the people. First of all we shall discuss the factors responsible for the origin of communal conflict.

1. Absence of Culture of Communication

Absence of cultural communication becomes the cause of many conflicts. Due to this, grievance are seen to be accumulating between the conflicting groups. There is no common forum at which the conflicting groups could assemble for exchange of views in order to acquire some degree of clarity of perceptions. That is to say open and frank exchange, the ability to listen with open and sympathetic disposition is found to be absent in such situations.

2. Imposition of Decision

A necessary ingredient of the culture of communication is consultation and participation of each and every culture in decision making process. Conflict arises when decisions are imposed without their healthy participation.

3. Absolute Feeling of "The Other"

Close analysis of conflict reveals that a total negation, or even consideration of the other as 'the other' is responsible for such situations. Conflict arises if the needs, the just demands and right of 'the other' are totally rejected or neglected.

4. Superiority Complex

Most conflicts arise due to the assertion of the superiority of one culture over the other. This naturally under-cuts all social and economic relations and transactions. Many cultures while asserting their own existence deny the existence of other cultures or, at the very least, supplant them and behave 'as if' they do not exist. A high percentage of conflict and violence reported in recent times ascribed by sociologists are because of this very reason.

Various steps are being taken in order to control such conflicts and violence. Responding to burning issues many police-action, fire-fighting, short-lived peace marches and such other steps are taken. But besides this, interaction through actual live experience could lead to a more healthy atmosphere in which the sources of tension, misunderstanding and resulting conflicts can be nipped beforehand.

It is a historical fact that the human and social psyche does not remain same. Mankind has witnessed from time to time some enlightened persons proving to be the light-beacon for humanity. In the period of 19th-20th century, many great persons like Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Rabindranath Tagore, Vinoba Bhave, Acharya Tulsi etc. has tried hard to overcome this problem. We can say, emphatically that Mahatma Gandhi has done a lot in this regard. He mentioned the following principles² :

- (a) Recognition of the basic equality of all
- (b) Faith in the goodness of the other
- (c) Love for the opposer

Gandhiji negotiates even with the opponent having a conviction that even the worst enemy has some truth to which the other party should lend their ears. In this field,

inter-cultural dialogue can provide the best measures to have a peaceful world. In the present day world, many inter-cultural, inter-religious dialogues are being organized. The question is why then, there are so many communal conflicts and violence in spite of efforts of peace and harmony. I think that efforts of dialogue have some gaps because of improper communication. I would like to clarify my point by a concrete example, e.g., Let us take the concept of God. Many religions such as i.e. Hinduism, Mohammedanism, Christianity, etc. believe in God in different names. But within inter-cultural dialogue the dominant culture interprets the concept of God in their own terms, from their own viewpoint. As we are seeing today, how English language and European ideas dominated over a dialogue, and interpreted Indian cultural ideas in their terms. They totally neglect or give less importance to other's perspective and this causes improper and unhealthy communication which makes dialogue fruitless and which consequently leads to violence.

With the acceptance of the Jain doctrine of *Anekānt* this problem of incommunicability of one's viewpoint to the viewpoint of other in the field of intercultural dialogue can easily be overcome. *Anekānt* is not merely a metaphysical concept. It is relevant in practice too. It is a kind of intellectual non-violence, it is philosophy of coexistence and it changes the absolutistic framework of the mind. Because *Anekānt* says there is the possibility of many perceptions of an object. It says that everything is relative and multi-dimensional having inbuilt co-existence of opposites. *Anekānt* says one dimension is as possible as another. As Claude Levi Strauss had said that a word is meaningful because of its binary "other" word. Thus "light" and "dark" give meaning to each other by a binary relation. A single word by itself has no meaning. Similarly

a single culture has no meaning in the absence of the other. Jacques Derrida goes one step further. He says that a word includes its other within its meaning. It just depends upon the point of view of the subject as to which one will be in the focus and which one in the margin. He refers to Plato's use of the word "pharmakon". The word 'pharmakon' means medicine, elixir of life as well as poison. Thus the word contains opposites as its meaning. In the philosophy of language when we say "*syād ghatah asti ca nāsti ca*", it shows two opposite 'asti' and 'nāsti' in one single substance. The cultural problem of "the other" can be seen in this very same light. In fact the other is not that "other" sealed off against each other.

Inter-cultural dialogue with reference to *Anekānt* does not advocate unification of all sects by destroying or amalgamating them all, because in view of different levels of human perceptions and mental development the existence of different kinds of thinking and different religions is unavoidable. Along with this, it does not give privileged treatment to any one particular tradition or culture. It pleads for the acceptance of the value of different cultures as part and parcel of entire cultural milieu of the world. Inter religious and inter-cultural dialogue reject the two hermeneutic models—hermeneutics of total identity of modernity and that of radical difference of post-modernity. It pleads for third model of—identity cum difference i.e. the *anekāntic* way of interpretation (analogous hermeneutics).³ In certain quarters, there is a fear that inter-cultural dialogue might destruct the very idea of truth, philosophy and culture. This fear is unfounded, because what it destroys is not the truth, but extremely absolutic truth claims of that ideas. The idea of the total purity of a culture is a fiction or a myth. Emile Durkheim, also said, "There is no religious system, ancient

or recent, where one does not meet, under different forms, two religions, as it were, side by side, which though being united closely and mutually penetrating each other, do not cease, nevertheless, to be distinct". So, to show the superiority as an ancient or a rich culture or religion is fake.

In *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, Bhagavān Mahāvīra says, "to praise one's belief and degrading the other's faith leads that absolutistic person (*ekāntavādī*) to unending problems and sorrow".⁴ Really he wants to emphasize that a single faith and belief as the only true faith and belief is the biggest hindrance in the path of the search for truth. A fixation of belief is attachment, and where there is attachment, the whole truth cannot be seen. In such a case, even partial truth become untruth (if fixed). One cannot arrive at truth, by disowning others truth, simply because they are other people's truth. In inter-cultural dialogue with reference to *Anekānt*, one tries to understand the others truth from their point of view. Truth cannot be unified. Paul Ricoeur rightly remarks that "uniformization of truth is, no doubt, a dream of reason but it is at the same time an act of violence." Acharya Mahaprajna, the man of present era, presented a 'Garland Project' under Surat Spiritual Declaration to honorable Ex-President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, on 15th Oct, 2003 in Surat. Under this project, in order to resolve such conflicts following projects were identified :

- (1) Celebration of inter-religions festivals.
- (2) Multi-religious projects.
- (3) Education in and with the ambience of unity of religions.
- (4) Inter-faith dialogue.
- (5) National level independent and autonomous organization managed by religious and spiritual leaders as well as scholars and enlightened citizens.

Inter-cultural dialogue in context to *Anekānt* revolutionizes the narrow culturalistic concept of identity, which of course, has a centre with fringes. Under such intercultural dialogue, no culture – Chinese, European, Indian or any other is monolithic and monadic. Culture as a closed system is philosophically and methodologically unsound and even politically dangerous, because it may lead to the ideology of ‘culturalism’, which ascribes to certain culture absolute values and treats others as a means to the aggrandizement of that specific culture. Under the goal of *anekāntic* inter-cultural understanding, we accept all cultures to argue not only in their own favour but also to give a patient hearing to the arguments of the other for their own culture. It does not demand identity of views for understanding. In inter cultural dialogue the absence of certain features of the other are taken as complementary and not as a lack.

One, who owns inter-cultural attitude, has to bring change in perspective which helps to cultivate the virtue of tolerance as well as respect for others.

At last, inter-religious and inter-cultural praxis with reference to *anekānt* should be promoted. But first of all, we should dispel the thick layer of prejudice and ignorance that prevent a true perception not only of the faith of the other but even their freedom to have it. The only way is *anekāntvāda*, with the help of such steps we can usher in a peaceful and harmonious world.

As a matter of fact, unless one develops an *anekāntic* view of truth, there can be no effective room for intercultural dialogue and consequently there will be no lasting peace and harmony in the cultural arena of the world. Jain doctrine of *anekānt* is virtually the ever-opened gateway to intercultural dialogue leading to peaceful co-existence and mutual development of global diaspora of mankind.

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*sayam sayam pasansantā, garahantā param vayam/
je u tattha viussanti, saṃsāram te viussiyā//*