

INTERDESCIPLINE OF VEDANTA AND JAINISM

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INTRODUCTION OF VEDANTA AND JAINISM

Etymologically, Vedanta means the end or the conclusion of the Vedas. Thus the last portions of the Vedas-the Upanishads and the principles or philosophy propounded in them-are called Vedanta. In fact, Vedanta is a system of philosophy, which forms the basis of Hinduism. There are different interpretations of the Upanishads based on which there are various schools of Vedanta like Dvaita, Visistadvaita and Advaita. Generally, the Advaita philosophy as propounded by Sankaracarya is equated with Vedanta.

History of Vedanta Philosophy can be dated back to thousands of centuries ago. In the medieval period the word Vedanta meant the school of philosophy that interpreted the Upanishads. The traditional Vedanta considers scriptural evidence as the genuine means of knowledge. The philosophy of Vedanta was systematized into one rational treatise that was undertaken by Badarayana in the Vedanta Sutra. This was composed around 200 BCE. Several names have been assigned to Vedanta Sutra and they include Brahma sutra, Sariraka, Vyasa-sutra, Badarayana sutra, Uttara-mimamsa and Vedanta-darsana. The enigmatic aphorisms of Vedanta Sutras have been interpreted in various ways by many saints. This has resulted in the formation of abundant Vedanta schools. Each of these schools has construed the texts in its own manner. This has led to various sub commentaries. All these school interpreted the texts in its own way thereby producing its

own sub-commentaries. However an individual's quest for truth through meditation has been consistent throughout Vedanta. All sects of Hinduism have been influenced by the thought systems that have been developed by Vedantic thinkers. The principles of Vedanta speak of unity of all existence and the universality of spiritual truth.

The primary source of Vedanta is the Upanishad. However certain portions of Vedanta have been derived from some of the earlier aranyakas. The main principle of Vedanta is the absolute reality that has been termed as Brahman. Sage Vyasa was one of the major proponents of this philosophy. Most schools of Vedanta believe in the concept of Brahman - the eternal, self existent and inspiring Supreme and Ultimate Reality which is the divine ground of all Being. There are six interpretations of these source texts. Among these six three (Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita) are well-known. These Vedanta schools of thought were founded by Shri Adi Shankara, Shri Ramanuja and Shri Madhvacharya. Bhagavad Gita has also played a major role in Vedantic thought. All teachers of Vedanta have completely attested to the importance of Gita to the development of Vedantic thought and practice. Vedanta is not restricted to one book, thus it has no single source.

Jainism is one of the major ancient religions of the world. Scholars believe that it originated as a reaction to the cumbersome ritualism (karma kanda) and as revolt against animal sacrifices in the name of religion, which were prevalent in Hinduism. We get evidence of this protest against killing animals in sacrifices (yajnas) in the mythological stories of Jainism. Other Jainologists, however, consider Jainism as old as Hinduism, if not older. It was prevalent then as one of the popular religions. These scholars believe that in India, from times immemorial, there were two parallel streams of culture: the

Vedic or brahman culture, and the shramana culture. The former originated and flourished in the Indus valley or Sarasvati Valley according to modern scholars, and the latter had its birth and growth in Magadha, the present state of Bihar, India. There are certain fundamental differences between these two cultures, which have persisted in some form or other till to day.

DISSIMILARITIES OF VEDANTA AND JAINISM

Vedanta says that Brahmn is ultimate reality. All other beings and things are unreal. Swami Sivananda upholds that Brahmn is paripoorna, full, because all desires melt there. Brahmn to him ‘is something, after seeing which there is nothing more to be seen, after becoming which there is nothing more to become, after knowing which there remains nothing to be known’. Brahmn is that which is all-pervading, which surrounds us from all sides – around, above and below. It is satchidananda or existence, knowledge and bliss. It is that which has no other. It is without a second, endless, eternal, one and one alone. It is everlasting, the one continuous experience-whole. Brahmn has six attributes: ‘jnana (divine wisdom), vairagya (dispassion), aishwarya, power (bala, strength), sri (wealth); and kirti (fame)’.

He is nitya (eternal), ananta (infinite),and ananda (supreme bliss). He is unchanging amidst changing phenomena. He is permanent amidst the impermanent, and imperishable amidst the perishable. He is what the Gita calls “Jyotishamapi tat jyoti,Light of all lights” He is the Adhithana or support of the phenomenal world. Brahmn is the sutradhara, string-puller of all bodies of beings. He is the antaryamin, inner ruler of all beings. He is in you and you are in Him. Each of the five primary elements is a manifestation of His qualities.

Brahmn is swatantra or independent. He has satkama (good desires) and satsankalpa (pure will). Since karmas are jada or insentient, on their own they cannot yield fruits, so it is Brahmn who dispenses fruits of actions of jivas. He is all merciful; quenching the thirst of jivas. He satiates our hunger. He dispenses justice to all. The five activities of God are: srishti (creation), sthiti (preservation) samhara (destruction) tirodhana or tirobhava (veiling) and anugraha (grace). Brahmn is beyond the reach of the senses and mind that is why its existence cannot be proved by scientific experimentation. It is purely a question of faith and refers to the intuitive side of man. However, His existence can be inferred by certain empirical facts or common experiences in daily life.

Shramana culture considers formal sannyasa or total renunciation of all possessions, desires and even activities essential for attaining liberation. The word Arhat refers to a person who has gained perfect control over all his activities. An arhat, without any activity, is projected as the ideal. Of the four purusarthas, or goals of life, the brahmana culture stresses dharma or righteous conduct, whereas the shramana culture emphasizes moksha or freedom more than dharma. **One must keep in mind these few basic facts while trying to undertake a comparative study of Vedanta and Jainism.** It must also be borne in mind that Brahmanism or Hinduism is not the same as Vedanta. Likewise Shramanism and Jainism are not identical. Besides, both Vedanta and Jainism have various aspects: philosophical, ethical, social and practical. There are some similarities between the two as well as some dissimilarities. One must be careful not to draw simplistic conclusions.

Georg Feuerstein summarizes the advaita realization as follows: The manifold universe is, in truth, a Single Reality. There is only one Great Being, which the sages call

Brahman, in which all the countless forms of existence reside. That Great Being is utter Consciousness, and It is the very Essence, or Self (Atman) of all beings."

The Vedic culture emphasizes the concept of a Brahmana or brahmanahood, whereas the Shramana culture has its basis in the concept of an all-renouncing Monk, a bhikkhu or shramana. The Vedic culture sets before us the concept of a Jivanmukta, a person liberated in life. A jivanmukta can even be a householder. He is also called a Rishi (mantra-drasts), a person who has realized the scriptural truths. There are many references to such householder rishis in the Hindu scriptures. King Janaka and the sages Yajnavalkya, Vasistha, Atri and many other rishis were all householders.

Right Knowledge is greatly emphasized in Vedanta because ignorance can be destroyed only by knowledge. The chief means of acquiring this knowledge is called jnana yoga, which aims at attaining the highest spiritual knowledge. **However there is an important difference between Vedanta and Jainism.** According to Advaita Vedanta the individual soul and the Cosmic Soul or Brahman are essentially one and non-different. But Jainism believes that individual souls are innumerable and separate, and that this differentiation remains even after emancipation. But one thing is certain: both Jainism and Vedanta believe that the soul in its real nature is pure, free, blissful and of the nature of consciousness.

SIMILARITIES OF JAINISM AND VEDANTA

Advaitins believe that suffering is due to Maya (also known as Mithya or Vaitathya), and only knowledge (called Jnana) of Brahman can destroy Maya. When Maya is removed, there exists ultimately no difference between the Jiva and Brahman (Isvara). Such a state of bliss when achieved while living is called Jivanmukta. While one

is in the pragmatic level, one can worship God in any way and in any form, like Krishna or Ayyappa as he wishes; Adi Shankara himself was a proponent of devotional worship or Bhakti. But Adi Shankara taught that while Vedic sacrifices, puja and devotional worship can lead one in the direction of jnana (true knowledge) they cannot lead one directly to moksha. At best, they can serve as means to obtain moksha via shukla gati.

Both Jainism and Vedanta accept the **Atman** as the real nature of all living beings-a reality that is different from the body, the pranas, the mind and the intellect which are inert (jada) Jainism calls them pudgala. Vedanta propounds that the individual soul forgets its real nature and identifies with the unreal (body and mind) due to ignorance (avidya). Jainism also considers mithyatva or wrong knowledge-ignorance-as the chief cause of bondage between the conscious principle, Atman and the insentient pudgala. It however, postulates a few more causes of bondage: the absence of dispassion for sense enjoyment (avirati), carelessness (pramada), attachment (kasaya) and the activities of body, mind and speech (yoga).

It is not that Jainism does not preach faith in oneself. In fact Jainism does not believe in a God who creates, sustains and destroys the universe. Likewise it does not advocate the concept of grace of a superhuman divine being. Although Jainism adores tirthankaras or prophets it also believes that anyone can attain to that exalted state by one's own self-effort. Adoration of the tirthankaras is more a reminder of the state of perfection than worship. This does not contradict Swamiji's Practical Vedant which preaches the potential divinity in every human being. Swamiji repeatedly exhorted his disciples to become Rishis-even greater than himself.

Swami Vivekananda based his scheme of Practical Vedanta on the foundation of Advaita Vedanta. We must serve others because in serving them we really serve ourselves; because there are no two beings there is only one Cosmic Soul. Your soul and others soul are the same. To harm others is only to harm one self. The Jain Tirthakara Mahavira speaks in almost the same vein: Whom you want to kill is none but you; whom you want to bind is none other than you. To kill anyone is to kill oneself; compassion towards creatures is compassion towards oneself. **In this teaching of Lord Mahavira we find an echo of Advaita Vedanta.**

Both Vedanta and Jainism believe in the **theory of karma** and transmigration. In Jainism the philosophy of karma is discussed in great detail. To get rid of the bondage caused by past karma Jainism recommends two means: samvara and nirjara. Samvara means prevention of new karmic bondages-prevention of the influx of fresh karma. Nirjara deals with the methods by which the already formed bondages could be severed-the purgation of karma. This is done **by Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct**. These three together are called tri-ratna (**‘Triples Jewels’**) and are very basis of Jainism Besides these tapas (austerity) is so greatly stressed in Jainism that it may be considered the fourth jewel.

When we try to study these basic principles in the light of Swami Vivekananda’s Practical Vedanta we find certain similarities. Swamiji too greatly emphasized faith as one of the most important virtues. While in Jainism Right Faith means having faith in the true and pure guru (suddha guru), pure deity or prophet (suddha deva) and true and pure religion (suddha dharma). Swamiji stressed faith in oneself. He went to the extent of

proclaiming: The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.

INTERDISCIPLINE OF VEDANTA AND JAINISM

Now, if we believe that only the **ritualistic aspect** of Hinduism and Brahmanism is repugnant to Jainism, there should not be any antagonism between Jainism and the spiritual aspect of the Upanishads. Even the Upanishads have decried Vedic ritualism characterized by excessive activity and sacrificial paraphernalia, and have preached the conscious principle the Atman the realization of which they advocated as the ultimate goal of life. There cannot be any contradiction between Jainism and Vedanta on this score.

We have thus far seen some basic tenets of Jainism in the light of Practical Vedanta. Let us now try to evaluate some of the principles of Practical Vedanta as preached by Swami Vivekananda in the light of Jainism. Let us to begin with take up Swami Vivekananda's definition of religion: Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship or psychic control or philosophy-by one, or more or all of these-and be free. This is whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details. (1.124).

Now let us correlate it with Jainism. We have already seen that Jainism believes the soul to be a conscious entity and considers its freedom from karmic bondage the goal of life. We have also seen that in Jainism greater stress is laid on karma raja. However devotion worship or bhakti is not neglected. Worship of images in temples and chanting of hymns and praises form an integral part of Jain religious practice. Jain devotees derive

immense spiritual benefit from such observances. Nor are philosophical studies neglected. There is enough scope for scholarship and the exercise of reason in karma yoga has not been extolled in Jainism as it has been done in the Bhagavad gita. Service to man is service to God is the very basis of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta. In Jainism service is considered one of the six kinds of internal tapas or austerity. But here too service only means service of saints and monastics. Although charity is considered meritorious for householders according to Jainism all activities ultimately lead to greater bondage. **Hence karma is not considered a means of purification. Instead tapas is advocated as a means of cleansing oneself of karmic impurity**

Anekantavada and syadvada are two inter-related theories, which demonstrate the catholicity of Jainism. An object or phenomenon can be viewed from various viewpoints and these various views can all be true though only partially. To explain this Jains give the famous example of several blind men feeling various parts of an elephant and deriving their own conclusions about it, which are all only partially true. This principle resembles Sri Ramakrishna's saying: 'As many faiths so many paths.' God can have various forms according to the conceptions of different devotees, and at the same time can be formless too. And there could be various paths to reach Him all of which can be equally valid.

Swami Vivekananda considers external details like rituals forms and temples of secondary importance. Jainism also emphasizes mental attitude more than the external act. This subject is discussed in Jainism under the subject of Naya meaning outlook. If a meritorious act is performed with an evil intention it cannot be considered meritorious. This is akin to the Karma yoga of Vedanta according to which the fruits of an action

performed without attachment cannot affect the doer. There are two types of violence according to Jainism: actual violence and mental or intentional violence-dravya himsa and bhava himsa. Of the two, intentional violence is considered worse than actual violence.

Jainism is basically a religion that **strongly emphasizes renunciation** and meditation and the giving up of all activity. It is a renunciation-dominant religion (nivrtti-pradhana dharma). In Jain temples we often find images of Jain prophets and saints sitting-or even standing-in meditation. Swami Vivekananda too assigned the prime place for concentration of mind and meditation in his scheme of Practical Vedanta. **He was himself an adept in meditation and considered concentration of mind to be the secret of success in all spheres of life.** In Jainism several meditation techniques are described, starting from such simple and preliminary techniques of collecting the dispersed mind as ananupurvi to the most advanced sukla-dhyana.

Jainism lays the greatest stress on the necessity of character and purity of conduct (samyak caritra). So does Swamiji: ‘Money does not pay nor name; fame does not pay nor learning. It is love that pays; it is character that cleaves through the adamant walls of difficulties’. (4.367) In fact character building was the very basis of all his practical plans of action. He defined education as the man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. (3.302)

Observance of the five **Yamas** – truth, non-violence, non-stealing, chastity and non-possessiveness-wholly or partially as vows is the basis of Right Conduct. According to the great sage Patanjali the author of the Yoga Sutras these five values must be practiced by everyone everywhere and at all times without exception. Sri Ramakrishna

was fully established in these virtues. Swami Vivekananda too advocated them. Hence there can be no dispute in this matter. The only difference is that whereas in Jainism the greatest stress is laid on Ahimsa or non-injury, Swamiji has emphasized truth and chastity.

CONCLUSION

Today we need to follow the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda, one of whose missions was to remove the culls from the oft-projected picture of Hinduism and give an invigorating message of Vedanta to both the East and the West. **When our religion is thus made comprehensible to the modern man, when the practices incompatible with Vedanta are purged, when our education is spiritualized through de-secularization, when our nation gets united by the application of Vedanta, only then will Hindus be able to impress the world outside.** Only then can our acaryas deliver what is expected of them – showing how to have the correct attitude to solve modern and ultra-modern problems: pollution, population explosion, escalating terrorism, ecological imbalance, unprecedented pauperization of man, ‘genetic bomb’ etc. Only then the song of the Puranic ballad will have significance today : The residents of the celestial sphere sing, and the theme of their song is the following: ‘Blessed are those that live in the territory of ‘Bharata.’ Let us, by our act and deed, justify our love for ‘Bharata’ which may mean rata, or addicted, to bha, or enlightenment.

Vedanta is as old as the Vedas and is the basis of the various Indian philosophical systems. Although Vedanta had always been a practical scheme of life as well for modern times Swami Vivekananda has given it a new interpretation called Practical Vedanta. From the above analysis it will also be evident that although Jainism may differ

philosophically and empirically from traditional Hinduism there are more similarities than differences between Jainism and Vedanta especially Swamiji's Practical Vedanta. Besides, Swamiji's definition of Vedanta is very wide all comprehensive and all-inclusive. According to it Religion is Vedanta, which includes all the different religions like Jainism Buddhism and Hinduism Even if one may not accept this definition of Vedanta one would find a lot of similarities between Jainism and Vedanta. Not only this, the two systems can help and enrich each other-as it should be. Vedanta can gain something from Jainism and Jainism too can benefit from Vedanta without in any way compromising their special features or originality.

Self-enquiry is greatly emphasized in Vedanta, where it is called tvam-pada-sodhana. When one asks the questions, Who am I? What is my real nature? And seeks answers to such questions one ultimately realizes one's real pure conscious nature-the Atman free from adjuncts like body mind ego and intellect. There is no difference between Vedanta and Jainism as far as the process of inquiry is concerned.

Jains seek forgiveness from all creatures of the world chanting the following verse: I forgive all creatures may all creatures forgive me. I have friendship with everyone and enmity towards none. No true religion preaches hatred separation or conflict. It bring people together and spreads goodwill. This has been the aim of both Jainism and Vedanta, which is why both Jainism and Vedanta have flourished in India. There has always been a cordial relationship between the Jains and the Vedantins and it continues to grow stronger every day.

The practice of serving man as God (siva jnane jiva seva) can easily become a part of the Jain way of life, since it accepts every soul as a pure free conscious entity. It is

gratifying to note that a number of Jain organizations have nowadays undertaken philanthropic activities. On the other hand the followers of Practical Vedanta can gain much by learning to lay greater stress on tapas as done in Jainism. Vedantins can also make use of the universal navakara mantra of Jainism and its practice of forgiveness. Navakara mantra is an extremely liberal and effective mantra where in salutations are offered to the acaryas, teachers, perfected souls, saints and prophets of all religions. None can begrudge the acceptance of such a liberal non-sectarian mantras as a part of their religions practice.

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