

Chapter 6

Sañjaya's Ajñānavāda and Mahāvīra's Anekāntavāda: From Agnosticism to Pluralism



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Abstract This chapter aims to examine parallels between two ancient Indian philosophical schools, Jaina (Jainism) of Mahāvīra and *Ajñāna* (Unending Agnosticism) of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta. Jaina and *Ajñāna* traditions were a part of the Non-Vedic larger *Śramaṇa* movement of seventh to sixth-century BCE India, where *Śramaṇa* were monastics, who dwelled in forests and lived a retired life, focussing themselves in the search of discovering the knowledge of truth, reality and existence. Sañjaya and Mahāvīra were contemporaries and were a prominent and well-known *Śramaṇa* of their time. The chapter is broadly divided into two parts, with two sections each. The first part aims to discuss Sañjaya's *ajñānavāda* (epistemological method) and Mahāvīra's doctrine of *anekāntavāda* (metaphysical pluralism) and *saptabhaṅginaya* (sevenfold predication). The second part aims to explore the logical relationship and similarities between *ajñānavāda* and *anekāntavāda* and its metaphysical consequences, and conclusively the major part of the paper will discuss the claim first made by the German Jaina scholar Hermann Jacobi, about the possible influence that Sañjaya's *ajñānavāda* had on the establishment of Mahāvīra's *anekāntavāda*. In brief, the chapter intends to present and discuss the contemporary scholarship claims on Sañjaya and his possible influence it had on the development of the Jaina thought.

Keywords Jainism · Mahāvīra · Anekāntavāda · Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta · Ajñānavāda · Saptabhaṅginaya

¹ The Sanskrit word “*Ajñāna*” here represents a set of philosophical schools with consistent agnostic tendencies, particularly the school of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta that existed in ancient (seventh to sixth-century BCE) India. It should not be confused with the term “*ajñāna*”, commonly used in Indian Philosophy which means “ignorance” or “nescience”. The name of these schools perhaps was given to them by other contemporary rival schools, such as Buddhism and Jainism. The word “*Ajñāna*”, “*Ajñānavāda*” or “*Ajñānika*” is often found in the ancient Jaina and Buddhist texts to refer to these agnostic schools of thought.

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1 Ancient Jaina Texts and the School of Ajñāna

Jaina (Jainism) and *Ajñānika or Ajñāna*¹ are two of the ancient philosophical traditions among many other that existed in ancient India around seventh to sixth-century BCE and belonged to the larger *Śramaṇa*² movement which comprised numerous philosophical sects. This was historically a very significant and a turning point in the subcontinent of India, where there was a boon and upliftment in various fields such as science, economics, logic, trade, etc., and philosophy was no exception to it. The *Śramaṇa* movement which emerged was at its peak during this time and later. *Śramaṇas* were truth seekers who had abandoned the duties done by the laity and sought themselves to the path of resolving deepest questions of truth and existence, and obtaining the right knowledge. Within the *Śramaṇa* tradition, we find diverse metaphysical and ethical belief systems and practices.. From historical sources we gather that it was a common practice among the people to get indulged in deep philosophical, intellectual and spiritual discussions. The issues at times originated from the Vedas, but were ultimately free from the Vedic influence. Presumably, among them the *Śramaṇas* engaged in philosophical debates without any restrictions and control from any political or religious authorities.

Jainism, being one such prominent philosophical and religious movement, believes in the tenet of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) to be of absolute significance. Violence according to Jaina should neither exist at the physical level nor at the level of emotion or intellect. In Jainism, ethics is very closely linked with metaphysics and epistemology. Since seventh to sixth-century BCE was a revolutionary time where new ideas, philosophies and standpoints were emerging, presumably, in order to handle the conflicts and intellectual rivalries existing at the time of Mahāvīra, the doctrine of *syādavāda* (possibility of multiple relative standpoints) was established and propagated. This strengthened the Jaina doctrine of *anekāntavāda* (roughly translated as the doctrine of many realities or metaphysical pluralism). Importantly, Mahāvīra and *Jaina* philosophers constructed the logic of *saptabhanginaya* (sevenfold predication method) as the panacea for ending such conflicts (Datta and Chatterjee 2016, 83).³

² The term “*Śramaṇa*” in Sanskrit or “*Śamaṇa*” in Pāli literally translates in English as “someone who labours and lives in austerity”. And in the historical context it refers to people, mostly monks, who in ancient India laboured and sought the ultimate reality or truth, if there was any.

³ The sevenfold predication given by the Jainas can be listed as follows:

- (1) Somehow S is P (*syāt asti*).
- (2) Somehow S is not P (*syāt nāsti*).
- (3) Somehow S is P and not P (*syāt asti ca nāsti ca*).
- (4) Somehow S is indescribable (*syāt avaktavyam*).
- (5) Somehow S is P and is indescribable (*syāt asti ca avyaktavyam ca*).
- (6) Somehow S is not P and is indescribable (*syāt nāsti ca avyaktavyam ca*).
- (7) Somehow S is and not P and is indescribable (*syāt asti ca nāsti ca avyaktavyam ca*).

The school of *Ajñāna* of Sañjaya Belat̥hiputta⁴ dealt with the clash of ideas and disputes by consistently suspending judgements (which in Sanskrit I is termed as “*amarakathananilambana*”) at least on metaphysical and ethical debates. He formulated a fivefold response (*pañcakoti*) to escape taking positions on any philosophical view. Sañjaya's systematic method will be discussed in the following section. However, Hermann Jacobi (1895) from the nineteenth-century ADE is among the first modern scholars of Jainism to compare and notice the similarities between Mahāvīra's *saptabhanginaya* (sevenfold predication) and Sañjaya's logical method.⁵ He said:

The similarity between some of those 'heretical' doctrines on the one side, and Gaina or Buddhist ideas on the other, is very suggestive, and favours the assumption that the Buddha, as well as Mahāvīra, owed some of his conceptions to these very heretics, and formulated others under the influence of the controversies which were continually going on with them (xxvii).

Jacobi suggests that Jaina and Buddha philosophies are connected with the debates that happened among the intellectuals of the time and got influenced by them. These (probably logical) connections enabled Jacobi to say that some of Mahāvīra's concepts must have got influenced by Sañjaya's method, and were used to debate against Sañjaya. Jacobi goes on to conclude that:

... In opposition to the Agnosticism of Sañgaya, Mahāvīra has established the Syādvāda. For as the Agñānavāda declares that of a thing beyond our experience the existence, or non-existence or simultaneous existence and non-existence, can neither be affirmed nor denied, so in a similar way, but one leading to contrary results, the Syādvāda declares that 'you can affirm the existence of a thing from one point of view (syād asti), deny it from another (syād nāsti); and affirm both existence and non-existence with reference to it at different times (syād asti nāsti). If you should think of affirming existence and non-existence at the same time from the same point of view, you must say that the thing cannot be spoken of (syād avaktavyah). Similarly, under certain circumstances, the affirmation of existence is not possible (syād asti avaktavyah); of non-existence (syād nāsti avaktavyah); and also of both (syād asti nāsti avaktavyah)... Would any philosopher have enunciated such truisms, unless they served to silence some dangerous opponents? The subtle discussions of the Agnostics had probably bewildered and misled many of their contemporaries. Consequently the Syādvāda must have appeared to them as a happy way leading out of the maze of the Agñānavāda (xxviii).

The interpretation of *saptabhanginaya* presented by Jacobi comes very close to the idea of Saptabhangi given by post-eleventh-century. ADE Jaina thinker Vimaladāsa in *saptabhangitarangini* (Jain, 2008, 17). The same interpretation is found in modern Jaina scholarship:

⁴ Sañjaya Belat̥hiputta was an ancient Indian philosopher from seventh to sixth-century BCE. He was a Śramana, and was a senior contemporary of Mahāvīra and Buddha. Ancient Buddhist Pāli texts refer to him as one of the famous six heretical teachers, who preached at the time of Buddha and held their own independent philosophical views. Sañjaya is referred to as a well-known thinker who systematically and consistently suspended judgements on all philosophical matters (*amaravikkhepika*), be they affirmative, negative, both or neither. Sañjaya is also known as Sañjaya Vairat̥tiputra (Belat̥hiputta in Pāli literally translates as Virat̥tiputra in Sanskrit).

⁵ For Buddhist texts, Jacobi refers to English translations by Gogerly and Bornouf.

(1) existence (in a specific context); (2) non-existence (in another specific context); (3) successive occurrence of both the attributes; (4) inexpressibility; (5) inexpressibility as qualified by the first predicate; (6) inexpressibility as qualified by the second and (7) inexpressibility as qualified by the third (Mookerjee, 1978, 118).

Before discussing Jacobi's remark about Sañjaya's possible influence on Mahāvīra later in the chapter, it is important to firstly mention the references of *Ajñānika* in ancient Jaina texts, and secondly, the reference of Sañjaya's teaching as found in ancient Theravāda Buddhist texts.

In the ancient Jaina texts, one finds indirect references to *Ajñāna*, with no specific mention of Sañjaya. Jacobi's introduction to *Sūtrakṛitāṅga* and *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* notices a difference between the ancient Buddhist and ancient Jaina texts on the subject of the schools of *Ajñāna*. While the Buddhist sources, namely, *Brahmajāla Sutta* and *Samānaphala Sutta* of Digha Nikayas recognize four schools (Sañjaya being the last), the Jaina texts conflate them into one. Nonetheless, I present the views of schools of *Ajñānika*. The *Ajñāna* references in ancient Jaina texts, however, are presented thus: *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* by Sudharmaswāmi who was Mahāvīra's chief disciple mentions the king Sañjaya in the chapter "Sañjaya". On a hunting trip, King Sañjaya is influenced by the Jaina sage Gardhabali. The king realizes the wrongness of hunting and becomes a monk. Jacobi states that Gardhabali regards the *Ajñānavādins* to be people with limited knowledge who talk "foolishly" about the inefficiency of knowledge, and are thus incapable of guiding others towards monkhood.⁶ In the chapter, "Praise of Mahāvīra", of *Sūtrakṛitāṅga Sūtra*, Mahāvīra is said to have understood and mastered the doctrines of *Ajñānavādins*, without condemning their views.⁷ Further, the *same Sūtra* by Sudharmaswāmi states:

There are four (heretical) creeds which the disputants severally uphold: 1. the Kriyāvāda, 2. the Akriyāvāda, 3. the Vinayavāda, and 4. the Agñānavāda. The agnostics (Annāniyā or agñānikās), though they (pretend to) be clever, reason incoherently, and do not get beyond the confusion of their ideas. Ignorant (teachers) speak to ignorant (pupils), and without reflection they speak untruth (*Jaina Sutras* (Jacobi 1895), Part II, p. 315).

And,

There are enumerated three hundred and sixty-three philosophical schools: those of the Kriyāvāda, those of the Akriyāvāda, those of the Agñānikavāda, and those of the Vainayikavāda. These (philosophers) teach final beatitude, they teach final deliverance, they speak as Srāvakas (disciples), they speak as teachers of Srāvakas. All these philosophers, founders of systems of their own, differing in intellect, will, character, opinions, taste, undertakings, and plans, formed one large circle, and every one of them stood in his place (*Ibid.*, p. 385).

Jacobi's commentary on the number of schools (viz. *kriyāvāda*, *akriyāvāda*, *ajñānavāda* and *vinayavāda*) and their subdivisions arise from mathematical calculation (and not actual observation). One find two more quotations in *Sūtrakṛitāṅga* where they have repudiated the school of *Ajñāna*:

⁶ See *Jaina Sutras* (Jacobi 1895], Part II, p. 83.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

1. The speculations of Agnostics (Ajñānikās) cannot lead to knowledge; they cannot reach the truth by themselves, still less to teach it to other men. As a man in a wood who does not know it follows a guide who also does not know it, both being unacquainted with the place come to great trouble. As when one blind man is the guide of another, then man walks a great distance, loses his way or follows a wrong way (*Ibid.*, p. 241).
2. The Agnostics (Ajñānikās), though they pretend to be clever, reason incoherently, and do not get beyond the confusion of their ideas. Ignorant teachers speak to ignorant pupils, and without reflection they speak the untruth (*Ibid.*, pp. 315–16).

In addition to Sudharmaswāmi, the medieval Jaina scholar Umāswāti, in his monumental work *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, also makes references to *Ajñāna* considering their doctrines to be essentially deluded or a false philosophy (*mithya-darśana*). Verse 7.18 of the *Tattvārtha Sūtra* mentions that a Jaina observer of vows is free from delusion. Of the five attitudes prescribed to Jaina monks, one includes acknowledging heretical or non-Jaina doctrines. Umāswāti's commentary on the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, *Svopajna Bhāṣya*, classifies the heretical doctrines as speculative and non-speculative. They are further classified as *kriyāvāda* (activism), *akriyāvāda* (inactivism), *ajñānavāda* (agnosticism) and *samtāvāda* (egalitarianism) (Tatia, 2007).

Verse 8.1 identifies five causes of bondage. The first cause of bondage is recognized as a belief in false philosophies. It explains that “heretical” doctrines are born from imagination and abstraction and are therefore speculative; the blind faith of common folk, on the other hand, is considered non-speculative. Finally, this verse in addition recognizes doubting as a third type of false philosophy. *Ajñāna* may be seen as falling into this third type of “false philosophy”. Puṣyapāda Devanandi's commentary on *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, titled *Sarvārthasiddhi*, describes two broad divisions of the heretical views: natural and non-natural. Natural refers to heretical views that arise out of a wrong understanding of *karma* and is produced by formal instruction and at the instigation of others. Non-natural heresies are divided into categories of four and five parts: the four types are activism, inactivism, agnosticism and egalitarianism; the five types are absolutist, perverse, sceptical, egalitarian and agnostic (Tatia, 2007).

There is an important point to be drawn from the Jaina documentation: *ajñānavāda* (agnosticism) is differentiated from *saṃśayavāda* (scepticism), as well as from *samtāvāda* (egalitarianism). Where egalitarianism considers all philosophical views to be equally valid and scepticism considers them to be invalid, agnosticism denies even the possibility of distinction between valid and invalid doctrines; agnosticism (*Ajñāna*) avoids taking a position on which doctrine is meritorious or morally tenable and which one is not (Tatia, 2007).

2 Ancient Buddhist Texts and Sañjaya

Referring to Buddhist scriptures, Sañjaya is said to have stated his philosophical view in the following way:

If you ask me if there exists another world [after death], if I thought that there exists another world, would I declare that to you? I don't think so. I don't think in that way. I don't think otherwise. I don't think not. I don't think not not. If you asked me if there isn't another world... both is and isn't... neither is nor isn't... if there are beings who transmigrate... if there aren't... both are and aren't... neither are nor aren't... if the Tathagata exists after death... doesn't... both... neither exists nor doesn't exist after death, would I declare that to you? I don't think so. I don't think in that way. I don't think otherwise. I don't think not. I don't think not not (Thanissaro, 1997).

In Buddhist Pāli scripture above, Sañjaya is recorded to have developed *pañcakoti* (a fivefold method of suspending judgement) for *catuṣkoṭi* (the four kinds of possible metaphysical and moral statements):

1. A,
2. Not A,
3. A and Not A and
4. Neither A nor Not A,

where “A” is a statement or a judgement. To each of these four possibilities, he responded as follows. The response in Pāli and its English equivalent is given in fivefold manner:

1. I do not think so “*evam ti pi me no*”.
2. I do not think thus (or) that “*tathā'ti pi me no*”.
3. I do not think otherwise “*aññathā'ti pi me no*”.
4. I do not think not “*no'ti pi me no*”.
5. I do not think not (of) not “*no no'ti pi me no*”.

Ancient Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa, in his commentary *Sumangalavilāsini*, also reports Sañjaya's method of elusiveness in the above manner (Nakamura, 1992, 162). Jayatilleke offers two interpretations for Sañjaya's response by Buddhaghosa. In both interpretations, “no” (in Pāli) and “no/not” (in English) are considered “contrary” rather than “contradictory” relation (Jayatilleke, 2013).

The first interpretation of the fivefold method of suspension of judgement is given below:

1. An indefinite rejection or denial, i.e. it is denial of a general and an unspecified view, say, for instance, the statement that there is something which is real ($\neg(p =)$).
2. Contrary to (1.), i.e. it is a denial of a definite or a specific philosophical view (e.g. *sassatāvāda* or Eternalism) ($\neg(p)$).
3. Is the denial of an alternate or a variant view of (2.), say, the denial of a Semi-eternal view, which is similar yet different from Eternalism ($\neg(p.- p)$).

4. Is the denial of the contrary position of (2.) (e.g. *ucchedavāda* or Annihilationism) $(-(-p))$.
5. Is the denial or rejection or in better words contrary of (4.), i.e. double denial or contrary of denial of the contrary view, say, for example, denying that the ultimate reality is neither Eternalism nor Annihilationism $-(-(p.-p))$.

Here “-p” is not contradictory, but contrary to “p”. Buddhaghōṣa calls this explanation of Sañjaya's response “*takkīvāda*” or thesis of a sophist, or if I can use in the terminology used by Akṣapāda Gotama (the founder of the school of Nyāya), Sañjaya can be referred to as a “*vitāṇḍavādin*”, that is, someone who in a debate does not establish any position or is without a position of their own, but criticizes or questions the exponent's position.

The second interpretation can be elaborated as follows:

- (1) Is simply a denial of an assertion, for example, if we affirm, there is God, then he denies it $(-(p))$.
- (2) Is denial of negation of (1.), say, there is no God, he denies it $(-(-(1.)))$.
- (3) Is again a denial of a position which is different from both (1.) and (2.), i.e. denying both (1.) and (2.) (denial of that there is a God, and denial of that there is no God) $(-(1.2.))$.
- (4) Is the denial of a position which says that it is other than (1.), (2.) and (3.) or other than all the above possibilities; this also is denied by Sañjaya $(-(-1.2.3.))$.
- (5) And lastly, is the denial of the denials, i.e. if his position is to deny everything, or every position, he denies that $(-1.2.3.4.)$.

Jayatilleke considers the former explanation given by Buddhaghōṣa to be more satisfactory than the latter from the language point of view; however, he offers a third alternative explanation. He accepts the first four positions of the first interpretation and adds to them the fifth position of the second interpretation to complete the fivefold scheme (1. $-(p =)$, 2. $-(p)$, 3. $-(p.\text{not } p)$, 4. $-(\text{not } p)$ and finally 5. $-(1.2.3.4.)$, where “not p” is not contradictory but contrary of “p”). This way he credits Sañjaya the fivefold scheme of response to the questions asked, along with other sceptical schools of thought of the time (Jayatilleke, 2013). From the language as well as from the logical point of view, I accept Jayatilleke's view for my argument.

3 Ajñānavāda and Syādavāda: Influence of the One Over the Other

Let me go back to Jacobi's interpretation/position as cited in the beginning of the chapter. Jayatilleke analyses the conclusion made by Jacobi and shows the similarities and differences between Sañjaya's *ajñānavāda* and Mahāvīra's *syādavāda*. However, Jayatilleke (2015) is not as supportive as Jacobi who regarded the similarity and possible influence of Sañjaya on Mahāvīra or the Jainas. He writes:

Jacobi thinks that ‘in opposition to the Agnosticism of Sañjaya, Mahāvīra has established the syādavāda. Superficially, there seems to be some truth in this observation. The Jain syādavāda appears to be the opposite reaction to that of the Sceptics when faced with the same epistemological problem. The Sceptic [Ajñānika] doubts or denies all logical possibilities, whereas the Jain asserts that they are all true in some sense or another. But this appearance of a radical contrast is deceptive and in fact although the two have to be distinguished, it would be quite wrong to consider them as being poles apart (138–139).

Here I find that Jayatilleke is not very supportive of the idea that Sañjaya might have influenced Mahāvīra’s doctrine of syādavāda. yet I say that Jayatilleke does not disagree with Jacobi that there is a viable similarity between the depiction and methodology in the way both these thinkers dealt with the problem of absolute knowledge and its predication. By making a comparison among the logic of Jainism, Buddhism and the influence that Jaina and Buddhist logic had from the schools of Carvāka (Materialism), Ajñānika (Agnosticism) and Ājīvika (Fatalism), Jayatilleke further says:

Whatever the influence of Jain epistemological and logical theories on Buddhism and vice versa, Both schools seem to have profited by the critical outlook of the Materialists and the Sceptics as well as the logical experiments of the Sceptics [Ajñānikas] and the Ājīvikas (p. 161).

Jayatilleke shows that the listing of possible reactions towards the *catuṣkoṭi* (four propositions) by Sañjaya and Mahāvīra bears striking similarity. Jayatilleke lists the Sceptic’s terminology as follows:

p may (or may not) be the case
Notp”
p.notp”
Not(p.notp)”

And he then lists Jaina terminology of their standpoints as follows:

p may be the casesyādaṣṭi
Notp”*syānnasti*
p.notp”*syādaṣṭināṣṭi*
(p. is inexpressible)”*syādavaktavyah*

Here I make three points of clarification. The first point is that Jayatilleke’s interpretation of a Sceptic, especially if taken to be that of Sañjaya, is erroneous. For the sceptic (*Ajñānika*), the proposition should be “it is not said that p is the case”. Similarly, it should be “it is not said that Not p is the case” and so on.... The second point is that this comparison is limited only to the use of *catuṣkoṭi* by the sceptics and not to the fivefold response to it. Jainas only have a singlefold response, i.e. “*syāt*” (*somehow*) as against the fivefold response of sceptics to the response to the seven propositions that they list.⁸ The third point is that Jayatilleke is right when he

⁸ Sceptics’ response is of $4 \times 5 = 20$ statements; however, Jainas response is of $7 \times 1 = 7$ statements only. They expanded the *catuṣkoṭi* into *saptabhaṅgi*, but responded each one of the *bhaṅgis* only with “somehow” (*syāt*).

says and explains that where sceptics make no commitment as to whether reality is p or *not p*, etc. he clarifies that for the Jainas, statements like “ p , may be the case”, “*not p* may be the case”, etc. is not a sceptical standpoint, but from a context and perspective p is in fact true, though again, from another standpoint it may not be.

In this context, it can be said that Jaina's *syādavāda* is a form of *sāpekśavāda* (pluralism) connecting it with *anekāntavāda*, and Sañjaya's *ajñānavāda* can be called as a form of *vikśepavāda* (evasionism) (Padmarajah, 1996). However, unlike Jacobi, who saw Mahāvīra's *syādavāda* as an opposite reaction and solution to the metaphysical debates faced as against Sañjaya's *ajñānavāda*, Jayatilleke believes that both these methods because of their logical similarities had a mutual point of origin (Jayatilleke, 2015, 139–40). However, Jacobi also accepts the logical similarity between the two methods. DD Kosambi (1956) likewise observes the proximity between them when he quotes: “Even closer to the Jains was the agnosticism of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, a *brahmin* who neither affirmed nor denied that good and evil deeds had good and evil fruit, or that there was (or was not) a world beyond” (p. 164).

This common concern that may have led to the mutual origin of these two views is also noticed by Benimadhab Barua (1921). He stated that Sañjaya in order to avoid error in answering the philosophical questions considered all of them in the form of *catuṣkoṭi*, and it is these same questions that also led Mahāvīra to claim that with just one alternative, I cannot arrive at the truth, and like Sañjaya, he also warned that adhering to anyone of these will certainly lead one to an error (*nirpekśavāda*) (p. 401). Despite Barua going in support of Jayatilleke about the point of their common origin, BK Matilal (1985), however, is very critical of Jayatilleke's criticism of Jacobi's point, that in opposition of Sañjaya, Mahāvīra or Jaina established the *syādavāda* theory, and the fact that two theories had a common origin. Matilal wrote:

Scholars like Herman Jacobi have surmised that Mahāvīra established the sevenfold *syāt* predication in opposition to the “Agnosticism” of Sañjaya. There seems to be some truth in this claim. For Mahāvīra adopted the method of answering all metaphysical/philosophical questions with a qualified yes. But, as I have already noted, there is no textual evidence to show that Mahāvīra had actually used the sevenfold predication. K.N. Jayatilleke has apparently been very critical of Jacobi's view on the matter. He has been eager to show that the two (the Jaina formula and the Sañjaya formula) “seem to have a common origin”. In his eagerness to show this “common origin” Jayatilleke has mistranslated *syāt* as “may be”. I find the argument of Jayatilleke unconvincing as a rebuttal of Jacobi's thesis, viz. Mahāvīra's philosophy was formulated in opposition to the philosophy of Sañjaya. It is undeniable that while the former preferred conditional affirmation of the questions about after-life, etc., the latter preferred a straight denial (p. 303).

Matilal argues that *ajñānavāda* of Sañjaya is a precursor to *saptabhanginaya* of the *Jaina* and in order to solve the supposed problem of evasion, Mahāvīra and Jaina thinkers after him responded Sañjaya through the method of *saptabhanginaya* (sevenfold predication method). Sinclair Stevenson (1915) seems to be supportive of Jacobi's view, especially to the need that Jainas must have felt to tackle with the prevaricating evasion of Sañjaya. She said that *syādavāda* was invented to confute an intellectually dangerous opponent like Sañjaya, and must have been an incessant

requirement as... “Certainly to fight against it would be as difficult and useless as fighting against a London fog!” (p. 91)

Further, and that might be of interest to the readers, a twist comes from the point made by Bhagchandra Jain Bhaskar (1972) who brings and shows Sañjaya’s connection with Jainism by mentioning that in Jaina literature, Sañjaya is regarded as a Jaina sage. He suggests that Sañjaya could have influenced the Jaina theory of *syādavāda*, but because Sañjaya’s philosophy focusses on the “indeterminate” whereas Mahāvīra’s on the “determinable”, Jaina scriptures ultimately criticized Sañjaya. Bhaskar concludes that irrespective of whether Sañjaya was a Jaina thinker or not, Jaina philosophy of the time could have influenced Sañjaya (p. 14). This is because even if *syādavāda* and *saptabhanginaya* were later developments, nonetheless, the doctrine of *anekāntavāda* is the root of philosophy of early Jainism (Jain, 1996, pp. 269–271). Hence, it is Sañjaya who got influenced by Jaina views.

On Bhaskar’s point I bring Matilal, who had said above that since there is a considerable amount of doubt whether *saptabhanginaya* was formulated and taught at the time of Sañjaya, I cannot conclude that Sañjaya was directly influenced by *syādavāda* to establish his fivefold response to *catuṣkoṭi*. I say this more so because the sevenfold classification of propositions by Jaina seems to be a further development upon the *catuṣkoṭi*, which was fourfold, thereby suggesting that fourfold *catuṣkoṭi*, which is simpler in origin is older than the *saptabhanginaya* of the Jainas. *Anekāntavāda* being the view of *sāpekśavāda*, which is different from *vikśepavāda* of Sañjaya, shows that Sañjaya perhaps could not have got influenced with *anekāntavāda*. As when if Sañjaya was asked about why he suspends judgements, he, unlike other schools of *Ajñāna*, did not say that it is because he found all views, similar or opposing, or that none of the views were better than another.⁹ I am here paying attention to this debate because I aim to highlight the misconceptions that exist about Sañjaya’s philosophy when he is compared with the Jaina’s doctrines.

Moving on, the significance of Sañjaya’s use of *catuṣkoṭi* and the response to it, and Jainas development of *syādavāda* view from Sañjaya is well expressed by Paul LeValley (2000) who observes that “While Sañjaya’s four-point logic touched all Indian Religions, only Jains expanded it, and elevated it to an equal position with Mahāvīra’s own doctrine of the standpoints to form the Jain doctrine of many sidedness” (p. 153). Ashim Kumar Roy (1984) also supports the point made by Jacobi, but finally shows this to be advantageous for the Jainas than Sañjaya. Since Sañjaya did not have any answer to any questions, he after a point may not have had many followers. Perhaps because of this, in the history of philosophy, we do not find many successful agnostics. Sañjaya might have influenced *syādavāda* but it was *syādavāda* that helped many truth seekers to overcome the cryptic approach in *ajñānavāda*, by giving them a direction to proceed in the path of truth (pp. 16–17). Herman Jacobi much before Roy suggested the same point that even though Sañjaya

⁹ “Since the various theories claiming knowledge have arisen in contradiction to one another, they are not true, therefore, Scepticism is best of all” or “All teachings are like the utterances of barbarians since they have no (epistemic) basis”. See KN Jayatilke (2015, pp. 113, 115).

influenced the development of Jaina method of *saptabhaṅginaya*, it came out to be more advantageous for Jainas and disadvantageous for Sañjaya's school (p. xxvii).

David J Kalupahana (1995) also remarks that Sañjaya's method led to an absolute ineffability and negated all the four possibilities of truth (*catuṣkoṭi*), and this was followed by the *saptabhaṅginaya* by the Jainas (p. 32). Kalupahana mentions that before Mahāvīra, Sañjaya proposed an evasionist response to *catuṣkoṭi* and Sañjaya's younger contemporary, Mahāvīra found this response to be exceptionally sceptical and paved a way out of the alternatives that were evaded with a "syada", that is, "it is possible". To this later Jaina thinkers expanded it and made it a sevenfold view which came to be known as *saptabhaṅginaya*, viz. *catuṣkoṭi* (1a) I do not say A is B, (2a) I do not say A is not B, (3a) I do not say A is and is not B and (4a) I do not say A is neither B nor not B; into (1b) it is possible that A is B, (2b) it is possible that A is not B, (3b) it is possible that A is and is not B, (4b) it is possible that A is neither B nor not B, followed by three more propositions, viz. (5b) combination of (1a) and (4a), (6b) combination of (2a) and (4a) and lastly (7b) combination of (3a) and (4a). (Kalupahana, 1984, 17).

Parmita Shekhar (2012) also credits Sañjaya's equivocal stand as an inspiration behind Mahāvīra's logic, especially the *saptabhaṅginaya* and *syādavāda*, though Mahāvīra used it to counter the method of Sañjaya. She believes that Sañjaya's approach set him free from following any rigid ethical path that we find in ethical teachings of Mahāvīra and made him to set his entire focus on the path of spirituality (pp. 74–75). Yakub Masih (1983) admits the difference between these views when he writes "Of course, there is this difference that Sañjaya's views are agnostic, since he prefers silence to any positive commitment concerning soul or any metaphysical entity. However, according to *syādavāda*, the nature of reality is many-faceted and no one proposition can adequately describe it" (p. 266). And in alignment with Jacobi, he goes on to say that "...Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta, laid down the fundamentals of the Jaina doctrine of *syādavāda*" (p. 261). Govind Chandra Pande (1999), however, criticizes Jacobi's view on the matter that Jainas *syādavāda* was established by Mahāvīra in opposition to Sañjaya by calling this claim unproven. Pande supports this point by arguing that *syādavāda* is later development in Jainism and hence is not influenced by Sañjaya (p. 354). Here, I clarify that though I cannot prove with evidence either of the case, nonetheless Pande's point establishes that *syādavāda* theory developed in the later passage of time although his point does not suggest that *syādavāda* was not influenced by the *ajñānavāda* of Sañjaya.

Scholars like SK Belvalkar and RD Ranade (2012), unlike Pande, not just agree with the point made by Jacobi, but also believe that Mahāvīra and the early Jainas at the time of Mahāvīra directly worked upon Sañjaya's method and made it positive in character and enabled them to successfully defend their philosophy against the critique of Sañjaya:

Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta's teaching was mainly negative. The teaching of Mahāvīra and Gautama—like the Vedānta of Yājñavalkya—had a positive aspect which was kept steadily in the background. Thus, for instance, Mahāvīra changed Sañjaya's formula—"I cannot say if A is B; I cannot say if A is not-B; I cannot say if A is both B and not-B; and I cannot say if A is neither B nor not-B"—into "I can say that A in-a-sense is B; that A in-a-sense is not-B;

that A in-a-sense is both B and not-B;” and so on through the rest of the seven-membered Dialectics of “*Syādvāda*” —The change was not really very great, but it was probably enough to satisfy the subtle and high-strung logical acumen of the day, and probably did save his system from the charge of unmitigated scepticism... (pp. 525–26).

Belvalkar and Ranade, in a similar way to Jayatilleke, have simplified the fivefold response of Sañjaya into a simple “I cannot say”, which as I have said is not the case. Hari Shankar Prasad (2007), on the other hand, is extravagant enough not just to believe that Sañjaya influenced the Jaina doctrine of *syādvāda*, but also believed that Sañjaya influenced the other major Vedic and non-Vedic systems. He believed that Sañjaya had a moral end in mind and avoided instrumentality of knowledge to emphasize any claim of knowledge. He suggests that Sañjaya’s unconditional non-commitment to any knowledge forced (1) Vedāntic *advaitavāda* (absolutism), (2) Jaina *anekāntavāda* (non-absolutism), (3) Nāgārjuna’s *śūnyavāda* (emptiness) and (4) Krishna’s Supreme Truth in *Bhagavadgītā*, to establish and defend their doctrines against *ajñānavāda*. All these well-known views, according to Prasad, tried to reconcile the criticisms against conflicting approaches taken in ancient Indian Philosophy, which I presume must have been highlighted and questioned by Sañjaya (p. 125). Alluding to the metaphysical discussion in the *Bhagavadgītā* from the *Mahābhārata*, Belvalkar and Ranade points that *Mahābhārata* (*Santiparvan*, 244, 6) refers to disputants similar to Sañjaya who treated all views evenly, and abstained themselves in the manner so as to not commit themselves to any position (2012, p. 525).

With these references brought, I am sure there would be many others in support of the claim that Sañjaya’s philosophy and his successful use of his method did influence the tradition to either accept his approach or otherwise to criticize it, like ancient Jaina and Buddhists did. Esther A Solomon (1978) where by concludes:

Thus Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta and other sceptics and agnostics, though brushed aside cursorily as stupid and ignorant, and as having confused ideas, influenced considerably contemporary speculation and the development of dialectical criticism and of philosophical views in general (p. 686).

Solomon in her research on Indian dialectics observed the perennial impact that the sceptical and agnostical traditions had in the development of philosophical thought in India, even though that was largely unacknowledged in history as well as in modern scholarship. Jaina thought could not have been an exception.

4 Śāṅkara Critiques Anekāntavāda or Ajñānavāda?

There is another important point that needs to be discussed. This point goes beyond the scope of discussing Jacobi’s observation, however brings up the issues concerning the possible misinterpretations that can be seen, before I compare and see the possible connection and influence of one philosophy over the other. Jaina theory of

anekāntavāda and *syādavāda* together aimed to reconcile the conflicts and contradictions between different philosophical views existing at the time. These theories are different from that of Sañjaya, who suspended judgments on saying anything about any view. However, this reconciliation or an attempt of merging opposite views or standpoints (*naya*) by Jaina had been a subject of criticism. Śaṅkara in his commentary on *Brahma Sūtra* (2.2:33) has criticized this view explicitly when he wrote:

It is impossible that contradictory attributes such as being and non-being should at the same time belong to one and the same thing; just as observation teaches us that a thing cannot be hot and cold at the same moment. The third alternative expressed in the words 'they either are such or not such' results in a cognition of indefinite nature, which is no more a source of true knowledge than doubt is. Thus the means of knowledge, the object of knowledge, the knowing subject, and the act of knowledge become all alike indefinite. How can his followers act on a doctrine, the matter of which is altogether indeterminate? The result of your efforts is perfect knowledge and is not perfect knowledge. Observation shows that, only when a course of action is known to have a definite result, people set about it without hesitation. Hence a man who proclaims a doctrine of altogether indefinite contents does not deserve to be listened any more than a drunken man or a madman.¹⁰

Now there is a considerable debate as to how much justified and relevant this criticism of Śaṅkara is against *syādavāda* of Jainism. One criticism of this view by Śaṅkara comes from the scholar V Pandya, which is of considerable importance to us. Pandya (2001) argues that Śaṅkara wrongly identified Mahāvīra's doctrine of *syādavāda* with the doctrine of *samśayavāda* of Sañjaya and hence criticizes it. And in fact this criticism by Śaṅkara should be addressed to Sañjaya and other *Ajñānika* thinkers, instead of Mahāvīra or the Jaina. Pandya defended *syādavāda* against Śaṅkara by stating that since *syādavāda* and *anekāntavāda* held the truth only partially and not absolutely, there is no direct contradiction involved, and the method shows the positive and negative aspects of the same object and not two objects, so there is no contradiction involved as Śaṅkara suggests (pp. 5209–10).

The argument by Pandya can be seen to be challenged by Hajime Nakamura who supports Śaṅkara's criticism of *syādavāda* as against V Pandya. Nakamura (1992) argues that the criticism of Śaṅkara is apt because it is not possible to establish any theory by partially accepting all supposed true statements without committing to any one of them wholly (p. 170). To this debate, however, I say that, whatever be the issue between Śaṅkara and Mahāvīra, our focus here lies more in analysing Pandya's point where he, in order to save *syādavāda*, directs the criticism of Śaṅkara from *syādavāda* to Sañjaya's *ajñānavāda*. Considering Pandya's view for the sake of it, let us observe the above quote.

First of all, the question of contradiction in Sañjaya technique does not arise, as Sañjaya consistently suspended judgments on affirmation, negation, both and neither. Secondly, Śaṅkara in the quote asks a question in a way to refute it, what he asks is precisely the question I am answering in this chapter. In the criticism by Śaṅkara, it appears that he assumes that definiteness is the only way towards knowing. However, ironically it is interesting to note that he himself defined his most definite knowledge

¹⁰ Cited in Nakamura (1992, pp. 169–170).

of *Brahman* (absolute) to be *anirvacaniya* (beyond name and form). And even if I grant that Śāṅkara's doctrine is not of altogether indefinite contents like Sañjaya, then I reply that Sañjaya does not have any doctrine of his own, as I have clearly shown that he is often alluded as a *vitāṅdavādin*, i.e. a debator who does not have any position of their own whatsoever. With this I support the view against V Pandya that if Śāṅkara's criticism is directed towards Sañjaya, then it is not appropriate, irrespective of the fact whether it is appropriate for the criticism of Jaina doctrine of *syādavāda* or not.

5 Conclusion

To sum up the discussion, I can refer to the three terms used above, viz. *nirpekṣavāda*, *vikṣepavāda* and *sāpekṣavāda*, which individually and altogether deal with epistemological issues about the meaning of metaphysical truths. *Nirpekṣavāda* which is literally translated as "not many views" holds Reality as one and is consistent with the view that there is always a possibility to separate the true view from the false one if there is any inconsistency between the two views. This view follows the principle of non-contradiction and is most common among the philosophical literature. *Vikṣepavāda* distinction, on the other hand, somewhat comes nearer though is not exact to the category of Agnostics. Thinkers following evasion do not accept any of the propagated views and take truth claims to be neither true nor false (the fourth option of *catuṣkoṭi*, neither A nor not A). Sañjaya, however, went much ahead to suspend judgement on neither this nor that as well.

This conclusion by *vikṣepavādins* except Sañjaya is derived through the *pramāna arthāpatti* (postulation). The other agnostics also use this means of knowledge to suspend judgement on all the matters, even the option of neither this nor that (or none of the above). However, unlike Sañjaya they proposed an end. If Sañjaya is regarded as a *vikṣepavādin*, then he belongs to its most extreme conceived category. The last distinction of *sāpekṣavāda* (pluralism) alludes to Jaina Logic of *saptabhanginaya*, who instead of apparently siding with one view (*nirpekṣavāda*), or with being neutral by not siding to any affirmative or negative view (*vikṣepavāda*), hold all the views to be true depending upon the condition from which the content of that view is assessed. The view, therefore, is acceptable from a standpoint and a context.

Pluralists claim that pluralism as a theory is true (Schang, 2010, 49). Thence, where Mahāvīra through his doctrine of *anekāntavāda* went on to define the ultimate reality in terms of an Absolute (*Kevalya*), which comprises different views as partially true for the purpose of liberation and spiritual enlightenment, and avoids candid predication (*nayavāda* or *nirpekṣavāda*), i.e. to consider only one view as the ultimate reality and other views as false. However, Sañjaya through his method of *ajñānavāda* transcended not only predication but also non-predication of "neither this nor that", thereby not making commitment to any opinion whatsoever, and maintaining a spoken silence or a kind of philosophical quietism.

Conclusively, in this chapter, I make two points. Firstly, with some reservations I accept Jacobi's claim that Sañjaya though seen negatively did influence the development of thought in Jainism and can be seen as a precursor to Jaina logic, and secondly, Sañjaya's non-committal method must have been seen by the Jainas as a way out of the perplexities concerning the metaphysical, epistemological and ethical disputes among various philosophers. This presumably was one of the sources of inspiration for Mahāvīra and other Jaina thinkers to develop the view of *anekāntavāda* and *syādvāda* to resolve the rigorous philosophical debating existing at that age to meet the tenet of "non-violence" (*ahimsā*).

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