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Neither New Nor Western: The Pre-Modern Roots of Multiculturalism in Jaina Thought

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The conceptual framework of Anekantavada is the focal point of this essay, which delves into the philosophical foundations of multiculturalism within the Jaina philosophical tradition. Jain philosophy is regarded as one of the important philosophies in Indian philosophical doxography from the heterodox tradition that challenges Vedic authority in their knowledge tradition. In simple words, Anekântavâda stands for the many-sidedness and plurality of reality. The research makes use of a comparative approach to investigate the connections that exist between Jaina philosophy, postmodernism, and multiculturalism. It contends that although multiculturalism and postmodernism share certain traits, the fundamental concept that underpins diversity has been present in a variety of traditions, including Jainism, for a significant amount of time prior to the postmodern era. The purpose of this research is to conduct an investigation of the ways in which Anekântavâda, which places a strong focus on acknowledging diverse perspectives and rejecting absolutism, aligns with multicultural principles that aim to celebrate variety and challenge cultural identity. A major objective of this paper is to assert the compatibility of the Indian philosophical system to align even with the postmodern theories like multiculturalism. The conclusion of the paper is that the interrelationship between these notions offers a comprehensive

philosophical framework that may be utilised to solve modern concerns of cultural recognition and social cohesiveness in different communities.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Anekantavada, Postmodernism, Cultural Diversity, Jaina Philosophy

Introduction

The contemporary world is becoming more fragmented in terms of identity, and every identity is seeking recognition. It is not an adverse situation, but it is absolutely what postmodern thinker Jean-François Lyotard meticulously articulated in his 'The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge'. For Lyotard, the societies were overarched with grand ideologies, and with the advent of postmodernity, such grand narratives that overruled the human identity and society slowly became disintegrated and fragmented and ultimately fell apart, which led to the fragmentation of identity and social bonds. When we carefully read Lyotard's 'The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge', it unravels a light fabric of multiculturalism that opposes cultural grand narratives and demands its fragmentation, simultaneously seeking to acknowledge, recognise and celebrate the diversities within the socio-political structure rather than that of mere sympathetic toleration. While relocating, postmodernism is a suitable condition for multiculturalism to thrive, the pure philosophy that underlies the discourse of multiculturalism cannot be attributed to postmodernism because postmodernism exhibits the tendency to reduce the social bond towards the individualistic realms when multiculturalism is a primordially defined social bond with its concomitance of collectivity.

Multiculturalism¹ is not a philosophy that is detached from the real world; rather, it is shaped and evolved through frequent interaction with society. From ancient times onwards, or from the inception of a settled and social life of humanity, there developed distinct cultures and evolved the real-world condition of 'multiculturalism'. Bhikhu Parekh remarkably bifurcates how multiculturalism significantly differs from the fact of cultural diversity. Although it shows that the socio-political trajectory of multiculturalism evolved or, in fact, came to the forefront of postmodernity, it doesn't

prove that its philosophy is postmodern. Since the underlying epistemology for multiculturalism has always been here, why must there have been a delay for multiculturalism to be part of this academic world? I argue that the discourse of multiculturalism can be categorised as ‘multicultural’ and ‘multiculturalism’; the cultural diversity generated out of tradition and authority based on collectivity should be understood as a long-existing phenomenon. Such a society has always been here. However, the ideology that seeks to acknowledge, recognise and celebrate diversity, ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘multiculturalist’, came really late, although the fundamental structure of ‘lived experience’ for multiculturalism has always been here. In short, descriptive multiculturalism has always existed, but why did it take so long to be a ‘normative’ version of it as multiculturalism?

The answer is that the underlying philosophy of multiculturalism has always been here but has never truly been applied to sociopolitics as an innovative political philosophy, only in the twentieth century. Various philosophies that resonate with the philosophy of multiculturalism can be found in various traditions of philosophy. The primary purpose of this article is to find how the aesthetics of multiculturalism and its philosophy are significantly coherent with the Jaina philosophy of Anekantavada, resulting in asserting that the philosophy of multiculturalism is not an invention of the New World. Rather, it has existed but failed to be recognised. As a secondary task, this paper argues that the Jaina logical theory Syadvada leading to Anekantavada not only enhances the aesthetical quality of multiculturalism but also asserts the anti-essentialist nature of multicultural metaphysics; at the same time, it provides a concrete metaphysical foundation for multiculturalism from the Indian knowledge tradition.

This research article aims to unearth the philosophical underpinnings of multiculturalism using a comparative methodology. While acknowledging multiculturalism’s preconceived and primordial nature might lean towards Eurocentric philosophies, this research maintains an independent perspective, avoiding adherence to specific philosophical schools. It examines Indian and Western epistemology, employing intercultural philosophy to decolonise multiculturalism’s

foundations. The paper investigates the similarities and differences between multiculturalism and postmodern conditions, exploring how multiculturalism's metaphysical foundation strongly resembles Jaina philosophy. A critical and descriptive exploration of both postmodernism and Jainism highlights this as a method for understanding multiculturalism's premodern nature. The primary objective is to investigate the conceptual links between Jaina philosophy, postmodernism, and multiculturalism through comparative analysis. It employs textual analysis to examine the philosophical ideas of Anekantavada and its close connection with fundamental principles of multicultural thought. Furthermore, this paper critically examines multicultural and postmodern literature to establish Anekāntavāda within a broader intellectual discourse. This comparative analysis is multifaceted: it asserts the compatibility of Indian knowledge traditions with Western philosophies and attempts to establish multiculturalism's universal and premodern nature by tracing its roots within Jaina thought.

Multiculturalism and Postmodernism

Multiculturalism is both a political and philosophical expression against all kinds of authoritarianism, totalitarianism and essentialism. In that manner, multiculturalism is closely allied with postmodernism. Postmodernism's incredulity toward totalising ideologies and its critique provided a wider space for fragmented, heterogeneous identities to come to the forefront. Such a situation doesn't assert that multiculturalism is a new world philosophy. Multiculturalism conceptually rejects a monopolising culture in terms of language, religion, race or any form of differences (Hoffman, 2007). However, it doesn't mean that multiculturalism can address all kinds of differences that are generated out of individual choices. Recognising all such differences that emanate from individuals will reshape the social bonds' dynamics that centre on collectivity to individuality, consequently challenging the basic ideas of multiculturalism. Bhikhu Parekh remarkably articulates the domain of multiculturalism, which concentrates on collective cultural identities. "Multiculturalism is not about difference and identity per se but about those that are embedded in and sustained by culture; that is, a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the

world and organise their individual and collective lives. Unlike differences that spring from individual choices, culturally derived differences carry a measure of authority and are patterned and structured by virtue of being embedded in a shared and historically inherited system of meaning and significance. To highlight this distinction between the two kinds of differences, I shall use the term ‘diversity’ to refer to culturally derived differences” (Parekh, 2002, p. 3). Hence, the central force of multiculturalism is cultural differences in society that make the society diverse and anti-essential. Multiculturalism constructively challenges all kinds of authoritarianism and essentialism by providing a postmodern critique of power structures and representation. Both postmodernism and multiculturalism criticise the power structures and representations that are built upon the notions of enlightenment, like reason, objectivity, and universal moral principles. Both of these streams of thought hold that reason, moral principle, power structure, identity, and moral principles should be situated in culture and collective life (Parekh, 2002, p. 9). However, there are scholars like James Tully who argue that even postmodernism is not compatible with situating and recognising cultural diversity because it, too, is characterised by the imperialistic European male gaze. Tully says that no matter which tradition, liberalism, nationalism, or even communitarianism tries to recognise and accommodate cultural diversity in the framework of modern constitutionalism, constitutionalism once suppressed and hunted down cultural diversities. Here comes Tully’s claim to deconstruct every form of modern constitutionalism’s meta-language in order to facilitate multicultural constitutionalism (Tully, 2012, p. 16). If Tully is explaining how multiculturalism will come to be imperialist and European-centred if it is allied with postmodernism, Parekh traces the aesthetical elements of multiculturalism when it is understood in the postmodern background. When postmodernism challenges the tendencies of globalisation because it tends toward a cultural homogeneity, such a social condition is actually needed for multiculturalism to thrive because multiculturalism is the recognition and celebration of every culture, not only the minority cultural diversities. Parekh highlights how the availability of diverse cultural options and even the reality of the

existence of cultural diversity enhance the beauty and well-being of society and the individual. For Parekh, multiculturalism can disclose and make the engagement and dialogue between different cultural characteristics possible. Providing such a chance to significantly challenge the cultural homogeneity that is enforced by the universalist notions through globalisation and liberalism in modernity can only be realised through postmodernity, according to Parekh. It is through dialogue and evolution that each cultural diversity can interact and rectify them within them, creating a more fluid and hybrid culture (Parekh, 2002, p. 167). Iris Marion Young challenges modernity's notions of politics that are mainly dominated by the 'politics of the common good', and such politics are inherently characterised by liberal neutrality that results in difference blindness. Hence, it emphasises that there is nothing like a common public good since each cultural diversity's concept of good and justice is fragmented since they are situated upon their moral principles, mainly characterised by their culture (Young, 1990, p. 97). While differences and diversity are sociocultural facts that can determine the beauty and well-being of a societal structure, much of Western philosophy, mainly that concerning society and politics, is exclusionary towards the identities that are with a body and feeling. Young says, "The traditional public realm of universal citizenship has operated to exclude persons associated with the body and feeling, especially women, Blacks, American Indians and Jews. Many contemporary theorists of participatory democracy retain the ideal of a civic public in which citizens leave behind their particularity and differences" (Young, 1990, p. 97).

By holding multiculturalism and postmodernism together, the major theorists from the multicultural tradition are trying to bring the immanent transcendentalism of postmodernity that truly articulates the aesthetical quality of society. By asserting that 'each carries bits of the other within itself and is rarely sui generis', Parekh undoubtedly challenges modernity and all of its universalist essentialism only to substitute homogeneity with multiculturalism. The assertion that every culture is internally plural and frequently engages in dialogue and adaptation asserts that no culture is stagnated like the political ideas that evolved in modernity. While keeping their internal coherent identity

simultaneously with the interaction and engagement, asserting that cultural identities are fluid and plural (Parekh, 2002, p. 337). It shows that both multiculturalism and postmodernism are challenging the logic of identity that is concrete, essential and stagnated.

Anekantavada: The Recognition of Plurality

A widely prevalent misconception is that the whole Indian knowledge tradition and knowledge systems are cemented upon the Vedas. But, in the doxography of Indian philosophy, we can see a group that is not dominated by the Vedas and, in fact, actually doesn't approve of the dominance of Veda philosophy and asserts their nature as heterodox Indian philosophy. Among this heterodox system come Buddhism, Jainism and Carvaka (Ganeri, 2017, p. 50). At the same time, many of the Indian philosophical systems are characterised by the Brahminical or orthodox traditions. Such a characterisation came along with its acceptance and non-acceptance of the then religion, which is Brahminism, which tries to characterise and structure the society according to the Vedic knowledge system (Aklujkar, 2017, p. 82). The Jaina system that we are about to discuss in this chapter does not accept the authority of Vedas; more than that, it holds "the truth of its system on the ground of its accordance with reality" (Moore, 1957, p. 250). Jaina tradition's commitment towards the lived experience or grounded reality can even be found in their epistemology. Jainas conceive knowledge can be attained through five means: firstly, *mati*, or ordinary cognition, which includes memory, recognition and induction. Second, *Sruti* is knowledge derived through signs, symbols or words, which includes associations, attention and understanding and *Naya*, or aspects of the meanings of the things; thirdly, *Avadhi* is direct knowledge of things at a distance in time or space. It can also be termed as clairvoyance. *Mahaparyaya* is the fourth source of knowledge, which stands for the direct knowledge of the thoughts of others. And the fifth one is perfect knowledge that is all comprehensive (Moore, 1957, p. 250). Among these five sources of knowledge, it can be seen that Jaina epistemology is not trying to essentialise or reduce the epistemological purview to any concrete knowledge or source. The *Naya* and *Mahaparyaya* sources of knowledge tended to provide relative truths as abstractions. Direct knowledge of others'

perspectives is even regarded as one of the errorless categories in Jaina epistemology. It proves that the Jaina epistemology always saves room for different perspectives.

Jaina's metaphysics is also significantly based on their *naya*, which is the main component of Jain's logic. According to Naya, there can be several standpoints in understanding an object. The logic and epistemology of Jaina ultimately led to their metaphysics, which is known as Anekantavada. It asserts that "reality has many – not only one – aspect. Jaina's metaphysics holds that everything holds a plurality of aspects. Hence, we cannot essentialise or assert anything, which ultimately leads to a relative predicament (Moore, 1957, p. 261). Jaina logic, epistemology and metaphysics that theoretically strive to recognise and include other perspectives and standpoints denote that their identity construction is more dialogical than monological, which means that there is an underlying philosophy of recognition inherent in the Jaina metaphysics. Rather than keeping aside this persuasive theory from classical times to modern times, Anekântavâda is a main component of both theoretical and practical study only due to its focus on plurality. Although Jaina's theory holds such a pluralist, dialogic identity construction, the community is remarkably able to preserve and affirm its identity. Even while practising a fundamental religion, Jainism's quality of being open and accommodating of other perspectives is termed as 'flexible fundamentalism' by Christopher Chapple (Chapple, 1993).

Although there are ongoing debates regarding how Anekântavâda should be understood or if it can be contextualised, they are still going on. But even Gandhi, who was significantly influenced by Gujarat's Jaina tradition, praised the high of anekantavada and proposed to view anekantavada as something that tries to view the "merit of other views peacefully, rationally and tolerantly". Gandhi says by mentioning Anekântavâda and the story of seven blind men who went to see an elephant, that is a story too central to Jain theory Syadvada. Gandhi says, "Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to hear the moral of this story and learn to examine the various religious systems from all standpoints" (Barrows, 1893). It shows that Anekântavâda functions both as an internal and external force. While

trying to affirm their identity by accepting many sidedness, Jainism shows the tendency of flexible fundamentalism inside the community, but their footedness in Anekantavada helps them effectively engage in dialogue and interaction with other sociocultural diversities (Barbato, 2019). Since Anekântavâda is an ancient doctrine, it has evolved and become more flexible according to each sociohistorical epoch. In the classical period, anekantavada represented the ability of Jaina schools to represent many-sidedness. But when it comes to the colonial period, anekântavâda facilitated the Jaina to cope with Christian monotheism in their colonial engagements. Here, anekântavâda is presented as a philosophy that consists of intellectual nonviolence and religious tolerance. When it comes to the global context, sometimes it goes beyond Jainism and is a philosophical resource for developing intercultural philosophy and pluralistic approaches.

First, anekantavada's core principle that recognises the validity of diverse viewpoints is well suited to the multicultural value of respecting and embracing different cultures, beliefs, and ways of being. Just as anekântavâda rejects a single, absolute truth, multiculturalism rejects the notion of a dominant or superior culture. In addition, anekântavâda's approach with a dialogical nature encourages openness to engage with different perspectives and can facilitate intercultural exchange and understanding – a key aspect of multiculturalism. By approaching other cultures and belief systems with a spirit of curiosity and willingness to learn rather than rigid dogmatism, anekantavada can help foster the kind of pluralistic, inclusive society that multiculturalism aims for. Finally, both anekântavâda and multiculturalism share a standard underlying value of valuing diversity and rejecting simplistic, one-dimensional views of reality or culture. This philosophical kinship suggests that the Jain concept of anekantavada could provide a valuable framework for conceptualising and practising multiculturalism in a way that is philosophically grounded and culturally nuanced. For example, Ram Adhar Mall states that the Jain argument for the reciprocal recognition of different standpoints (naya) that are complementary rather than exclusive has been helpful for his development of an 'intercultural hermeneutic approach which is non-reductive, open, creative, and tolerant.' Similarly, Chakravarti

Ram-Prasad's theory of 'multiplism' takes from *anekantavada* the idea of 'seeking affinity with the other through an 'empathetic inter-location' of one's sensibility. However, it is important to keep in mind that *anekantavada* was originally part of a Jain religious system that ultimately considered the views of other religions and philosophies as 'inadequate'. Moreover, *anekantavada* should be understood partly as a communication strategy that defends the Jain worldview and stabilises Jain identity rather than as pure relativism or uncritical pluralism. There should be academic interventions on modern interpretations of *anekântavâda* and try to understand how ancient Indian philosophy presents it as compatible with ideas of pluralism, diversity, and ambiguity associated with postmodernism.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the intricate yet nuanced relationship between multiculturalism and postmodernism. The arguments explained highlight both their convergences and divergences. While multiculturalism shares postmodernism's critique of grand narratives and totalising ideologies, it focuses on collective cultural identities rather than individual differences. The philosophy underlying multiculturalism is not recent but has roots in various traditions, including the Jaina philosophy of *anekântavâda*. The paper argues that multiculturalism can be categorised into 'multicultural' (the long-existing phenomenon of cultural diversity) and 'multiculturalism' (the ideology that seeks to acknowledge and celebrate this diversity). While descriptive multiculturalism has always existed, its normative version emerged relatively late in academic and political discourse. Multiculturalism challenges cultural homogeneity and provides a framework for recognising and celebrating diverse identities. It criticises power structures and representations built upon Enlightenment notions, such as situating reason, moral principles, and identity within cultural and collective contexts. The paper also acknowledges critiques of multiculturalism's alliance with postmodernism, such as James Tully's argument that even postmodernism can be characterised by an imperialistic European male gaze. It underscores that careful examination is needed to recognise and accommodate cultural diversity. Ultimately, this paper asserts that while sharing some characteristics

with postmodernism, multiculturalism has its own distinct philosophy rooted in various traditions. Anekântavâda, a principle from Jaina philosophy, complements this relationship by asserting that reality has multiple aspects. While being an ancient doctrine, anekântavâda resonates with multiculturalism's celebration of diversity and postmodernism's rejection of singular truths. Anekantavada's emphasis on recognising different perspectives and its "flexible fundamentalism" aligns with multiculturalism's goal of acknowledging and celebrating cultural diversities. The interconnection between these concepts is evident in their common focus on plurality, dialogue, and the rejection of essentialist thinking. This connection critically challenges the notion that multiculturalism is solely a postmodern invention. These three concepts offer a framework for understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, promoting dialogue between different perspectives, and challenging societal homogenising tendencies. Their interrelationship provides a rich philosophical basis for addressing contemporary cultural recognition and social cohesion issues in increasingly diverse societies. While they share common ground in challenging totalising ideologies and promoting diversity, they differ in their origins and specific approaches: multiculturalism focuses on recognising and celebrating cultural differences, postmodernism emphasises the fragmentation of knowledge and rejection of universal truths, and anekantavada asserts the multifaceted nature of reality through a more structured philosophical framework.

Endnote:

1. Multiculturalism is a vast topic that has influence in various academic disciplines, from literature to zoology. Thus, here the discussion is limited to the core or abstract philosophy of multiculturalism.

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