

Multiplicity Of Viewpoints And Nonviolence Of The Mind

Based on The 'many-sidedness' of Jainism¹

by Aidan Rankin

Multiplicity of viewpoints (ANEKAANTAVAAD) and nonviolence:

According to Aidan Rankin, “Jainism prefers to exert subtle influence rather than seeking converts.” Such nonviolent approach, based on multiplicity of viewpoints (many-sidedness of truth), leads to an intellectual field of interfaith overtures. Aidan Rankin has observed, “Accordingly, truth can be approached from different angles, as the summit of a mountain may be reached by different paths, some straight, some winding. But knowledge grows with an understanding that many paths exist and that one's own is not necessarily the most correct. Our beliefs, political or spiritual, are mere facets of reality, not reality itself.” Thus there exist many paths for spiritual progress. This is evidently true if we consider that the real purpose of religion is to bring contentment, genuine happiness and peace of mind to individuals. Further, such an approach is bound to foster understanding between various religious groups and harmony in society as well.

Aidan Rankin writes, “The more dogmatically certain someone is, the further they are likely to be from enlightenment.” Obviously, the doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints ‘is an inoculation against fundamentalist rigidity’. Thus it eliminates dogmatism.

Scientific nature of Jainism:

There is no room for dogmatism in the Jain system, as is the case with science as well. Aidan Rankin observes, “Within Jainism ... the division between spirituality and science that still dogs so much of western thought simply does not exist. So ‘scientific’ is Jain spirituality that Albert Einstein once expressed a wish to be reborn in India as a Jain.”

¹ Face to faith Series published in The Guardian, Saturday January 27, 2007.
Website <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jan/27/religion.uk>.
Ritesh Jain, Beaverton, OR, sent the original article of Aidan Rankin.

Resolution of conflicts: A Rational Way

The concept of multiplicity of viewpoints can lead to nonviolent resolution of conflicts, an idea alien to western thought. Aidan Rankin observes, “For the western consciousness, this approach is radical in the literal sense. It challenges at the root both our thinking and the way we organize our thoughts. In many-sidedness, there is no ‘battle of ideas’, because this is considered to be a form of intellectual HIMSА (violence) or damage, leading quite logically to physical violence and war.”

Aidan Rankin continues, **“Either you're with us or against us' was President Bush's war cry (and look where it has got him), but it sums up the adversarial mindset and is by no means confined to the political or religious right. All too often, progressive movements use the same language of inflexibility and hate.”** We Jains should avoid this pitfall at all cost.

* * * * *

Non-absolutism And Tolerance

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

(Quoted from the book ‘The Present Crisis Of Faith’, page 129)

“Modern psychiatry tells us that it is no use being furious at people who behave stupidly or wickedly. Instead of losing our tempers with them, we should study the reasons for their behavior. ... Cruel methods are not necessary even to drive out cruelty.

“The first step we have to take is to look upon our enemies as people like ourselves who are anxious to lead quiet, respectable lives. Plato was opposed to any naturalization of foreigners and wanted every foreign creed and usage to be kept out of the commonwealth. This view dominated European thought for centuries. History has failed to conform to what Plato desired. The crusading spirit that we must spread our way of life whatever be the cost or the consequences does not help us much. In the past quarrels tended to violence when each participant believed firmly and sincerely that he had the one final truth and if people differed from him it must be due to bad faith. Such an attitude led to persecution in the name of truth. The Greek and the Barbarian, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Christian, the Christian and the Muslim, the Catholic and the Protestant, the Allies and the Axis Powers have all

fought one another in the name of the infallibility of their particular ways of life. ... History shows that time cures many ills and brings about reconciliations, which previously seems impossible. ***The healing power of time, the resilience of human nature and the mutability of social and political institutions may help us to resolve the present conflicts if we avoid absolutism in creed and conduct and develop the courage to be patient and long suffering.***

* * * * *

A Word Of Caution About Multiplicity Of Viewpoints

by Munishri Nyayavijayaji

It is observed that sometimes individuals attempt to justify their mistaken beliefs and concepts, which are contrary to reality, in the name of relativism or multiplicity of viewpoints. At times delusional and irrational statements are propagated in the name of examining the issue from others' viewpoints. Munishri Nyayavijayaji, in his celebrated work 'Jain Darshan' has warned against such endeavors. He states: The doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints (ANEKAANTAVAAD) postulates the proper synthesis of those aspects and views, which are consistent with one another. However, an attempt to synthesize inconsistent or incompatible views is totally undesirable. It is not in the spirit of Jainism that emphasizes rationalism. An attempt to establish the wrong concepts is improper. The doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints is meant to bring synthesis and harmony and not chaos or confusion.

When a certain activity is evidently inappropriate and, in some instances, it may even turn out to be detrimental, an effort to justify it on the basis of multiplicity of viewpoints is indefensible. The pretext of being liberal and keeping peace and harmony between individuals and society is counterproductive as it amounts to promoting undesirable practices and actions. ***The doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints does not mean that one should surrender to views that are not consistent with the accepted norms of ethical behavior. It does not require us to accept irrational views. It entails that we be rational. Adopting the doctrine of multiplicity of viewpoints is expected to bring about a judicious synthesis.***