

“Building Bridges”: A Comparative study of “Anekantvada” of Jainism and Korzybski’s concept of transdisciplinary approach

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With General Semantics we can add to life values, because it is the science of values in life.

Alfred Korzybski

The present paper is an attempt to compare the *Anekantvada* of Jainism and Korzybski’s concept of transdisciplinary approach and its contemporary relevance. The paper is divided into two sections. The first section analyzes the philosophy of *Anekantvada* and second section evaluates Korzybski’s views about transdisciplinary approach and make the comparative study of both the concepts.

Human beings have invented language to express their emotions, thoughts and ideas about life. With the advent of civilization we have developed various branches of knowledge like art, philosophy, history, science, psychology, etc. All these disciplines though apparently look different are part of human behaviour. Since no discipline is singular they are interconnected or interdependent. This idea gave a birth to multi/transdisciplinary approach to life. Bruce Kodish observes:

Interdisciplinary approach requires going beyond the confining boundaries of any traditional field. By doing so, researchers can expand the concept of their studies and make use of the perspectives and tools of other fields. The multidisciplinary approach brings together individuals and knowledge of different fields in order to deal with a particular set of concerns. (Kodish . 39) .

Indian philosophy from the time of *vedas* and *Upnishadas* was multidimensional. As it is said in *Rig veda* “Ekam sad vipra bahuda vadanti (Truth is one , but scholars interpret it differently) even *Upnishadic* philosophy accept the co – existence of two opposite view points . *Taitriya Upnishad* mentions “Yato vachho

nivartance aprapyamansa saha “*Isha Upnishad* endorses multidimensional nature of reality by saying, “Ten taktayain bhunjitha ma gudh kayacit dhanm” *Isha upnishada* also accepts the co-existence of *vidya*(spirituality) and *avidya* (science) for the liberation of human soul. This acceptance of “many points of view about the perception of reality” or non-absolute view of reality paves the way for the systematic development of *Anekant* philosophy. Bruce kodish in his article, “The Unity of human problems through method” traces the origin of multidisciplinary approach in Jainism He says:

In India at least a couple of thousand years ago, Jain thinkers challenged the absolutism of overly sharp divisions among different areas of knowledge with the notion of *Anekant*(non-absolutism or the multisidedness of truth) as exemplified by their story of the blind men and elephant. (Kodish. 38)

Kodish considers Jain sages and people like Leibniz as the early formulators of interdisciplinarity.

Annekantvada as defined by Jain sages, “Is an art of wisdom, a science of rational thinking as well as analytical tool to understand the reality in its true sense. It is a psychological technique to train the mind for rational and scientific attitude in all walks of life”. (Shah, Navin.1)

At the time of lord Mahavira there were various schools interpreting reality in their own terms within their philosophical pursuits. An old canon *Sutrakrtng* mentions 363 different philosophical theories prevailing during Mahavira's time. They all defined reality as they perceived. But according to Jainism reality is multifaceted any absolute assertion about the reality will not cover its all the aspects simultaneously. To comprehend the true nature of reality Jain philosophes have invented *AnekantVada*. *AnekantVada* focuses on the following aspects of reality.

- (1) What is reality?
- (2) How reality is interpreted and expressed?
- (3) How different people perceive reality in various different valid ways?

Anekantvada's practical aspect *syadvada* is a linguistic expression in purview of viewpoints about the object. They may be called cognitive concept dealing with the construction of perception, conception of idea, expression, and interpreting someone's idea in the course of communication. The cognitive concept is an expression of variable viewpoints which are mainly objective rather than subjective. The main classification of the viewpoints are

- (1) Time dimension
- (2) Space dimension
- (3) Substance dimension
- (4) Form dimension

All these main factors or para-meters can be classified into further innumerable factors. According to *Anekantvada* not only one cognitive concept is valid but all the variable concepts are valid. The realistic attitude cannot be formed without comprehending multiple unilateral view points. When we accept the concept of multiple reality, it will be the model of synthesis of conflicting and contradictory viewpoints which makes *Ankentvada* a *Samanvayavada*.

While discussing about the expression of abstract reality *Anekantvada* focuses on the psychological process of converting abstract concept of meaning into concrete visible form or words. The visible form which has been given to abstract meaning is called language through which meaning or message is translated. Between meaning and words there are many permutations and combination for e.g.

1. One word has many meanings e.g. liberation.
2. For one meaning there are many words e.g. Sky.
3. Between any two similar words there is a distinction of shade and tone e.g. Compassion
4. Some words represent class or group of objects e.g. boy.

5. Some words represents a specific name of an object e.g. river.

Innumerable alternatives can be observed in expression of two persons who describe the same object. Object or Reality may be one but expressions by two person differs substantially. If a person wants to understand reality precisely accurately and validly s/he not only has to understand his/her way of realistic perception, interpretation and expression but also he/she has to understand the way of realistic perception, interpretation and expression of others. We can understand the point of view of others only if we overpower our *raga* and *dwesa*. The most significant aspect of *Ankantvada* is an enlightened approach to life that can be achieved through developing insight into reality and changing life style based on new insight. Mahavir advocated life style guided by the principle of non-violence. The principle of *Ahimsa* is based on tolerance, compassion and co-existence. *Ahimsa* can widen our mental horizon to incorporate all opposite conflicting views to perceive reality. The social harmony and progress of human civilization is only possible when we accept "others points views" democratically.

According to scholars of *Anekantvada* words are symbolic expression of reality and they are not reality itself. (Map is not territory) Words are pictures or images of an object as it seen and not accurately as it is. Words represent individual view points towards the particular object. They are formed to convey substance or meaning. The formation of language is a product of socio-cultural background. We perceive reality according to our environment. Reality can be divided in to three phenomena.

- (1) Reality as it actually exists.
- (2) Words and meanings which represent Reality.
- (3) Perception, interpretation and expression which grasp some specific aspect of reality.

Reality is one but perceptions are innumerable. It reveals differently at different times from different aspect to different people.

- The nature of reality is multi-dimensional.
- The search for gaining new insight of reality is endless.
- Reality of object and statement of object are not the same thing.
- Reality can be experienced statement about reality can be expressed within a particular Space, substance, time and form so both are not the same.
- Knowing object is knowing what it is not.

- Reality exists as it is but no human being can know reality from all its aspects.
- Reality does not cease to exist because you do not see it.
- Insight is process of seeing thing which was not previously seen due to mental block.
- Block is within and not outside.
- Things look similar but they are never same.
- Examine the subject in context with situation, reference of time, with relative aspect with all possible alternatives.

In short, *Anekantvada* perceives reality in its multi-dimensional form with reference to time and space. Its application in different fields of human behaviour can develop a broader outlook and open mindedness to resolve the mutual conflicts which ultimately leads us to world peace.

Alfred Korzybski the founder of General Semantics provide us new outlook to look into the nature of reality. He is against the narrow generalizations or fixity of meanings in language. Aristotelian system creates the world of fixed definitions which creates a world of boundaries. The system supports essentialist and absolute world view which limits our thinking process. Korzybski provides us an alternative model which is “inter disciplinary and multi-dimensional”. His concern about peaceful harmonious co-existence relates him to Jain philosophy of *Anekant*. Human beings as Time Binders have a unique and defining capacity each generation can start where the previous generation has left off. We have capacity to transmit our ideas, information and knowledge across time and space and thus we create the culture. According to Korzybski “science and technology if not use with wisdom can create devastating weapons”. His desire to understand the causes of war and safeguard the future of human civilization compel him to accept the multidimensional approach to the nature of reality. The desire to unify different theories and to connect the apparently disconnected phenomena is the strong motive of Korzybski’s outlook. He accepts the fact that no object exists in isolation. All objects are interconnected. On the basis of this notion he has developed non-elementalistic notion of evaluation which connect two opposite objects like mind and body, knowledge and values, emotion and intellect, Raga and dwesha, joys and sorrows.

Our perception about reality is not reality. The nature of reality is constantly changing. We impose our map definitions to territory but as Korzybski says “Map is not territory”. We always try to fit our map to the changing territory and in doing so we adjust our maps as

per the requirement of the territory. This according to Korzybski is an extensional attitude to life. Korzybski’s emphasis on unity of human problems creates a formula in which we cannot think about boundaries or divisions’. This holistic approach builds the bridges between different disciplines and creates an atmosphere of social harmony.

Korzybski’s concept of indexing accepts the uniqueness of each individual or object at the same time discusses the co-existence of all the object. We have to interpret object in relation to time place and situation.

The extensional device of dating put stress on interpreting reality in terms of time. We live in an ever changing world so we have to evaluate, reevaluate, and reinterpret the concept of reality as per the requirement of time and place.

The device of hyphens also put stress on unity of world view. For instance psychologist is not only concern with the mental health of the patient but he has to examine his mind, body, behavior to cure him completely.

By using
transdisciplinary
approach says
Kodish.:

“We can look behind the curtains of overly-restrictive disciplinary divisions and see the unity through method of problems and solutions. Putting ‘hyphen’ between the disciplines we can move among them and beyond them”.

(kodish.38)

Comparative analysis of Anekant vada and Korzybski’s views:

- *AnekantVada* and Korzybski’s views are scientific and rational
- Both put stress on accepting different points of view and holistic democratic approach to life.
- Both accept the views that there is nothing like “Fixed use of language”, words and meanings can change according to the requirement of time and place.

- *Anekantvada* put a stress on the concept of tolerance and non-violence attitude to life. Korzybski also in a different way desires to create peaceful harmonious co-existence.
- We as Time Binders are responsible for the development of human civilization and it is our duty to pass on positive value based knowledge for future.

The concept of non-absolution is accepted by modern scientists. Capra's *Tao of Physics* is a holistic system based approach extending to include important area of contemporary life-machines, Psychology, Economics, Political science as well as Physics. He finds a basic unity of the world-view which are very much akin and fundamental to Physics.

Capra writes:

The awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of basic oneness. All things are seen as interdependent and inseparable parts of this cosmic whole as different manifestations of the same ultimate reality. (Capra.142)

The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central characteristic of the mystical experience but is also one of the most important revelation of modern physics. Quantum Theory has abolished the notion of fundamentally separated objects. It has come to see the universe as an interconnected web of physical and mental relations whose parts are only defined through their connections to the whole.

The one dimensional thinking is uncritical, rigid and uncatholic whereas multidimensionality is a creative principle and source of individual liberation and society's development. Multi vision is the epistemological basis of multi-dimensional reality.

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