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Substance, Quality, and Mode in Jaina Ontology: An Introduction

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Abstract

Anekāntavāda, the theory that says that reality is multifaceted and cannot be fully grasped from a singular perspective, is a unique contribution to the world of philosophical thought. Jaina theory of substance along with correlated explanations of quality and mode provide the ontological basis for their pluralistic philosophical approach. In this short article, we will explore the Jaina theory of substance, along with its ontological ramifications into six substances (*śaḍ-dravya*): *jīva* (sentient soul) and five *ajīva* (non-sentient) categories *dharma* (medium of motion), *adharmā* (medium of rest), *pudgala* (matter), *ākāśa* (space), and *kāla* (time). We will also critically evaluate the interrelation between *guṇa* (qualities) and *pariyāya* (modes); and most importantly, we will discuss the *bhedavāda-abhedavāda* debate regarding this interrelation. Finally, by comparing Jaina ontology with *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* and Buddhist philosophies, the article aims to focus on Jainism's unique reconciliation of permanence and change, offering a robust framework for understanding existence.

Keywords: Dravya, Guṇa, Paryāya, bhedavāda-abhedavāda debate

Jainism has a unique place within the Indian philosophical tradition, due to its uncompromising commitment to a pluralistic understanding of reality. This unique perspective can be found not only in their understanding of knowledge but also in their examination of reality. The Jaina understanding of ontology especially their explanation of dravya or substance reinforces their nuanced perspective of reality. The theory of substance, which was expounded by early Jain scholars, gives us a robust understand the world's perceived conflicts between things that don't change and things that do, as well as between things that are the same and things that are different. Within the Jaina tradition, dravya serves as both the foundational aspect of reality and a crucial element for comprehending the processes of transformation and continuity that define existence. Let us try to explore the Jaina theory of substance, analysing its ontological classifications, the complex international between qualities and modes. The controversy regarding the interpretation of the complex relationship between substance and modes are of great significance, as they ultimately highlight the unique contributions of Jaina thought to the broader discourse within Indian philosophical traditions.

Substance (Dravya):

The core of Jaina Darshana is the profound doctrine of *Anekantavada*, a viewpoint that aims to understand reality in its entirety by acknowledging the various ways it manifests. This pluralistic view of life, which recognises stability in the face of constant change, inevitably brings us to the concept of substance, or *Dravya*, another key concept in Jain philosophy.

In Jaina philosophy, *Dravya* refers to the various types of beings that collectively make up the fabric of reality. The term itself comes from a root that expresses the essence of flow, implying that anything that endures through the endless cycles of creation and death has a genuine and enduring essence. *Dravya* encapsulates the timeless quality in the midst of change, much like the steady flow of a stream. Accordingly, *Dravya* is the technical term used in Jain ontology to refer to the basic substances or categories that make up reality, each of which is distinguished by an innate ability to endure change.

Within the Jaina tradition, substance is characterised as an everlasting, self-sufficient entity that embodies inherent qualities and experiences transformations while maintaining its fundamental essence. This definition is thoughtfully expressed in significant Jaina writings, including *Tattvārthasūtra* (TS), *Pravacanasāra* (PS) by *Amṛtacandra*, and *Pañcāstikāyasāra* (PKS) by *Kundakunda*. The Jaina conception of substance incorporates the concepts of annihilation (*vyaya*), origination (*utpāda*), and permanence (*dhrauvya*), as well as the interaction of modes (*pariyāya*) and characteristics (*guṇa*). In the following discourse, we shall delve into this definition comprehensively, bolstered by textual citations.

Division of Substance:

Jaina metaphysics' unique doctrine of reality as a complex structure made up of eternal, yet ever-changing entities is based on the idea of *dravya* (substance). The foundational exposition of this theme provided by Acharya *Kundakunda* in his *Pravacanasāra* has influenced later developments in the tradition.

In the opening of his discourse, *Kundakunda* distinguishes between two primary categories: *jīva* (soul or sentient substance) and *ajīva* (non-sentient substance) (*Pravacanasāra* II.35). This distinction highlights the qualitative difference between consciousness and its absence and goes beyond simple classification to be philosophical. *Jīva* is the only substance that can experience, knowledge, and liberation because of its innate sentiency and *upayoga*, or manifestations of consciousness. *Ajīva*, on the other hand, includes everything that is insentient, paving the way for additional ontological differentiation.

Expanding on this dual framework, Jaina thinkers list six basic substances, referred to as the *ṣaḍ-dravya*. Of these, *ajīva* is analytically expanded into five different categories: *adharmā* (medium of rest), *dharma* (medium of motion), *pudgala* (matter), *ākāśa* (space), and *kāla* (time). In contrast, *jīva* remains singular as the conscious principle.

As the only one of the *ajīva dravyas* with form, colour, taste, smell, and touch, *Pudgala* occupies a special place. Along with the karmic particles that bind and conceal the soul's actual nature, it makes up the material universe. In the soul's cycle of enslavement and release, the conversion of *pudgala* into karmic matter is a crucial mechanism.

The Jain concept of *dharma* and *adharmā* is unique. These are metaphysical media that function as prerequisites for movement and rest, respectively, rather than ethical precepts. In the same way that water allows fish to swim and shade allows a traveler to rest, they do

not cause motion or stillness themselves; rather, they create the necessary conditions for these phenomena to occur.

Space, also known as *Ākāśa*, is thought of as an endless area that can hold all other substances. While the *loka* (the inhabited universe) and the *aloka* (the infinite void beyond) are distinguished in Jain philosophy, only the former is pertinent to metaphysical investigation because it contains the five other *dravyas*.

Time, also known as *kāla*, is proposed as a non-material entity that promotes continuity, change, and order in the cosmos. Even though time is not active in and of itself, it enables other substances to change and evolve, which makes origination and destruction processes understandable.

Dravya (Substance), Guṇa (Quality), and Paryāya (Mode):

As we have already noted, in Jaina metaphysics, a substance is defined by three essential attributes: origination, annihilation, and stability (*utpāda-vyaya-dhrauvyayuktam sat*, TS 5.30). This suggests that a substance is in a state of perpetual change, evolving in its expressions while preserving its fundamental essence. For example, regarding the essence of the soul (*jīva*), consciousness is its fundamental characteristic, enduring through various transformations (TS 5.29). Moreover, a substance is characterised by its inherent qualities and modes. The essence of these qualities and modes is inherently linked to the substance itself, as highlighted by Kundakunda: “There is without substance no quality whatever and no modification” (PS 110; PKS 12-13). Jaina theory of substance emphasises on the essential interconnectedness of essence, its attributes, and its variations.

The above passages highlight that *dravya* serves as the foundation that maintains its intrinsic essence (*svabhāva*) even as it experiences transformations through its manifestations (*pariyāya*), which are facilitated by its inherent attributes (*guṇa*). Essence exists beyond the bounds of time, unformed by creation or obliteration (PKS 11, 15). The differentiation between essence and manifestation holds significant importance. *Guṇa* signifies the fundamental and lasting attributes of a substance, such as consciousness in a soul or the characteristics of colour and taste in matter, which are inherent and simultaneous with the essence of the substance. *Paryāya*, conversely, signifies transient alterations or conditions, exemplified by the metamorphosis of a golden pot into a golden bangle, wherein the essence (gold) persists unchanged while its manifestation varies (Soni, 1991, p. 84). Similarly, the essence of the soul (*jīva*) undergoes transformation through diverse states – ranging from hellish to human existence – yet its fundamental nature as consciousness remains constant. This timeless essence is articulated as being, intertwined with attributes and transformations. Kundakunda highlights the profound connection and individuality of substance and quality, asserting, “Really speaking what is substance is not quality, nor what is quality is not substance: this is a case of non-identity and not of absolute negation” (*Pravacanasāra* II.16, cited in Soni, 1991, p. 76). This permits Jainas to assert that a substance can undergo transformation while preserving its fundamental essence.

The Jaina tradition delineates two distinct forms of alterations (*pariyāya*) pertaining to a substance:

- 1. The Transformations of Qualities:** These are inherent to the substance and occur simultaneously (*sahabhāvi* or *sahavarti*). The affective (emotional), cognitive (knowledge-related), and volitional (will-related) attributes of the soul are among them. These

attributes may present themselves in a state of illusion or in a state of clarity. For instance, the soul's transforming ability may cause its awareness to change from illusion to enlightenment.

2. Transformations of Substance: These are sequential and external, illustrating the empirical conditions of the soul, such as existing as a human or a being in torment. These states are transient and linked to the soul's journey through various existences.

The *Bhedavāda-Abhedavāda* Debate:

In Jaina philosophy, there is a disagreement between the difference (*bhedavāda*) and the non-difference (*abhedavāda*) between *guṇa* (qualities) and *pariyāya* (modes), as well as their position in respect to *dravya* (substance). According to Soni (1991), this disagreement highlights different views among Jaina philosophers, especially Kundakunda and Siddhasena Divākara, and has important consequences for comprehending the essence of matter and its transformations.

Bhedavāda: The Doctrine of Difference:

Bhedavāda asserts that the qualities and modes of a substance are distinct yet inherently intertwined with its essence. In Kundakunda's account, there are remarks that appear to suggest *abhedavāda*; however, as Soni has pointed out, he ultimately aimed to establish *bhedavāda*. Thus, Kundakunda became a significant advocate of this perspective, alongside *Umāsvāti*, *Pūjyapāda*, and *Vidyānanda*. This point of view posits that *guṇa* is *sahabhāva* (coeval and intrinsic to the substance), whereas *pariyāya* is *kramabhāva* (successive and extrinsic, manifesting temporarily) (Soni, 1991, p. 83; Tatia, 1994, p. 128). This distinction holds significant importance when examining the essence of the soul, where intuition and knowledge are viewed as separate qualities that function in succession within the ordinary realm, yet coexist in the state of complete awareness. Kundakunda's *Pravacanasāra* (II.16) points out the notion of non-identity: "What is substance is not quality, nor what is quality is not substance" (Soni, 1991, p. 76), suggesting that although *guṇa* and *pariyāya* are distinct, they are not entirely disconnected from *dravya*.

This perspective finds endorsement within the *Digambara* tradition, which highlights the importance of analytical clarity in differentiating between enduring qualities and fleeting manifestations. For instance, Upadhye employs the analogy of a golden pot and an earthen pot: while the essence of the pot remains unchanged, the attributes of gold and earth present a stark contrast. In a similar vein, a golden ring and a golden bangle possess the same intrinsic qualities of gold, yet they diverge in their forms – one being a ring and the other a bangle (Soni, 1991, p. 84; Upadhye, 1984, p. 65). The *Uttarādhyayanāsūtra* (28.6) underscores this distinction, clearly distinguishing between *guṇa* and *pariyāya* (Soni, 1991, p. 85). The *bhedavāda* perspective resonates with the Jaina metaphysical requirement to reconcile the persistent essence of a substance with its ability to undergo transformation, as illustrated by the triadic nature of *utpāda*, *vyaya*, and *dhrauvya* (*Pañcastikāya* 10, cited in Soni, 1991, p. 87).

The *bhedavāda* perspective also discusses the usefulness of Jaina soteriology. In the mundane condition, the uniqueness of *guṇa* like *darśana* and *jñāna* symbolises the soul's involvement with *karman*, which obstructs its full potential. In a state of liberation, the concurrent manifestation of these attributes indicates the soul's reversion to its intrinsic nature. This distinction safeguards the inherent qualities of the soul from being confused

with its transient conditions, thereby maintaining the purity of the Jaina journey towards liberation (*mokṣa*).

***Abhedavāda*: The Doctrine of Non-Difference:**

In contrast, *abhedavāda*, advocated by Siddhasena Divākara (c. 500 CE), posits that *guna* and *pariyāya* are not separate entities but rather synonymous, as qualities are intrinsically encompassed within a substance and do not necessitate independent examination (*Sanmatitarkaprakarana* III.8–14, cited in Soni, 1991, p. 83). Siddhasena argues that Jaina scriptures, including the *Tattvārthasūtra*, focus solely on the substance perspective and the modification perspective, without reference to a distinct perspective of qualities (Soni, 1991, p. 83). He posits that *guna* is encompassed within *pariyāya*, as both articulate the modes of a substance's manifestation, thereby rendering any distinction between them unnecessary. In the all-knowing condition, perception and knowledge are not distinct activities but coalesce into the harmonious essence of the freed spirit, residing in its ideal form (Soni, 1991, p. 84).

Siddhasena's *abhedavāda* embodies a comprehensive perspective, highlighting the interconnectedness of a substance's attributes. He posits that differentiating between *guna* and *pariyāya* adds an unwarranted layer of complexity, since both serve as manifestations of the essence of the substance (*svabhāva*). This viewpoint resonates with the *Śvetāmbara* tradition, which often emphasises the cohesive essence of existence rather than focussing on analytical separations (Jaini, 1979, p. 97). In order to provide support for his viewpoint, Siddhasena relies on scripture (*śruti*), which highlights the significance of canonical texts such as the *Tattvārthasūtra*. These texts describe substances as inherently possessing qualities and modifications, without the need for a distinct category for *guna* (Soni, 1991, p. 83; Tatia, 1994, p. 126).

Upadhye presents a critical examination of Siddhasena's stance, contending that it may lead to a conflation of the Jaina perspective with that of *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, which asserts that qualities can exist independently from substances (Soni, 1991, p. 84). He articulates a defence of Kundakunda's *bhedavāda*, emphasising that attributes such as colour in matter endure even at the atomic level, while *pariyāya* (for instance, specific colours like blue or red) represent ephemeral modifications (*Bhagavatīsūtra* 4.315, cited in Soni, 1991, p. 85). Upadhye posits that the lack of a specific framework in scriptures does not undermine the differentiation, as qualities are inherent in substances and therefore do not demand an independent viewpoint, in contrast to transformations, which require a distinct approach to understand their variability (Soni, 1991, p. 85; Upadhye, 1984, p. 65).

Implications of the Debate:

The dispute between *bhedavāda* and *abhedavāda* brings to light the Jaina commitment to *anekāntavāda*, since both positions are legitimate within their own standpoints. *Bhedavāda* provides a meticulous framework, vital for differentiating the inherent attributes of the soul from its karmic alterations, which is fundamental to the Jaina journey towards liberation (Jaini, 1979, p. 142). *Abhedavāda*, on the other hand, underscores the comprehensive unity of a substance, resonating with the Jaina perspective that reality is intricate and defies simplistic classifications (*Padmarajah*, 1986, p. 47). The discourse reveals divergent perspectives, as *Digambaras* advocate for *bhedavāda* due to its precision in metaphysical examination, while *Śvetāmbaras* prefer *abhedavāda* for its straightforwardness and adherence to scripture (Jaini, 1979, p. 97).

The discourse carries more profound implications for our understanding of existence and thought. *Bhedavāda* presents a systematic framework that embraces the duality of permanence and change, echoing the Jaina triadic principles of *utpāda*, *vyaya*, and *dhrauvya*. *Abhedavāda*, in contrast, resonates with a non-absolutist perspective, highlighting the interconnectedness of all elements within a substance. As Matilal observes, this adaptability enables *Jainas* to traverse the delicate balance between being and becoming, presenting a harmonious alternative to the substantialism of *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* and the impermanence of Buddhism (Matilal, 1977, p. 101). The discussion highlights the significance of *nayavāda* in addressing seemingly conflicting viewpoints, as both *bhedavāda* and *abhedavāda* hold validity from distinct angles (Dixit, 1971, p. 45).

Conclusion:

From the above discussion it is evident that the Jaina theory of substance finds itself in a balanced position, bridging the perspectives of *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* and Buddhist ontologies. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* school underscores the notion of independent substances characterised by distinct qualities and actions. In contrast, the *Jain* perspective posits that qualities are intrinsic and inseparable from the substance, dismissing the notion that a substance could exist devoid of qualities, even for an instant. For example, attributes such as sound, regarded as *guna* in *Vaiśeṣika*, are simply manifestations of matter (*pudgala*) in Jainism. In contrast, adherents of Buddhism, especially those from the *Sautrāntika* tradition, propose a continuous flow of transient phenomena (*dharmas*) devoid of any enduring foundation. *Jainas* argue that the concept of change inherently relies on the existence of a constant essence, asserting that “there cannot be any change, any fluctuation, for it is only the permanent that can change” (Matilal, 1977, p. 101). This resonates with the Jaina perspective that substance encompasses creation, annihilation, and constancy (*Pañcastikāya* 10, cited in Soni, 1991, p. 87), a notion reflected in the *Anuyogadvāra-sūtra*, which articulates that substances embody both everlasting and fleeting characteristics.

Furthermore, the Jaina theory of substance, as articulated in various ancient texts, presents a nuanced understanding that primarily emphasises the interplay between permanence and change through the categories of *dravya*, *guna*, and *paryāya*. The framework presented by Kundakunda, further strengthened by *nayavāda*, highlights the interconnectedness and individuality of these categories, allowing for a deeper understanding of existence. The discourse surrounding *bhedavāda* and *abhedavāda* reveals intricate layers within Jaina thought, particularly through Kundakunda’s differentiation between *guna* and *paryāya*, which serves as a compelling counterargument to the separable qualities posited by *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* and the anti-substantialist stance of Buddhism. This theory differentiates Jainism within Indian philosophy and offers a robust framework for tackling the universal issue of existence and transformation, as shown by its alignment with both traditional Jaina literature and contemporary philosophical analyses. Thus, Jaina theory of substance reconciles the tension between permanence and change, reminiscent of the debates in the Western tradition between Heraclitus and Parmenides. By asserting that entities intrinsically embody both persistent characteristics and mutable forms, *Jainas* navigate the polarities of eternalism and annihilationism.

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