

JAINISM AND SARTREAN PHILOSOPHY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Samani Shashi Pragya*

Abstract

This article is an attempt to perceive the Sartrean philosophy from the Jain Perspective. Here, in this paper, the focus would be to see to what extent the concepts of Jain Philosophy are parallel to the views of the Post-modern Western Sartrean thinking thereby to find out the points of commonalities and points of disagreements. This paper is an endeavour to have a comparative study of Sartrean concepts of Ontology, Ethics, Freedom, Bad Faith etc. with that of Jain ontology, Jain ethics, Jain concept of *ātmakarṭṛvavāda* and utilization of energy in proper direction i.e., in the spiritual upliftment of the self.

Introduction

Any comparative study in the field of philosophy may use the tool-box method of Wittgenstein's Family Resemblance Theory to look at the ideas of 'overlapping' among the various systems of philosophy (Gibran). In this research paper efforts are made to highlight the points of agreements as well as differences between some of the basic concepts of Jain philosophy with that philosophy of Sartre. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is known as 'Existential Phenomenologist' in western post-modern philosophical world. Jain philosophy, although an ancient philosophy, is scientific, analytic and modern as it coincides with the views of post-modern western thinkers. Here Sartrean concepts of ontology, ethics, freedom, bad faith etc. are compared with Jain ontology, Jain ethics, Jain concept of *ātmakarṭṛvavāda* and utilization of energy in proper direction i.e., in the spiritual upliftment of the self.

Similarity in Great Metaphysical Division

Jain Philosophy classifies fundamental elements basically under two heads – *jīva* (living beings) and *ajīva* (non-living beings)¹. Sartre also accepts two basic entities in the world. He uses his own way of expression coining new terminology as Being-for-itself (*Etre pour-soi*) and Being-in-itself (*Etre En-soi*) (McCullaoch 3). According to the Sartre, the world can be divided into two types namely, the consciousness and the object which is specifically coined by him as Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself respectively. This way we can see the fundamental similarity between the acceptance of the two types of metaphysical entities. It seems that the notion of Sartre's ontology highlights him to be as a dualist, but he is not a dualist in the Cartesian sense as he speaks also about the Being-with-others (Social Being).

* Associate Professor in Department of Jainology and Comparative Religion and Philosophy, Jain Vishva Bharati University, Ladnun, India, Email: shashi121272@gmail.com

¹ "jadatthi naṃ loge taṃ savvaṃ dupaoāraṃ, taṃ jahā- jīvacceva, ajīvacceva" (*Thāṇaṃ*, 2.1)

Sartrean Concept of In-itself vis-à-vis Jain Concept of Ajīva

According to Jain philosophy, there are six substances in this world.² Among them, one of the substances is matter or *pudgala*. Even Sartre also accepts the being-in-itself (matter) as a substance which cannot be created. It is not a cause, not even a cause of itself. It is neither passive nor active (Jones 352). Similarly, Jain philosophers believe that matter or *ajīva* is not created by any creator. It is neither a cause, nor even a cause of itself. It is in this world from the beginningless past.³ Moreover, Jain philosophers assert that the objects are by nature neither active nor passive, they move according to the operations of external forces. But the point of disagreement is that Sartrean concept of Being-in-itself (object) does not undergo change or transformation, whereas Jain concept of an object undergoes change every moment maintaining its persistence (Tatia 57).

Jain Concept of Nature of Soul and Sartrean Concept of Being-for-itself

Jain philosophers assert two levels of souls mundane and liberated souls⁴. The Liberated souls are self-complete; it means they don't have covering of karmic particles anymore and they attained the pure nature of consciousness. so, they do not possess any sort of deficiency, desire or any project for future possibilities. This Jain view of liberated souls is in disagreement with the Sartrean concept of Being-for-itself. But as far as mundane souls in Jain Philosophy are concerned, they are incomplete like Sartrean Being-for-itself (soul).

According to Sartre, Being-for-itself is incomplete, and has indeterminate structure, innumerable possibilities. He says, 'It is only in the human world that there can be lack. Consciousness is primarily a lack it contains nothingness within itself, and is forever reaching beyond to something else... At the same time, consciousness at a pre-reflective level, has a desire for wholeness.....' (Jenny & White 133). Sartre also shows that the existence of discontent or dissatisfaction is the living proof of Being-for-itself. Jain philosophers also believe that the mundane beings always desire to attain more of material pleasures and also some spiritual souls try to achieve the higher ladders of spiritual development. So, in one sense mundane souls are incomplete and possess some deficit and are always in the process of being built up. The mundane souls of Jain Philosophy seem to be in parallel with the Sartrean concept of Being-for-itself.

But here the point of disagreement lies in the fact that as the soul gets rid of the bondage of eight types of *karmas*, it achieves the state of self-completeness. In that stage, there is no lack, no desire, not even any sort of possibility of becoming. But in Sartrean philosophy, Being-for-itself has all the characteristics of Platonic becoming. It is always in the process of being built up in its ever-renewing attempts at the realization of future projects. The nature of Being-for-

² “*dharmādharmākāśapudgalajīvāstikāyā dravyāṇi | kālaśca |.....ṣaḍdravyātmako lokaḥ ||*” (Jainasiddhātadīpikā 1.1-8)

³ “*dharmādīni dravyāṇi gatihetutvādiviśeṣalakṣaṇa dravyārthādeśādastitvādi sāmānyalakṣaṇa dravyārthādeśāśca kadācidapi na vyayantīti nityāni |*” (Sarvārthasiddhi 5.4)

⁴ “*samsārasamāvāṇṇagā ceva, asamsārasamāvāṇṇagā ceva*” (Thāṇaṇi 2.1)

itself is persistent in striving. He says, “for-itself - i.e., consciousness is a being which is what it is not, and which is not what it is” (Jones 353). The question of this possibility does not arise in the case of being-in-itself (matter). This means that it is neither passivity nor activity. As per Sartre, Being-in-itself is neither possible nor impossible, it simply is.

In the Sartrean perspective, Once the Being-for-itself stops choosing any possibility, it converts itself into a Being-in-itself (matter), something which is not agreeable to the Jain philosophers. Jain scholars believe that when all the possibilities are accomplished, being through self-efforts in the auspicious direction attains the state of divinity and becomes omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent and self-complete (Prajna 57). But as per Jain view souls can never transform into a non-soul or thing or object-like Being -in-itself as accepted by the Sartre. In Sartrean view, there is a point of disagreement over here that consciousness always keeps on transcending itself for future projects, only death can stop this transcendence and reduce it to a thing-like congealed something (Jones 353).

Sartrean Concept of Freedom and Jain View of Change of Karmas

In Sartrean philosophy, man is said to be absolutely free – “Man is condemned to be free” (Sartre 21). Sartre says, consciousness does not make being; it makes meanings. “When the for-itself ‘upsurges’ it makes a world, a world of things that stand in complex spatio-temporal and causal relations...” (Jones 354). Thus, the for-itself lives in the world that it has created and for which, as the creator, it is responsible (Jones 355). Jain philosophers also believe in the fact that man is independent or free in performing any auspicious or inauspicious action, but not free to experience its fruitions. Sartre, though he advocates absolute freedom, understands that there are many things which obstruct our exercise of freedom. They can be categorized under five heads: (i) My place, (ii) My past, (iii) My environment, (iv) Other human beings, and (v) My death (McCullaogh 53). About these categories, Sartre has said that they may obstruct human freedom to a certain extent, but in all of them it is possible to construct a new situation. Likewise, Jain philosophy too agrees with the view that certain karma particles can be changed into other karma particles, and this way a man can change his future through auspicious religious practices, like observation of penances, meditational practices etc. But in the fruition of *nikācīta* karma (those group of karmas of which its fruition cannot be made otherwise), it has to be experienced by the self as it is bound, he/she is not free in this case. As far as those group of karmas of which its fruition can be made otherwise, are concerned, a man is free to change the fruition of karmas (*Karma Prakriti* 19). Here both the schools of thought go hand in hand to be free in designing one’s own destiny through continuous self-exertion.

Sartrean Concept of Bad Faith and Jain Belief of Puruṣārthavāda

According to Sartrean view, the Being-for-itself (soul) has freedom of choice, if he/she refuses to choose amongst the alternative choices open to him, it means he/she is fleeing from anguish. It means he/she is in Bad Faith. Here the Sartrean terminology Bad Faith means that if the soul stops choosing towards one’s end in life, then he/she will turn itself to the nothingness. Sartre admits that a person is an authentic self in and through choices made on his or her own

initiative, without adopting other people's standards or following their advice (Jones 341). He says if someone formulates excuses and gives some causes or excuses as for not taking a decision then, he is reducing himself to the thing or Being-in-itself. Moreover, he says if one denies his very nature of transcendence, i.e., if he accepts himself to be what he is, at a particular time, he becomes like a Being-in-itself (object), like a waiter who tries to make himself solely and wholly a waiter. He is then said to be in bad faith. Sartre says, "Good faith is an attempt to face our freedom and Bad faith is to flee from it" (Jones 353).

The very same view of Bad Faith i.e., freedom to choose at every moment can be compared with the Jain view of *puruṣārtavāda*, in other words the doctrine of self-effort. Human efforts are essential pre-requisite for the maturing of the past *karmas*. Jain theory of karma emphasizes that man is free in doing good or bad actions and is responsible for good or bad fruitions in one's life. That is why it is rightly said that if any monk or nun hides his own ability or capacity to do spiritual work i.e., capacity to observe penance, recitation of verses, going for alms, then he is a *pāpaśramaṇa* as mentioned in "*Pāpaśramaṇīya*" the 17th chapter of *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*. *Pāpaśramaṇa* is a *śramaṇa* who, according to Sartrean gloss, is simply in Bad Faith. Moreover, Mahāvīra has said, man has freedom of action, so he himself is an agent of his own actions and responsible for his own fruition of auspicious and inauspicious *karmas*.⁵ In this regard, even Sartre says, "Since our choice of this fundamental project is spontaneous, we are wholly responsible for it. We cannot pass on the responsibility to others or lay before others different excuses for ourselves by blaming the time, the place or the circumstances (Jones 358). Even Jain philosophers believe with the fact that the material cause of each and every action is the human being himself, but situations may be considered as an efficient cause (Mahapragya 230). Jains believe in the theory of '*ātmakartṛtvavāda*' i.e., human is agent of its good or bad action. So, no question of blaming others for one's auspicious and inauspicious *karmas* that is experienced by an individual. Here we find the point of agreement between both the schools of thought that even Jains and Sartre believes that man himself is responsible for one's good or bad deeds.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, we can conclude in the words of Vedānta Philosophy: "Truth is one but the way of expression differs".⁶ In the same manner, we have seen that there are more points of agreements than disagreements between Sartrean view and Jain philosophical view and they go hand-in-hand most of the times. Thus, it is clear that there is points of commonality in Jain metaphysical division of *jīva* and *ajīva* and Sartrean Being-for itself and Being-in-itself, in the concept of *ajīva* as existing in this universe from the beginningless past and Sartre's view of the Being-in-itself to be uncreated. Moreover, the Jain concept of the nature of mundane soul and Sartrean concept of the nature of Being-for-itself undergo non-stop endeavour in achieving one's end. Along with that Sartrean concept of Freedom and Jain view of change of certain

⁵ "appā kattā vikattā ya duhāṇa ya suhāṇa ya | appā mittamamittam ca duppaṭṭhiya-suppaṭṭhiyo ||"
(*Daśavaikālika Sūtra* 20.37)

⁶ "ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti" (*Rigveda* 1.164.46)

karma particles into other karma particles, is in tune with the freedom to choose one's destiny. If the human being stops choosing to make one's future progress, then he or she is termed to be in Bad Faith. So, the Jain theory of *puruṣārtavāda* endorses the self-responsibility of each and every good or bad action and its fruition to the self alone and denies the human tendency to blame others for one's own favourable or unfavourable situations in life. These similar views can establish a platform sufficient for the inter-cultural dialogue between both the schools of thoughts and philosophies.

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