

The Dialectic of Being: A Comparative Analysis of Jain Pragmatism and Hindu

Philosophical Traditions

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Introduction: Framing the Encounter

The intellectual history of ancient India is characterized by a vibrant and sustained dialogue between two major streams of thought: the Vedic tradition, rooted in the authority of the Vedas, and the non-Vedic, Śramaṇa traditions, which include Jainism, Buddhism and the now extinct, Ajivikas. This essay provides a detailed examination of the relationship between Jainism and the philosophical schools of Hinduism, focusing on the central tenets of Jain pragmatism like its doctrines of non-absolutism. The central thesis of this analysis is that the connection between these traditions is not one of simple linear derivation but of complex interaction, mutual influence, reciprocal critique, and profound conceptual resonance. These systems emerged from a shared cultural and intellectual milieu, addressing similar fundamental questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and liberation, yet ultimately arrived at distinct and often irreconcilable metaphysical conclusions.

At the core of Jainism's unique philosophical contribution is its pragmatic, or more accurately, non-absolutist approach to reality and knowledge, encapsulated in the doctrines of *Anekāntavāda* (the ontology of manifoldness), *Nayavāda* (the epistemology of standpoints), and *Syādvāda* (the logic of conditional predication). These principles, which assert that reality is multifaceted and can only be understood through a synthesis of multiple, partial perspectives, form the primary lens for this comparative analysis. They represent not merely a call for intellectual tolerance but a sophisticated philosophical response to the perennial problem of permanence and change.

We will proceed in five parts. First, will be delineated the architecture of Jain non-absolutism, examining the textual basis and philosophical function of *Anekāntavāda*, *Nayavāda*, and

Syādvāda with reference to foundational Jain Āgamas and treatises. Second, this essay will explore potential antecedents and conceptual parallels within the Vedic corpus, particularly the paradoxical descriptions of Brahman in the Upaniṣads, to assess the claim of derivation. Third, it will analyze the systematic critiques leveled against Jain pragmatism by the major orthodox (*āstika*) schools of Hindu philosophy: Vedānta, Mīmāṃsā, and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. Fourth, it will adopt a "Hindu lens" to interpret the Jain ideal of the perfected being, the *Tīrthankara*, by comparing the Jain concept of *Kevala Jñāna* (omniscience) with the Sāṃkhya-Yoga concept of *Kaivalya* (isolation) and examining the Puranic assimilation of Jain figures. Finally, the essay will address the question of Jainism's origins, marshaling evidence to evaluate its status as a *sui generis* tradition, independent of but in constant dialogue with its Hindu counterparts.

I. The Architecture of Jain Non-Absolutism

The philosophical edifice of Jainism rests upon a tripartite foundation that integrates ontology, epistemology, and logic into a coherent system of non-absolutism. This structure is designed to accurately map a reality perceived as inherently complex and multifaceted. The metaphysical doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* posits a world of manifold attributes; the epistemological doctrine of *Nayavāda* provides the analytical method for apprehending this world from partial standpoints; and the logical doctrine of *Syādvāda* offers the synthetic method for expressing these partial truths without contradiction. Together, they form a robust framework for understanding the nature of being while avoiding the one-sided absolutism (*ekānta*) that Jain thinkers identified as the principal error of other philosophical systems.

1.1. The Metaphysics of Manifoldness: Anekāntavāda in the Āgamas

Anekāntavāda, literally the "doctrine of non-one-sidedness," is the ontological cornerstone of Jain philosophy. It asserts that every entity (*dravya*) is possessed of infinite attributes (*anantadharmātmakam vastu*) and is therefore too complex to be captured by any single,

absolute proposition. This doctrine fundamentally rejects *ekānta*, or one-sided views, which it considers to be incomplete and therefore misleading.

The conceptual roots of this doctrine are traceable to the teachings of Mahāvīra as recorded in the Jain Āgamas. While the term *Anekāntavāda* itself was coined later by the 5th-century CE logician Siddhasena Divākara to systematize Mahāvīra's teachings, the underlying principle is evident in the canonical texts. The *Bhagavati Sūtra* (also known as the *Vyākhyāprajñapti*), for instance, is replete with dialogues where Mahāvīra responds to his disciple Gautama's questions with multifaceted answers that defy simple binaries.¹⁰ When asked if the soul is one or many, permanent or impermanent, Mahāvīra's replies illustrate the Anekānta perspective: from the standpoint of substance (*dravya*), the soul is one and permanent; from the standpoint of its modes (*pariyāya*), it is many and impermanent. This method of qualified assertion is the hallmark of early Jain thought.

A methodological precursor to the fully formed doctrine of *Anekāntavāda* is *Vibhajyavāda*, or the "doctrine of analysis" and "conditional answers". The *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, one of the earliest Āgamas, identifies Mahāvīra's approach as a form of *Vibhajyavāda*. This non-dogmatic method involved analyzing metaphysical questions to reveal their underlying complexities, thereby avoiding simplistic, absolute answers. Mahāvīra developed this analytical method into a systematic philosophy that could synthesize apparently contradictory viewpoints.

The ontological basis for *Anekāntavāda* is the Jain view that every substance is characterized by a simultaneous triple process: origination (*utpāda*), destruction (*vyaya*), and permanence (*dhrauvya*). For example, when a clay pot is made, the "lump" mode is destroyed, the "pot" mode originates, but the underlying clay substance remains permanent throughout the transformation. This principle of "permanence-in-change" (*pariṇāmanīyatva*) is the metaphysical bedrock that makes the logic of *Anekāntavāda* possible, as it allows a single entity

to be described as both permanent (from the perspective of its substance) and impermanent (from the perspective of its modes) without logical contradiction.

1.2. The Epistemology of Perspective: *Nayavāda* in Umaswati's *Tattvārtha Sūtra*

If *Anekāntavāda* is the ontological claim that reality is manifold, *Nayavāda* is the epistemological tool for its apprehension. *Nayavāda*, the doctrine of standpoints, is the analytical method that operationalizes the Anekānta worldview. A *naya* is a particular viewpoint or perspective from which a statement is made about an object. Each *naya* reveals a partial but valid truth about the object's infinite attributes. Crucially, a statement from a single *naya* is not considered false; it only becomes a fallacy, or *nayābhāsa* ("a semblance of a standpoint"), when it is asserted as the absolute and complete truth, thereby excluding all other valid perspectives.

A key scriptural foundation for this doctrine is found in Umaswati's *Tattvārtha Sūtra* (c. 2nd-5th century CE), a foundational text accepted by both the Digambara and Śvetāmbara traditions.²² Sūtra 1.33 explicitly mentions the role of standpoints in understanding reality, solidifying their importance in the path to right knowledge (*samyakjñāna*).

Jain philosophy provides a systematic classification of these standpoints. The primary division is between the *Dravyārthika naya* and the *Paryāyārthika naya*.

- The **Dravyārthika naya** is the noumenal or substantial standpoint, which focuses on the permanent, universal, and unified aspect of a substance.
- The **Paryāyārthika naya** is the phenomenal or modal standpoint, which focuses on the changing, particular, and manifold aspects of a substance's modes.

These are further elaborated into a sevenfold classification, with the first three generally categorized as *Dravyārthika* and the latter four as *Paryāyārthika*:

1. **Naigama naya** (Figurative/Teleological): Considers an object with reference to its purpose or by mixing its generic and specific qualities.
2. **Samgraha naya** (General/Collective): Focuses on the common or class characteristics of an object, emphasizing unity.
3. **Vyavahāra naya** (Practical/Distributive): Focuses on the specific, empirical, and conventional aspects of an object, emphasizing particularity.
4. **Rjusūtra naya** (Momentary): Considers only the present state or "straight thread" of an object's existence, ignoring its past and future.
5. **Śabda naya** (Verbal): Differentiates between synonymous words, holding that they are not completely interchangeable as they may have different grammatical implications (e.g., gender, number).
6. **Samabhirūḍha naya** (Etymological): Goes further than the *Śabda naya*, insisting that synonyms have different meanings based on their etymological roots.
7. **Evambhūta naya** (Actual): The most specific standpoint, which holds that a word should only be applied to an object when it is actively performing the function denoted by that word.

This analytical framework was also a powerful polemical tool. Jain thinkers used *Nayavāda* to diagnose the "one-sided" errors of other philosophical systems, classifying them as *nayābhāsas*. For instance, the Advaita Vedānta emphasis on absolute unity was seen as a fallacy of the collective standpoint (*Samgrahābhāsa*), while the Buddhist doctrine of momentariness was identified as a fallacy of the momentary standpoint (*Rjusūtranayābhāsa*). In this way, Jainism could respectfully acknowledge the partial truth in rival doctrines while demonstrating their ultimate inadequacy compared to the comprehensive vision of *Anekāntavāda*.

1.3. The Logic of Conditional Predication: Syādvāda and the Saptabhaṅgī

Syādvāda, the "doctrine of conditional predication," is the logical and linguistic expression of *Anekāntavāda*. It serves as the synthetic method that integrates the various partial truths analyzed by *Nayavāda* into a coherent, non-contradictory whole. It provides a systematic framework for articulating the complex, multifaceted nature of reality in language and thought. Central to this doctrine is the prefix *syāt*. While commonly translated as "maybe" or "perhaps," this is a significant misinterpretation that suggests skepticism or probability. In the context of *Syādvāda*, *syāt* functions as a logical qualifier meaning "in some respect," "from a certain perspective," or "conditionally". Its inclusion before any predication is a constant reminder that the statement is not an absolute truth but is valid only under specific conditions and from a particular standpoint.

Syādvāda is formalized in the *Saptabhaṅgī*, or the "seven-fold predication," a set of seven exhaustive and logically possible propositions that can be made about any object or its attributes. These seven modes are:

1. ***Syād-asti***: In some respect, it is (existent).
2. ***Syān-nāsti***: In some respect, it is not (non-existent).
3. ***Syād-asti-nāsti***: In some respect, it is and it is not.
4. ***Syād-avaktavyam***: In some respect, it is indescribable (when existence and non-existence are to be predicated simultaneously).
5. ***Syād-asti-avaktavyam***: In some respect, it is and is indescribable.
6. ***Syān-nāsti-avaktavyam***: In some respect, it is not and is indescribable.
7. ***Syād-asti-nāsti-avaktavyam***: In some respect, it is, it is not, and is indescribable. 18

Each predication is considered valid with respect to a thing's own substance (*svadṛavya*), place (*svakṣetra*), time (*svakāla*), and mode (*svabhāva*), and invalid with respect to those of another (*paradravya*, *parakṣetra*, *parakāla*, *parabhāva*). For example, a clay pot "is" with respect to

its own substance (clay) but "is not" with respect to another substance (metal). This framework allows for the reconciliation of apparent contradictions by specifying the context in which each statement is true.

The doctrine's development is notable. While its conceptual underpinnings are present in the Āgamas, the Digambara Ācārya Kundakunda (c. 2nd century CE) is credited as the first to explicitly enumerate the seven *bhaṅgas* (predications) in his works *Pravacanasāra* and *Pañcāstikāya*. However, his discussion is brief. The full logical formalization and its use as a powerful tool in inter-school debate were perfected by later Jain logicians such as Samantabhadra and Akalaṅka, who established *Syādvāda* as the central organizing framework of Jain epistemology.

II. Vedic Resonances and Potential Antecedents

While Jain pragmatism constitutes a unique and systematic philosophical system, it did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum. The Indian subcontinent during the first millennium BCE was a crucible of philosophical inquiry, where Vedic and Śramaṇa thinkers grappled with similar questions regarding the nature of ultimate reality. An examination of the Vedic corpus reveals methodological parallels and conceptual resonances that suggest a shared intellectual heritage, even if the final metaphysical conclusions drawn by the Jain and Vedic traditions were starkly divergent. The relationship is not one of direct derivation but of a shared toolkit of paradoxical predication being applied to fundamentally different ontological frameworks.

2.1. From Vibhajyavāda to Anekāntavāda: A Shared Methodological Heritage?

The precursor to *Anekāntavāda*, as identified in the Jain *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, is *Vibhajyavāda*—the "doctrine of analysis" or "doctrine of distinctions". This term, however, was not exclusive to Jainism and denotes a broader methodological current within the Śramaṇa milieu. The Buddhist tradition, particularly in the Pāli canon, also identifies its own doctrine as *Vibhajyavāda*. For

Buddhists, this analytical method served to distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome phenomena, to deconstruct the notion of a permanent self (*ātman*), and to set aside certain metaphysical questions (the *avyākata*, or "unanswered questions") as being wrongly posed and not conducive to liberation.

Although both Mahāvīra and the Buddha employed a *Vibhajya* or analytical method, their applications and philosophical aims were distinct. This divergence is captured in B.K. Matilal's insightful distinction between Mahāvīra's "inclusive" middle way and the Buddha's "exclusive" middle way. The Buddha's analysis often leads to the rejection of two extreme and mutually exclusive positions—such as absolute eternalism and absolute annihilationism—in favor of a middle path that denies both. In contrast, Mahāvīra's analysis leads to the qualified acceptance and synthesis of both extremes. For a Jain, a substance is eternal from the perspective of its underlying substance (*dravya*) and non-eternal from the perspective of its changing modes (*paryāya*). Thus, while the method of "making distinctions" was common, the Buddha used it to exclude and negate, whereas Mahāvīra used it to include and synthesize.

2.2. The Paradoxical Brahman: Non-Absolutist Currents in the Upaniṣads

Striking parallels to the non-absolutist mode of expression can be found within the Vedic tradition itself, particularly in its descriptions of the ultimate reality, Brahman. These texts often employ paradoxical and seemingly contradictory language to gesture towards a reality that transcends ordinary conceptualization.

- In the **R̥gveda**, the famous Nāsadīya Sūkta (10.129.1) begins with a profound paradox: *nāsadāsīnno sadāsīt tadānīm* ("Then, there was neither non-existence nor existence"). The 14th-century commentator Sāyaṇa, reflecting on this verse, acknowledged the possibility of such contradictory aspects co-existing simultaneously in a single substance.

- The early **Upaniṣads** are replete with such descriptions. The *Īśa Upaniṣad* (verses 4-5) describes the Ātman (Self, equated with Brahman) as that which "moves, and moves not; It is far, and It is near" (*Tad ejati tan naijati tad dūre tadvantike*). The *Kena Upaniṣad* states that Brahman is "other than the known and also above the unknown". These passages demonstrate a comfort with holding contradictory predicates in tension when describing the Absolute.

However, the philosophical function of this paradox in the Vedāntic framework is fundamentally different from its function in Jainism. In the Upaniṣads, such language serves as an *apophatic* device—a method of negation known as *neti neti* ("not this, not this") found in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The purpose is not to affirm the simultaneous reality of contradictory attributes within a complex object, but to exhaust the limits of dualistic, conceptual thought. These paradoxes are designed to demonstrate the inadequacy of language and logic to grasp the transcendent, non-dual, and ultimately attributeless reality (*nirguṇa Brahman*) that lies beyond all phenomenal categories.

2.3. A Comparative Analysis: Shared Method, Divergent Metaphysics

The presence of non-absolutist language in both traditions indicates that Jainism did not invent this mode of discourse in a vacuum. The use of paradoxical predication was a recognized intellectual tool in ancient India for grappling with the nature of ultimate reality. However, to claim that Jain pragmatism "derives" from these Vedic antecedents would be to mistake a shared methodological tool for a shared ontological conclusion.

The crucial distinction lies in the metaphysical goal. The Upaniṣads employ paradox to ultimately negate all limited perspectives in favor of a single, transcendent, and attributeless Absolute. For the Advaita Vedāntin, the world of multiplicity and attributes is ultimately an appearance (*māyā*), and the contradictory descriptions serve to point the mind beyond this appearance to the sole reality of Brahman. In sharp contrast, Jainism employs a highly

structured system of conditional perspectives (*Syādvāda*) to affirm the simultaneous validity of multiple, and even contradictory, attributes as inherent and real features of a genuinely complex, pluralistic, and substantival reality.

The classic parable of the blind men and the elephant illustrates this divergence perfectly. For a Vedāntin, the blind men's partial descriptions (rope, wall, spear) are all equally false representations of a transcendent "elephant-ness" that cannot be captured by phenomenal experience. For a Jain, their descriptions are equally valid, though partial, truths about the actual, multifaceted elephant that truly possesses all those features from different perspectives. The Vedic path uses paradox to transcend the world; the Jain path uses a logical system of relativized paradox to accurately describe it.

III. The Orthodox Rebuttal: Hindu Critiques of Jain Pragmatism

The sophisticated philosophical system of Jain non-absolutism posed a significant challenge to the foundational tenets of the orthodox (*āstika*) schools of Hindu philosophy. In response, these schools developed systematic critiques aimed at exposing what they perceived as logical inconsistencies and epistemological failings within the Jain framework. These critiques, however, were not uniform; rather, they were projections of each school's own core philosophical commitments. The Advaita Vedānta school attacked from a monistic standpoint, the Mīmāṃsā school from a scriptural-authoritarian standpoint, and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools from a logical-epistemological standpoint. These rebuttals are less a refutation of Jainism on its own terms and more a vigorous defense of their respective worldviews.

3.1. The Vedānta Critique: Śaṅkara's Charge of Indeterminacy (*Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* II.ii.33-36)

The most formidable critique of Jainism from the Vedānta tradition comes from Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (c. 8th century CE) in his commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *Brahma Sūtras*. In the

section specifically refuting the "doctrine of the Ārhat" (Jainism), Śaṅkara launches a multi-pronged attack centered on the logical impossibility of the Jain position.

His primary argument, based on *sūtra* 2.2.33 (*naikasminn, asaṃbhavāt*—"Not in one, because of impossibility"), is that the Jain doctrine violates the fundamental law of non-contradiction. Śaṅkara asserts that it is impossible for contradictory attributes, such as existence and non-existence, to belong to the same substance at the same time, just as a thing cannot be simultaneously hot and cold. For Śaṅkara, whose philosophy is dedicated to establishing the singular, non-dual, and determinate nature of Brahman, the Jain ontology of a reality teeming with real, manifold, and contradictory attributes represents the ultimate metaphysical threat.

From this follows the charge of indeterminacy (*saṃśaya*). Śaṅkara argues that the Jain method of seven-fold predication (*saptabhaṅgī*) results in "cognition of an indefinite nature, which is no more a source of true knowledge than doubt is". If every statement is qualified and uncertain, then the Jain teachings themselves—including the nature of the seven *tattvas* (realities) and the path to liberation—become indeterminate. This, he contends, would paralyze all practical human endeavor, for "only when a course of action is known to have a definite result, people set about it without hesitation".

Finally, Śaṅkara argues that the doctrine is self-refuting. If *Anekāntavāda* itself is subjected to the *saptabhaṅgī*, then the doctrine is "somehow true" and "somehow not true," which undermines its own claim to philosophical validity. This logical chaos, Śaṅkara concludes, makes the proponent of such a doctrine unworthy of being listened to, comparing him to "a drunken or a mad man". In subsequent *sūtras* (2.2.34-36), Śaṅkara extends his critique to the Jain doctrine of the soul possessing a variable size (*madhyama parimāṇa*), arguing that this would make the soul subject to change (*vikāra*) and thus non-eternal, a conclusion that contradicts the very concept of an immortal soul.

3.2. The Mīmāṃsā Critique: Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's Rejection of Non-Vedic Authority and Omniscience

The Pūrva Mīmāṃsā school, primarily concerned with establishing the absolute and infallible authority of the Vedas for the purpose of ritual action (*dharma*), offered a different line of attack. The Mīmāṃsā philosopher Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (c. 7th century CE) was not principally concerned with the metaphysics of contradiction but with defending the Veda's exclusive epistemological domain.

In his magnum opus, the *Ślokavārttika*, Kumārila argues against the validity of non-Vedic scriptures, including those of the Jains and Buddhists. His critique is twofold. First, he attacks the textual integrity of these scriptures, claiming they are composed by human authors and are therefore subject to human faults and errors. He dismisses them as being written in "overwhelmingly incorrect (*asadhu*) language," such as the Prakrit dialects of Magadha, which he considers corruptions (*apabhraṃśa*) of the pure, eternal Sanskrit of the Vedas. For Kumārila, the authorless (*apauruṣeya*) nature of the Vedas guarantees their freedom from error, a status no human-authored text can claim.

Second, and more fundamentally, Kumārila launches a sustained critique against the very possibility of an omniscient being (*sarvajña*), such as a Jain *Tīrthaṅkara* or a Buddha. The Mīmāṃsā worldview holds that human knowledge is limited to the empirical realm accessible through perception and inference. Knowledge of transcendent matters, specifically the nature of *dharma* and the results of ritual actions, can *only* be derived from the Veda. The existence of an omniscient being who could directly perceive these truths would establish a rival and superior source of authority, thereby threatening the unique and unassailable position of the Veda. Therefore, to protect Vedic authority, Kumārila had to demonstrate the impossibility of omniscience, thus invalidating the foundational authority of the Jain *Tīrthaṅkaras* and their teachings.

3.3. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Position: The Challenge from Realist Epistemology

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools, while also realist and pluralist like Jainism, built their ontology on a foundation of atomism and a fixed set of categories (*padārthas*)—substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*) and action (*karma*) among others. In their view, reality is composed of distinct, eternal atoms that combine to form objects, and these objects possess specific, inherent, and non-contradictory qualities.

The Nyāya school, in particular, is a system of logic and epistemology focused on the valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*), which include perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. The entire Nyāya project is aimed at achieving determinate and certain knowledge (*nirṇaya*) and systematically eliminating doubt (*saṃśaya*). From this perspective, the Jain system of *Syādvāda*, which allows a single pot to be described as both "existent" and "non-existent" from different viewpoints, appears as a failure of logical precision and a regression into the very indeterminacy that the Nyāya logical apparatus was designed to overcome.

While less explicitly polemical than Śāṅkara, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system implicitly critiques Jainism by its very structure. The Jain response to this is equally telling: Jain texts classify the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tendency to see substance and quality as absolutely distinct entities as an example of *Naigamābhāsa*, a fallacy of the figurative standpoint. This reveals a mutual critique rooted in their differing conceptions of reality and knowledge. For Nyāya, Jainism is logically indeterminate; for Jainism, Nyāya creates false and artificial distinctions that fail to capture the fluid, integrated nature of reality.

IV. A Hindu Reading of the Jain Savior: The Tīrthaṅkara as Sāṃkhya Yogi

To view the Jain *Tīrthaṅkara* through "Hindu eyes" is not to see through a single lens but through a multifaceted prism that refracts the image in at least two distinct ways. On one level, there is a philosophical-analogical reading, which seeks to understand the perfected Jain being by comparing it to the closest available model within the orthodox *darśanas*—the liberated

Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga school. On another level, there is a religious-syncretic reading, evident in the Purāṇas, which seeks to absorb and subordinate the powerful figure of the *Tīrthaṅkara* by incorporating him into the Vaiṣṇava pantheon as an *avatāra*. These two approaches, while seemingly contradictory, both serve to interpret and neutralize a potent non-Vedic spiritual ideal by mapping it onto established Hindu categories.

4.1. The Nature of the Liberated State: Jain Kevala Jñāna versus Sāṃkhya Kaivalya

A comparison of the ultimate soteriological goals of Jainism and Sāṃkhya-Yoga reveals fundamental differences in their conceptions of the liberated state. The ultimate attainment in Jainism is *Kevala Jñāna* (Omniscience), whereas in Sāṃkhya-Yoga it is *Kaivalya* (Isolation). The nature of the knowledge involved is starkly different. *Kevala Jñāna* is a positive and active state of all-encompassing, direct knowledge of all substances and their modes across past, present, and future. It is an intrinsic quality of the pure soul (*jīva*), which becomes manifest once all obscuring karmic particles (*pudgala*) have been eradicated.⁶⁰ In contrast, *Kaivalya* is a state of "negative freedom," defined not by the acquisition of new knowledge but by the cessation of misidentification. It is the complete and final dissociation of pure consciousness (*Puruṣa*) from primordial matter (*Prakṛti*) and all its evolutes, returning the *Puruṣa* to its intrinsic nature as a pure, content-less witness.

This leads to differing states of consciousness. The Jain *kevalin* experiences supreme, infinite, and imperishable consciousness and bliss (*ananta-jñāna*, *ananta-darśana*, *ananta-sukha*).⁶⁴ The liberated *Puruṣa* of Sāṃkhya-Yoga, however, abides in a state of pure, passive, and content-less consciousness (*sākṣin*), characterized by indifference (*mādhyasthya*) and existing beyond pleasure and pain.⁶⁶ While both states involve a complete dissociation from matter—karmic matter (*pudgala*) in Jainism and primordial matter (*Prakṛti*) in Sāṃkhya-Yoga—their views on post-liberation agency diverge significantly.⁶⁰ The liberated *Puruṣa* is completely inactive (*akartr*) and passive; *Prakṛti* ceases its activity for that specific consciousness.⁶² In

Jainism, the two main sects differ: Śvetāmbaras believe the *kevalin* remains active, preaching, traveling, and possessing normal bodily needs, while Digambaras hold that the *kevalin* is inactive, motionless, without bodily needs, and preaches via an impersonal divine sound (*divyadhvani*). Despite these profound differences, both traditions maintain a pluralistic ontology, agreeing that the liberated soul or *Puruṣa* remains an individual, distinct entity, and that there are infinite such distinct entities in existence.

4.2. The Perfected Being as Passive Witness: The Kevalin and the Liberated Puruṣa

The comparison between the Jain *kevalin* and the Sāṃkhya *Puruṣa* reveals a fascinating point of convergence, particularly when viewed through the lens of the Digambara sect of Jainism. The liberated *Puruṣa* of Sāṃkhya is defined by its passivity; it is a pure spectator (*sākṣin*), indifferent (*madhyastha*), and entirely inactive (*akartṛ*). Once liberation is attained, *Prakṛti* ceases its "performance" for that particular *Puruṣa*, which then abides in its eternal isolation.⁶² This state finds a strong echo in the Digambara conception of the *kevalin*. According to Digambara belief, the perfected being does not experience human needs like hunger or thirst, remains largely inactive and motionless in a meditative posture, and does not engage in verbal preaching. Instead, their teaching is manifest as an impersonal, divine sound (*divyadhvani*) that emanates from their body and is interpreted by their disciples. This image of a detached, non-participatory, and transcendent being aligns closely with the Sāṃkhya ideal of the isolated *Puruṣa*.

The Śvetāmbara view, however, presents a stark contrast. For Śvetāmbaras, the *kevalin* continues to live in the world with normal bodily functions, travels extensively, and actively engages in compassionate preaching to guide other beings toward liberation. This vision of an active, engaged savior is fundamentally different from the passive witness of Sāṃkhya. Therefore, a Hindu philosophical reading of the *Tīrthaṅkara* as a Sāṃkhya Yogi finds a much

more compelling analogue in the Digambara ideal, suggesting either a shared ascetic heritage or a possible historical influence between the traditions on the conception of the liberated state.

4.3. Puranic Syncretism: The Absorption of Ṛṣabhanātha into the Vaiṣṇava Fold

The second Hindu approach to the *Tīrthan̄kara* is not one of philosophical comparison but of religious assimilation. This is most evident in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which incorporates the first Jain *Tīrthan̄kara*, Ṛṣabhanātha, into its narrative as a partial *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.⁶⁸ The *Purāṇa* recounts his birth to King Nābhi and Queen Merudevī, acknowledges his role as a great king and the father of Bharata (after whom India, or *Bhāratavarṣa*, is named), and describes his eventual renunciation and adoption of a severe ascetic path as a naked *avadhūta*.⁶⁸

However, the narrative carefully reframes this life story within a Vaiṣṇava theological context. Ṛṣabha's incarnation is presented as a deliberate act by Viṣṇu to teach the path of renunciation and the *dharma* of the *śramaṇas*.⁶⁸ By doing so, the *Purāṇa* performs a powerful act of syncretism: it acknowledges the immense prestige and antiquity of Ṛṣabha but subordinates his tradition by claiming him as a manifestation of its own supreme deity. This strategy neutralizes the "heretical" aspects of Jainism (such as its rejection of Vedic authority) and subsumes its revered founder within the expansive Vedic framework.

This pattern of acknowledgment is not limited to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Other texts like the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Agni Purāṇa* also contain similar accounts. Furthermore, Jain tradition itself fosters connections, identifying the 22nd *Tīrthan̄kara*, Neminātha, as a cousin of the Hindu deity Kṛṣṇa. These intersections, whether initiated from the Hindu or Jain side, testify to a long history of interaction and a shared cultural landscape, even amidst profound doctrinal differences.

V. The Question of Origins: Jainism as a *Sui Generis* Tradition

The question of whether Jainism is a *sui generis* tradition—one that is unique and of its own kind, rather than a derivative of another—is central to understanding its place in Indian religious history. While it shared a common geography, vocabulary, and set of philosophical problems with the Vedic tradition, a substantial body of textual and historical evidence suggests that Jainism's origins lie in a distinct, non-Vedic stream of thought, making it an independent but deeply dialogical faith. The query itself forces a re-evaluation of "Hinduism" not as a monolithic entity from which others diverged, but as a tradition that itself evolved and consolidated in conversation with powerful parallel movements like Jainism.

5.1. The Śramaṇa Movement: Independent Stream or Reaction to Brahmanism?

Jainism is a product of the Śramaṇa movement, a diverse collection of ascetic and renunciate traditions that flourished in India parallel to, but separate from, Vedic society. This movement, which also gave rise to Buddhism and the Ājīvikas, was characterized by a focus on personal ascetic effort (*śrama*), renunciation of household life, and the pursuit of individual liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Indeed, it was largely through the Śramaṇa traditions that these concepts became central to all major Indian religions.

The fundamental point of departure between the Śramaṇa and Vedic worlds was the former's categorical rejection of the epistemic authority of the Vedas and the concomitant ritual and social dominance of the Brahmin priests. While some scholars have viewed the Śramaṇa movement as an "offshoot" or a reaction against Vedism, the predominant view, particularly among Jain scholars and supported by significant evidence, is that it represents an entirely independent cultural and religious stream. This perspective posits that the Śramaṇa tradition was not a protest movement but a pre-existing, non-Vedic worldview, with some scholars suggesting its roots may extend back to the pre-Aryan Indus Valley civilization.

5.2. Textual and Archaeological Evidence for the Antiquity of the Tīrthaṅkara Tradition

The Jain claim to be a *sui generis* tradition is strongly supported by references to its earliest figures in the sacred texts of the Vedic tradition itself.

- **Vedic Evidence:** The *Ṛgveda*, the most ancient of the Vedic texts, contains references that have been identified with the first and twenty-second *Tīrthaṅkaras*, Ṛṣabha and Ariṣṭanemi, respectively. The *Yajurveda* also mentions Ṛṣabha, Ariṣṭanemi, and the second *Tīrthaṅkara*, Ajitanātha. The presence of these figures in the earliest layers of Vedic literature is a powerful argument that the *Tīrthaṅkara* tradition was at least coeval with, if not antecedent to, the composition of the Vedas.
- **Puranic Evidence:** As discussed previously, numerous *Purāṇas*, including the *Bhāgavata*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Agni Purāṇas*, contain detailed accounts of Ṛṣabhanātha. While these texts assimilate him into a Vaiṣṇava framework, their very act of doing so serves as an acknowledgment of his ancient and profound significance, lending historical weight to the Jain tradition's own account of its antiquity.
- **Historical Figures:** Beyond textual references, the historicity of Pārśvanātha, the 23rd *Tīrthaṅkara*, is widely accepted by modern scholarship. He is believed to have lived in the 9th or 8th century BCE, approximately 250 years before Mahāvīra. This firmly establishes that Mahāvīra was not the founder of a new religion, but rather the reformer and propagator of a well-established, pre-existing faith.

5.3. Conclusion on Sui Generis: An Independent but Dialogical Path

The cumulative weight of the evidence strongly supports the conclusion that Jainism is a *sui generis* tradition. Its philosophical foundations, core tenets, and historical lineage originate not in the Vedic world, but in the independent Śramaṇa stream of Indian thought. Its rejection of Vedic authority is not a later reformist stance but a foundational principle.

However, to call it independent is not to suggest it was isolated. Jainism developed in a state of continuous and dynamic dialogue with the schools of Vedic philosophy. They inhabited a shared intellectual landscape, utilized a common philosophical vocabulary (e.g., *karma*, *mokṣa*, *ātman*), and addressed a similar set of ultimate questions, even as they formulated profoundly different answers. The sophisticated critiques from thinkers like Śaṅkara and Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, and the syncretic impulse of the Purāṇas, are testaments to the long and often contentious interaction between these two ancient and formidable traditions. Jainism is thus best understood as an original, independent philosophical system that was a formative and integral contributor to the pluralistic tapestry of Indian thought.

Conclusion: A Synthesis of Findings

This report has examined the complex and multifaceted relationship between Jain pragmatism and the philosophical traditions of Hinduism, navigating questions of derivation, critique, comparison, and origin. The analysis yields several key conclusions that challenge simplistic narratives of linear influence and instead reveal a dynamic of sustained, dialogical interaction between two distinct and ancient Indian worldviews.

First, Jain pragmatism—comprising the ontological principle of *Anekāntavāda*, the analytical epistemology of *Nayavāda*, and the synthetic logic of *Syādvāda*—is a coherent and internally consistent philosophical system. It is not merely an ethical doctrine of tolerance, but a sophisticated realist-pluralist framework designed to resolve the fundamental metaphysical problem of permanence and change by positing an inherently multifaceted reality.

Second, while Jainism employs methodological tools like paradoxical predication that find resonance in the Vedic Upaniṣads, this parallel does not support a claim of direct ontological derivation. The Vedic tradition uses such language as an *apophatic* device to point towards a singular, transcendent, non-dual reality, ultimately negating the world of attributes. In stark contrast, Jainism uses its logical apparatus to affirm the reality of a pluralistic world with

infinite, co-existing attributes. The shared method serves radically divergent metaphysical ends.

Third, the critiques of Jain non-absolutism from orthodox Hindu schools are not monolithic but are projections of each school's own foundational commitments. Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta attacks from a defense of non-dualism, rejecting the Jain position as logically contradictory and epistemologically indeterminate. Kumāṛila Bhaṭṭa's Mīmāṃsā attacks from a defense of scriptural absolutism, seeking to invalidate the rival authority of the omniscient *Tīrthaṅkara* and the non-Vedic Āgamas. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools implicitly critique Jainism from their commitment to determinate logic and a reality of discrete, non-contradictory substances. Fourth, the Hindu interpretation of the *Tīrthaṅkara* is bifurcated. Philosophically, the perfected Jain 'being' can be understood through analogy with the liberated *Puruṣa* of Sāṃkhya-Yoga, particularly in the passive, detached form conceived by the Digambara sect. Religiously, figures like Ṛṣabhanātha are assimilated into the Vaiṣṇava tradition as *avatāras*, a syncretic strategy that acknowledges their importance while subordinating their independent status.

Finally, the weight of textual and historical evidence—including references to *Tīrthaṅkaras* in the Vedas and Purāṇas and the established historicity of Pārśvanātha—strongly supports the Jain claim to be a *sui generis* tradition. Its origins lie not in Vedism, but in the parallel and likely more ancient Śramaṇa stream of Indian thought. Ultimately, the relationship between Jainism and Hinduism is best characterized as a long, complex, and often contentious dialogue. Their encounters have been marked by profound philosophical disagreement, mutual critique, and moments of syncretic assimilation, revealing not the derivation of one from the other, but the enduringly pluralistic and dynamic nature of India's intellectual history itself.

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OCHS. This article was published at ESamskriti where some rigour has been removed. All online citations have been removed for easy reading and the same will be provided when this is published in print.

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