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Jain Syllogisms for and against Liberation for Women:

The Force of Validity over Inferences

In *Gender and Salvation*, Jaini presents several Digambara arguments and Śvētāmbara objections to why women cannot attain moksha. The main issue has to do with clothes. Both groups accept that Mahāvīra and his early adherent mendicants went naked. To the Digambaras, going naked is fundamental, and one cannot attain liberation without such a practice – which speaks to perfection in one of the three jewels, right conduct. To the Śvētāmbaras, going naked is an optional Jain mendicant practice – like fasting. They do not see clothes as a possession that needs to be let go of to achieve perfection in the right conduct.

The first known Jain scholar to have put forth the controversy in Jain philosophical writings was the Digambara mendicant Kundakunda. Summing up Digambara arguments, he claimed that “a woman’s renunciation is not comparable to that of a man”¹ because women, having female bodies, cannot go naked. Another Jain sect, now extinct, the Yapaniyas were the first ones to argue against Kundakunda’s position. They sided with the Digambaras prohibiting women from going naked, but not because women were *prima facie* ineligible for liberation. Instead, they claimed that going naked is unnecessary for a woman to achieve liberation. According to the Yapaniyas, “a modicum of clothing is not a hindrance to the attainment of moksha.”²

In this paper, I argue that Śvētāmbaras fail to persuade the Digambaras because they rely on oppositional inferences instead of straight-up attacks on the Digambara points.

¹ Jaini, *Gender*, 4

² Jaini, *Gender*, 4

For example, unlike the Yapaniyas who claim a piece of clothes should not dictate deliberations on moksha for women, the Śvētāmbaras prefer only to oppose, say, the Digambara position that there is no valid evidence to justify moksha for women by inferring that there is no valid evidence of the opposite either. It would be better to deduce that there is no such evidence than to infer the opposite likelihood. This is further problematic because the nature of inference is not validity but only likelihood. This will become clear as I analyze some of the first arguments and objections both sides pose.

Before I do so, it is essential to note that both sides employ Sanskrit terms to discuss their arguments' components. The form of such arguments follows what is known as the Nyāya syllogism. This syllogism is a *modus ponens* of sorts whose premises go up and down from the conclusion. In other words, if a *modus ponens* operates like this:

If p then q,

p

q

The Nyāya syllogism operates like this:

q

p

If p then q, (as in an example)

p

q

The following is an example of a Nyāya syllogism:

There is fire

Because of smoke

If there is smoke, there is fire (as in a culinary hearth)

There is smoke

There is fire

According to Colebrooke,³ a Nyāya syllogism comprises five members: the proposition, the reason, the instance, the application, and the conclusion. In other words, the proposition that there is fire follows from the reason that there is smoke – as in the instance of a culinary hearth. Applied to a hypothetical syllogism: if there is smoke, there is fire. Given the proposition that there is smoke, one concludes that there is fire through the instance and its application.

With this background in mind, let us tackle the Digambara argument for the impossibility of moksha for women. It claims that “there is moksha for men only, not for women; because of the absence of valid evidence to support the claim; as is the case with congenital hermaphrodites.”⁴ In other words, the Digambaras claim there is no instance by which the Śvētāmbaras could claim that there is the possibility of moksha for women. Because there is none, and likewise with hermaphrodites, it is impossible to claim that moksha is possible for women. The evidence is just not there. Note that the Digambaras do not infer the impossibility of moksha for women without valid

³ Ganeri, *Indian Logic*, 47

⁴ Jaini, *Gender*, 6

evidence. They conclude the impossibility of moksha for women from the absence of evidence.

Note also that this argument is not formally put as a Nyāya syllogism. As I mentioned above that both groups use Sanskrit terminology of Nyāya syllogism to analyze their claims, let us put this argument into Nyāya form.

There is no moksha for women

Because of the absence of valid evidence to support the claim

If there is no evidence to support the claim, there is no moksha for women (as there is none for congenital hermaphrodites)

There is no evidence to support the claim

There is no moksha for women

One of the problems with the Digambara syllogism is the assumption that one cannot argue for “p” from the absence of “p.” This is a problem because if there is an absence of “p,” “p” is already inferred given that “~p” entails the existence of “p.” If there is no such inference, then, from the absence of “p,” one could not conclude the absence of “p” – given that “p,” not inferred, would not exist. In other words, the Digambaras cannot claim that there is no moksha for women from the lack of evidence that “there is moksha for women.” That is so because if there is an absence of “moksha for women,” “moksha for women” is already inferred as a possibility. If there is no such inference, from the absence of “moksha for women,” one could not conclude such absence – given that “there is moksha for women,” not inferred, could not be a possibility. In sum, if the

Digambaras claim that there is no valid evidence of moksha for women from the absence of moksha for women, such inference of theirs is not valid.

Now, one may object to this objection, as Gaunilo did of Anselm, that just because one can posit “p,” it does not mean that “p” is a real possibility. In other words, Digambaras could claim that just because Śvētāmbaras can posit the possibility of moksha for women – even though no valid evidence has been provided – it does not mean that moksha is possible for women. I think the Digambaras have a good point here. This is an instance in which it would be better for the Śvētāmbaras to produce valid evidence for the possibility of moksha for women instead of just positing that the Digambaras cannot claim the opposite evidence either. For, what is the opposite evidence? That there is no moksha for women is evidence for the Digambara claim.

To the Digambara claim, for instance, that just because a Śvētāmbara can think of moksha for women, it does not mean that moksha for women is a possibility, the Śvētāmbaras could reason thus: given that the Digambaras argue from the absence of “p,” and the Śvētāmbaras from the absence of “~p,” the dilemma is that either “~p” or “~~p.” In other words, either there is the absence of moksha for women, or there is the absence of absence of moksha for women. Note that “~~p” is the equivalent of “p.” That is, the absence of the absence of moksha for women is equivalent to there being moksha for women. Thus, moksha for women follows logically from a process of natural deduction, indicating valid evidence for the possibility of moksha for women. That is not, however, what the Śvētāmbara will claim in their objection.

Jaini presents the Śvētāmbara objection to the Digambara claim that there is no moksha for women because of the lack of valid evidence as an oppositional inference and not as a straight-up response based on valid evidence. Śvētāmbaras claim that “there is moksha for women; because there is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for them; as in the case of men.” Putting this down formally as a Nyāya syllogism:

There is moksha for women

Because there is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for women

If there is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for women, there is moksha for women

– as in the case of men

There is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for women

There is moksha for women.

According to Jaini, the causes mentioned above allude to the three jewels of Jain practice: the right view, conduct, and knowledge. In other words, Śvētāmbaras object that as there is no deficiency in the case of men practicing the three jewels, there is no deficiency in the case of women practicing the three jewels. Both men and women practice the three jewels in order to achieve perfection in the three jewels. Both are on equal levels. Note that the unstated premise in this argument is that it cannot matter whether there is a lack of valid evidence for the possibility of moksha for women; what matters is whether there is any valid evidence or not – the very absence or the absence of the absence – is secondary to the evidence way in which both men and women practice the three jewels.

However, the problem with such a proposition is that it relies on the conditions of the externality of right conduct. The Śvētāmbaras claim that by seeing people practicing the right conduct, men and women can be judged on such externality for the possibilities of one's moksha. This proves problematic for the Śvētāmbaras because the Digambaras can employ this exact condition of the externality of right conduct to lead the Śvētāmbara into a *reductio ad absurdum*: suppose there is moksha for women. According to the Śvētāmbaras, one cannot know that before the moment right before death. Again, according to Śvētāmbaras, such judgment is imperceptible right before death. If it is so, one cannot know whether there is moksha for women or not. Thus, it is at least as likely as the opposite conclusion that there is no moksha for women.

Another problem with the Śvētāmbara position is that the practice of right conduct does not equate to perfection in right conduct. According to Jaini, Digambaras claim that even though the practice of right conduct is to be found in women, "moksha is possible only when the aspirant attains to the absolute perfection of [right conduct]" – otherwise, "all religious persons at the moment immediately following their initiation into mendicancy would necessarily attain moksha."⁵ To the Digambaras, this cannot be the case.

In other words,

There is no moksha for women

Because of their lack of absolute perfection in the three jewels

⁵ Jaini, Gender, 6

If there is a lack of absolute perfection in the three jewels, one cannot be liberated (as is the case with women)

Women lack absolute perfection in the three jewels

A woman cannot be liberated

One of the problems with the Digambara insistence on “absolute perfection” is that there is a Pan-Indian idea of initiation liberating the individual from all future sticking karma. All that is left is the sticky karma that has started to accrue in this lifetime. Thus, it is possible that a female mendicant, upon being initiated, is liberated from all future sticking karmas. All that is left for her to go through is the sticky karma that has started to accrue in this lifetime. Suppose the Jain idea of sticky karma – that one’s liberation is hindered by the karma stuck to one’s body – holds that a woman’s future sticky karma has been removed from her. All that is left for her is the sticky karma she has to endure in her current lifetime. It is unclear how this sticky karma must lead to the positing of impossibility of moksha for women. If sticky karma has no future, it will eventually end by itself. At that moment, a woman may then be perceived to be liberated.

This is not, however, how the Śvētāmbaras object to the Digambaras. The Śvētāmbaras insist not on providing valid evidence for the possibility of moksha for women but on the inference that “absolute perfection” cannot be perceived. This proves to be a further problem because by claiming that this moment is right before death, the Śvētāmbaras leave open the possibility that the Digambara claim that one does not achieve perfection upon mendicant initiation is valid. In other words, if perfection can

only be perceived at the time right before death, the Śvētāmbaras agree that at the moment of initiation, one cannot have achieved perfection in ridding oneself of sticky karma – which is a Digambara premise to conclude that just because women mendicants have been initiated, it does not follow that they have achieved perfection in right conduct.

Therefore, the Śvētāmbara arguments against the Digambaras suffer from a lack of validity. The above are only some of the objections that could be posed to the Śvētāmbaras as they hope to defeat the Digambara claim that there is no valid evidence for the liberation of women with oppositional inferences only. Again, instead of pushing back against the idea that there is no valid piece of evidence, scriptural or not, to prove that women can attain liberation, the best the Śvētāmbara can do is to claim that the opposite is not true either. Likewise, instead of pushing back against the claim that women cannot attain moksha because they do not achieve perfection in right conduct, the Śvētāmbaras entangle themselves further by claiming that such cannot be known until the moment right before death.

Had the Śvētāmbaras the force of the arguments the Yapaniyas once had, they would be able to refute the Digambara argument straight-up, not only oppositionally. Thus, when the Śvētāmbaras tell Digambaras, "if you have any other logical means to prove your argument, then let us hear your arguments,"⁶ they have forgotten that validity is much more logically certain than likely inferences.

⁶ Jaini, Gender, 7

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