

Revisiting Jain Syllogisms:

Challenging Inferences in the Women's Liberation Debate

In his work on *Gender and Salvation*, Jaini delves into the intricacies of Digambara arguments and Śvētāmbara objections regarding the possibility of women attaining moksha. At the heart of this debate lies the contentious issue of attire. Both Jain sects acknowledge that Mahāvīra and his early adherent mendicants practiced nudity. However, their perspectives diverge significantly. For Digambaras, the act of going naked is considered fundamental and indispensable in the pursuit of liberation. According to their beliefs, one cannot achieve moksha without embracing this practice, which is seen as a manifestation of perfection in one of the three jewels of Jainism: right conduct.

Conversely, Śvētāambaras view going naked as an optional practice for Jain mendicants, akin to fasting. They do not perceive clothing as a possession that must be relinquished to attain perfection in right conduct. In their perspective, liberation can be pursued without shedding clothing. This discourse underscores attire's central role in the intricate tapestry of Jain philosophy, particularly concerning women's liberation.

Kundakunda, a notable Digambara mendicant, is the first known Jain scholar to introduce the contentious issue of gender in Jain philosophical writings. In a succinct encapsulation of Digambara's arguments, he asserted that "a woman's renunciation is not comparable to that of a man" due to the inherent challenge posed by women's physical bodies, which, in their view, rendered them unable to go naked as part of their spiritual practice. However, an extinct Jain sect, the Yapaniyas, was the vanguard in

challenging Kundakunda's stance. While they aligned with the Digambara prohibition against women going naked, their reasons differed significantly. The Yapaniyas did not assert that women were inherently ineligible for liberation but contended that going naked was not a prerequisite for women to attain moksha. According to the Yapaniyas, "a modicum of clothing is not a hindrance to the attainment of moksha,"¹ signaling a departure from the traditional viewpoint. This intriguing debate illuminates the nuanced perspectives within Jain philosophy regarding gender and the path to spiritual liberation.

In this paper, I contend that Śvētāmbaras' efforts to persuade the Digambaras are often ineffective due to their reliance on oppositional inferences instead of direct refutations of Digambara positions. Unlike the Yapaniyas, who assert that a piece of clothing should not be a determining factor in discussions about women's moksha, Śvētāmbaras tend to engage primarily in opposing Digambara viewpoints. For instance, rather than challenging the Digambara claim that there is no valid evidence to support women's moksha, Śvētāmbaras often counter by suggesting that no valid evidence supports the opposite view. Instead of deducing that such evidence does not exist, they infer its absence, creating a subtle yet significant distinction. This approach raises issues because inference hinges on likelihood rather than strict validity. This distinction becomes evident as we delve into both sides' initial arguments and objections in this debate.

¹ Jaini, *Gender*, 4

Before delving into the analysis of these arguments, it is crucial to acknowledge that both sides of this debate employ Sanskrit terminology to articulate their argument components. These arguments are structured following what is commonly referred to as the Nyāya syllogism. The Nyāya syllogism is akin to a modus ponens but distinct in how its premises are arranged concerning the conclusion. While a modus ponens operates as follows:

1. If p , then q .
2. p .
3. Therefore, q .

The Nyāya syllogism follows this pattern:

1. q .
2. p .
3. If p , then q . (as exemplified below)
4. p .
5. Therefore, q .

As an illustration, consider the following Nyāya syllogism:

1. There is fire.
2. Because of smoke.
3. If there is smoke, there is fire (as in a culinary hearth).
4. There is smoke.
5. Therefore, there is fire.

This structural distinction is fundamental to understanding the framework within which these arguments are presented and debated. As elucidated by Colebrooke,² a Nyāya syllogism consists of five distinct elements: the proposition, the reason, the instance, the application, and the conclusion. To illustrate this concept further, consider the example where the proposition "there is fire" is derived from the reason "there is smoke," as exemplified in the instance of a culinary hearth. Applied to a hypothetical syllogism, such as "if there is smoke, there is fire," when we are provided with the proposition "there is smoke," we are then able to conclude "there is fire" by employing the instance and its application within the logical structure.

With this foundational understanding, let us delve into the Digambara argument asserting the impossibility of moksha for women. Their argument posits that moksha is attainable by men alone, not by women, owing to the absence of substantiated evidence to support such a claim, as is similarly the case with congenital hermaphrodites.³ In essence, the Digambaras assert that there exists no instance that Śvētāmbaras can cite to contend that moksha is a possibility for women. Given this absence of evidence, they posit that it is impossible to claim that women can attain moksha. The Digambaras do not make an inference regarding the impossibility of moksha for women without valid evidence; instead, they arrive after impossibility based on the absence of such supporting evidence.

It is important to note that this argument is not formally structured as a Nyāya syllogism. To align with the Sanskrit terminology and framework of Nyāya syllogisms

² Ganeri, *Indian Logic*, 47

³ Jaini, *Gender*, 6

that both groups employ in their analysis, let us reconfigure this argument in a Nyāya format:

1. There is no moksha for women.
2. Because of the absence of valid evidence to support the claim.
3. If there is no evidence to support the claim, there is no moksha for women
(paralleling the case of congenital hermaphrodites).
4. There is no evidence to support the claim.
5. Therefore, there is no moksha for women.

In this revised format, the argument follows the Nyāya syllogistic structure, making it more consistent with the analytical framework employed by both Jain groups.

One of the critical issues with the Digambara syllogism lies in its foundational assumption that one cannot deduce "p" from the absence of "p." This assumption is problematic because when there is an absence of "p," the mere negation " \sim p" inherently implies the potential existence of "p." Failure to acknowledge this inference means that from the absence of "p," one cannot logically conclude the absence of "p." The Digambaras cannot assert the non-existence of moksha for women based on the lack of evidence supporting "there is moksha for women." In the absence of evidence for "moksha for women," the mere possibility of "there is moksha for women," though not explicitly inferred, still exists. Therefore, if there is no such inference, it is not logically valid to deduce the absence of "moksha for women" solely from the absence of evidence. In summary, Digambaras' argument claiming the absence of valid evidence

for moksha for women from the absence of moksha for women is inherently flawed in terms of logical validity.

However, an objection to this objection is worth considering, reminiscent of Gaunilo's critique of Anselm, which asserts that merely positing "p" does not necessarily make "p" a plausible reality. In other words, the Digambaras could counter that just because the Śvētāmbaras can conceive the potential for moksha for women – even without valid evidence – it does not automatically render moksha a genuine possibility. Indeed, the Digambaras have a valid point here. This scenario underscores a situation in which it would be more compelling for the Śvētāmbaras to present substantial evidence supporting the prospect of moksha for women rather than solely positing that the Digambaras cannot substantiate the opposite claim. The question arises: what exactly constitutes opposite evidence? The assertion that there is no moksha for women, in itself, supports the Digambara stance.

In response to the Digambara assertion that merely conceiving of moksha for women does not validate its possibility, the Śvētāmbaras could offer a counterargument as follows: considering that the Digambaras argue based on the absence of "p." In contrast, the Śvētāmbaras argue that from the absence of " $\sim p$," we encounter a dilemma where the choice lies between " $\sim p$ " and " $\sim\sim p$." In other words, it is a matter of either the absence of moksha for women or the absence of the absence of moksha for women. It is important to note that " $\sim\sim p$ " is equivalent to "p." Therefore, the absence of the absence of moksha for women is equivalent to the existence of moksha for women. Consequently, the logical deduction leads to the conclusion that moksha for women is a

valid possibility, supported by a process of natural deduction, indicating the presence of credible evidence in favor of the prospect of moksha for women. However, it is worth noting that this is not the precise claim made by the Śvētāmbara in their objection.

Jaini highlights that the Śvētāmbara objection to Digambara's assertion – that there is no moksha for women due to the absence of valid evidence – is framed as an oppositional inference rather than a direct response grounded in substantial evidence. The Śvētāmbaras argue that "there is moksha for women" because there exists no deficiency in the factors that facilitate moksha for women, similar to the case of men. To formally present this as a Nyāya syllogism:

1. There is moksha for women.
2. Because there is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for women.
3. If there is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for women, there is moksha for women – akin to the case of men.
4. There is no deficiency in the causes that lead to moksha for women.
5. Therefore, there is moksha for women.

In this Nyāya format, the Śvētāmbara objection is structured logically, asserting the possibility of moksha for women based on the absence of deficiencies in the factors contributing to their liberation, in parallel to the circumstances of men.

Jaini clarifies that the causes mentioned previously correspond to the three fundamental facets of Jain practice: right view, conduct, and knowledge. In essence, Śvētāmbaras object by asserting that, since there is no deficiency in men's practice of the

three jewels, there should be no deficiency in women's practice of the same three jewels. Both men and women diligently pursue perfection in these three jewels, placing them on equal footing in this endeavor. It is essential to recognize that this argument's underlying, unspoken premise is that the presence or absence of valid evidence for the possibility of moksha for women may be of secondary importance. Instead, the primary focus lies on the evidence found in the shared practice of the three jewels by both men and women, transcending the distinction between the absence or presence of such evidence.

Nonetheless, a fundamental issue with this proposition lies in its reliance on the external manifestations of right conduct. The Śvētāmbaras argue that observing individuals practicing right conduct can assess the potential for moksha in both men and women based on these external actions. However, this approach introduces a significant challenge for the Śvētāmbaras because the Digambaras can employ the exact condition of external right conduct to lead the Śvētāmbara perspective into a *reductio ad absurdum*. Let us consider a hypothetical scenario: suppose there is indeed moksha for women. According to the Śvētāmbaras, one cannot ascertain this fact until right before death.

Furthermore, they contend that this judgment of moksha's attainability is imperceptible at that critical juncture. If this assertion holds, it logically follows that one cannot definitively determine whether moksha is achievable for women. Consequently, the likelihood of moksha for women is, at the very least, as plausible as the opposite conclusion that there is no moksha for women.

Another critical issue with the Śvētāmbara standpoint is the misunderstanding that the practice of right conduct is equivalent to achieving perfection in right conduct. As Jaini elucidates, the Digambaras maintain that while right conduct can be observed in women, moksha is attainable only when the aspirant reaches the absolute perfection of [right conduct]. Otherwise, in the Digambara view, all religious individuals immediately following their initiation into mendicancy would inevitably attain moksha,⁴ which they find untenable.

In essence, the argument can be structured as follows:

1. There is no moksha for women.
2. Due to their lack of absolute perfection in the three jewels.
3. If the three jewels lack absolute perfection, one cannot attain liberation (as with women).
4. Women lack absolute perfection in the three jewels.
5. Therefore, a woman cannot attain liberation.

This argument underscores the Digambara perspective that the mere practice of right conduct does not equate to achieving the necessary level of perfection in the three jewels, which, in their view, is a prerequisite for attaining moksha.

A challenge with the Digambara insistence on "absolute perfection" is that it contrasts a broader Pan-Indian idea of initiation liberating individuals from all future binding karma. This concept suggests that, following initiation, individuals are freed from all future karma that would accrue. What remains is the karma already

⁴ *Gender*, 6

accumulated in the present lifetime. In this context, it becomes plausible that a female mendicant, upon receiving initiation, could indeed be liberated from all future binding karmas. Consequently, the only karma she can endure is the one currently adhering to her existence.

Suppose we accept the Jain belief that one's liberation is impeded by karma adhering to the body. In this case, a woman's future binding karma seems to have been effectively eliminated. What remains is the karma she must endure in her present life. It becomes less clear how this remaining karma would necessitate the assertion of moksha's impossibility for women. If the future-binding karma ceases to exist, it will naturally end. At that juncture, a woman could potentially be perceived as liberated. In essence, the Digambara stance encounters a challenge in reconciling their emphasis on "absolute perfection" with the broader notion of initiation freeing individuals from future binding karma, raising questions about the claim that moksha is unattainable for women.

However, it is worth noting that the Śvētāmbaras' objection to the Digambaras does not take the approach of presenting valid evidence for the possibility of moksha for women. Instead, they emphasize the inference that the concept of "absolute perfection" cannot be directly perceived. This perspective introduces another layer of complexity because, by asserting that this moment of perception occurs right before death, the Śvētāmbaras inadvertently leave room for the possibility that the Digambara claim, stating that perfection is not attained upon mendicant initiation, might hold.

In simpler terms, if perfection can only be perceived right before death, the Śvētāmbaras essentially concede that, at the point of initiation, one has not achieved the required perfection in purging oneself of sticky karma. This aligns with a Digambara premise, which argues that the mere initiation of female mendicants does not necessarily imply that they have attained the level of perfection required in the right conduct. This nuanced exchange highlights the intricacies of the debate, where both sides grapple with the timing and nature of perfection in the context of sticky karma and its implications for moksha attainability by women.

Hence, the Śvētāmbara arguments against the Digambaras suffer from a lack of logical validity. The objections presented above represent just a portion of the potential criticisms that could be raised against the Śvētāmbara perspective as they seek to challenge the Digambara assertion that no valid evidence exists supporting women's liberation, relying solely on oppositional inferences.

To elaborate, instead of directly challenging the premise that there is no substantiated piece of evidence, whether scriptural or otherwise, to establish the possibility of women attaining liberation, the Śvētāmbaras primarily counter by asserting that the opposite cannot be proven. Likewise, in response to the claim that women cannot achieve moksha due to their failure to attain perfection in right conduct, the Śvētāmbaras find themselves in a more intricate quandary by contending that such perfection can only be known at the moment right before death, which further complicates the discourse. In essence, the Śvētāmbara objections, while engaging in a

constructive dialogue, may encounter challenges in terms of logical consistency and establishing a solid counter-argument to the Digambara perspective.

If the Śvētāmbaras possessed the compelling arguments that the Yapaniyas once presented, they would be equipped to effectively challenge the Digambara standpoint directly rather than relying solely on oppositional reasoning. Consequently, when the Śvētāmbaras call upon the Digambaras to present alternative logical methods to substantiate their claims,⁵ they may overlook that validity carries more logical certainty than mere likelihood-based inferences. In essence, the Śvētāmbaras might be in a stronger position to refute the Digambara argument if they could present robust, logically sound counterarguments, highlighting the importance of validity in logical discourse over probabilistic inferences.

⁵ *Gender*, 7

Works Cited

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