Chapter - III

Deconstruction and Syadvada:

Relative Nature of Knowledge and Inadequacy of Language

3.1 Postmodernism and Deconstruction:

Postmodernism and deconstruction are closely related to each other. Deconstruction imparted vitality to the postmodern stance. To be more precise, the postmodern stance came into existence as a result of the speculations on the limitations of language. Deconstruction, as a matter of fact, gave the necessary impetus to Postmodernism which was also strengthened by findings in other areas of studies. The major difference between Postmodernism and deconstruction is that of inclusivity. Postmodernism is all embracing and deconstruction itself is a postmodern viewpoint. Deconstruction came to the conclusion (or open-endedness) thanks to its analysis of language and its inadequacies. Even though everything in the world can be deconstructed, its primary concern is to show the instability of language. Since all communication (most of them) takes place through language, there cannot be anything outside the language. As a result, it becomes imperative that one understands the philosophy of language that deconstruction propounds as it is one of the mainstay contentions of Postmodernism. Robinson identifies postmodern skepticism with the linguistic uncertainty:

Postmodernism is perhaps just a convenient label for a set of attitudes, values beliefs and feelings about what it means to be living in the late 20th century. The only certainties about Postmodernism are that it is deeply skeptical and that this doubt derives from an obsession with language and meaning. The problem of language is perhaps our best access to Postmodern skepticism. (2005; 35)
Postmodernism is highly skeptical of everything that claims finality and absolutism. It is not ready to accept anything without subjecting it to thorough analysis. Fredrick Nietzsche, the great philosopher, is celebrated as the father of Postmodernism. By profession, Nietzsche was a philologist. It should be clear as to why Nietzsche was very particular and critical about language. According to Nietzsche, all human beings live in the prison house of language. Language is not a medium that helps one communicate one’s ideas but a screen that stands between the individual and reality. This stance is characteristic of Postmodernism. Nietzsche questioned the view that language can represent reality. Robinson writes:

Human language has no coherent correspondence with the ‘real’ world. Language can never be ‘literal’ in the sense that it can describe the reality of the world to us. Concepts like ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ are relative to language or ‘metaphorical’ and can only ever lie within language. They can tell us nothing about the world. Nietzsche’s radical view of the relationship between language and the world pre-echoes many of the central ideas of 20th century philosophers like Wittgenstein and Derrida. (2005; 16-17)

Nietzsche was the first person who called into question the claims of the Enlightenment school of philosophy. The enlightenment philosophers believed that it was possible to arrive at absolute knowledge. The enlightenment philosophers like Descartes, Rousseau and Kant believed in the supremacy of reason and thought that pursuing the path of reason, which is universal and objective, will lead one to infallible knowledge. Postmodernism is thus a denial of this belief in infallible knowledge. Butler remarks in this regard:
He (Jean Lyotard) argued in his ‘La Condition Postmodern’ (published in French in 1979, in English in 1984) that we now live in an era in which legitimizing ‘master narratives’ are in crisis and decline. These narratives are contained in or implied by major philosophies such as Kantianism, Hegelianism, and Marxism, which argue that history is progressive, that knowledge can liberate us, that all knowledge has a secret unity. Lyotard considers that such doctrines have lost their credibility since the Second World War. (2002; 13)

This incredulity towards metanarratives started with Nietzsche. Nietzsche wrote a book titled ‘Revaluation of All Values’. ‘Revaluation of all values’ is the way of Postmodernism and deconstruction. Accepting something without evaluation leads one to mental stupor and mediocrity. Descartes believed that not everything could be doubted. He was of the opinion that ‘the self’ cannot be questioned, as it is self-evident. His doubt got cleared once he drew the conclusion i.e. ‘I think therefore I am’. ‘I’ cannot be questioned because the questioner himself is the question. The existence of the ‘other’ can be questioned as it is not ‘present’ to the subject but the subject cannot question his/her own existence. This line of thinking made Descartes conclude that there is something whose existence is certain. But Nietzsche brushed this argument aside. An excerpt from Robinson will be illuminating in this context:

Nietzsche also saw language as the key player in a continual process of human self-deception. … Not only will our grammar control the ways in which our thoughts are organized but also more drastically it will determine what sorts of thoughts it is possible for us to have. So the subject-predicate grammar we think with means that we impose a subject-object framework onto the world, and this encourages us to
believe for example, that there is an ‘ego’ or an ‘I’ that exists as a transcendent Cartesian entity somehow inside us separate from our physical existence. (2005; 17)

Nietzsche thus claimed that language constructs reality and it does not just represent reality. He was of the opinion that all human endeavors including science suffered this misconception. Nietzsche thus questioned the validity of science and his questions laid the foundation for the present ‘Postmodern science.’ Even science, which is often thought to be the representation and elucidation of reality, is called into question. One knows very well that what was considered to be scientific in the yester years became unscientific now. If one follows this line of argument, it would be easy to see that what is considered to be scientific today may be refuted tomorrow. The following excerpt from Dave Robinson will throw light on the issue:

Nature’s conformity to ‘law’ of which you physicists talk so proudly… exists only owing to your bad philology… things do not behave regularly, according to a rule. There are no things… they behave just as little under the constraint of necessity… and our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language. (2005; 21)

Language is at the heart of postmodern philosophy. Language and meaning are the two important words in postmodernism. As a result of this, it becomes imperative to analyze ‘language’, its nature and the way in which language communicates ‘ideas’. Deconstruction is highly skeptical about language, meaning, and the process of signification. Deconstruction came into existence thanks to structuralism and its notions of medium, message and mediation. Hence it will be highly rewarding to analyze structuralism as it will automatically lay the platform for the analysis of Deconstruction.
3.2 Saussure and Structuralism:

Many scholars believe that ‘language’ is the most important feature, which distinguishes man from other animals. Communication often takes place through language. Man’s most admirable achievements took place because of it. But how does communication take place? It is the most important question. What one sees, hears or reads is not reality but the representation of reality. It is not reality itself. What one sees is the sign and the comprehension takes place because of the process of signification. The branch of study, which specializes in this ‘sign-system and meaning’, is semiotics. If it is understood that medium may manipulate reality, it becomes imperative to understand the medium. Only by understanding the medium, the process of medication can be understood. Language is the medium taken for analysis in this research work. ‘How does language communicate?’ and ‘How is language structured?’ are the important questions to be analyzed.

Our communication system i.e. language is different from other communication systems of animals. In what way are human beings different from animals? The features, which differentiate human beings from other primates, are called design features. One of the most important features, which differentiate human language from other communication systems of primates, is arbitrariness. This quality of arbitrariness is the seed-concept of structuralism. To understand structuralism, arbitrariness must be understood. ‘Words do not have any logical connection with the object they are referring to’ is the argument of the concept of arbitrariness. ‘Arbitrariness’ is the core concept of structuralism. The claims of structuralism are based on this core concept. But the principle of arbitrariness is not the original concept of Saussure. But he added a different dimension to the argument. Chandler writes:
While the notion of the arbitrariness of language was not new, the emphasis which Saussure gave it can be seen as an original contribution, particularly in the context of a theory that bracketed the referent. Note that although Saussure prioritized speech, he also stressed that ‘the signs used in writing are arbitrary, the letter ‘t’, for instance has no connection with the sound it denotes. (2003; 27)

The discussion of arbitrariness brings one to the discussion of Saussure’s analysis of language. Both Saussure and Chomsky were structuralists, in the sense that they wanted to find out the ‘structure’, which makes the event possible. Despite their ‘ideological similarity, they part ways when it comes to the analysis of language. Chomsky’s focus was syntax as he hailed from the school of American structuralism. On the other hand, Saussure makes the analysis of words central. Struccok elucidates the difference in focus between Saussure and Chomsky in the following way:

Chomsky has followed in the tradition of American structuralism in taking the sentence to be the basic unit of language and in showing relatively little interest in the word. With Saussurean structuralism the reverse is the case. Following the example of Saussure himself, it has fixed its attention on the word in its function as linguistic sign. The definition of language offered by a Saussurean structuralist would be that it is a system formed of linguistic signs, and for the sake of argument we can say that the terms ‘word’ and ‘sign’ are here interchangeable.

(2003; 34).

Saussure attached more importance to words and as a result his analysis was more on ‘words’ than ‘sentences’. Even though Chomsky’s supporters have done much research on phonology and morphology, syntax remains his forte. Coming to
Saussurean analysis, one can observe that Saussure gave more emphasis on spoken language than written language. In this regard, he followed the footsteps of his predecessors. This is what is called ‘phonocentricism’ by the deconstructionists and this aspect will be dealt with later in the thesis. Saussure laid more emphasis on spoken language. He considered a word to be sign. According to Saussure, a sign has two aspects i.e. signifier and signified. ‘Signifier’ is the sound image of the word and ‘signified’ will be concept that the word argues. A sign is then a combination of signifier and signified. Saussure writes:

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer’s psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a material element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept. (1983, 66)

The Saussurean model of the sign is revolutionary. He, for the first time, took the concept away from the world and placed it in the mind of the listener. The important point is that both the signifier and the signified are psychological. The arrows in the Saussurean model of the sign signify the process of signification. A sign should have a signifier and signified. There cannot be meaningless signifier and a formless signified sometimes, ‘signified’ is taken to the object in the world outside. This problem occurs in the ‘Course in General Linguistics’ itself. ‘Referent’ is the word used to signify the
objects in the world. ‘Signified’ means the psychological concept even though both the words have been used synonymously in the ‘Course in General Linguistics’ at times.

Saussure stressed that both ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ are psychological and he compared them to two sides of a paper. They are inseparable and the invocation of one necessarily leads to the invocation of the other. It is time to reassess the arbitrariness principle. Saussure advocated that there is no logical connection between ‘a word’ and its referent. The acceptance of arbitrariness is a more radical step forward than one imagines as it causes many a thing tumble. Struccok writes:

The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is a more radical matter than is sometimes realized, because it establishes the autonomy of language in respect of reality. Structuralism tends to reverse the precedence which a nomenclaturist accords to the world outside language, by proposing that far from the world determining the order of our language, our language determines the order of the world. (2003; 36-37)

The principle of arbitrariness is central to structuralism not only for the reason stated above but also for other reasons. If there is no logical relationship between ‘a word’ and its referent, then how does language communicate? Saussure’s original contribution comes to the fore at this point. In fact, post-structuralism goes beyond structuralism at this point. Bertens explains how meaning is thought to be given birth to in the structuralist’s scheme of things:

If the form of words is not dictated by their relationship with what they refer to, then that form must have its origin elsewhere. Saussure traces the origin of the form of words of linguistic signs to the principle of differentiation. New words like ‘nerd’ take their place among existing words because they are different. The whole system is based on minimal
differences… as Saussure himself says of all the elements that make up a linguistic system their most precise characteristic is being what the others are not'. (2003; 57)

Languages communicate because of their internal difference. The word ‘rat’ communicates what it communicates because of its not being ‘mat’, ’bat’, ’cat’ and so on. As a matter of fact, the Jain philosophy also talks about the simultaneous co-existence of ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence’. Saussure in this regard concluded that ‘presence’ is determined not only by the presence of the sign but also by the absence of other signs. But one point must be made clear before one goes ahead. Saussure advocates that a sign is both arbitrary and fixed. It is arbitrary in the sense that there is no logical connection between the ‘word’ and ‘the object it refers to’. It is fixed in the sense the individual has no power to change as s/he wishes. Thus a word is paradoxically arbitrary and fixed at the same time. To quote Wheeler:

Saussure, however, observed that the signs are originally arbitrarily set up and in due course come to designate things or referents, which are accepted and understood within a particular social/linguistic group. Therefore a sign is arbitrary with reference to nature but not culture. It thus attains stability by repetitive use but does not have ultimate determinacy with regard to its referentiality. (1997; viii)

Saussure also differentiates between the value of a sign and the process of signification. The value of the sign comes to pass thanks to the association of the sign with other signs of the language. A sign has no value on its own and its value is in its inclusivity and in its exclusivity. Saussure uses the analogy of the chess game to illustrate the value of a sign. In the game of chess no particular piece enjoys any value independently. They gain their value as part of the system. A horse is what it is because
of its not being the pawn, bishop and etc. Here the value assigned to the particular sign comes out of the principle of differentiation. Saussure writes in this connection:

The notion of value… shows us that it is a great mistake to consider a sign as nothing more than the combination of a certain sound and a certain concept. To think of a sign as nothing more world be to isolate it from the system to which it belongs. It would be to suppose that a start could be made with individual sounds, and a system constructed by putting them together. On the contrary, the system as a united whole is the starting point, from which it becomes possible, b a process of analysis, to identify its constituent elements. (1983; 112)

Saussure made it very clear that one should understand the system to clearly comprehend the event. The value of a sign depends on the system. It is the interaction of the sign with other signs, which determines the value of the sign. The analogy, which Saussure used, is apt and it helps one comprehend the issue clearly. The analogy is especially helpful in demonstrating the crucial difference between form and substance, given the insignificance, for someone actually playing chess, of the substantiality of the pieces.

The value of the signs is different from the process of signification as has been stated earlier. The value of the sign is not only determined by the interaction but also by other factors. Even though ‘the value’ is different from the process of signification, it has its connections to it. A comparison between different languages helps one understand the proposition better. The example which Saussure himself uses involves the English word ‘sheep’ and the French word ‘mouton’. Saussure explicates the difference in the following way:
The French word mouton may have the same meaning as the English word sheep; but it does not have the same value. There are various reasons for this, but in particular the fact that the English word for the meat of this animal, as prepared and served for a meal, is not sheep but mutton. The difference in value between sheep, and ‘mutton’ hinges on the fact that in English there is also another word mutton for the meat, where as mouton in French covers both. (1983; 114)

The value of a sign is derived essentially by its interaction and association and it is also decided by the presence and absence of other signs. ‘Presence’ and ‘absence’ are very important to understand the Saussurean theory of language. To Saussure, the presence is also determined by the absence. As a result, he came up with a very unique language model which has two axis i.e. syntagmatic and paradigmatic. The horizontal or linear model is called syntagmatic and the vertical model has come to be called associative or paradigmatic for the reasons.

Saussure’s contribution to the academic world is immense. Sassure had to break away with the then academia. Linguistics, at the time of Saussure’s arrival on the scene, was primarily concerned with ‘language change’. Linguistics was primarily philology and historical linguistics. Linguists were mainly interested to understand the word-change and its genealogy. Saussure broke away from this traditional outlook and wanted to look at language as a system, which functioned on two axes i.e. synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic study of language would constitute the study of language, which for practical purposes, thought to be unchanging. Struccok writes:

Like any other innovator, Saussure was in reaction against orthodoxy. In this case the orthodoxy of the later nineteenth century, which dictated that language be studied historically and genetically. The questions that
linguists then chose to ask and to answer were chiefly ones of the origins and evolution of particular languages or groups of languages. They were obsessed with change and ignored what it was exactly that was changing. The first great shift which Saussure introduced into his linguistics is intended to go against this emphasis and as it were, to hold the object of study- language- steady for long enough to enable its permanent structure to be investigated. (2003; 27-28)

The synchronic study of language is the radical step put forth by Saussure. It also laid the foundations for structuralism. Even though language changes continuously, there must be something, which holds the center. If one only looks at the change, one will not look at that substance that is changing. This assumed ‘unchanging substance’ is necessary to analyze anything. For, continuous change defies analysis. Synchronic study of language assumes that language does not change and proposes to study language with the assumption that it is unchanging. Struccok explains how revolutionary the idea of Saussure was:

It may today seem a relatively trivial stipulation that language be studied as a system, but that is only because we have become so accustomed to the synchronic point of view. In Saussure’s time it was not a trivial stipulation because it went against the grain among linguists, who resisted the abstraction, which it involved of language from history. The systematic, synchronic perspective opens the way for language-study to be saved from an unambitious atomism, or mere accumulation with one another but never fully co-related. (2003; 28-29)

This is the first revolutionary step in modern linguistics. Synchronic study of language considers language as a system and proposes to study the system. Next,
Saussure proposes yet another revolutionary step. Saussure makes a distinction between speech and language. Speech is the individual utterance. Language is the system, which makes the utterance possible. Saussure wanted to study this system ‘language’ to understand the communicative process better. Saussure called the language ‘langue’ and speech ‘parole’. It would have become clear by now as to why linguistics was the mother of structuralism. In Saussurean ideology, the structure operates the code. Even the individual has no freedom. He has freedom to the extent that he can operate within the system. But he cannot go beyond it. The structure operates the event and thus to understand the event one has to understand the structure also. Struccok writes:

It seeks to comprehend linguistic facts as elements in a single system, and it is the profound shift of perspective from the diachronic to the synchronic that enables it to do so. This integration of the linguist’s proper subject matter is located by Saussure, be it noted, within the ‘collective consciousness’, which is an abstraction, since it is not commensurate with the consciousness of any given individual, however massively knowledgeable or competent in his native language. (2003; 29)

Unearthing this collective consciousness is the aim of structuralism. Noam Chomsky is also a structuralist, as he wanted to find out the universal grammar that governs the structures of all the languages of the world. Chomsky claims that the knowledge of universal grammar is innate. The difference between Chomsky and Saussure is in their understanding of the system. Saussure said that langue is social and pays little attention to how it is acquired. Chomsky, on the other hand, says that UG is individual. If one overlooks this difference, Chomsky is as much a structuralist as Saussure is. In fact, Chomsky’s universal grammar is an excellent example for the claims of structuralism. Chomsky is of the view that languages differ only within the
limits of the system i.e. universal grammar. The differences among languages can be understood as variations within the select boundaries if one studies the typology of languages.

Understanding the underlying ‘structure’ helps one understand the ‘event’ better. This is the very essence of structuralism. Structuralism thus provides one with the hope that one-day, in the distant future; one will be able to find out the all-governing structure which will then turn out to be panacea for all the problems confronting humanity. Scholars from different fields wanted to apply the insights gained from linguistics to their own areas of study. One of the well-known scholars who applied the ideas of structuralism to others areas of studies is Claude Levi Strauss. He wanted to understand the ‘mythemes’, which control the myth formation of societies.

‘Mythemes’ bear a clean resemblance to the ‘phoneme’ whose existence is psychological. Phonemes are psychological but that is what makes a phone possible. In the same way, Levi Strauss wanted to find out the mythemes, which actually give birth to the myth, cultures and puranas of the society. Levi Strauss followed Jakobson’s ‘distinctive features’ schema to analyze things. Bertens writes:

Prehistoric men and women must have organized their experience around such +/- oppositions, the idea for which Levi Strauss derived from the ubiquitous Jackobson. According to the latter’s distinctive feature theory, which again makes use of the differential principles, the smallest sound units in any language. The so-called phonemes have developed as binary opposites. Vowels have become contrasted with consonants, unvoiced consonants with voiced ones and so on until a subtle system of binary oppositions had created all the phonetic differences in the thousands of languages that we know. (2001;62-63)
Structuralism thus wanted to uncover the system that governed the event. The distinctive features and their permutation and combination would constitute the system and the process of becoming respectively. Phoneme, for linguists, is an abstraction and it gives birth to the ‘phone’ which one actually speaks. In the same vein, ‘mythemes’ are psychological and give birth to the actual myths. Studying myths, then for Levi Strauss, is to understand the mental process which made the actualization of myths possible. Understanding Jakobson’s distinctive feature theory would eventually lead one to the threshold of structuralism. This is the model, which Levi Strauss took up from the Prague school. He wanted to look at anthropology from this viewpoint. As a result, his method of studying anthropology came to be called ‘structural anthropology’. Comparing the phonetic inventory of sounds seems to point out that there can be universal patterns. It is not a matter of great surprise that human beings will not be able to produce more than x number of sounds as they share almost same physiology. To quote Hyman:

> Cross-linguistic comparisons have been made on the basis of both phonetic and phonological inventories; such implicational universals have been discussed by Jakobson (1941) and Greenberg (1966). In an implicational universal, x implies y but y does not imply x. Thus to take an example, the consonant /t/ implies the consonant /d/, but /d/ does not imply /t/. That is, it has been suggested that any language which has /d/ also has /t/. There are, however, many languages which have /t/ but do not have /d/. (1975; 15)

Jakobson could propose some universals on the basis of his study of his distinctive features and phonemes. Levi Strauss owes a lot to Jakobson’s analysis and adapted the same method to analyze culture and cultural variation. Bertens writes:
Levi Strauss’s anthropological structuralism is interested in the question of how our ancestors once, sometime during the evolutionary process that gave us the sort of conscious awareness of ourselves and our environment that animals lack, started to make sense of the world they found themselves in. A very basic mental operation consists is the creation of opposites. (2001; 62)

Thus the human mind, according to structuralism, categorizes the world in binary opposites. An analogy can be made here in which human being’s mind can be compared with the software of a computer. A computer recognizes only two elements i.e. 0, 1. What one gets is a variation of these two elements arranged in numerous forms. Levi Strauss was interested to find out the basic pattern through which human mind interprets the data in the world. As in the computer, Levi Strauss’s model suggests that human beings look at things, of course unconsciously, in terms of binary opposites. Levi Strauss applied this to almost every walk of human life. Deliege writes:

In the case of kinship the analyst has only to select four societies that enable him or her to elaborate a structure having universal validity. We recall that each relationship within the family is a function of the other three; in other words the avuncular relationship (mother’s brother /sister’s son=4) stems from relations of alliance (husband /wife=1), descent (father (son=3) and consanguinity (brother/sister=2) since a structure is an equilibrium, here different relations will necessarily have to include two positive and two negative relations. (2004; 35)

Levi Strauss thus applied the insights gained from linguistics to kinship. He argued that one could understand the picture more comprehensively. Levi Strauss criticized Radcliff Brown’s method because it failed to assimilate the cases in to one
coherent whole. To Levi Strauss, the comparative method will never lead one to significant end as one has to amass data without ever keeping an eye on the ‘structure’ that motivates the change. It was the case with Saussure and he came down on the historical linguists and philologists who looked at language change and concentrated only on comparative study and forgot to look at the ‘structure’ that operates language. Deliege clearly explains the aims of structuralism thus:

Structuralism does not regard observable reality as its primary object of study. The social sphere in this case is considered to be merely a realization of the properties of human mind. In other words and contrary to Durkheim, for whom, according to Piaget, the social determines though, Levi Strauss asserts the primacy of intellect of the mind over the social. (2004; 36)

Levi Strauss affirms that it is the intellect, which gave birth to the societal structures. The outer societal structures, according to Saussure, Levi Strauss and structuralist principles, are the outcome of the inner psychological structure of human beings. In addition, structuralism claims that one can understand ‘this inner psychological structures’ by studying the outer societal structures. It is important to understand the nature of ‘the structure’ that one talks about in the theory of structuralism. Deliege enumerates them in a convincing manner:

1. The structure exhibits the characteristics of a system; a change in any one of the elements results in change in all the rest.
2. For any given model, there should be a possibility of ordering a series of transformation resulting in a group of models of the same type.
3. Properties 1 and 2 make it possible to predict how the model will react to modification of one of its elements.
4. The model should be constructed so as to account for the observed facts.

(2004; 32)

Thus ‘the structure’ is an interconnected continuum. If there is a change in one of its parts, the change will affect the entire structure. In the same way, ‘events’ will take place well within the space and manner given by the structure. It is for this reason that structuralism is considered to be anti-humanist. If one is a structuralist, one will have to accept that human beings have freedom but their freedom has boundaries. Looked at from a broader perspective, it would appear that human beings have no freedom at all and they are the puppets in the hands of the wirepuller i.e. the structure. Bertens writes thus:

It should be clear that anthropological structuralism in spite of its overriding interest in the way the human mind has from the beginning interacted with its natural environment, does not take up a humanist position. Whereas an interest in form is wholly compatible with humanism, structuralism denies that individuals whose behavior it studies are autonomous and act and think the way they do out of free will. (2001; 64)

Thus structuralism is essentially anti-humanist. Not only is structuralism anti-humanist but also ahistorical. This was the case with Saussure also. Saussure changed the focus of linguistics from diachronic study to synchronic study of language. In Saussure’s account of language, diachronic study has been given less importance. Structuralism does not deny that language changes but maintains that they change only within the stipulated boundary. Bertens writes:

Structuralism is not only anti-humanist, it is also ahistorical in the sense that it traces all the structures we know and their earlier, historical,
versions as combinations of ever new (and ever-increasing) permutations of a limited number of basic and unchanging given… it will insist that we are only dealing with variations upon what is essentially as unchanging basic pattern (consisting of binary opposition) and that it is this pattern that must have our attention. (2001; 64)

3.3 *Derrida and Deconstruction:*

When one talks about post-structuralism, it is imperative to deal with structuralism at length as post-structuralism is essentially an extension of structuralist ideas. Had structuralism not come into existence, post-structuralism would have been unheard of. In poststructuralism only ‘deconstruction’ is taken for study in this research work, even though there are other post-structural domains. ‘Deconstruction’, as one will see, is indebted to structuralism for its ideas. Struccok maintains that poststructuralism is not merely an extension of structuralism but a critique of it. Struccok writes:

> Post-structuralism is not ‘post’ in the sense of having killed structuralism off, it is ‘post’ only in the sense of coming after and of seeking to extend structuralism in its rightful direction. Post-structuralism is a critique of structuralism conducted from within that is, it turns certain of structuralism’s arguments against itself and points to certain fundamental inconsistencies in their methods which structuralists ignored. (2003;122-123)

> Post-structuralism is a continuation of structuralism in spite of its denial of structuralism’s claims. It would be more appropriate to say that ‘post-structuralism’ identified the blind spots of structuralism. The seeds of poststructuralism were already there in structuralism. Post-structuralism disagrees with structuralism on certain standpoints as it agrees with certain standpoints. ‘Deconstruction’ was born as a result
of the deconstruction of structuralism. In a way, deconstructed or reconstructed
structuralism is poststructuralism. Bertens is of the view that language is at the heart of
differences between structuralism and poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism continues structuralism’s preoccupations with
language. But its view of language is wholly different from the
structuralist view. In fact, language is at the heart of differences between
structuralism and post-structuralism. Poststructuralism is unthinkable
without structuralism although it continues its anti-humanism and its
focus on language, poststructuralism undermines structuralism by
thoroughly questioning-‘deconstructing’-some of its major assumptions
and the methods that derive from those assumptions. (2001; 120)

As has been said earlier, post-structuralism agrees with structuralism in its claim
that language has no connection with reality. The relation between word and its meaning
is caused by convention. It has no logical connection. If language has no relations with
reality, then it would be naïve to think that language will effectively communicate
reality. Even though structuralism questioned this seeming connection between word
and its meaning, it failed to probe deep in this regard. Structuralism, however, suggested
that it is possible to find out the structure that governs the language use. This stance
gives back the comfort, which its earlier claim has taken away. If one broods over the
nature of language, one understands that it is not a trustworthy medium. Everyone feels
it at one stage. Barry explains that the concerns of poststructuralism are not remote and
esoteric:

The characteristic concerns of poststructuralism, as hinted at here, may at
first seem pretty remote. Why this constant high anxiety about language,
we might ask, when it seems to work perfectly well most of the time for
day-to-day purposes? But on reflection we may find that it is precisely on this matter of anxiety about language that we can most easily identify with poststructuralist concerns… in these cases, and many more, there is an almost universally felt anxiety that language will express things we hadn’t intended or convey the wrong impression, or betray our ignorance, callousness or confusion. (1999; 62)

Many philosophers and men of letter have felt this feature of language. Precisely for this reason, Buddhism holds that one has to transcend language in order to attain nirvana. In fact, the Madhyamikas negate speech and prescribe silence as the only way of understanding reality. T.S.Eliot beautifully paints this picture of instability (a postmodern picture of course) in his ‘Four Quartets’:

…words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish
Decay with imprecision. (150-153)

Words occupy man’s mind. Man is always surrounded with words and these words cloud his consciousness. Not only do they fall short but also they become man’s pre-occupation. Post-structuralism latches on to this predicament and attempts to uncover the reasons for this inherent instability of language and its ability to mislead human beings by covering up its instability and creating a false appearance of stability.

Post-structuralism agrees to the fact that ‘difference’ is at the core of language and its process of signification. A sign comprises a signifier and signified. One signifier may have many signifieds and one signified may have many signifiers. But Derrida goes ahead and claims that every signifier is accompanied by a ‘trace’ and ‘this trace’ is associated with other ‘signifiers’. The process of signification, in Derrida’s view, goes
round and round in the signifiers. For instance, the signifier ‘red’ in the signal system has a particular signified i.e. ‘stop’. But the signifier ‘red’ may mean something else in other places. In the system of traffic signal, the signifier ‘red’ has the meaning ‘stop’ because it is not ‘green’ and ‘amber’. The signifier ‘red’ in the signal system has the traces of ‘green’ and ‘amber’ signifiers in it. In the same vein, every signifier has countless traces in it and this makes the process of signification fluid. Struccok says:

No sign is an island we might say. Every sign contains what Derrida calls a ‘trace’ of signs other than itself. It is because of the trace that we can say that one sign leads always to another, in a process of interpretation that is strictly interminable. It is thus the ‘ground’ of language as a system, and to be able to define it from within the language system itself is presumably impossible. Indeed, the elusiveness of the trace is a proof of its significance since it demonstrates that signs can never be complete in themselves but refers endlessly to other signs. (2003; 124-125)

This is where Derrida adds to the Saussurean notion of difference. Having accepted the relevance of the theory of difference, Derrida attempts to enlarge its scope. As every signifier has ‘traces’ in it, it will be impossible to associate a particular signifier to a particular signified. As has been suggested, the signifier ‘red’ in a signal system has the traces of the signifiers ‘green’ and ‘amber’. To understand this signifier, one needs to look at ‘the signifiers’, which constitute ‘the trace’, and ‘the trace’ is also a signifier and will have its own traces. Those traces will have their own traces and ad infinitum. The effort to pin down a signifier leads one from one signifier to another. Derrida uses his own coinage ‘differance’ to mean both ‘difference’ and ‘deference’, which was described earlier. Wheeler explains the upshots of difference thus:
Contradiction is a conflict of forces and energies, not so much of concepts or propositions, however, “difference” acts as a ‘metalinguistic excluder’ of the meaningful and the meaningless, not just the opposite of the meaningful. Meaning is delayed, reserved, postponed, deferred. Derrida thus puts in the brackets or under erasure, the concept of meaning, neither affirming nor rejecting, but suspending it, suspending logic, reason, truth, to leave space for other activities, as yet perhaps virtually inconceivable. (1997; 37)

The very word ‘differance’ defies precise definition. That is exactly what Derrida would have had in his mind. Mark Currie beautifully puts it, “differance, spelled with an ‘a’, is a notoriously unpindownable concept, but in fact it means something very close to ‘unpindownability” (45). According to Derrida, language is a fluid system and it is in continuous flux and any attempt to ‘freeze’ the ‘flux’ will be anti-realist as it is against the very nature of reality. Currie explains how both presence and absence are important in the Derridean scheme:

One of the many jokes contained in the word ‘differance’ is that one little phonemic change, a phonemic change that cannot even be heard, can alter the meaning of the word ‘difference’ from structural to temporal relation. This tiny change highlights a principle with large consequences for narrative thought in general… what all these factors conspire to show is that a word is not simply a free form or the bearer of meaning as presence, since the presence is always contaminated by absences, traces of context both immediate and distant. (2004; 57-58)

Derrida argued that ‘meaning’ always slips by and it would be impossible to arrive at an absolute meaning’. As every sign has other traces in it, the process of
signification will be unstable and meaning will be continuously delayed. Doing so, Derrida extended the Saussurean theory of ‘difference’ to ‘differance’ to mean both ‘differ’ and ‘defer’. Thus, Derrida both accepts and denies Saussure. The denial comes from the point of view of structure. In structuralism, despite its anti-humanist position, there was a cold comfort of finding out the center. Deconstruction takes away even this cold comfort. Precisely for this reason, deconstruction is said to set in motion a decentred universe. Peter Barry neatly sums it up in the following way:

The post-structuralist maintains that the consequences of this belief are that we enter a universe of radical uncertainty, since we can have no access to any fixed landmark, which is beyond linguistic processing, and hence we have no certain standard by which to measure anything. Without a fixed point of reference against which to measure movement, you cannot tell whether or not you are moving at all. Post-structuralism says in effect, that fixed intellectual references points are permanently removed by properly taking on board what structuralists said about language. (1999; 61-62)

‘Deconstruction’ deconstructs the very basic tenet of structuralism that it is possible to find out an unchanging center, which governs the change. Such a move implies a decentred universe where nothing is predetermined. An event cannot be thought of as the realization of a system. An event will be just an event. Attempts to find out the system, which shapes the event, are doomed to fail, as the very journey is a wild goose chase in the viewpoint of Derrideans.

If the attempt to find out the unchanging structure were a wild goose chase, then what would have prompted the search? Derrida answers that the ‘illusion of presence’ is what has driven one in search of the ‘real’. Derrida’s deconstructive ability is at its peak
when he deconstructs the idea of presence and solidarity. Structuralism believes that mind perceives objects in binary opposites. Binary opposites are the concepts which poststructuralism also borrowed from structuralism. It is an obvious fact that ‘binary opposites’ form the core of structuralism; deconstruction also revels in binary opposites but for different reasons. Derrida argues that marginalizing one of the points in the binary mode creates an illusion of stability. The marginalized point constitutes the periphery and privileged constitutes the center. This then creates the illusion of a stable structure. Bertens elucidates how meaning appears to be stable:

Post-structuralism’s answer is that texts set up one or more centers-derived from the language they make use of that must give them the stability and stop the potentially infinite flow of meaning that all texts generate. If there is a center, there is also that which does not belong to it, which is marginal. Setting up a center automatically creates a hierarchical structure... as the American critic Barbara Johnson described it, “the deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text. (2001; 128)

According to Derrida, the idea of a stable structure is a myth. The so-called stability was created by the process of centering and marginalization. In this process, one entity is privileged and the other one is marginalized. However, if one analyzes the nature of signification and the process of centering, one would understand that the privileged entity banks upon the marginalized entity for its survival. If one is removed from the scene, the other one slips into oblivion on its own. If the ‘privileged’ in the binary opposites gets its signification thanks to the marginalized other, how can one maintain the distinction anymore?
The structure that structuralists want to uncover is non-existent according to Derrida. In reality, the ‘structure’ hides its instability as it is always in a flux. The pair in the binary opposite seem to create the structure. But the marginalized supports the existence of the ‘centered’ entity. The process of signification is thus based on this process of formation of hierarchy. To Derrida, language is an endless becoming. Any attempt to ‘freeze’ it is against its very nature. Hierarchies exist because of human psyche and not because they have a priori existence independent of human mind.

Coward offers a useful comparison between Derrida and Bharathhari:

Just as Derrida finds the psychological mechanism behind the western experience of an unchanging logos, presence, or self to be the suppression of the difference within the psyche… for Bharathhari, and it would seem for Derrida, the experience of self is the unobstructed experience of sabdatattva or arche-writing manifested in the temporal dynamic of language. Obstacles to this experience are identified as the incorrect understanding and use of language forms and the “ego knots” such impure usage produces. (1990: 61)

‘Derrida himself deconstructed the long-standing privilege that was given to speech. Derrida’s aim was not to accord more importance to writing but to take away the prejudice that the western tradition had accorded on speech. Saussure also was a party to this prejudice. Barbara Johnson writes in his preface to Derrida’s ‘Dissemination’:

The spoken word is given a higher value because the speaker and the listener are both present to the utterance simultaneously. There is a temporal or spatial distance between speaker, speech and listener since the speaker hears himself speak at the same moment as the listener does.
This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we have said. Whether or not perfect understanding always occurs in fact, this image of perfectly self-present meaning is according to Derrida, the underlying ideal of western culture. (2000; viii)

This was the case not only in the western culture but also in the eastern culture. Spoken word was given more prominence and the written word was thought to contaminate the intended meaning, as it did not enjoy the presence of the speaker. The very word ‘Upanishad’ means ‘to sit near the master’. This ‘presence’ was the reason why spoken word was accorded more importance than the written word. Derrida calls this the metaphysics of presence. Derrida wants to expose the hitherto unexposed prejudice with which the western philosophical tradition operated. Coward writes:

Derrida’s critique is not aimed at reversing this value system, and showing writing to be superior to speech. Rather, his critique attempts to dissect the whole system of metaphysical opposition upon which the speech-writing debate is grounded. In so doing, Derrida finds that both speech and writing are beginninglessly structured by difference and distance. The very experience of meaning is itself an experience of difference and this difference is shown by Derrida to inhabit the very heart of what appears to be immediate and present. (1990; 54)

Saussure, in spite of his theory of difference, accorded importance to speech over writing. Saussure claims that language creates meaning through difference. Written word works exactly in the same way as the spoken word works in the human psyche. But the idea of origin works in favour of the spoken word. The listener is there during the production of speech and thus this conception of origin and purity give the spoken
word its edge. The spoken word is thought to be pure as it originates in the speaker’s consciousness. The speaker is aware of the origination and mediation. But according to Derrida, consciousness itself is subject to language. The moment ’x’ enters consciousness; it goes through the process of mediation. Consciousness also functions through the principles of differentiation. There is no way to get out of it. To quote Struccok:

The traditional priority accorded to speech comes about, Derrida claims, because of the deep ‘phonocentricism’ of western thought. We are sentimental towards the human voice and deluded by it into forgetting that even when we speak or speak inwardly with ourselves, i.e. think, we still have recourse to signs. We cannot be fully present to ourselves in so far as we must of necessity commune with ourselves in a system of signs that is not ours alone but a social institution. ‘Hearing ourselves speak’ is the illusory model of intimacy and immediacy. (2003; 127)

Derrida’s debt to Freud will be very clear here. Derrida asserts that the illusion of presence is a result of the humanist belief that man’s mind is an undifferentiated whole. Humanists believe that man is a rational animal and is conscious of his actions all the time. Freud claimed that man’s actions are primarily controlled by the unconscious and the person concerned will have no inkling about the operation of unconscious forces. In the same way, man is unconscious of the process of mediation that takes place in the psyche. The immediate is also distant if one becomes little aware of the process of signification. Struccok writes:

Can everyone be wrong or deluded but himself? His explanation is that such a fundamental contradiction can only be the effect of desire. This is the Freudian component of Derrida’s thought. We know that even when
we commune with ourselves we cannot be fully ‘present’ to ourselves, but we manage to believe the opposite. This is the result of repression. We cannot face the truth of the matter, which is, that we are alienated even from our selves by language. We cherish the phonocentric illusion of intimacy because to acknowledge that it is an illusion is to acknowledge our own absence from the words we speak.

(2003; 127-128)

The illusion of immediacy and presence is created because of repression i.e. the inability to face the fact that one is absent from the words one speaks. This repression was the root cause for the egocentric attitude. Having deconstructed the metaphysics of presence, it would be rewarding to dismantle the metaphysics of purity. Logocentricism prevailed because of the metaphysics of purity. Currie notes:

Writing is also a fall from presence since like the sign it is extension to what it means, capable of signifying in the absence of the writer, creating a kind of a nostalgia for its origin, speech is also the origin of writing in the sense that it comes first, in childhood, or in the history of humankind, and this temporal priority is often seen as a kind of logical or metaphysical priority. To explain writing, it then becomes necessary to trace it back to its origin in speech, when language can be seen in its purest form. (2004; 59)

Derrida deconstructs this notion of purity. ‘Purity’ is non-existent in the real world and it is the idea of purity that confuses one and leads one astray. Rousseau thought that the savage was the ‘pure’ man uncontaminated by the developments of modernism, science and technology and etc. In the society, one can trace the problems of castism to this illusion of purity. But this purity is a conceptual ideality and not an
existential reality. This conception of the purity of one’s caste is only an illusion scientifically speaking. Rousseau’s conception of the savage beauty only indicates his dissatisfaction with the people and his possible projection of his desires on to the savages. Derrida affirms that this phantom ideal of purity drives one towards unachievable targets.

Derrida read Plato between the lines and showed that the ideal is not really an enough-onto-itself entity. The word ‘pharmakon’ has multiple meanings. It can mean both poison and remedy. Then one can conceive of the ambivalence created by the term ‘pharmakon’ and the ambivalent attitude to writing. Rousseau calls writing a dangerous supplement. Writing is a supplement to speech and it means that writing helps speech rid of its shortcomings. If speech is self-sufficient, there will not be a need for a supplement. The need for a supplement points to the fact that speech is inadequate and not self-sufficient. Speech has all the internal differences that writing has. Plato himself had to resort to writing though he subjugated writing to a marginal place. Derrida writes:

The purity of the inside can only be restored if the charges are brought home against exteriority as a supplement, inessential yet harmful to the essence, a surplus that ought never to have come to be added to the untouched plenitude of the inside. In order to cure the latter of the ‘pharmakon’ and rid it of the parasite, it is thus necessary to put the outside out. Writing must then return to being what it should never have ceased to be an accessory, an accident, and an excess. (1981; 128)

Having deconstructed the ideal of purity, one would have no reason to marginalize writing. Speech is characterized by difference and distance as writing is. Derrida postulates then that speech is also a kind of writing. It might be a little hard to
comprehend Derrida’s motives in postulating speech as a kind of writing. But this viewpoint of Derrida is the most unique principle of him and marks him off from other thinkers.

This arche-writing should not be confused with literal writing. Arche-writing is what makes speech and writing possible. Arche-writing is the inscription of letters in the mind of the speaker. Even Plato thinks that speech is not a guaranteed medium. Speech can be deceptive. Writing can be deceptive too. Because speech is secondary to the thinking mind, both speech and writing are ways of mediating the message and the origin of both speech and writing must be traced back to arche-writing. By calling speech a form of writing, Derrida revolutionized the whole philosophical tradition. By doing so, the ideal of purity, presence and immediacy could be deconstructed. Derrida does not advocate that his theories will provide the human beings with the security and stability they want. Contrary to this notion, Derrida affirms that instability and open-endedness are the inherent qualities of language and one has to accept it rather than creating ideals of purity and perfection. Deutscher points to the fact that all languages are subject to the principle of difference and deference:

To describe speech as a form of arche-writing is to say that despite its phantom promise it is not immediate and embodies the possibility of deception. Derrida’s real point here is that this is true of all forms of language. This fear is the original condition of language. By his expanded definition, all forms of language can be described as forms of writing. But the aim of this broader definition of speech as writing is to flag this paradoxical nature. The ideal is an illusion; all language involves the risk Plato describes, which could never be expunged.
For Derrida, language is an ever-becoming and ever-changing entity. Attempts to stabilize the process of signification are asking for the impossible. Deconstruction thus strongly affirms that living with instability and insecurity is the only way out. Acceptance of this fact is the way to liberation. In a way, understanding this fact (that one is not free) and stable), is the only way to be free. Deconstruction is not negative as its name may suggest but a necessary condition for reconstruction. Deconstruction is a revaluation of all values.

3.4. The Implications of Deconstruction:

To live as a deconstructionist is to live in decentred universe. It is to live with no fixed point of reference. To be a deconstructionist is to be a Postmodernist. Deconstruction reminds one of the continuous changes that the world is going through. Any fixed point of reference will then be an anachronism. As Heraclitus put it, “one cannot step into the same river twice”. Barry portrays the implications of deconstruction in the following way:

These pronouncements about language send us into a gravity free universe, without upside down or right way up. This situation, of being without intellectual reference points, is one way of describing what poststructuralists call the decentred universe. One in which by definition, we cannot know where we are, since all the concepts which previously defined the center, and hence also the margins have been deconstructed or undermined. (1999; 62)

For poststructuralists, there is no transcendental reality. Reality is ever changing. In this regard, Buddha’s philosophy of continuous flux can be equated with Derrida’s notions of language as an ever-changing entity. Buddha said that one has to be a light unto oneself. All philosophies and doctrines are outdated because they were pronounced
in a different space and time. Much water has already flown through Ganges. Reality is ever changing and no ready-made philosophy is of use because reality is not ready-made. As a result, Buddha affirmed that one’s consciousness should be one’s torchbearer. To quote Coward:

> It is the direct experience of this dynamic process of becoming, not as a process of static reflection or metaphysical opposition, that would for Derrida be the realization of the spiritual whole. The sensitive deconstruction of the illusions of permanence static or presence (which our ordinary experience and many of our philosophies have superimposed on the becoming of language) is Derrida’s prescription as the means for the realization of the whole. (1990; 69)

The foremost implication of the theory of deconstruction is the dismantling of faith in language. Structuralists believed that there is a structure to be found out and explored. For them, the structure is objective and definable. Deconstruction nullifies this belief in objective structure waiting to be exposed and poststructuralists believe that meaning arises because of the reader’s stopping the flow for a second. Bertens writes:

> First of all, poststructuralism is completely at odds with structuralism in its original scientific form. While for the structuralists the structures they described were objectively present in the texts they dealt with to be discovered by anyone who seriously examined them. For Derrida, such a structure is an arrangement produced by a reader who has temporarily stopped the infinite flow of meanings that a text generates. For Derrida, a text is not a structure, but a chain of signs that generate meaning, with none of these signs occupying a privileged, anchored (and anchoring) position. (2001; 135-136)
Deconstruction then, approves of plurality, as there can be no singularity. Reality is multi faceted and the language, which is used to understand reality, is instable and has endless pregnant significations inside. Deconstruction is critique of language. It subjected language to scrutiny and exposed some of the weak links of the philosophical schools, which preceded deconstruction. It is very difficult to define deconstruction as it is about the evasiveness of language. Deconstruction cannot be defined satisfactorily as it looks at definition as a system of hierarchies. The very indescribability is the definition of deconstruction and deconstruction is subject to its own theory. Deconstruction is a way of life and it prescribes a continuous introspection and a continuous cleaning of the cob webs of the mind. In essence, deconstruction is a critique of language, meaning and reality.

3.5 Anekantavada and Syadvada:

As Postmodernism and poststructuralism are interrelated, Anekantavada and Syadvada are also interrelated. As a matter of fact, Syadvada is a logical correlative of anekantavada. The Anekantavada theory holds that truth is multi faceted. This many sidedness of reality is the first principle of Anekantavada. It is further strengthened by the argument that man’s perception is also limited. Truth as such is manysided. Human beings perceive it differently and as a result it is perceived differently. The word Anekanta includes both these possibilities i.e. aneka (manyness) and anekanta (manysidedness).

If truth is many-sided, how can it be expressed comprehensively? Truth’s being many sided is ontological and man’s perception being varied is epistemological in nature. Anekantavada is ontological in character and nayavada is epistemological in character Syadvada is then based on both anekantavada and nayavada. Syadvada does not stand alone as a theory. It depends on anekantavada and nayavada. Syadvada is the
expression of anekantavada and nayavada. Syadvada as a theory has to do with expressing the ontological and epistemological nature of reality.

Anekantavada is the heart of Jaina metaphysics and nayavada and Syadvada are its main arteries, or to use a happier metaphor, the bird of anekantavada flies on its two wings of nayavada and Syadvada.

(Rampuria (ed) 1996; 85)

Looking at nayavada as an epistemological issue independent of language will problematize the issue from the poststructuralist perspective. It would be inappropriate, for a poststructuralist, to separate consciousness and language as though they are two different entities. This is one of the major differences between Jainology and Postmodernism. From the poststructuralist point of view, language is essentially epistemological in nature. To understand the way one understands, it is indispensable, in the deconstructionist’s scheme of things, to understand the nature of language. In Jain metaphysics, all the three arguments i.e. anekantavada, nayavada and Syadvada are clearly demarcated. It suffices to say this much at this point of time. Jainism holds that truth is beyond language. But Jainism agrees to the point enunciated by poststructuralism that language is inadequate and hence cannot express reality.

Mahapragya writes:

Each object has many attributes. In an atom itself, there are many attributes and that too opposing pairs of them. To explain infinite attributes at the same time is not humanly possible through words, only one attribute or one mode of the object can be described in a said moment. This is one of the common limitations of language that is impossible to overcome. (2002; 53)
Language is inadequate to express the many-sidedness of reality. Since language cannot express reality, the speaker has to be extremely conscious of what one is saying. Poststructuralism focuses on the inherent instabilities of language and its skepticism emerges as a result of its scrutiny of language. On the other hand, the Jain theory of Syadvada came into existence not because of its analysis on language but because of its theory of the nature of reality and human being’s inability to see the ‘many sides’ at the same time. It is then primarily ontological. An excerpt from Rampuria will put syadvada in proper perspective:

Syadvada is linked with the ontological theory called anekantavada and it stands and falls with that ontology. If Syadvada is a theory in logic, as many people have accepted, then we are justified in demanding autonomy for it; it should be able to stand on its own force, without invoking the support of a theory about reality. If this cannot be done then we are obliged to call Syadvada an extension of the Anekanta ontology.

(1996; 314)

The point to be emphasized is that Syadvada was formulated on the basis of Jain philosophers’ understanding of the nature of reality and comprehension. The word Syadvada has two words in it i.e. syat and vada. The word has two meanings i.e. may be and in one respect. Like Derrida’s differance, the syat in Syadvada is very complex. If one takes the word syat to mean ‘maybe’, it gives way to the notion that Jain philosophy is skeptical and indeterminate. Even though Jain philosophy is anekantic in nature, it does not advocate absolute indeterminacy. An object may have many facets but one can talk about one aspect with surety. Negating this possibility just gives birth to nihilism. Even though one cannot describe an object in its totality, it will not be impossible to talk about one aspect with surety.
This formulation of Syadvada presents two problems. The first relates to
the translation of syat as may be. Although this is fairly common, and
syat means may be, yet it, in this connection, may be translated
‘somehow’. Without being dogmatic on this point there is room for
suggesting that ‘somehow’ may be a better translation as it prevents the
Jain doctrine from appearing unduly skeptical. (Rampuria (ed)
1996; 332)

Syadvada was formulated in order to remind the speaker that what he/she speaks
is only one aspect of reality. This reminder helps one maintain one’s composure. Syat
means ‘in one respect’. With every statement, the word ‘syat’ must be added to make it
non-absolutistic. Jain philosophers paid attention to the nature of human mind and knew
that human beings can slip back to unconsciousness very easily. Syadvada was
formulated with a view to keeping consciousness on the track all the time. It will be
enlightening to quote Padmarajiah in this connection:

Discussing the spirit of Syadvada a modern critic observes: “it signifies
that the universe can be looked at from many points of view, and that
each viewpoint yields a different conclusion. The nature of reality is
expressed completely by none of them for in its concrete richness it
admits all predicates. Every preposition is therefore in strictness only
conditional. Absolute affirmation and absolute negation are both
erroneous”. It is this conception of reality as extremely indeterminate in
nature that is suggested or illumined by the term syat. (1986; 338)

A syadvadin is then one who always reminds oneself of the limitations of
language and perception. Dogmatism exists because of inflexible and obstinate
viewpoints, which fail to see the veracity of the other man’s point of view. History bears
testimony to the fact that many a war happened in history in order to defend one’s ideas or to prove them right. Philosophical discussions were converted into verbal duels as a result of the undue desire to prove the supremacy of one’s ideas. Syadvada will be of tremendous help in eradicating dogmatism. One ought to remember the plurality of truth and inadequacy of language to wear out the absolutist tendencies. Peaceful coexistence is possible only when anekantavad and syadvada are the ways of life. Radhakrishnan writes:

Individual freedom and social justice are both essential for human welfare. We may exaggerate the one or understate the other. But he who follows the Jain concept of anekantavad, Saptabhanginaya or Syadvada will not adopt that kind of cultural regimentation. He will have the spirit to discriminate between the right and the wrong in his own and in the opposite views, and try to work for a greater synthesis. (2006; 142)

3.6 Nayavada and Syadvada:

One has to understand the theory of nayavada in order to understand the theory of syadvada. Nayavada is the theory of standpoints. Nayavada attempts to analyze the different possible viewpoints for looking at an object. Nayavada is thus analytic in nature and Syadvada attempts to synthesize the viewpoints to arrive at a coherent whole. While nayavada is analytic, Syadvada is synthetic. To quote Padmarajiah:

Syadvada is a method which is complementary to that of nayavada, and that while nayavada is analytic in character, Syadvada functions as a synthetic method …owing to their function of analysis and synthesis, the methods of nayavada and Syadvada may also be described as the disjunctive dialectic and the conjunctive dialectic respectively.

(1986; 333-334)
Nayavada is defined as the theory of viewpoints. Naya is the speaker’s viewpoint of particular object at a particular time and at a particular place. Anekantavada has already made its position clear by stating that an object has innumerable aspects. It becomes impossible then to individualize the viewpoints in constructing a theory. So Jain philosophers attempted to work out a broader theory, which takes into account all aspects in a broad way. So nayas are broadly divided into two categories i.e. dravyanaya or substantive viewpoint and paryayanaya or modal viewpoint. The axioms of anekantavada are discussed in the last chapter. It would be relevant to consider them briefly here in order to have a better understanding of nayavada

1. The concomitance between universal and particular.
2. The concomitance between permanent and impermanent.
3. The concomitance between one and many.
4. The concomitance between existence and non-existence.
5. The concomitance between expressible and inexpressible.

Anekantavada accepts all of these qualities in a given object. Since all these qualities are there in an object, it will not be difficult to conceive that viewpoints will be in accordance with the quality one happens to have. One important point, which is pivotal to Jain scheme of things, is that the assertion of one point of view does not, in any way, nullify the existence of other points of view. This is in tune with their conception of reality. Since reality is possessed of both manyness and many-sidedness, even contradictory viewpoints can coexist without any problem. To quote Padmarajiah:

A naya is defined as a particular opinion or a viewpoint (apeksa) a viewpoint which does not rule out other different viewpoints and is, thereby, expressive of a partial truth about an object (vastu) – as entertained by a
knowing agent. A naya is a particular viewpoint about an object or an event, there being many other viewpoints which do not enter into, or interfere with, the particular viewpoint under discussion. (1986; 310-311)

With this note, it will be appropriate to begin the analysis of the analytic predication. As has been already mentioned, nayas are divided into two broad categories i.e. dravyanaya and paryayanaya. The individual nayas are seven in number. They are as follows:

1. Naigamanaya
2. Sangrahanaya
3. Vyavaharanaya
4. Rjusutranaya
5. Sabdanaya
6. Samabhirudhanaya
7. Evanbhutanaya.

Of all these seven nayas as conceived and classified by the Jain philosophers, the first three are considered to be dravyanayas and the other four are considered to be paryayanayas.

3.6.1 Naigamanaya (The Teleological or the Universal-Particular Standpoint):

Naigamanaya can be interpreted in two ways. It can be the standpoint of the purpose of the actions involved. To make things more clear, one does not take into account the individual actions but the result. The end takes the foreground and the individual items which combinedely produce the end recede to the background.

Padmarajiah writes:

For instance, a person carrying fuel, water, and rice, when asked “what are you doing?” says “I am cooking” instead of saying “I am carrying
fuel” and so forth. This means that the general purpose of cooking controls the entire series of actions which are represented by one or more of them such as carrying the materials or drawing water enabling us thereby to grasp the purpose which governs the individual factors relating to it. This is the aim or function of the naigama standpoint. (1986; 314)

There is another interpretation to naigamanaya. In this interpretation, naigama means ‘no distinction’. That is to say that the person concerned is neither aware of the universal nor the particular. The object in hand is treated neither as a universal nor as a particular but as a concrete unity. This standpoint is called ‘naigamanaya’.

3.6.2 Sangrahana (The Generic Viewpoint):

Unlike the naigamanaya standpoint, sangrahana deals with the generic quality of an object. Naigamanaya deals with the objects without discriminating the universal aspect and the particular aspect. Even though sangrahana deals only with the generic aspect, it is not inimical to the specific qualities of the object concerned. Sangrahana accepts the fact that there is no universal without the particular. But focusing on the universal is what is needed for the purpose in hand. As has already been mentioned, the assertion of one viewpoint does not negate the importance of other viewpoints.

For instance, if a person wants to locate a particular house, he/she will be directed accordingly. They may be asked to go right or left after crossing a temple (anything for that matter). Here, it does not matter whether the temple is archaic or modern, big or small, sophisticated or plain, shivik or vaishnavik so and so forth. For the purpose of identifying the place, it is enough to know the generic quality.

3.6.3 Vyavahara (The Viewpoint of the Particular):

In contrast to the previous viewpoint i.e. sangrahana, vyavahara concerns itself with the particular. As is with other standpoints, the standpoint of the particular
does not negate the importance of the standpoint of the universal. The universal has no existence without the particular and vice versa. The same example can be used here but in a different context. When one wants to find out a shivik temple, one is interested in the particular temple and not in the temple as such. One knows very well that there are other temples of which shivik temple is a model. Then it all depends on the purpose in hand. Omitting one point of view and resorting to the other is fallacious. It is the context, which decides whether naigamanaya or vyavaharanaya is taken into account. The first three ayas i.e. naigamanaya, sangrahanaya and vyavaharanaya are considered to be dravyanayas.

### 3.6.4 Rjusutranaya (The Standpoint of Momentariness):

Rjusutranaya concerns itself with the momentariness of the object. It is narrower than the vyavaharanaya as it deals with the particular object at a particular time. One very well knows that everything in the world undergoes change. Emphasis on this momentariness of an object leads one to conclude that only momentariness is true. The Buddhist’s conception of continuous flux results as a result of over emphasizing rjusutranaya.

### 3.6.5 Sabdanaya: (The Verbal Viewpoint):

It is sabdanaya, which brings Jainology closer to deconstruction. Jain philosophers understood that language and meaning are very closely interwoven that any disturbance in the linguistic structure will cause a difference in meaning. ‘Meaning’ as such cannot stand alone without the mediation of language and language apart from its pragmatic aspect is a structured unit. Mahapragya says:

The implication of this naya is that the meaning of a word necessarily varies with the variation of the tense, gender and number, because no additional part of a word is meaningless. Any additional element in a
word is bound to introduce a novelty of meaning. In grammar the
difference of tense, case endings etc do not entail the difference of the
referent, but this is not accepted to be so by the verbal standpoint, which
claims that the difference in tense and case endings of a word necessarily
implies difference in the nature of the referent. (1984; 59)

When Acharya Mahapragya considers the sabdanaya to be grammatical in
nature, Padmarajiah looks at it in a different way. He calls this standpoint ‘the
standpoint of synonyms’. Here Padmarajiah asserts that sabdanaya is the standpoint of
synonyms. Synonym means ‘close’ but not ‘same’. Misunderstanding of this principle
will lead one to wrong conclusions. This is where Jain philosophy comes closer to
poststructuralism and its misgivings about the process of signification.

3.6.6. Samabhirudhanaya (The Etymological Standpoint):

The etymological standpoint problematizes the nature of meaning and is
considered to be an advancement of sabdanaya. Even the so-called synonyms are not
exactly the same and the difference among them springs from their etymology. This
standpoint looks at words from their etymological point of view. Padmarajiah elucidates
the etymological standpoint with an example thus:

The synonyms Indira, sacra and pruandara denote, according to the
conventional approach of sabdanaya, the same individual where as they
do not do so if their difference in their etymological derivation is taken
into consideration. Indira, for instance, signifies one who is all
prosperous and the other two names signify one who is the all powerful
and the destroyer of the enemies respectively. (1986; 321-322)

As is evident in the example, the difference in the root will effect a
corresponding change in meaning. Derrida uses this to subvert the notions of established
meaning and tradition. Derrida’s analysis of Plato is an outstanding example. Plato uses the word ‘pharmakon’ to subjugate writing but the word ‘pharmakon’ has two meanings i.e. poison and remedy. Writing is not only a poison (in Plato’s sense) but also a remedy (in Plato’s unconscious sense) to speech. Analyzing the etymology revives and adds depth to the analysis of meaning. Barry gives an exciting example for the same:

A seemingly innocent word like ‘guest’ is etymologically cognate with ‘hosts’, which means an enemy or a stranger, thereby inadvertently, manifesting the always potentially unwelcome status of the guest.

Likewise the long-dormant metaphorical base of words is often reactivated by their use in philosophy or literature and then interfere with literal sense, or with the stating of single meanings. (1999; 64-65)

This deconstructive account of etymological reading goes well with the etymological standpoint of Jainology.

3.6.7. Evambhutanaya (The Such-like Standpoint):

Evambhutanaya is a specialized form of the application of sabdanaya. It is an effort to showcase the arbitrariness of words and an effort to stop the process of verbalizing actions and objectifying people by labeling. A person should not become a concept, as the person is a living being. For instance, if one uses the word ‘actor’ to denote a particular person even when he is not acting, the word ‘actor’ does not denote the characteristics of the person but only his profession. Thus, according to this naya, a word should be used only in a particular context where its usage is relevant. All these four nayas are called ‘paryayanayas’ or the modal viewpoints. Sometimes, ‘sabdanaya’ subsumes all the three nayas relating to the language in it.

Nayavada points to the fact that there are multiple viewpoints and an object can be looked at from various angles. Once nayavada has come out with the set nayas,
Syadvada words upon each naya and examines them form various strands of truth. One can visualize the complex system that is formed of nayavada and Syadvada. This complex method consists of both of disjunctive dialectic and conjunctive dialectic. Keeping this in view, one can understand as to why nayavada and Syadvada are called the wings of the bird called anekantavada. Padmarajiah writes:

It has already been observed that Syadvada is a method, which is complementary to that of nayavada, and that while nayavada is analytical in character, Syadvada functions as a synthetical method. That is, nayavada analyses one of the standpoints under the aspect of identity or of difference and Syadvada further investigates the various strands of the truth delivered by a naya, and integrates them into a consistent and comprehensive synthesis. (1986; 333)

The philosophy of nayavada adds vitality to the philosophy of anekantavada. Anekantavada asserts that truth is many-sided. Nayavada, in spite of knowing the fact that truth is many sided, is aimed at working at a system of viewpoints. These viewpoints are synthesized by the philosophy of Syadvada. Above all, the philosophy of nayavada is not a closed system. An excerpt from Padmarajiah will be illuminating in this context:

Describing nayavada as a philosophy of standpoints a critic observes, “it is a revolt against the tendency in philosophers to build closed systems of philosophy. According to Jainism, the universe in which we live is an active universe, plastic and full of possibilities. And no particular current of thought can fully comprehend it. In order to do justice to the complexity and variety of such a universe, thought must not be hurried to any easy terminus but must be allowed to follow its course freely and
meander through the whole field of experience, crossing and recrossing it, so as to create a great confluence of standpoints rather than a closed system”. (1986; 330)

3.7 Saptabhangi (The Theory of Seven-fold Predication):

Syadvada is a system of synthesis. It synthesizes the different points of view propounded by nayavada. Syadvada is also called Saptabhangi as it follows the seven plank epistemological frame. As has already been stated, Syadvada and nayavada are the pillars, which stand the weight of the theory of anekantavada. Shah writes:

Logically anekantavada means theory of relative judgment. It warns us to be very mindful while translating our relative and partial knowledge into verbal expression. While making statement a man should be fully aware that his knowledge is relative and partial. As his knowledge is relative and partial, its expression in words should also reflect this relativity and conditionality. His every judgment or statement should be qualified by a particular term meaning relative in a certain sense, somehow etc. It has been chosen by the Jaina logicians, Therefore Jaina theory of relative judgment is called Syadvada. (2000; x)

As has been already mentioned, Syadvada is also called ‘Saptabhanginaya’. Here one can see that Saptabhangi is also called a naya as it has a close relationship with naya.

Saptabhangi is called, as the number of possible truths under the conditional method of syadvad are only seven. They are as follows:

1. Syadasti (it is ‘in one respect’)
2. Sydnasti (it is not in one respect)
3. Syadastinasti (it is and it is not in one respect)
4. Syadavaktavya. (It is inexpressible in one respect)
5. Syadastyavaktavyaca (it is and is inexpressible in one respect)
6. Syadnastyavaktavyasca (it is not, and is inexpressible in one respect)
7. Syadastinasticavaktavyasca (it is, it is not, & it is inexpressible in one aspect).

These are the seven fold predications, which investigate the individual nayas. These seven plank epistemological frame has the asti, nasti and avaktavyo strands as its substratum. All other arguments are derived from the combination and permutation of the above three. When one says that a thing ‘is’, one says it in the context of a particular state, time, substance, color etc. An object ‘is not’ from the point of view of the above said characteristics. Confusions abound in this area as many scholars misinterpreted that a thing is and is not in its own right, which will be fallacious. An excerpt from Rampuria will throw light on this area where confusions abound:

Modern illustrations sometimes tend to exemplify Syadvada in such a way that the case of predications of the non existence of the object includes the possibility of it not existing by itself in some sense and not necessarily in the sense it does not exist as another object. The concept of non-existence has been taken in the sense of possibility of the coexistence of different aspects in the same object, such as could lead one to assert the existence of the opposite of the first predicate. Thus A may exist as a father but he can also exist as someone’s son so that it can be said of him (a) he is a father; (b) he is not a father; and so on. However, on the strict application of Syadvada one would have to say (a) he is his child’s father (b) he is not the father of someone else’s child.

(1996; 336)
The fallacy of this argument can be exposed very easily. If one says that a pot is
in some respect and a pot is not in some respect, one means that a pot ‘is’ in term of its
colour, substance, time etc. This pot is made of clay. This statement is one of
affirmation and then it can be said that this pot is not made of copper so on and so forth.
One can’t say that the pot ‘is’ and the pot ‘is not’ as though the pot has become
something else. If the pot is something else, one does not need anekantavada, nayavada,
and Syadvada to explain it. When one talks about affirmation and negation, one has to
bear in mind that they ought to be done with reference to locality, time, substance, and
nature. An excerpt from Rampuria will be relevant in this context:

According to Jaina logic, affirmative predication about a thing depends
upon four conditions, Svadravya, svaksera, svakala and svabhava, i.e. its
own substance, its own locality, its own time and its own nature or
modification. Correspondingly, the negative predication about the same
thing is conditioned by the four things of an opposite nature, Paradravya,
aparasketra, parakala and parabhava i.e. other substance, other locality,
other time, and other nature. The ornament is made of gold, and it is not
made of any other metal are two obvious predications about the same
gold ornament the affirmation (asti) form the point of view of itself
(svadravya) and the negation (nasti) from the point of view of other
substance (paradravya). (1996; 337)

An object ‘is’ from the point of view of svadravya, svakala, svabhava and
svaksetra and is not from the point of paradravya, parakala, parabhava and paraksetra. If
both these qualities ought to be expressed at the same time, it becomes impossible via
language. They can be explained successively as Syadvada does. As the object cannot
be expressed in its entirety, it is said to be inexpressible. If these three aspects are
understood, it will be very easy to understand the other strands of truth espoused by the theory of Saptabhanginaya, as they are the result of the interaction among the three important principles asti, nasti and avaktavya i.e. affirmation, negation and inexpressibility. An excerpt from Shah shows with mathematical precision how the seven plank epistemological frame was derived:

First, let us note how Jaina’s get their seven types of proposition evaluation. If we allow combinability of values, and if we have three basic evaluative predicates, ‘true’, ’false’, and ‘inexpressible’ then we have seven and only seven alternatives. (writing ‘+’, ‘-‘ and ‘0’ for three values respectively)

\[+\), \(-), \(+\,0), \(+0), \(-0), \(+0\)\]

for the proper mathematical symmetry, we may also write:

\[+\), \(-), \(+\,0), \(+0), \(-0), \(+0\)\] \hspace{1cm} (2000; 13)

As has been said, the other four formulations i.e., is and is not, is and inexpressible, is not and inexpressible and is, is not, and inexpressible, are the result of the interaction of the first three formulations.

3.8. **Syadvada and Its Implication:**

Many a fact follows the exposition of Syadvada. First of all, one understands that truth is very complex. It might have numerous aspects, which are unknown to the human mind at present. Not everyone can look at reality from the same angle. The different philosophical traditions that existed and exist around the globe are staring examples for the veracity of the statement. Difference in viewpoint was analyzed in detail in the theory of nayavada. Syadvad is about the expression of the nature of reality as has been conceived by nayavada. Syadvada takes into account each aspect and analyses the ways in which this aspect can be described. The inexpressibility of the
object follows the proposition that an object has numerous aspects. Inexpressibility, here means, the inability to describe the object concerned in its totality. Since it is not possible to describe reality in its totality, one has to be very conscious when one expresses one’s viewpoint. Mahapragya elucidates the import of syadvada:

The meaning of syad is the acceptance of one’s inability to express, to accept the limitations of language. The one who uses the word ‘syad’ immediately declares that he must not be taken as telling the entire truth and that it is just one aspect. That he is informing the listener of only one aspect. And at the same time he is expressing his inability to know the entire truth. This is the merit of the word syadvad. (2002; 55)

Syadvada reminds one that even one aspect of the truth is very difficult to pin down. Syadvada or the seven-fold predication affirms that the aspect in hand must be described in seven ways to be able to deal with all the features of the object in hand. Syadvada is not nihilistic, as it does not say that truth is inexpressible as such. On the contrary, Syadvada asserts that it is both expressible and inexpressible. One can talk about one aspect of an object with determinacy but one cannot talk about all the aspects in one go. To be precise, Syadvada stands between expressibility and inexpressibility. Jain philosophers contend that one word has only one meaning. For this reason, they formulated sabdanaya. Even the synonyms are not the same and they have subtle differences.

True to their conception of one word and one meaning is the conception of Syadvada. Hence one word has only one meaning, all the aspects cannot be expressed at the same time. The theory of Syadvada is to show that an all-embracing description is possible if the aspects are described successively. The implication of this argument is that it does not take away the comforts of knowledge and the possibility of knowing but
emphasizes the limitations of language and knowledge without effecting ‘nihilism’ or ‘absolutism’. The result will be respect for pluralism and humility. Mahapragya enumerates the implications of accepting the theory of syadvada:

One cannot find a more beautiful way of realizing truth. If there was a non-committal syad with every argument there would perhaps be no argument at all, no persistence to any single point of view would ever be heard. Passions are easily aroused because whatever one knows one reacts vehemently to it on the basis of the idea: what I say is the truth.

(2002; 56)

3.9. **Deconstruction and Syadvada:**

Both deconstruction and syadvada are about the inadequacy of language. Both the deconstructionist and the syadvadin arrive at the same destination i.e. awareness of the limitations of language and knowledge and a healthy skepticism. Deconstruction arrives at the conclusion thanks to its analysis of language and syadvad arrives at the conclusion by virtue of their ontological, epistemological notions of reality and their notions of language and meaning.

Deconstruction views texts as subversively undermining an apparent or surface meaning, and it denies any final explication or statement of meaning. It questions the presence of any objective structure or content in a text instead of discovering one ultimate meaning for a text, as formalism seems to promise, deconstruction describes the text as always in a state of change, furnishing only provisional meanings. All texts are thus open-ended constructs, and sign and signification are only arbitrary relationships. Meaning can only point to an indefinite number of other meanings. (Guerin et al 1999; 340)
Deconstruction is a critique of language and meaning. Even though Syadvada shares some of the concerns of deconstruction, Syadvada has not subjected language to threadbare analysis as deconstruction has done. Syadvada opines that reality is both expressible and inexpressible. It considers reality to be inexpressible as a result of their conception of reality as many-sided, their epistemological standpoint (nayavada) and their idea of reference i.e. one word always signifies one meaning. Jain philosophers do not share the standpoint of structuralism and poststructuralism that reality is shaped by language. For them, language is a medium and nothing more than that. Jain philosophers with their belief in enlightenment believe that absolute truth can be realized if one transcends language. This is where Jain philosophy (Syadvada) cuts across a different path. For them, truth is beyond language and language must be transcended despite its being helpful in the initial stage. Mahapragya writes:

All the complicated philosophical disputes exist in the world of language. Truth is beyond language. Truth and language can never go together… if you accept your incapability or the inadequacy of language, then it can be truth. The limitation of language is that in one moment, with one word, it can only express one truth, when in actuality there are infinite truths. (2002; 52)

Deconstruction and Syadvada are both similar and dissimilar. Syadvada, faithful to its mother-concept anekantavada, accepts both the inexpressible and expressible qualities of language. It treats language as a medium whereas Derrida treats it as an end in itself. For Derrida, there is nothing outside the text and no transcendental reality or meaning. Panja writes:

Deconstruction is a theory that assumes that language refers only to itself rather than to an external reality outside the text. There is nothing outside
the text. Everything is text… meaning is not seen as something hermetically sealed and accessible only to the trained eye but something that is elusive, difficult to pin down, multiple. (2002, 39-41)

But for this difference, both syadvada and deconstruction work in the same direction with the same motive i.e. creating awareness about the inadequacy of language and multiplicity and unpindownability of meaning.