

The Theory of Knowledge in Jainism

1 Introduction

According to Jainism, consciousness is the essential quality of each individual soul. Soul itself does not require perception or cognition as knowledge is inherent in its essential nature. But it is covered by the impurity of karma and remains inaccessible to the soul so it loses omniscience temporarily and rely on intermediate sources like mind and senses to gain knowledge and have experience.

An ordinary individual gains knowledge of the world first through perception, which helps to acquire generalities of object and then through intelligence which helps to gain specific details of each.

2 Means Of Acquiring Knowledge

There are five different levels of acquiring knowledge: Mati, Sruthi, Avadhi, Manah-Paryaya, Keval Jnana. The first three are imperfect and prone to error. Also first two depend on our senses and are considered to be an indirect source of gaining knowledge. All Tirthankaras are said to be born up with first three level of Knowledge and after initiating to ascetic life, they are said to gain fourth level of knowledge (Manah-Paryaya) and after a certain duration of involvement in Sadhana, they are said to possess Absolute Knowledge (Keval-Jnana).

2.1 MATI JNANA:

This is the knowledge of the mind gained through senses, memory and deductive reasoning. This is a type of indirect knowledge gained through faculties of the mind.

2.2 SRUTHI JNANA:

Here learning happens from other sources through observation of symbols or words. The knowledge is gained through association, understanding and various interpretation of meaning of things(naya).

2.3 AVADHI JNANA:

The knowledge of entities(having form), space, time and feelings gained through psychic abilities without using mind and senses is Avadhi Jnana. It is 'limited' because it functions in particular area in a limited period of time. Even after acquiring it, if a person is having a large proportion of negative desires, this knowledge can diminish.

2.4 MANAH-PARYAYA JNANA:

Through this knowledge, a person can infer about the true identity of his fellow being and also can read the mind and thoughts of others. A person should be calm, dignified and self-controlled to acquire this knowledge though everyone can't acquire it even after having these qualities. Whenever a person think of something, then his mind is said to change to different meanings for the same context. A person with this knowledge can infer true meaning through his psychic.

2.5 KEVAL JNANA:

This is the highest form of knowledge in which a person is said to possess knowledge of all entities(form as well as formless), space, time and feelings of others. After having this knowledge, all the categories of knowledge is combined with it. This knowledge is gained by a person who has overcome the obstacles for the true knowledge and perception of the soul.

3 ANEKANTAVADA:

The reality is said to be constituted with innumerable substances with different qualities and susceptible to modifications. So ordinary knowledge can't comprehend this complex reality since it is limited by the notion of space and time. The concept of anekantavada (Many-Sidedness) was developed to recognize this rich and complex reality which enables to affirm both permanence and change. The concept of Anekantavada is applied to the true knowledge given by Tirthankars. Their true verbal knowledge written by Gandharas is said to be interpreted at different time of the cycle by the people according to the needs of the society.

4 SYADAVADA:

Anekantavada and Syadavada are said to be two faces of the same coin. It is also known as theory of standpoints or the doctrine of "may be" according to which one may affirm or negate the proposition in seven ways which is based on the fact that there is no universal position on truth but only conditional and relative possibilities of affirmation or negation for the truth.

For example, following are the seven ways to say about the temperature of water:

1. It may be warm (to someone coming from the cold)
2. It may not be warm (to someone feeling cold coming from a very warm room)
3. It may be both warm and not warm, depending upon certain conditions like if one wants to lower the calories or aid in digestion.
4. The water is indescribable independent of all conditions (all knowledge rest on certain conditions)
5. Being indescribable, the water may be said not to be warm under certain conditions(a combination of 2 and 4)
6. Being indescribable in itself, the water may be said to be warm under certain conditions(a combination of 1 and 4)
7. Being indescribable, the water may be said to be warm and not warm depending upon certain conditions (a combination of 3 and 4).

The process may be indescribable because it might possess infinite number of qualities with chances of modification with time.

This scheme helps us to recognize the partial and incomplete nature of ordinary human knowledge. It is an initial step in overcoming the passions because desires, hatred etc. arises from partial understanding of the things that is assumed to be truth.

5 References:

1. [Anekantavada - Jain Philosophy](#)
2. [The theory of knowledge in Jainism- by Jayaram V](#)
3. Jain Dharma Darshan, Adinath Jain Trust(Chennai) (Part-6)