



Is 'Kevaljnan Static or Dynamic?

In Jain Philosophy, the concept of 'Keval-jnan' (a state of omniscience) is an important one. It is the precursor to 'Moksha' (freeing of the soul from the cycle of birth and death). When a person eliminates all its 'Ghati' (destructive) karma, and all but one 'Aghati' (non destructive) karma, the 'Ayushya' (age determining) karma, his/her soul is purified. This brings about the true qualities of the soul, namely, infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite energy and bliss. This all knowing and perceiving state is called Keval-jnan (omniscience) When 'Ayushya karma, is eliminated (spent), the body dies and the soul reaches 'Moksha' (salvation). The ultimate goal of a Jain is to reach this stage.

During my study of Jain philosophy, I have come across literature by several Jain scholars and thinkers, who have addressed many different concepts related to Jain conduct. Some of them seem to be giving conflicting views. The concept of 'A-karta-vad', appears to assume the static model of 'Keval-gyan'. Explaining that all our thoughts, actions as well as their consequences are not in our control, they are pre-determined, based on our 'Karma' in previous lives. To think that one can change anything is only an illusion. 'A-karta-vad' suggests that every thing we do, good or bad, is direct result of fruition of our past 'Karma' (Karma no uday). In other words, our past karma makes us do things. We are only the 'agents' of our karma and not the real doer! The believers of 'A-karta-vad' explain by using 'Keval-gyan' as an example. They argue that 'Keval-jnan' gives the bearer, a complete knowledge of every one's past, present and future. Thus, if the future is all known, they conclude, it has to be constant and cannot be changed by anyone! Arguing that if you believe in 'Keval-jnan', you must believe in 'A-karta-vad'

If you assume this static model of 'Keval-jnan', it absolves you of any action or inaction. A murderer cannot be held responsible for his action, since all actions and outcomes are predetermined. 'Purusharth' (efforts) would have no meaning. There would be no point in 'doing' any thing anyway. The world would be a dreadful place. There would be no difference between humans and animals.

Here is a question for believers of 'A-karta-vad'. If an individual has no control over his/her actions, where did their karma come from in the first place?

If they are not the real doers, who is responsible for their karma? And how does one eliminate these karmas. Under this scenario, no one can possibly attain 'Keval-jnan'. In my opinion, the concept of 'A-karta-vad' is the biggest excuse for our inaction.

Now, let us examine the dynamic model of 'keval-jnan'. Under this model, knowing and perceiving is continuous and not fixed. Hence, the future does not have to be fixed and it is subject to change based on accumulating or shedding of karma by each individual through thought, speech and action.

Here, although every individual is subject to his/her past karma, he/she can modify its outcome, as well as influence the future outcomes, based on their new karma. This does not allow anyone to shirk their responsibility, since each soul is fully responsible for its past, present and future. No matter how bad a past karma you may be born with, you always have a hope of influencing your present and future

based on your new karma. Thus, this dynamic model has the ability to empower every soul, unlike the static model that discourages us from taking any initiative.

If we assume this dynamic model of 'Kevel-jnan', then the concept of 'A-karta-vad' dwindles away immediately.

Now let us examine this, from a different angle. Under the static model of 'Kevel-jnan', the knowledge would be absolute and predetermined. However, Jainism as taught to us by Mahavirswami, gave us this unique concept of anekantavad (non-absolute logic) stating that all knowledge claims are only tentative and not absolute!

Also if everyone's future is predetermined and beyond their control, why would Mahavirswami give us sermons after his 'Kevel-jnan' or establish a religious order? What is supposed to happen will happen regardless of any guidance from anyone including a Kevali!!!

I would like to know your views on this subject.