

## **Review**

# **An Insight into the Different Concepts of Sources of Valid Knowledge**

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**This research article attempted to study the various concepts followed by eastern and western thinkers on sources of valid knowledge. And it also tried to analyse the similarities between them. Here the three famous western theories; Correspondence theory, Coherence theory, Pragmatic theory and related ideas and concepts of eastern thinkers; Charvakas, Naiyayikas, Mīmāṃsakas, Viśishtadvaita Vedantins, and Advaitins are studied.**

**Keywords :** Valid knowledge, Correspondence theory, Scholastics, Charvakas, Direct Perception, Coherence theory, Inference, Spinoza, Memory, Vedic Testimony, Pragmatic theory, Shankaracharya, Brahman knowledge.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

According to Aristotle, Philosophy is the knowledge of truth. It is the inquiry into fundamental principles of truth, Metaphysics and epistemology are its important parts. One who is curious to know every sort of knowledge can be termed as a philosopher. Human being has always been in a quest for truth from time immemorial. The famous philosophers of the East and the West have given us various theories on truth. In

Indian philosophy, six prominent '**pramanas**' are generally chose as methods of knowing truth, which are Perception, Inference, Verbal Testimony, Comparison, Presumption, and Non-Apprehension. The Correspondence Theory, The Coherence Theory, and The Pragmatic Theory of Truth are the three famous theories of truth in the western philosophy. These ideas, theories, and methods of the East and West are highly connected each other. This paper is an inquiry into such a resemblance.

## **Different Concepts of Sources of Valid Knowledge and its Correlation**

### **Correspondence Theory**

The **Correspondence Theory** is the most popular and widespread one among the Neo-classical theories of truth. According to it, truth means 'agreement between thought and reality'. An idea which corresponds with reality is true, and which does not correspond with reality is termed false. This can be traced back as far as **Plato** (428-328 BC) and **Aristotle** also followed the same concept.

All Indian philosophical traditions accept these concept of Direct Realism. In other words, all Indian philosophical schools affirms the validity of Perception as a source of valid knowledge.

### **Ideas of Scholastics and Charvakas**

The **Scholasticism** of Galileo's day (16th -17th century) followed somewhat a similar principle as that of correspondence theory. Their theory of perception is known as '**Direct Realism**' or '**Naive Realism**'. Direct

realists say that all knowledge of the physical world must be based on direct perception of such real (physical) objects. They affirm that our primary knowledge of these things comes to us directly, through seeing or otherwise sensing them, rather than indirectly, through inferring their existence from something else. The **Scholastics** used Aristotle's concepts to explain how the direct perception of physical things is possible. They explained that, in seeing an object, our "sensitive faculties" (powers of sensing) are being imprinted with the actual form of the object (i.e., its nature and qualities). This imprinted form they called a "sensible species". The sensible species is the form of an object as present to a perceiving mind. It is present to a knowing mind "in abstraction from the matter" of the object. For example: The perceiving mind does not become a brown object when it perceives the brownness of the pot.

These theories of perception highly suit with that of **Charvaka philosophy**, one of the three significant '*nasthika*' systems of Indian philosophy. **Bruhaspati** is said to be the founder of the Charvaka philosophy. The Charvakas regard perception as the only means of valid knowledge, they reject the validity of inference. They reject the authority of the Vedas. They are materialists who admit the reality of gross matter. According to them, Perception is either external or internal. External perception is due to the intercourse of the five sense-organs with their objects. Internal perception depends on external perception. Mind, internal organ, can work upon the material supplied by external perception. The perceptible world is the only reality. The other things beyond the reach of perception are not real.(1)

Hence the ideas of Scholastics and Charvakas are seem to be similar.

### Coherence Theory and Concepts of Nyaya Philosophy

The second major western theory on truth is the **Coherence theory** which adds that a belief is true if it coheres or is consistent with an existing belief or body of knowledge. Even more simply, a belief is true when it fits in with the set of all our other beliefs without creating a contradiction, the whole set of which could then be tested against reality. **George Hegel** (1770-1831) is the famous Proponent of Coherence theory. "theory of knowledge which maintains that truth is a property primarily applicable to any extensive body of consistent propositions, and derivatively applicable to any one proposition in such a system by virtue of its part in the system"(2). This Idea is termed as **Theoretical holism**.

A parallel idea can be seen in the Eastern **Nyaya philosophy**. **Gautama** or Akshapada of 200 B.C.

was the founder of the Nyaya philosophy. Induction (*vyapti*) is the ground of deduction in the Nyaya philosophy(3). And the source of Induction or '*vyāpti*' is nothing but '*smruthi*' or memory, and the base of these memories is something which they call '*samskāra*', which is absolutely a set of beliefs that we make up through our everyday experiences. And this is the same idea envisaged in the Coherence theory and Theoretical holism.

### Modern Coherence Theorists and Mīmamsakas

**Modern coherence theorists** says that there are many possible systems to which the determination of truth may be based upon coherence. Some others, particularly those with strong religious beliefs hold that the truth only applies to a single absolute system.

Vedic testimony as recognised by the **Mīmamsakas** can be regarded as an eastern counterpart in the usage of such a single absolute system, The Vedas.

### Ideas of Spinoza and Viśishtadvaita Vedantins

'**Ethics**' is the magnum opus of the seventeenth century philosopher **Baruch Spinoza** (1632- 1677). His ultimate aim in that book was the ethical one of pointing the way to human blessedness, a blessedness that is inseparable from "knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature"(4).

An eastern counterpart of this idea is **Viśishtadvaita Vedantin's** doctrine of quintuplication of the elements. According to it, '*Prakriti*' is transformed into cosmic intellect (*mahat, buddhi*). Determination is its quality. Cosmic intellect is transformed into cosmic egoism which is '*sattvika*', '*rajasa*', and '*tamasa*'. *Sattvika* egoism is transformed into the five cognitive senses, the five motor senses, and Mind (5).

### Shankarācharya's Advaitic concepts in connection with Cartesian Dualism and Pragmatic Theory

**Cartesian dualism**, in rejecting the union between mind and nature, encouraged us to take a negative, alienated attitude toward the nature in which we live and have our being. This idea concord with the '*Maya*' concept of Sri Sankaracharya, which affirms that the world-appearance is false - mere '*Maya*'.

The Pragmatic theory as explained by **William James** can be summarized by his statement that "the 'true' is only

the expedient in our way of thinking, just as the 'right' is only the expedient in our way of behaving"(6). By the statement he meant that truth is a quality, the value of which is confirmed by its effectiveness when applying concepts to **actual practice (thus, "pragmatic")**.

**Shankaracharya** (788-820 AD), the founder of Advaita Vedanta, recognizes not only Correspondence but also practical efficiency as tests of truth. The knowledge which corresponds with the real nature of its object is valid. The knowledge of *Brahman* is valid, since it corresponds with its real nature. For him '*Brahman*' is the only reality(7). All else are a mere false appearance. When the absolute truth, '*Brahman*' is attained, the Ignorance, which is the cause of bondage and suffering, is removed and the '*Atman*' is eternally liberated(8).

## CONCLUSION

The three famous western theories i.e, Correspondence theory, Coherence theory and Pragmatic theory and other related western ideas correlate with various concepts of eastern thinkers on sources of knowledge. For example, both the western scholastics and eastern charvakas follow similar ideas, who accept mainly the direct perception as the sole source of knowledge. Coherence theory of Hegel says that a belief is true if it coheres with the existing body of knowledge, Indian Nyaya philosophy which approves Inference as a source of knowledge in a similar way. Modern coherence theorists says about some possible systems to which determination of truth to be based upon coherence and for them the truth only applies to a single absolute system, like that the eastern thinkers, mīmamsakas follow such a principle for whom, the single absolute system is Vedas. Likewise Spinoza's idea of human blessedness, inseparable from knowledge of union between mind and the whole of nature, resembles with the doctrine of quintuplication of Viśishtadvaita Vedantins, which says that the nature itself is transformed into cosmic intellect. Cartesian dualism on the other hand takes an alienated attitude toward the nature in which we live, Somewhat a similar concept can be traced back

to Shankarācharya, who's concept of *maya* says that the world appearance is false, and affirms that only the knowledge of Brahman is Valid, since it corresponds with its real nature. Western Pragmatic Theory well applies in Concept of Brahman. Thus the various concepts of eastern and western thinkers on sources of valid knowledge highly resemble each other.

## Notes

- 1.Saddarsana Samucchaya, (Chaukhamba Sanskrit series., 1905), Laghuvritti., p. 72.
- 2.Benjamin, A. Cornelius (1962), "Coherence Theory of Truth", p. 58 in Dagobert D. Runes (ed.), Dictionary of Philosophy, Littlefield, Adams and Company, Totowa, NJ.
- 3.Jadunath Sinha, Outlines of Indian Philosophy( Varanasi, Pilgrims publishing, 2005) p.217.
- 4.John Wild, ed., Spinoza Selections( New York: Scribner's, 1930), p.5.
5. Yatindramatadipika. p.24.
6. James, William. The Meaning of Truth. 1909.
7. Samkara Bhashya., Mundaka Upanishad., ii, 2, 12; Mandukyopanishad., i, 19-21.
8. Shankara Bhashya on Brahma Sutra., i, 1, 4-5; ii,3,46; Shankara Bhashya on Bhagavad Gita., xiii, 26; Shankarabhashya on Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad., ii, 1, 20.

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- 6.Ten Principal Upanishads: With Sankarabhashya. Vol.1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964. Print.
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