

Idea and Significance of 'Truth' in Indian Context

Neelanjana Chakravarty

ABSTRACT

The work of philosophy is to search the truth. The work of science is to follow the truth. And the common men also try to be morally truthful in their life. Idealist philosophers believe in constant truth. Science and Modern Philosophy keep in mind the changing reality of truth. Everybody knows the importance of truth. The idea of truth is very difficult to conceive for the common people. Even if we do not know what truth is, the pursuit of truth should never be stopped.

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Satyameva Jayate— Truth (*Satya*) alone triumphs— is a part of the mantra from the ancient Indian scripture *Mundaka Upanishad*. Following the Independence of India, it was adopted as the National motto of India on 26 January, 1950. It is inscribed in Devnagari script at the bottom of national emblem of India.

Realisation of 'Ultimate Truth' makes us wise; it reveals to us the subjectivity and absurdity of duality of life and world. The first and the foremost task of philosophy is to search for the 'Ultimate Truth'. But the question is what the Truth is? In the *Shrimad Bhagavada Geeta*, we find:

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sata%

ubhayorapi d[ic]hmo 'nta stvanayos tattva-darśhibhi%. (Adhyay 2, shloka 16)

The unreal has no existence; the real never ceases to exist. The truth about the both has been realized by the seers of truth. The unreal has no being and the real has no non-being; and the truth about both has also been seen by men who know the reality (RamsukhDas 19-20).

Shankaracharya, in his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, establishes that this entire universe which, out of one's ignorance, appears as of diverse forms is nothing else but Brahman who is absolutely free from all the limitations of human thought:

Ardhena pravakshyami yad-uktam granthakotibihñ

Brahma satyam jagan-mithya jivo brahmaiva naparahññ (Basu 312)

But Ramanuja claims that creation is a fact and the created world is as real as Brahman (Basu 327). In Vaishnava Philosophy, Shree Chaitanya also denies Shankara's doctrine "Brahman satyam jagan-mithya". If the God truly exists, then how can one doubt about the existence of God's creation? These great Indian Philosophers take truth as what is to be called existence.

Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment is centered on the four Noble Truths which are the foundation of Buddhism. There is one way to understand the concept is to view the truth as hypotheses and Buddhism as the process of verifying those hypotheses or realizing the truth of the truths. A common, sloppy rendering of the truths tells us that life is suffering; suffering is caused by greed; suffering ends when we stop being greedy. The way to perform this rule is to follow the 'Eight-fold Path' as stated in Buddhism. In a more formal setting the truths read:

1. The truth of suffering (*Dukkha*)
2. The truth of the cause of suffering (*sumudaya*)
3. The truth of the end of suffering (*nirhodha*)
4. The truth of the path that frees us from and suffering (*magga*) (Basu 100)

As it is generally believed in Indian philosophy that to appreciate the Truth fully one have to spend years in study and meditation.

Truth or valid knowledge is called 'Prama' in Indian Philosophy. *Prama* is a definite and true cognition of some object. The Sankya analyses the process of cognition in a different way. There are three factors in all valid knowledge: the subject (Pramata), the object (Prameya) and the ground or source of knowledge (pramana). The modification of the intellect through which the self knows an object, is called *pramana*, so *prama* or valid knowledge is possible when intellect, the unconscious element, takes the form of the object of knowledge which is reflected in the conscious self. Truth is not an object of knowledge which requires various proofs to show that it exists. It itself is the God incarnate. Its real nature is actionlessness— it is absolute without any trace of activity.

Regarding truth, Descartes says that if the idea of a thing is clear and distinct, it does not mean that the thing really exists (true), but all the ideas of existent things must be clear and distinct to be existent. Our judgments should be based on this assumption, i.e. clarity and

distinctness as criterion of truth (Bhattacharya 243).

In Jaina philosophy – every Judgment is conditioned by some limitations and specific characteristics in the eyes of different persons and each and every judgment is partially true with reference to the object perceived. This partial knowledge of about someone of the innumerable aspects of an object is called by the Jaina philosophers ‘naya’. The Judgment based on the ‘naya’ is also called ‘naya’. This type of Judgment is expressed as ‘syat’ or ‘somehow’, and that is why, this theory is known as *syadvada*. The Jains hold that Reality is manifold (*anekantaka*); it is not of one nature. So, this is also described as *anekantavada* because it is unity and difference, universal and particular, permanent and changing. The Judgment is of seven forms, so this is known as ‘Saptabhanginaya’. Ordinarily, in logic there are two kinds of judgment — affirmative and negative. The Jainas distinguish seven kinds of judgment including those two. Let us explain the sevenfold judgment with two examples. Suppose a pot is in a particular room at a particular time and the pot is described as blue. This may have seven forms as perceived by different persons at different times and spaces:

First, this may be stated as: somehow (Syat) the pot is blue. Secondly, somehow (syatnastic) the pot is not blue. Thirdly, somehow, the pot is and is not blue (syat astica nastica). Fourthly, somehow the pot is indescribable (syat avyaktavyam). This is indescribable because every statement is always conditioned by contradictions. Fifthly, the pot is somehow indescribable and somehow blue (avyaktavyam astica). Sixthly, the pot is somehow indescribable (avyaktavyam) and somehow is not blue (avyaktavyam nastica). Seventhly, the pot is somehow blue and somehow is not blue and somehow is indescribable (astica, nastica, avyaktavyam). (Banerjee 109-110)

These seven forms of judgment signify that truth is relative and realistic as there are various aspects of an object viewed from different perspectives.

The Jaina doctrine of *syadvada* is sometimes compared with the view of the western pragmatic philosophy. The basic principle of pragmatism is that nothing is constant, everything is provisional. Here pragmatism echoes the thought of Heraclites, the ancient Greek thinker, who declared that we are in the midst of incessant flow and flux. For pragmatism, values have no prior existence. They are created by a process of successful experimentations and emerge as problems are solved. Truth also is viewed by a pragmatist as something which works. Truth, thus, does not exist, it happens. Truth is literally verification, truth-making. It is never perfect, immutable, and eternal but always in the making. (Banerjee 77)

Materialism and Realism are very important trends which have inaugurated the age of reason aiming at not only to know but to do, to be and to become, what is useful to us that is true. Swami Vivekananda said— stick to the truth. Beware at everything that is untrue. Stick to the truth and we shall succeed, may be slowly but surely.

Plato was the saint of truth. Truth was eternal to him. He was the critic at art because art did not reveal the truth. He said those who seek for the best kind of song and music ought not to seek for that which is pleasant but for that which is true, and the truth of imitation consists as we were saying, in rendering the thing imitated according to quantity and quality (Chakraborty 61). But Plato allowed his Philosopher king “to tell lies, deceiving both in enemies and its own citizens for the benefit of the city” (Roy and Bhattacharyya 563). If the motive is good, the action is justifiable whatever might be the means.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, by treading an immoral path of falsehood and violence it is not possible to reach the temple of truth and justice. He said, “Truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle that is God” (Gandhi xiii).

From the *Gita* to Gandhi, from Plato to pragmatists the Idea of truth gets various forms. But we do not get definite answer to the question that – what is the ‘truth’? We only know some features of truth; two of them are self contradictory. What we have learned about the truth may be juxtaposed as follows:

- 1) Truth means existence.
- 2) Truth is eternal and unchanged.
- 3) Truth is relative.
- 4) It is always good to be truthful.
- 5) Truth is beautiful.
- 6) Truth is dynamic.
- 7) Truth is Equal to God.

At one time the Earth was considered flat; at that time it was the truth. Now, we know that the Earth is round. And we think it is true. The moon is a lifeless, light-less, cold inert satellite—

it is truth; but in full moon night, we are fascinating about it. This is also truth. Moon takes an important role in some religion. Some people think about Moon that it is a form of the God. The fact is false, but the belief is true. Imaginary things are false, but imagination is true. Ghost does not exist. But the fear about the ghost truly exists.

There are many types of truth in our life— Philosophical truth, religious truth, scientific truth, truth of common sense, practical truth etc. We do not find any universally acceptable definition of truth, but the search for the truth will never be ended.

I think the Existentialist view of the truth is mostly acceptable. According to them, the value of truth is felt when it is realized in the depth of the heart, when it is communicating with one's own emotion (Banerjee 93). But, now we get two more classifications of truth— personal truth and universal truth. No matter the number of disagreements, the pursuit of truth is eternal.

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