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Knowledge (Jnana) In Indian Philosophy: An Analysis

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Abstract-- The lexical meaning of the word 'knowledge' is regarded as the information, understanding, and skills that we gain through experience and education. It refers to the state of being aware of a particular fact or situation. It reveals the world of reality. We can generally fulfill all our practical activities through knowledge. In Indian philosophy, the word knowledge refers to both Jnana and true cognition. The term 'Jnana' is derived from the root 'jna', which means to know. In the Upanisads, the two words 'cit' and 'Jnana' were often rendered as knowledge. 'Cit' will be rendered as "Consciousness" and 'Jnana' as "cognition". The true cognitions, called Prama (yatharthajnana), and aprama stand for all cognitions that are not true. But in Western philosophy, knowledge always stands only for true cognition. False knowledge is not cognition at all. The division of true and false knowledge is useless. So, knowledge means true cognition. False knowledge means no knowledge.

Keywords-- Jnana, Consciousness, Prama & Aprama

Knowledge manifests the world of reality. True knowledge means the correct representation of reality. We can act successfully with true knowledge. Not all cognitions are valid. A special form of cognition (buddhi) is called valid knowledge. To understand the nature of valid knowledge, we first come to know the nature of cognition or knowledge. Knowledge illuminates things other than itself. The object of apprehension may be a thing or a quality, an existent or a non-existent. But where there is knowledge there must be something which stands out as the object of knowledge. All things revealed to us when they become objects of knowledge.

The base of Indian philosophy is knowledge, and the base of knowledge is questioning, and the base of questioning is curiosity. In India, 'Jnana' means knowledge is considered as prime. In ancient, medieval scriptures, we see that the treasure of wisdom begins with a question. Knowledge must be backed by reason. Kautilya in his "Arthashastra" states that there are four branches of learning: Scripture (the three Vedas), agriculture and commerce (Varta), politics and public administration (danda-niti), and Anviksiki or the discipline of Critical inquiry. Among these, the study of critical inquiry is considered a means in all activities and support for all religious, moral, and social duty. Here, critical inquiry means the art of investigating something by reason, and it should be practiced in all branches of learning.

Anviksiki in Kautilya's sense is a study of the generic concept of rationality. The study of critical inquiry means investigation with reasons. Vatsyayana tells us the meaning of 'reason' (hetu). It is a procedure of acquiring knowledge, a pramana. The Nyayas, one of the Schools in Indian Philosophy, have linked the pursuit of rational inquiry with the ends of life. They uphold the view that the rational life is a life best suited to eliminate pain and suffering. From this, we can assume the importance of knowledge in the ancient period. Some recent scholars also describe the significance of knowledge.

In Indian Philosophy, Jnana (Knowledge) primarily means the spiritual awareness. Knowledge is one of the fundamental issues concerned with life and the world in India. The Nyaya system believes that knowledge is not only an adventitious property but also an essential property of the self. Knowledge illuminates things other than itself. The object of apprehension may be a thing or a quality or an act, or the existent or non-existent. But in all cases, when there is knowledge there must be something that stands out as the object of knowledge. All things are manifested to us when they become the objects of knowledge. Nyaya believes "knowledge reveals both the subject and the object, which are quite distinct from itself. All knowledge is a revelation or manifestation of objects. Just as a lamp manifests physical things placed before it, so knowledge reveals all objects which come before it." Knowledge means awareness or apprehension of objects. Nyaya holds that the self is not a series of conscious phenomena. It is a conscious entity that receives sense-impressions and knows the external objects through them.

In knowledge, we cognize an object and understand it, and may also have a feeling of pleasure and pain. But here, knowledge is not a sense of feeling or the will. It has some specific characteristics of its own. It is quite distinct and self-sufficient. Through manas and sense organs, the self acquires knowledge. So, it is the acquired characteristics of the self. Cognition relies upon the mind-body relationship. When there is the separation of the body from the self, the self becomes a pure substance, devoid of cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, etc. So, the Nyaya system is of the view that the self is a pure substance and cognition is the acquired characteristics of the self, and it cannot affect the nature of the self. This view regarding the self is similar to Prabhakara's view of the self.



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Knowledge is divided into two broad classes of valid and invalid. Those cognitions that bear directly upon their objects are valid. And those cognitions that bear indirectly upon their objects are invalid. Valid means of knowledge is self-evident. Prama means true knowledge or the real nature of an object, and pramana implies the sources of getting such knowledge.

“yathartha anubhavah prama tat sadhanam ca pramanam.”

Different systems of Indian philosophy have given divergent views with regard to the nature of knowledge or prama.

The Nyaya system is known as pramana sastra in India. It is the science of correct knowledge. Prama is the presentational Knowledge, yatharthanubhava. Nyaya gives four important aspects of knowledge:

1. Pramatra or the subject 2. Prameya or object 3. Pramiti or the resulting cognition and 4. Pramana or the means of knowledge. Valid cognition requires these four aspects; the absence of any one of these prevents the occurrence of valid cognition.

(i) *Pramatra*- Knowledge involves a subject or knower. The person who obtains true knowledge is called pramata. Pramata is an intelligent agent. It is that which knows & strives, enjoys & suffers, remembers & expects, the knower.

(ii) *Prameya*- It is the object of adequate knowledge. Valid knowledge refers to some object. Every knowable object has some characteristics and attributes.

(iii) *Pramiti*- Pramiti is the resulting state of cognition. It is a valid cognition. It is the peace of adequate knowledge.

(iv) *Pramana*- Different Sources of knowledge are known as pramana. It means the instrument of valid presentative knowledge (yathartha-anubhava). Pramana leads to correct knowledge. It should be free from doubt and error. There is no possibility of valid knowledge without the study of pramanas. Ignorance is the root cause of human suffering, and true knowledge is necessary to overcome that suffering. Vatsyayana, in his commentary on the Nyaya Sutra of Gautama, marked that the study of Pramanas is necessary because we can know the reality through it. Though these four aspects are equally necessary for knowledge, the pramana is considered the most important.

Prof. D.M. Datta said that “Prama is generally defined as a cognition having the two-fold characteristics of truth and novelty, and that as regards the first characteristic-truth, all schools of Indian philosophy are unanimous.”

Naiyaikas hold that prama is a definite knowledge of an object which is true and presentational. For Jayanta, it is the knowledge of an object which is free from any sort of illusion & error. Vacaspati defines Prama as the confirmed knowledge of an object, which is different from recollection.

Buddhism states that true knowledge consists in its practical value. For them, Prama reveals an object that is capable of successful volition. Prama, as knowledge, makes us reach the object revealed by it. Further, Kamalasila clarifies that “The valid knowledge refers to a possible successful action; though not to the actual achievement of the object.” So, the validity of knowledge depends upon the success in the practical activity according to Buddhism.

Sankhya is of the view that all valid knowledge includes 3 factors subject (Pramatra), the object (prameya), and the source of knowledge (pramana). The subject is the self or pure consciousness (suddhachetana). The modification (vritti) of the intellect, through which the self-known as the object, is called Pramana. Through this modification, the object presented to the self is the prameya. Sankhya states Prama as the reflection of the Purusa (conscious self), in the mental mode corresponding to the object. For Sankhya, validity of knowledge consists in certainty (undoubtedness), correspondence to the object, and novelty as marks of valid knowledge. Vacaspati Mishra defines Prama as the cittavrtti (modification of citta) which apprehends an object that is undoubted real and unknown.

The Mimamsaka admits two kinds of knowledge, immediate and mediate. The most essential feature of valid knowledge is its novelty. Knowledge must not arise from defective causes. It must be free from contradiction. It must truly represent the object. Once the conditions are satisfied, our cognition of an object will be treated as valid. Thus, novelty, freedom from contradiction, and truth are the three essential features of valid knowledge, and if any one of these conditions is absent in knowledge, then it ceases to be valid. In the Bhatta Mimamsa, Prama or true knowledge is defined as primary and original knowledge. Knowledge is what has not been previously known. So, memory cannot be true knowledge. The act of knowledge has four parts according to Purva-Mimamsa. They are (i) the knower, (ii) the object of knowledge, (iii), the instrument of knowledge, (iv) the result of knowledge. Prabhakara's theory of knowledge is known as “Triputti-pratyaksavada.” Each cognition includes three factors, namely, the knower (self), the known (object), and the knowledge itself. In the view of Prabhakara, valid knowledge is apprehension (anubhuti). All apprehension is direct and immediate, and valid per se.



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Kumarila defines valid know ledge as apprehension of an object which is produced by causes free from defects and which is not contradicted by subsequent knowledge. Kumarila defines valid knowledge as:

“TasmatdrdhamyadutpannamnapiSamvadamrcchati
Jnanatarenavijnanamtatpramanampratiyatam”

It means valid knowledge is a form of assured objects, which don't need confirmation by other cognition.

Advaita Vedanta holds that valid knowledge is knowledge that possesses non-contradictions and novelty. This is the reason why memory is not accepted as knowledge. Advaita thinkers are of the view that knowledge, to be knowledge, must possess two characteristics, viz, non-contradiction and informativeness. For Advaitins, cognition in so far as it is non-different (abhinna) from caitanya or consciousness, which is of the nature of Brahman and as such is saccidananda Svarupa, is real and valid. Invalidity is a production of maya or ajnana, which is positive.

According to Visistadvaita, knowledge of the self is to be attained through practice. Ramanuja said that knowledge involves a subject and an object. Knowledge eternally belongs to the self. Knowledge functions not for itself but for another. Cognition is apprehension. Visistadvaita emphasizes practice or vyavahara while dealing with the definition of Prama. For Ramanuja, there is no false knowledge or bhramajnana. All knowledge is true, as knowledge reveals some objects. Knowledge is intrinsically valid. He advocated that “all apprehension is real”. (yatharthamsarvajnanam). He believes that knowledge means real knowledge, not ordinary or verbal knowledge

CONCLUSION

The concept of Jñāna in Indian philosophy represents a comprehensive and profound vision of knowledge that integrates intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. It seeks not only to explain reality but also to transform human life. The enduring relevance of this tradition lies in its recognition that true knowledge is not simply knowing about the world but realizing the deeper truth of oneself and existence. Therefore, the study of Jñāna continues to provide meaningful guidance for both philosophical inquiry and the pursuit of a fulfilled and enlightened life.

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