

## Bridging the Gap Between Western and Indian Concept of Truth

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### ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper aims to bridge the gap between the Western and Indian perspectives on truth by examining their conceptualisations and theories. The paper explores different theories of truth found in the Western context, including correspondence, pragmatism, coherence, semantic, and deflationary views. Bhagavad Gita is used as a source to understand the Indian perspective where truth is seen as the realization of consciousness and the ultimate reality, encompassing both the moral code and the eternal truth. The paper highlights the similarities and differences between the two understandings of truth and explores the implications of these differences for cross-cultural communication and understanding. It also explores the symbiotic relationship between truth and consciousness.

**Keywords:** *Concept of Truth, Theories of Truth, Western Perspective on Truth, Truth in Bhagavad Geeta, Realizing the Truth*

nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ  
ubhayorapi dṛiṣṭo 'nta stvanayos tattva-darśhibhiḥ  
(Bhagwad Geeta, 2.16)

'The unreal truth (Asatya) never exists, and real truth (satya) never fails to exist. The seekers or the knowers of the ultimate truth have perceived the existence of both'.

Truth is a fundamental concept that has been debated and discussed for centuries in both Indian and western cultures. Some thinkers define truth in terms of correspondence or coherence with reality; others propose that truth as a concept cannot be defined due to its abstract or primitive nature. (Moore, 1899; Asay 2013)

According to Alston (1996), the process of formulating a theory about the nature of truth involves comprehending the definition of the term 'true'. Other scholars such as Wright (1992) and Lynch (2009) tackle the task of elucidating truth by identifying and organizing foundational truths, commonly accepted assertions, or a priori principles. These types of investigations are familiar to researchers who specialize in the study of truth (Alston, 1996; Lynch, 2009; Wright, 1992).

Truth as a concept is difficult to define because of the discrepancy between how psychologists and philosophers understand truth. From a psychological standpoint, truth is

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perceived as a collection of information or knowledge that individuals store in their memory. Psychologists are primarily interested in understanding the cognitive processes and mechanisms that people use to access this stored knowledge when making judgments about what is true or false. (Machery, E., 2009). However, philosophers approach truth as an intentional mental state that is consciously focused on truth itself, often by examining the underlying principles, criteria, and conditions that determine when something can be considered true. (Kahneman et. al, 1973).

Discovering the truth is a focus of many philosophical, scientific, and religious traditions, but the definition of truth varies depending on cultural and traditional beliefs. In Western philosophy, truth is often associated with objective evidence, rationality, and empirical facts, while the Indian philosophical tradition values subjective experiences, intuition, and spiritual insight as essential to understanding the truth. This difference in conceptualisation has led to gaps in communication and understanding which can act as a hurdle in exchange of knowledge and ideas between the two cultures.

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The definition of truth has been explored in various research papers and philosophical works, as well as in spiritual texts like the Bhagavad Gita. Thus, the objective of this paper is to establish a connection between Western and Indian understandings of truth through a conceptual analysis. The aim is to investigate the distinct viewpoints and theories on truth in both cultures, and outline the similarities and differences between them. Additionally, it seeks to assess the impact of these differences on communication, comprehension, and collaboration between these cultures.

To accomplish this, the paper will define and conceptualize the definition, concepts and theories of truth in both western and Indian culture. The source of Indian literature on truth is primarily Bhagwad Geeta and that of western literature research articles and books of various western philosophers like Aristotle, Pierce, Bradley, etc. Further, a thorough analysis of similarities and differences will be outlined to find a common ground. Finally, it will discuss the implications of these differences for cross-cultural communication and understanding, and propose strategies for bridging the gap between the two perspectives.

### **WESTERN CONCEPT OF TRUTH**

Truth has always been a predominant topic of discussion among many philosophers, There are various theories of truth, some more rampant than others. The pragmatic theory, the semantic theory, the coherence theory, the pragmatic theory, and the correspondence theory are some of them.

#### ***Aristotle's correspondence theory -***

Aristotle's correspondence theory can be traced back to ancient Greece. Aristotle believed that truth is a correspondence between a thought, observation, belief, or statement and what exists in the surrounding environment. The thought, observation, belief, or statement only holds true when it corresponds to what exists in reality. The level of truth held by the thought, observation, belief, or statement is contingent on how accurately it depicts what exists in reality. (Aristotle 1984)

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By way of illustration, if you believe that the earth is round, that belief is true because the earth in reality is round; if the earth were flat, this belief would not stand to be true. The correspondence theory stresses the importance of pragmatic evidence and belief in the evaluation of how much truth a statement holds.

### ***The Pragmatic theory -***

The Pragmatic theory of truth was penned by William James in his paper titled "Pragmatism, a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" written in 1907. He coined the term "Pragmatism" which referred to a contemporary way to view truth and knowledge. James illuminated the fact that truth is the constructive and practical aspect of our lives and is not limited to just being an abstract concept, truth is an essential part of overcoming problems and reaching our goals.

William James also stressed upon the role of unique individual experiences and instincts in shaping our comprehension of reality. James held that traditional views of philosophy that emphasized the objective aspects of evaluating the degree of truth failed to take into account the subjectivity of truth (Individuality and life experiences that form our beliefs) (James, 1907). Another eminent pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey held that Truth is a function of curiosity and that an individual's beliefs stand true when it helps individuals overcome problems (Dewey, 1938).

### ***Coherence Theory of Truth***

This set of theories suggests that truth depends on the coherence of an individual's beliefs, rather than how the beliefs correspond to reality (Thagard, 2005). These theories state that an individual's beliefs stand true if they cohere with other beliefs that they may have.

The coherence of our beliefs helps us make sense of the happenings in the world and is what makes them true in the first place (Kant, 1781). Kant states that our knowledge doesn't stem from the outside world, but is in fact derived from the ways our minds are organized based on our experiences. The Coherence Theory is said to have originated from Kant.

Coherence theories were later developed by American philosopher Charles Peirce. Peirce (1877) and British philosopher F.H. Bradley (1893), Peirce stated that truth stems from queries when an individual's beliefs are put to the test. In the due process, the beliefs that align with our existing set of beliefs are adopted and the ones that are not coherent with our existing beliefs are rejected, The process of queries is ongoing and beliefs continue to be revised when new evidence comes forth (Peirce, 1877). Bradley went on to say that coherence is imperative to condition truth; any belief that does not align with an individual's existing beliefs simply cannot be true, truth is not just about logical consistency but also about how an individual's beliefs sit with each other to make a larger whole (Bradley, 1893).

Coherence theories take into account the alteration of beliefs when new evidence is put forth, in this way its more flexible and accepting of change than the corresponding theory. It also makes note of different beliefs that individuals have about the same things. However, coherence theory lacks because of its permissiveness and lack of coherence with actual reality.

### ***Semantic Theory of Truth***

This group of theories suggests that the degree of truth a statement or belief holds is evaluated by how well it can align with what exists in reality (Davidson, 1990; Tarski, 1944). Similar to the correspondence theory this group suggests that truth in its truest element is free from the influences of an individual's personal thoughts behaviors and opinions, Truth corresponds with reality and is defined as such, which leads to the assumption that our knowledge can be comprehensively understood as the precise representation of the world (Tarski, 1944).

The semantic theory also states that an individual's language and reality are two interdependent concepts, which means that our thoughts and beliefs only hold relevancy if it in sync with the world that exists around us, which ultimately boils down to the fact that language cannot be separated from what exists out there in the world and our comprehension of the truth at the end of the day is linked to how we comprehend the world (Davidson, 1990).

### ***The Deflationary Theory of Truth***

This theory rivals the existing traditional concepts about truth, it holds that truth is not very crucial or profound (Field, 2009). Truth in its truest essence is just a formal notion that aligns with the reality of the world, it does not provide any significant insights about the world (Kirkham, 1992). When we say that a belief, thought or statement is true we are not making a profound claim about reality, we are just stating that it aligns with reality (Lynch, 2001). By the way of illustration if we say that trees are green we aren't claiming that it is anything deeply insightful or profound, we are just pointing out that what we are saying aligns with what we have observed in the world.

One of the biggest strengths of this theory is that it does not run into the same problems that other theories of theory run into, for example, the correspondence theory begs the question of what it means for a belief to correspond with the world (Künne, 2003). On the other hand, the coherence theory of truth runs into the obstacle of how best to explain what it means for beliefs to be coherent (Lehrer, 1980). The deflationary theory of truth combats these issues by viewing truth as a purely formal concept as opposed to viewing it as other concepts and ideas, it is simply a tool that helps us comprehensively understand language. The deflationary theory holds that we do not need to resort to deep metaphysical or epistemological principles to comprehend the essence of truth (Sider, 2011).

### ***The Judeo- Christian view of Truth***

The Judeo-Christian view of truth is built on the foundation of the faith in an unbiased, ultimate truth that comes from revelations from God, This "truth" is regarded as everlasting and one that doesn't change, it forms the basis for morality, and ethical living (McKim, 2016). Truth is viewed in relation to God who is said to be the eternal holder of truth, Truth is said to be found through various things such as religious literature, Teachings, and individual experiences (Layman, 2018). There is a vast array of various Western concepts of truth, each focusing on a different aspect of truth. They all have their unique strengths and weaknesses, but each of them provides us with unique insight which helps us comprehensively understand the truth. Judeo-Christian Literature points out that the word of God is the most important source of truth, and the ten commandments and other laws set the standard for good or bad, and right or wrong for individuals from all walks of life (McKim, 2016). Additionally, this view reiterates the importance of an individual's integrity and striving to be honest. Honesty and truth-seeking/ Truth telling are the cornerstones of core

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values and virtues and being deceitful, or lying are seen as sinful acts (Layman, 2018). The Judeo-Christian view of truth boils down to living in accordance with the objective and eternal truth that is revealed by God alone (McKim, 2016).

### **TRUTH AND BHAGWAD GEETA**

Bhagwad Geeta conceptualizes truth as Atman. One Eshwar which is the true nature of Aatma is referred to as truth. This Truth is believed to be present internally within each individual. However, only a few actually realize the supreme truth because it requires bhakti or loving devotion. Hence, each human being has to strive hard to attain this truth. (Bhagwad Geeta, 7.3) This Truth is eternal, indestructible, and imperishable - hence it is called Sanatan. Truth is realization of consciousness and perception of reality in its absolute form without any distortions.

Bhagwad Geeta conceptualizes two kinds of truth, 'paramartha-satya' and 'vyavaharika-satya'. The ultimate reality, or 'paramartha-satya', which is the eternal truth that underlies all existence. It is the ultimate reality that governs the universe, and is beyond the understanding of the human mind. The ultimate truth can only be realized at the psycho-spiritual level. (Rao, 2016, P. 42) The moral code that governs human behavior, or 'vyavaharika-satya', is based on the principles of honesty, integrity, and adherence to dharma, or duty. This code of conduct is necessary for the proper functioning of society and the attainment of spiritual liberation. Hence, according to the Bhagavad Gita, truth encompasses both the ultimate reality that governs the universe, and the moral code that governs human behavior.

According to Bhagwad Geeta, Krishna, who is also referred to as the source of the entire creation and eternal seed of all beings, is the ultimate truth and to realize truth is to realize Krishna. Realizing the truth involves crossing the boundaries of 'maya' or veil consisting of three 'gunas' or modes of prakriti namely Satva (the quality of goodness), Rajas (the principle of activity) and Tamas (the principle of inertia). (Geeta, 7.40; Geeta 7.13)

Truth comprises adhibhuta (the field of matter), adhidaiva (Brahman) and the adhiyajna (divinity dwelling in the hearts of all beings). (Geeta, 7.30)

Those who possess a steady mind can attain the truth.

### **TRUTH AND CONSCIOUSNESS**

Truth is not a static concept and can be found in different levels of consciousness. The concepts of adhibhuta, adhidaiva, and adhiyajna are essential in comprehending the nature of consciousness and the individual's connection to it. In the Bhagavad Gita, adhibhuta refers to the material aspect of the universe, which undergoes constant change and is the source of both suffering and pleasure. Adhidaiva, on the other hand, denotes the divine aspect of the universe and the cosmic intelligence that governs and sustains all creation. Adhiyajna pertains to the divine presence within all living beings, which animates and guides them towards self-realization and liberation. (Bhagavad Gita, 8.4)

To realize the truth one needs to recognize the unity of these three concepts and understand and transcend the material aspects of existence to merge with ultimate reality, Brahman.

The relationship of truth and consciousness is symbiotic in nature. Consciousness seeks truth, and truth expands consciousness.

### HOW TO REALIZE THE TRUTH- INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Bhagavad Gita contains valuable insights about the truths of life, which Indian psychology uses to guide individuals towards discovering the truth. One such way is practicing detachment from all possessions, relationships and results by working for dharma (one's duty or right path) than for the fruits of it. This helps a person feel a sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment (Bhagwad Geeta, 3.19). A study conducted by Shirley Telles, Nilkamal Singh, and Acharya Balkrishna also revealed that during meditation, attention is directed inward and without any intent to judge or analyse leading to detachment. (Telles et al., 2015)

One of the prerequisites to realise the truth is understanding the true nature of self which is beyond the body and mind. The concept of self is widely explored in Indian psychology. Oyserman, Elmer & Smith (2012) in their review on self and self-concept discusses the self as the fundamental unit of human existence, characterized by consciousness, bliss, and freedom. They also highlight that self-realization is an ongoing process rather than a fixed state of being.

Further, there is a distinction between surface and metaphysical self. Ahamkara/ ego in both Yoga and Vedanta tradition of Indian psychology is considered to be the surface self, primarily based on body and phenomenal experiences, and different from a deeper, metaphysical self (Atman or Purusha) (Salagame and Raj 1999; Desai and Collins 1986; Salagame et al. 2005; Jakubczak 2013). Only accessing and understanding his metaphysical self or Atman can enable a person to realise the truth.

Indian psychology also emphasises on developing self-awareness through practices like Yoga, meditation, self-enquiry and self-reflection. There have been several empirical research studies that have explored the relationship between meditation and the attainment of truth. One study by Jeanetta et al. (2019) found that regular meditation practice increased self-awareness and helped individuals gain insight into their true nature, leading to a greater understanding of the truth. Another study by Fischer et al. (2022) found that meditative practices like yoga and mindfulness helped individuals experience a state of inner peace and tranquility, which facilitated the realization of the ultimate truth.

According to Bhagwad Geeta, consciousness is superior than gross body, mind and intellect and accessing 'paravidya' or transcendental knowledge helps you realise the ultimate truth.

According to chapter 4, Verse 11 truth can be attained by freeing oneself from attachment, fear and anger and being fully absorbed in 'krishna'. By doing so, individuals attain transcendental love of Krishna and thus realize the ultimate truth.

### HOW TO REALIZE THE TRUTH- WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

Alternatively, the Western tradition has also put forth various outlooks on realizing the truth such as existentialism, skepticism, empiricism, pragmatism, and rationalism (Russell, 2004). Existentialism accentuates the role of an individual's freedom and personal experiences as crucial aspects of comprehending the truth (Sartre, 1943/2003; Heidegger, 1927/2010). Sartre asserts that as individuals we need to create our own individual values and meanings instead of leaning on pre-existing standards. Skepticism on the other hand posits that pre-existing knowledge is debatable and as individuals we should keep our minds open to alter or amend our beliefs when new evidence is put forth, simply put this view

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suggests that we cannot be completely reliant on our beliefs and even the strongest held beliefs we hold have the potential to be doubtful (Hume, 1739/2000).

Additionally, Empiricism holds that our knowledge comes from sensory experiences as opposed to reason or intuition, simply put Locke believed that our ideas come from our unique experiences around the world and any knowledge that we have only come from our experiences (Locke, 1690/1975). Furthermore, Rationalism emphasizes the primary derivation of knowledge from our reasoning and logic as opposed to sensory experiences, Descartes posits that we know for a fact that we exist as thinking beings even when our sensory experiences sometimes fail to be reliable (Descartes, 1637/2003).

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Truth has been approached differently in Western and Indian philosophical traditions. While the former emphasizes correspondence between propositions and reality, the latter conceives of truth in a holistic and experiential manner. However, instead of highlighting their differences, scholars suggest exploring how these approaches are interconnected. They argue that the Western notion of truth is an idealized version of the more comprehensive viewpoint in Indian philosophy. (Lloyd, 2005)

Furthermore, the Western emphasis on rationality and evidence complements the intuitive approach to truth advocated by Indian philosophy. (Ganeri, 2012) There are also shared aspects in both customs, such as the importance of ethical conduct and self-improvement for attaining truth. Both correspondence theory of the west and indian view of truth in Bhagwad Geeta suggests that truth in its truest element is free from the influences of an individual's personal thoughts behaviors and opinions. However unlike Indian view which suggests comprehensive framework to understand and realise truth, the western deflationary theory holds that we do not need to resort to deep metaphysical or epistemological principles to comprehend the essence of truth.

The history of truth as a concept is prevalent and significant in both the Indian and the Western contexts, while both of these contexts share a number of similarities there is also a stark difference in how truth is approached in both these contexts. The Role of Truth is also influenced by faith in both contexts, In Indian Philosophy faith is often viewed in parallel with reason and an organic addition to an individual's intuition and experiences. In contrast to this Western philosophy views faith as a separate entity from evidence and reasoning. Faith is viewed merely as a matter of an individual's beliefs.

Truth is often comprehended as a correspondence in Western philosophy, i.e, something only stands to be true when it corresponds to what exists in reality, It accentuates the role of empirical evidence and objective reality as the foundation of assessing and identifying the truth, Indian Psychology seems to have a contrasting view as it is often viewed as a personal epiphany that stems from individual experiences or insights, Truth in the Indian context seems to be more subjective and experiential.

Additionally in the Indian context truth is often knit together with consciousness, The Geeta for instance highlights the importance of an individual's self-awareness and realization of the authentic nature of one's self. This realization is viewed as the way to achieve the ultimate truth of the universe. The Western context contradicts this by stressing the need for reason and logic in uncovering the truth.

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However, both these contexts also have their own parallelisms such as the significance of self-realization and self-awareness in individuals looking to uncover the truth and the setbacks, they might face due to the limitations of a human mind, both also highlight the need for humility in individuals looking to uncover the truth.

In addition to this, both contexts acknowledge that the pursuit of truth is a process that's underway, In the Western context this is studied through a scientific method that works based on ongoing inquiry and revision, and in the Indian context this is looked through the lens of self-realization which is an ongoing process of spiritual development and evolution.

All in all, Truth as a concept has been studied and explored significantly in both contexts and although there are pronounced differences in the approach to the concept of truth there are also some parallels such as the importance of self-awareness, humility, and the ongoing pursuit for truth.

### ***Limitation***

Since truth is a philosophical concept, only a limited number of research numbers were available for review. Secondly, it was difficult to determine the exact research methodology due to its qualitative nature. Moreover, the Indian concept of truth primarily draws from Bhagwad Geeta and it's difficult to put its theories into scientific investigation. Further, since truth is a multifaceted concept, it is approached differently by different philosophers, psychologists and researchers which can lead to biases in interpreting the concept. Finally, the review draws primarily from older textbooks and religious scriptures which can lead to contextual bias because the concepts that were relevant then might not be relevant now.

### ***Implication***

The paper will help contribute to a deeper understanding of truth as a concept, and to provide a basis for cross-cultural communication and collaboration. By exploring the similarities and differences between the Western and Indian concepts of truth, we hope to promote a more nuanced and respectful dialogue between these two cultures, and to foster greater understanding and cooperation in the pursuit of truth.

## **CONCLUSION**

The article aimed to explore the concept of truth in the Indian and Western contexts by comparing their ideologies, theories, and contexts. This Exploration helps us gain a greater appreciation for the richness and diversity human thoughts hold and the multitude of ways a concept such as this can be viewed by people from different walks of life, by doing this we encourage the exchange of cross-cultural dialogue and diversity which harbors a mindset of cross-cultural tolerance and encourages us as individuals to respect cultural boundaries, which in turn promotes striving towards a harmonious, tolerant and peaceful society. By bridging the gap between Indian and Western contexts we can gain a greater understanding of truth as a concept and the role it plays in our individual lives.

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