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## Truth Through the Spectrum of Social Perspectives

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*Abstract* - This piece of writing on the theme 'Truth' is an exercise based on philosophical, social science and literary material. The truth with different names--- existence, reality, fact, facticity attracted the attention of galaxy of established authors across disciplines. The status of truth has been attempted here discussing epistemological, linguistic, critical, constructivist, post-structuralist and postmodernist perspectives. It may be concluded that the concept of truth has still remained present in old and new volumes equally, but has lost its prominent position in theory and logical discussions. The concept moved from unifying and universal agreement to the disarrayed concept- either denial of its essentialist core, and designated post modernist anti-essentialist relativism in later year theorist. The debate now concentrates not on truth as such but on 'about truth'. And the 'hype-real' simulations of the real presents before us many versions of truth detached from its existential truth at a higher order.

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# Truth Through the Spectrum of Social Perspectives

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Truth has been attracting philosophers, saints, scientists, the development economists or the statesmen, spiritualists and common men generally feel comfortable with truth and not with falsehood . Truth is both a practical and moral urge simultaneously.

Truth has been still an unabated theme of social science and humanities literature. There is no dearth of references on truth or its variants with different connotations like existence, fact/ facticity , reality and hyper-reality even. Many truths, multiple truths, half truths, contextual truths: truth- real and truth- perceived are another types that give us entanglements that requires solution. But what is the best answer for truth? Is it science or the conscience? In the absence of agreed upon truth or universal truth, the debate in private and public domain is natural to arise.

In the wake of emergence of the knowledge societies or information society, there has been a great demand for a clearer concept of truth and criteria of truth. The credibility of institutions , persons and other agency can be faithfully believed if it operates within the premises of truth. Mahatma Gandhi upgraded the status of truth when he proclaimed that truth is God.

If social sciences aspire to be akin to sciences than it should take worry of validation of truthful statements . However, in behavioural sciences, the

positivist basis of truth is shaken and perhaps we are bound to stay at middle position in objective and subjective truths.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

There are two objectives in this conceptual piece that operate in the exercise.

1. To clarify the concept of Truth in relation to reality/ facticity.
2. To place the truth in different social science perspectives.

## III. METHOD

To seek the concept, status in philosophical and social science literature has been explored. The literature on truth and the literature on different perspectives embodying 'truth'/ reality was collected and analysed. However, no empirical data or quantitative analysis was made but literary survey was conducted and the concept of truth was put in different categories of perspectives.

## IV. THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH: THE MEANING

There are a large number of authors or social theorists who interchangeably used the concepts - truth, fact/ facticity and hyperreality. Further, the Oxford dictionary of sociology mentions the meaning of 'Truth' with specification of 'fact'. Thus, 'True facts about something rather than the things that have been invented or guessed'. This indicates the natural truth based on facts observed and not the facts made or created. P.V young,(1966:10) defined truth as fact in general and mentions thus -" Facts must be seen as physical, mental , or emotional occurrences or phenomenon which can be affirmed with certainty and are accepted as true in a given world of discourse.' Foucault (1977) attached the truth with a particular discourse which is subject to change. Being anti-foundationalist for Foucault, truth was relative and contextual but not absolute and universal.

## V. TRUTH: FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Truth as a concept is a very difficult subject and warrants treatment in multi perspectives. Derek Layder (2006: 128) suggested that truth must be seen from different perspectives. Earl Babbie (2004:43-44) recommended to look at truth /reality, assuming it more

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complex from the point of views i.e. pre-modern and post-modern.

The author of the paper has classified the material of perspectives into six categories and the truth is discussed herein:

#### *Perspective- 1*

##### *a) Epistemological position of truth*

The truth is subjected to appraisal (Chisholm,1987: 6-7) as it encompasses two elements- one is 'believing' in some position of 'true' or 'false' , and another is 'reasonably perceiving something'. Further, If something is believed as 'beyond reasonable doubt' and 'more reasonable than another' it means that truth is liable to be perceived by individuals with arbitrary but reasonably, he declares.

However, essential truth is rooted in humans' passionate embrace of authenticity. Here, truth is not an objective thing but is emotional in nature. Indian philosophical thinking recognizes soul as the best test for the truth. Greek thinking also recognizes soul in deciding the truth or falsehood . Yet, pragmatism considers truth as socially existing and not absolute. In Black feminist epistemology, -truth lies with in pre existing knowledge system and is believed accordingly. Knowledge remains based in beliefs and beliefs are assumed to be true ( Collins, 2000 ). Yet, there may be categories of believers, non- believers and agnostic affecting the concept of truth. Similarly, 'truth value' components i.e. negation (rejecting), conjunction (acceptance) and alternative propositions are examined for affirmation of truth statements. Truth value of a statement may also be decided by its correspondence or lack of it to an empirical reality outside (Howarth: 2002).

#### *Perspective-II*

##### *a) Existentialist view*

Sartre, an existential phenomenologist and philosopher, viewed existence (truth) as 'nothingness' devoid of any real existence with any meaning and objective. He attributed three characteristics of existence of the world— namely (i) shapeless (ii) purposeless (iii) uncertain and doubtful. It helps understand his stand point on ultimate reality of the world. Sartre developed a phrase— “Je pense donc Je suis” (I think therefore I am ) Otherwise, all reality outside consciousness is illusory and subject to decay and disappear. Yet, he recommends that we should study human realities rather going after 'essence' than existence. Later, following Sartre, Foucault declared that there is no absolute truth/reality and even knowledge that depended upon discourse dominating over in a time with some ideological forte. It is significant to mention that Oriental view on existence represented by Indian Hindu reformer and the founder of Arya Samaj

Maharishi Dayand of India of 19th century, a religious reformer, states that world is not purposeless. However, there is a purpose of God not of individual or collective humanity.

#### *Perspective-III*

##### *a) The constructivist idea of truth*

Absorbing partially the pragmatist view of truth / reality, Berger and Luckman (1966) emphasised that reality is socially constructed through institutionalization of habits of practical life that typify them. Goffman (2007) an interactionist – sociologist, stressed that whatever is presented in open social space, remains a managed affair and there is a difference every time in backstage reality and front stage presentation in an attempt to idealization of self identity showing difference between cultured appearance and manner. He states -- 'Mythology and our popular magazine are full of romantic stories in which the villain and the hero both make fraudulent claims that are discredited... . Here, this sign- accepting tendency puts the audience in a position to be duped and misled. (p 61). Whatever truth/ reality is produced creatively by actors in relationship to each other.

#### *Perspective-IV*

##### *a) Critical or emancipatory perspective on truth*

The emancipatory social philosophers of Frankfurt school like Althusser, Habermas and Gramsci emphasized the role of ideology of the time to bring distortions to reality narration, under the capitalistic operations, through the organ of public opinion which include media , universities, army and writings (Habermas : 2005), while putting forward the idea of communicative action he observed that the ideal speech situation was transgressed by distorted communication made by state apparatus and the truth was suppressed. Gramsci (The Prison Notebooks) also highlighted earlier the hegemonic control of ruling class through media means in their favour at the cost of reality that not appeared. Chomsky (2000) in the series through his monumental work stressed that capitalistic U.S.A was acquiring the 'manufactured consent' and exercising over rest of the world to manipulate the opinion in the developing countries to cover up its hidden capitalistic agenda. All it is through the false propaganda communication .

#### *Perspective-V*

##### *a) Post - structuralist view of truth: Truth is unfoundational*

Post- structuralist French philosopher Foucault was more interested in the effects of truth than the truth itself. He viewed that there is 'a battle' 'for Truth' or at least around truth “..... and battle “about the status of truth.....” ( p 208) . By truth he didn't mean “ensemble

of truth” which are to be discovered and accepted , but it was ensemble of rules according to which the true or false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the “true”. For post-structuralists, the truth is a ‘produced commodity’ which is transmitted under control of political and economic apparatus i.e the university, army, writing and media. Further, every society has ‘regime of truth’ accumulated after ideological struggle . And the dominant discourse of the time has the power to push the effects of truth, identifiable. However, the truth cannot be neutral and objective but a subjective category and is historically determined.

#### *Perspective-VI*

##### *a) Post- Modern view : The hyper-real truth*

The issue of reality /truth becomes further complicated in the post- modern age of “ hyper- reality” and “simulacra” where the difference between real and the images or between signs and simulations of the real has blurred ( Baudrillard:1981). The hyper reality is all about a reality which is ‘more real than real ’ and simulacra is the product of that hyper-reality. The phenomenon has uprooted the necessity of a real world or the true world. 3-D Video games, films, animated images on internet , animated sites of the simulation which promote a physically non- existent virtual world and which is not only better but also utopian . There is a promised and projected utopia built on the death of the real. The result is that the reality is doomed and the question of truth becomes undesirable. It is in the interest of the media promoters to promote hyper reality as it is a vast space which can supersede public rationality and can remove it from the plan of logic and take them in a world which is so ‘other worldly’.

Advertising focuses on removing the real and the rationality and produces exaggerated, inflated images and claims. The audience forgets the difference between real and non real. The question is whether we are comfortable with the unreal real or false?

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

From the above exercise based on pertinent literature mainly of philosophy and social science, some conclusions can be drawn however, with some risk of inherent disagreement. The theme of truth has not been receded even from new age literature. Of course, the concept of truth is expanded from philosophical adventurism to social analysis.

1. The emerging negative and alternative components are developed in methodological and theoretical literature and social sciences.
2. Post -structuralism gave a diversion to the concept as Foucault says now the ‘Battle is not for truth but about truth’.

3. Similarly, Post - Modernist Baudrillard ‘Moved to focus on ‘hyper-real’, not on real or truth. The status of truth concept shifted from moral and universal acceptance to utilitarian purposes serving pragmatist ends. Today, there is no real truth but truth claims.
4. In the last, status of Truth has changed as social progressed in different period of academic and other writings.

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