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Advaita Vedanta: Epistemology-Classical Indian Philosophy for Competitive Exams

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Literature

- The central texts of Advaita Vedanta tradition are Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras. These three texts collectively called Prasthan-trayi. They are;
 - Upanishads or the Shruti prasthan: The Vedic scriptures have contributed towards the formation of the Vedanta or Uttar-Mimamsa. Upanishads such as Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka are often quoted in the Vedanta schools.
 - The Brahma sutras or Nyaya prasthan: It is also known as Yukti prasthan. This has contributed towards in the formation of the reason based teachings of Vedanta school. Brahma-sutra deals with a compilation of the teachings of the Upanishads.
 - The Bhagavad Gita: It is also known as Smriti prasthan. It is regarded as a smriti or remembered tradition which lead to the foundation of Vedanta.
- Advaita Vedanta school is an orthodox school of Indian philosophy, as a result, it accepts Shruti as a reliable source of knowledge. Shruti includes the works of four

vedas, namely, Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva veda. It also includes the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aryanakas and the Upanishads.

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Pramanas

- According to Advaita Vedanta school of Shankara, all the six means of knowledge or the sources of knowledge (pramanas) are accepted. They are;
- Pratyaksha or perception:
 - According to him, perception is of two types; internal perception and external perception.
 - The latter arises when there is a contact of an external object with the five external senses.
 - The former arises from the perception of the inner sense organ, mind. For example, intuition, perception of universals, etc.
 - He maintains there are four conditions for perception to be possible. They are;
 - Indriyarthasannikarsha- there must be a direct experience of the object with the senses for the correct perception to take place.
 - Avyapadesya- perception to be true in nature can never depend on hearsay.
 - Avyabhicara- correct perception does not change, it is definite in nature.
 - Vyavasayatmaka- correct perception does not deal with doubts, errors, etc.
- Anumana or Inference:
 - Anumana or inference means after-knowledge.
 - This is because anumana literally means cognition or knowledge which follows from some other knowledge. Anu means after and mana means knowledge.
 - Therefore, anumana deals with knowledge which comes first from some other means of knowledge.
 - According to Indian Logic, anumana or inference deals with both deductive and inductive arguments.
 - The five propositions of a syllogism are;
 - The hill has fire (proposition that we want to prove or pratijna)
 - Because it has smoke (reason or hetu)
 - Whatever has smoke has fire, eg. an oven (example or udharana)
 - The hill has smoke (application of the universal relation of smoke-fire to the present case or upanaya)

- Therefore, the hill has fire (conclusion or nigamana)
- Upamana or Comparison:
 - It deals with a relation between two things, a name and a thing denoted by that name.
 - For example, a man who has never seen a cow goes to the jungle and sees an animal with four legs, long tail and is reminded how his friend once told him that a cow is an animal which has four legs and a long tail, so, the man recognises that animal in the jungle is a cow.
 - This is also known as knowledge via resemblance, examples, analogy, and denotation.
 - Valid knowledge via the means of comparison is called upamiti.
- Arthapatti or Postulation:
 - It is the means of knowledge where the necessary supposition of an unperceived fact is made to explain a thing.
 - For example, when a fat man who does not eat during the day is taken into consideration, we suppose that because he is fat, he must eat, so he eats during the night.
 - Here, our supposition that he eats during the night helps us explain the nature of the man who is fat.
 - Arthapatti is used when a given phenomenon is such that we cannot understand it unless we suppose some fact regarding it to help ourselves understand it.
 - Hence, it is called knowledge via assumption or presumptions or supposition.
- Anupalabdhi or Non-apprehension:
 - It deals with the immediate knowledge of something non-existent.
 - In other words, negation or absence of something is known through Non-Apprehension or Non-Perception (Anupalabdhi) pramana .
 - It is the only pramana which deals with the knowledge of something absent or not existent or not present (abhava) .
 - For example, the teacher is not in the class- means, the teacher is absent or non-existent (abhava) .
- Sabda or Verbal Testimony:
 - Verbal Testimony means knowledge that arises from the words of a trustworthy person (either spoken or written) .
 - They are also called aptavakya, meaning, words from an authentic authority (agama) which are error free, reliable, and not false.
 - According to Advaita Vedanta, sabda is the most important pramana.

MCQs

1. Prasthan-trayi includes

- A. Gita, Upanishad and Vedas.
- B. Rig Veda, Yajur Veda and Sama Veda
- C. Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras.
- D. Upanishads, Gita and Rig Veda

Answer: C

2. Another name for Brahman sutra is

- A. Nyaya Prasthan
- B. Yukti Prasthan
- C. Both A and B
- D. Shruti prasthan

Answer: C

3. Indriyarthasannikarsha, Avyapadesya, Avyabhicara and Vyavasayatmaka are the four conditions of

- A. Perception
- B. Inference
- C. Verbal Testimony
- D. Postulation

Answer: A

4. The five propositions of a syllogism are;

- A. Hetu, udharana, pratijna, upanaya, naigamana
- B. Upanaya, hetu, udharana, pratijna, naigamana
- C. Pratijna, hetu, upanaya, udharana, naigamana
- D. Pratijna, hetu, udharana, upanaya, naigamana

Answer: D

5. Shruti includes _____ works

- A. 4 vedas, Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aryanakas and the Upanishads.
- B. 3 vedas, Samhitas, Aryanakas, Upanishads,

C. Only 4 vedas

D. Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aryanakas and the Upanishads.

Answer: A

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#Vedanta

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 Manishika

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