

Q How does John Locke refute the doctrine of 'innate ideas'?

ans:- According to empiricism, sense experience is the only source of true knowledge. John Locke was one of the most famous empiricist philosopher and he pro the doctrine of empiricism. He criticised Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas and expounded the doctrine of empiricism.

John Locke refutes the doctrine of innate ideas as follows -  
Firstly, if there are innate ideas, they must be equally present in all the minds. Locke contends that there are no such ideas which are universally present in the minds. Children, savages, idiots and illiterate person are not conscious of the so called innate ideas. They are not conscious of the so called innate ideas, no idea of causality, infinity, eternity God and the like. If there are innate in their minds they must be conscious of them.

but they are not conscious of them. So they do not exist in their minds. To suppose that innate ideas exist in their minds of which they are not conscious of is self contradictory.

Secondly, if there are innate ideas in the mind, they must be the same in all the minds. But the so called innate ideas of God, morality and the like differ in different societies in different countries and in different ages.

They differ in different person even at the same time in the same society.

The atheist have no idea of God; there are many people who have no notion of God. Those who have <sup>a</sup> notion of God widely differ in their notion.

Thus, the idea of God differ from person to person. So it cannot be innate. Similarly the idea of morality differs from one person to

another, in different countries and in different cultures and ages. So it cannot be innate.

Thirdly, even if there were the same ideas in all minds. It would not prove their innateness. Everyone has the same idea of fire but it is not an innate idea; it is derived by all of us from experience. Universality of an idea does not prove its innateness.

'The earth is flat', 'the moon is flat', Everyone asserted to these ideas at one point of time but they are neither innate nor true. If there are no innate ideas, there can be no innate principle or propositions which are conjunctions of ideas. Principles are affirmations or denials and composed of ideas. If ideas are not innate, principles cannot be innate.

Fourthly, the so called innate ideas principles are general



truths, which are inductions from particular facts of experience. They are not primary facts of knowledge, but generalisations from particular facts which are acquired from perception. Perception is experience.

The child knows that sweet is sweet and that sweet is not bitter.

These are particular facts of his experience. Later he generalise the law of identity and contradictions from them. The so called simple principles are derived from experience, they are empirical truth and not innate and intuitive. They are not a priori or prior to all experience. Thus Locke disproves Descartes doctrine of innate ideas.