

A critical study about the Nyaya theory of prama and pramanas.

Dr. Bhaskar Jha,

Assistant professor in Philosophy, Raiganj University.

Abstract: *We all know that with the help of valid cognition we can solve many problems which we face in our day to day life. In the total period of our life we achieve knowledge of many things. But generally we do not want to know the problems, like: What is knowledge? In which way we can achieve knowledge? etc. We also come to know that some of our cognitions are true and some are false. But most of the people do not know the criterion of truth or falsity of knowledge. From ancient times all the systems of Indian Philosophy had explained these problems in their epistemology. In the present paper, I shall explain the above problems from the standpoint of Nyaya philosophy. We know that the Indian philosophers have given diversity of opinions in answering the above problems. But I think that the opinions of Naiyayikas are more appropriate in respect of the above cases than the others. I shall also explain here whether the opinions of Naiyayikas are acceptable even today, or not.*

I. Introduction

To define knowledge maharsi Goutama says, “Buddhih upalabdirjnanamityanarthantaram.” (Nyaya Sutra 1-1-15) That means, intellect, apprehension and knowledge are not different from one another. According to Nyaya philosophy, Knowledge is apprehension of object. Knowledge is a quality. Nyayayikas accept the independent existence of the worldly objects. “It not only asserts a reality outside knowledge, but also admits that it can be known.” (Hiriyanna-1932). Naiyayikas are the supporters of realism. According to them, knower and knowable objects are different and knowledge reveals both of them. So, Nyaya philosophy is called logical realism. “Cognition (buddhi) is consciousness (jnana) and is that Quality (guna) which is the ground (hetu) of all linguistic usage (vyavahara=sabdaproyoga).” (Gopinath Bhattacharya -1976). In Nyaya philosophy, the term ‘buddhi’ is synonymous with the terms ‘jnana’ or consciousness, and apprehension or ‘upalabdhi’.

In Indian philosophy, valid knowledge is called prama and the source of valid knowledge is called pramana. “Pramayah karanam pramanam.” (Annambhatta –Tarkasamgraha –sutra 39) That means, the uncommon cause or karana of valid knowledge or prama is called pramana. The way by which we can achieve valid knowledge is called pramana. As there is a detailed discussion about the pramanas in Nyaya Philosophy, so this system is also called pramana-sastra. Naiyayikas divided cognitions into two types- memory and reason. They say that memory is that state of consciousness which results from trace alone. Again, they say that the state of consciousness which is different from smriti is anubhava which are of two types- veridical and non-veridical. Naiyayikas said that valid knowledge are of four types – pratyaksa, anumiti, upamiti and sabda and the source of valid knowledge are also of four types- pratyaksa, anumana, upamana and sabda.

Goutama defines perception as “non-erroneous cognition which is produced by the intercourse of the sense-organs with the objects, which is not associated with a name and which is well defined.” (Chandradhar Sharma-1987). According to Goutama, “Indriyarthasannikarsotpannam jnanam avyapadesyam avyabhicari vyavasayatmakam pratyaksam.” (Nyaya-sutra, I.1.4) To understand the definition, we should at first have to understand the meanings of the words ‘indriya’, ‘artha’, ‘sannikarsa’, ‘avyapadesya’, ‘avyabhicari’ and ‘vyavasayatmak.’

Naiyayikas admit that we have six sense organs- eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin and mind. The first five are called external organs, while the rest is called internal organ. We perceive the external world with the help of external organs and by mind we perceive our internal states like pleasure, pain etc. The term ‘artha’ means an external object. According to the Naiyayikas, every external organ has its own object. ‘Sannikarsa’ means relation. The relation of sense organ with its object is called sannikarsa. ‘Avyapadesya’ means ‘asabda’ or undefineable by words. To explain indeterminate perception, the term ‘avyapadesya’ was included in the definition of perception. ‘Avyabhicari’ means infallible. Perceptual knowledge must be infallible. ‘Vyavasayatmaka’ means certainty. There should be certainty in perception.

According to the Naiyayikas, when our soul comes in contact with mind and mind comes in contact with external organs and external organs come in contact with external objects, then perceptual knowledge arises. “The contact of the sense-organs with the objects is not possible unless the manas first comes into contact with the sense-organs, and the contact of the manas with the sense-organs is not possible unless the self comes into contact with the manas. Hence sense-object contact necessarily presupposes the manas-sense contact and

self-manas contact.”(Chandradhar Sharma,1960). The self-manas contact and manas-sense contact are the common cause of perceptual knowledge and sense-object contact is the uncommon cause of perceptual knowledge.

Some neo-Naiyayikas mentioned that the definition of perception as given by Goutama is defective. According to them, perceptual knowledge is possible without the sense-object contact. According to Nyaya philosophy, God has no sense organ though God can perceive everything. So the definition of perception as given by Goutama suffers from the defect of under-coverage(avyapti dosha). To avoid this difficulty the neo-Naiyayika Gangesa told, “pratyaksasya saksatkaritvam laksanam.” (Gangesa – Tattvacintamani) . That means, perception is direct knowledge. Again, Visvanath said, “jnakaranam jnanam pratyaksam.”(Visvanath-Bhasaparinicheda). Perceptual knowledge is such type of knowledge where no other knowledge acts as uncommon cause. “This definition includes ordinary as well as extra-ordinary perception and excludes inference, comparison and testimony.” (Chandradhar Sharma,1987)

According to the Naiyayikas, perception arises after the contact of the sense organ with object. This contact may be of two types – ordinary or *laukika* and extraordinary or *alaukika*. Depending on the relation between sense organ and object, Naiyayikas divided perception into two types- ordinary or *laukika* perception and extraordinary or *alaukika* perception. *Laukika* perception may be of two types- external perception and internal perception. External perception again may be of three types- *nirvikalpa* or indeterminate perception, *savikalpa* or determinate perception and *pratyabhijna* or recognitive perception .On the other hand, external perception may be of three types – *samanyalaksana*, *jnanalaksana* and *yogaja*. When perception arises after the contact of external organs with objects, then it is called external perception and when perception arises after the contact of internal organ with the mental states, then it is called internal perception. “ *Nirvikalpa* perception is the immediate apprehension, the bare awareness, the direct sense-experience which is undifferentiated and non-relational and is free from assimilation, discrimination, analysis and synthesis.”(Chandradhar Sharma,1960).That means, perception of a thing without attributes is called indeterminate perception. The clear perception of a thing with its attributes is called determinate perception. “*Savikalpa* or determinate perception implies a knowledge of the genus to which the perceived object belongs, of the specific qualities which distinguish the individual object from the other members of the same class and of the union of the two .(S. Radhakrishnan, 1940). Recognitive perception is a kind of perception which is qualified by past perception. *Samanyalaksana* perception is the perception of universal . According to the Naiyayikas , universal belongs to the individual . The universal ‘cowness’ inheres in all cow and when we perceive an individual cow, we perceive cowness in it . This type of perception is called *samanyalaksana pratyaksa* . Sometimes we perceive an object by a sense organ which is not actually the object of that organ. For example, we often say , “ I see a fragrant rose”. Fragrance generally perceived by nose, but here it is perceived by eyes. Such type of perception is called *jnanalaksana* perception. Some persons can perceive objects or events of past, present and future through the power of meditation. This is called *yogaja* perception.

Thus Nyaya philosophy gives a clear and vivid picture about perception. Now it may be asked: whether perception is the only source of valid knowledge, or not ? According to the Carvakas , perception is the only *pramana*. But the Naiyayikas said that perception is one source of valid knowledge and besides perception there are three other sources of valid cognition which are inference, analogy and testimony.

After looking smoke coming out from a hill we may come to know that there is fire. This cognition results thus: we see smoke coming out from the hill; we remember: ‘ where there is smoke there is fire’ and we are assured that the smoke which we see comes under the rule. After this we infer that there is fire. This inferential cognition results from the three: the seeing, the remembrance and the assurance. This is valid knowledge. The way of such valid knowledge is called *anumana* and such valid knowledge is called *anumiti*. Inference is such type of knowledge which presupposes some other knowledge. The Naiyayikas have accepted inference as a source of valid knowledge. ‘ *Paramarsajanyam jnanamanumiti*’ means *anumiti* results from *paramarsa*.(Annambhatta: *Tarkasamgraha*, Sutra no.49) In defining *paramarsa* it is said that ‘ *vyaptivisista paksadharmata jnanam paramarsa*’(Annambhatta: *Tarkasamgraha*, Sutra no. 49). *Vyaptivisista* means that which is characterized by *vyapti* and *paksadharmata* means the fact of being a feature of *paksa*. Thus, *paramarsa* is the cognition of the ‘subject’ of an inference as having a mark, which is characterized by ‘*vyapti*’ of the *probandum*. The hill (*paksa*) under reference as having a smoke (the *hetu*) which is characterized by the invariable concomitance (*vyapti*) of fire (the *sadhya*) is *paramarsa*.

If only it is said that inferential cognition results from *paramarsa* alone, then there arises the defect of over-coverage. In that case we should call *samsayottora pratyaksa* (i.e. perception after doubt) as inference because it results from *paramarsa*. Sometimes we may look a thing from a distance and we may not sure what the thing is. We may confuse whether the thing is a man or a stump of a tree as the thing appears with the features which are common to both a man and a stump. We may think that ‘the thing before us has hands, legs etc. which are uniformly associated (*vyapya*) with the features of a man’. After that we may attain the cognition that the thing before us is a man. This cognition results from *paramarsa*. So, we should call it *anumiti*. But

actually it is a case of perception. To avoid this difficulty the Naiyayikas said that inferential cognition results from paramarsa accompanied by paksata. The absence of certainty that is accompanied by the absence of desire to infer is called paksata. If there is certainty that the sadhya is in the paksa, then inferential cognition does not arise. So, the certain knowledge of sadhya is a bar to arise inferential cognition. But in that case also inferential cognition may arise if there is the desire to infer. The desire to infer is here the stimulant (uttejaka). Thus the absence of certainty that is accompanied by the absence of the desire to infer is a causal condition for inferential cognition. It is described as paksata. In the case of samsayottara-pratyaksa, though the absence of certainty is present, there is also present the desire to infer. This is not a case where there is the absence of certainty that is accompanied by the absence of the desire to infer. So, we cannot say that samsayottara-pratyaksa results from paramarsa accompanied by paksata.

Inference may be of two types- svarthanumana and pararthanumana. Svarthanumana is inference for one's own need and pararthanumana is inference for others.

Naiyayikas accepted upamana as another source of knowledge. After looking the similarity between a name and a thing so named or between a word and its denotation we may achieve some knowledge. This is upamiti. The special condition of upamiti is upamana. Upamiti is described as the relation between between a term and what it signified. "For example, a man who does not know what a gavaya or wild cow is, may be told by a forester that it is an animal like a cow. If subsequently he happens to meet with such an animal in the forest and knows or recognizes it as a gavaya, then his knowledge will be due to upamana or comparison." (Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, 1984).

Naiyayikas have accepted sabda as another source of knowledge. Sabda means words of trust worthy persons. "Aptavakyam sabdah. Apastu yathartha vaktah." (Annambhatta-Tarkasamgraha , sutra 66). A trustworthy person is one who always speaks the truth. In other words, he always speaks correct statement. A trustworthy person is such type of person who is free from illusion, carelessness, defects of sense organs, desire of cheating others.

In conclusion , it can be said that the Nyaya theory of prama and pramanas is relevant even today . From the opinions of Naiyayikas we can clearly know about the sources of valid knowledge and nature of valid knowledge. aiyayikas said that we can attain valid knowledge from four sources which are perception, inference, analogy and verbal testimony. Everybody accepts that we attain valid knowledge by perception. We must have to accept inference as another source of knowledge because without inference we cannot pass our day-to-day life. Comparison also helps us to attain some valid knowledge. Again we may achieve many valid knowledge by the words of trustworthy persons. So, we should have to accept these four pramanas.

Here we should remember that in western philosophy, knowledge is divided into two kinds- direct or immediate cognition and indirect or mediate cognition. But the Naiyayikas divided knowledge into smriti and anubhava. So, there is a difference between the views of western philosophers and Naiyayikas. The Naiyayikas said that both direct and indirect cognitions come under anubhava. Perception is direct cognition and inference, analogy and testimony are indirect cognitions.

The Naiyayikas said that knowledge is an adventitious property of the soul which is produced when the soul comes in contact with the not-soul. "Correspondence with the object is the nature of truth."(Chandradhar Sharma,1960). Pravrittisamvada is the criterion of validity and pravrittivisamvada is the criterion invalidity, i.e. valid knowledge corresponds to its object and invalid knowledge does not correspond to its object. Successful activity is the criterion of truth. Truth is correspondence of knowledge with reality and error is disagreement of knowledge with reality .Truth or falsity of knowledge consists respectively in its correspondence and non-correspondence to facts. By eating something as 'sugar' if there arises the taste of sweetness, then the cognition is valid and if there does not arise the taste of sweetness, then the cognition is invalid. Thus we find the relevancy of Nyaya theory of knowledge in our practical life.

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