



THE NATURE OF PRAMA AND APRAMA IN NYAYA EPISTEMOLOGY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Dr. Savithri. A

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy, University of Calicut
Thenhipalem, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

In Indian Philosophy, epistemology is a main stream thought along with the other branches of philosophy. Nyaya is one of the orthodox schools and developed as a logical and epistemological tradition of Indian philosophy. The questions regarding knowledge and related issues are discussed by the Nyaya tradition invites a handful curiosity always. In this paper I am trying to analyze critically the nature of Prama and Aprama of the Nyaya tradition.

Keywords: Jnana, Prama, Yathartha, Aprama, Pramana, Samsaya, Tarka.

Introduction

Indian philosophy has a longer history of unending development than any other philosophical tradition, and encompasses a wide variety of traditions and systems. It has been more a practical attempt to realize the truth than a mere theoretical discussion of doctrines or principles. As a branch of philosophy, epistemology is concerned with the problems related to knowledge. What is knowledge? What are the sources of knowledge? What is the test or validity of knowledge? What is valid and invalid knowledge? What is the criterion of truth? etc... are the important issues related to knowledge in general. To Answer these questions, it requires a considerable relationship between knowledge, truth, belief, reason, evidence and reliability. So, it is evident that the epistemological issues have a central role in Indian Philosophy as compared to the West. On the basis of the authority of the Veda, the broad area of Indian philosophy is classified into two, namely, nasthika or heterodox and asthika or orthodox. Nasthika is the one, who rejects the authority of the Vedas, they are six in numbers and asthika, one who accepts the authority of the Vedas, they are three in numbers. The fundamental question of the nature of human knowledge leads each of the school to develop their own theory of knowledge. And, the fact is that, such questions cannot be limited to the epistemological frame work only, because, all these problems necessarily lead them to build up their own metaphysical theory as well. So, one can see that there is a close relation between the metaphysics, a search in to the speculative presuppositions of the reality as such and epistemology. Nyaya is one of the orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy and itself concerned more with the epistemological and logical problems. The epistemological problems of Nyaya tradition are based on jnana, prama, aprama, pramana, and pramanya. In this paper I would like to analyze the nature and characteristics of prama and aprama in Nyaya perspective.

As every school of Indian Philosophy, the Nyaya tradition too emphasizes the self-realization as the ultimate end of every human life. For this purpose, Nyaya, as the discipline of logic provides the sound methodology of philosophical inquiry into the nature of knowledge and the objects of knowledge. The object of apprehension may be a thing, a quality, an act, an emotion, or the existent as well as the non-existent. But in all the cases in which there is knowledge, there must be the object of knowledge. Everything which are revealed to us when they become objects of knowledge. According to them, it is the only means to obtain right knowledge (pramā) about the Self and to discover about the purpose of one's life. That is, the term Nyāya itself means, an analytical investigation of the subject through the process of logical reasoning. And, for the attainment of this highest end, according to them, requires a true knowledge of the object. It means that, without the understanding of the theory of knowledge or epistemology one cannot understand its metaphysical positions. As far as we concerned with the epistemology of Nyaya, we can see that their primary concern is always with the conditions of valid thought and the means of acquiring a true knowledge of objects. The validity of knowledge, according to them, is based on the validity of the methods or instrument of knowledge. That is, to maintain that our knowledge is true we must prove that it is really so, and derived from a valid method of knowledge which always gives us true knowledge and never leads to a false result. Vatsyayana says "it is that the instrumentalities of which things are rightly cognized"¹ Hence, it is through the right knowledge that the verification of definition of the object is done and the object is correctly known to us. Thus, knowledge according to them is like a lamp which lights its objects. Though, all the Indian philosophical schools discuss about the different nature and forms of valid (prama) and invalid (aprama) knowledge, here my attempt is to analyze the Nyaya perspective of valid and invalid knowledge. The reason is that, the nature and the methods of analysis which are used by the other schools are similar to the Naiyayikas. That is, we can see that they accept most of the epistemological viewpoints of the Nyaya tradition.

The Nyaya philosophers distinguish two types of knowledge, according to the differences in the nature, characteristics and validity of cognitions. Here, it very important to mention a few about jnana. The concept of cognition (jnana) in Indian epistemology,



especially in Nyaya-Vaisesika tradition, is wider than the Western concept of knowledge. Knowledge according to the Western epistemologists is, justified true belief (JTB), and hence, it receives a deep significance. Thus, the cognitions are classified into anubhava or presentational knowledge and smrti or memory. Anubhava or presentational knowledge can be defined as a cognition that follows uniformly and immediately on the presence of its special cause. From this definition itself it is clear that, it is the original knowledge and not the reproduction of any previous knowledge of objects. On the other hand, memory or smrti is not the presentation of objects, that is, it is a reproduction of our previous experience. In smrti, our knowledge is not so much appearing to be objects of them but it is depended upon our past cognitions of those objects. Each of this knowledge has been further divided into valid (prama) and invalid (aprama). The uncommon cause or karana of valid knowledge or prama is called pramana. To be clear, Nyaya says that, the way by which we can achieve valid knowledge is called pramana. That is, "Pramayah karanam pramanam."² Nyaya proposes four types of pramanas or means of knowledge for prama, namely, perception or pratyaksha, inference or anumana, comparison or upamana, and testimony or sabda. As defined as yatharthanubhava, there involved four factors in prama, namely, the subject or the knower (pramata), the object or the known (prameya), the method or the ways by which the subject knows the object (pramana), and the resultant knowledge (pramiti). Thus, the whole truth is based on these four factors and the prama is not possible with the absence of any one of these factors. With regard to the aprama the Naiyayikas includes doubt or samsaya, error or viparyaya, and hypothetical argument or tarka. However, prama according to Nyaya, is a quality or guna of the self and it reveals the object as it is along with its characteristics. Aprama, though regarded as a quality of the soul, it does not reveal the object as it is. Thus, the notion of jnana as it is used by the Naiyayikas, is taken to mean or refer to both the objects which are referred by prama and aprama as well.

Now, before going to deep in to the problem, it is better to start with the nature and characteristics of prama first. In the Nyaya system, the word 'knowledge' has been used in two deferent senses, namely, a narrow as well a wider sense. In its strict sense, knowledge means a true belief that carries with it an assurance of its truth.³ Hence, when we use knowledge, it is regarded as, that it is always true. In this context the Nyaya tradition uses the word prama as something more than knowledge in its strict sense and uses the phrase 'valid knowledge' for prama. The word 'prama' is used in a very technical sense in Indian Philosophy because, it is one of the species of 'cognition' (jnana). However, they define prama as true presentational knowledge that is yatharthanubhava. We can consider it as prama because it excludes all types of invalid knowledge, such as memory, doubt, error, hypothetical reasoning, etc. Here it should be note that, they excluded memory because it is not presentational, that is it is not anubhava. Others are excluded by two reasons, either they are not true or they are not definite and assured cognitions. Therefore, it is clear that, from the above we can see that prama possess mainly three characteristics, such as, assuredness, truth and presentativeness.

On the basis of the first characteristics, prama or valid knowledge can be defined as a definite categorical assertion and is distinguished from all indefinite, problematic and hypothetical knowledge. Here, the reason for this is, in prama there is a feeling of assurance or conviction in what is known. After all, valid knowledge is always connected with a firm belief. But it should be note that, all assurances or firm beliefs are not regarded as prama. Because, when we take illusion or bhrama we firmly believe in what we are experiencing and the fact is that we cannot recognize its falsity. To be clear, what we are experiencing is true for that moment and not able to know the falsity. This bhrama or illusory cognition is corrected only by a subsequent veridical cognition. But, as mentioned above, before the assurance of cognition our illusory cognition may be supported by immediate subsequent invalid cognition. It is to be noted that prama not implies any subjective certainty, on the other hand it is something more than a subjective certainty.

The second characteristics of prama can be defined as, it is true or unerring or yathartha knowledge. Udayana defines prama as "yatharthanubhavamanam"³ and suggests that a presentative cognition (anubhava) is valid or true (yathartha) only if it corresponds with the external object. We can say that knowledge is true or yathartha when it is not contradicted by its object, arthavyabhicahri. The object of cognition cannot be contradicted with any other object or knowledge. That is, if we say something as knowledge, it is true when it reveals its object with that nature and attribute which firmly remains in it regardless of all spacio-temporal changes or in any other conditions. Hence, it can be asserted that what we experienced once as true of an object is always remains as true of it. More clearly, to know a thing truly is to know it as characterized by what is a characteristic of it. Gangesa, one of the exponents of Navya Naiyayika defined truth as tadvat tatprakarakatva⁴. According to him, the property of having that as its qualifier which is delimited by the property of having a qualificand which possesses the that. Thus, the Nyaya tradition upholds the notion of truth of knowledge consists in its correspondence to truth.

According to the third characteristic of prama, it is not only a true and assured cognition, but also a presentational cognition or anubhava as well. It is called as anubhava because it is presentative cognition. One can say, for example, that, one's visual perception of a chair in front of him is a valid cognition (prama) because it is presented to him directly just as it really is and he is certain about the truth of his cognition. As I have already mentioned above that the memory is accepted as anubhava, it is not presentational, but representational in nature, it is the reproduction of a previous experience. And it should be remembered that a representational



cognition cannot be yathartha or true because the memory cognition does not have any independent claim to truth. Its truth can be said to be borrowed from that of its cause, that is, the previous non-recollective cognition of the same object. That is, though the memory knowledge is both true and definitely believed to be true, but it is not presentative or directly experienceable, hence, it is representative cognition. Thus, according to the Naiyayikas, prama or knowledge must be based on these three characteristics of assurance, truth and presentativeness.

Let me mention about pramanas now, because pramanas are the operative conditions for the attainment of prama. Among the four essential factors, the Western philosophers in general use to distinguish between the three factors, such as, the subject, the object and the resultant knowledge. But the Indian philosophers add pramanas in support of these three factors and the it lies in ascertaining the correctness of a cognition. Madhva, in his Sarvadarsanasangraha defined that “prama is that which is invariably related to prama” or “to be prama is never to be disconnected from a knower possessing right knowledge”⁵. It is evident from his definitions that the prama is the karana or means of prama. It is already mentioned that perception, inference, comparison, verbal testimony, etc... are popularly regarded as the valid means of knowledge. So, any kind of knowledge is not possible without the valid means (prama). However, there are many complexes of conditions, which are partly physical, psychical or mental in nature denoted by prama. That is, any instance of knowledge involves a long and complicated process which is physical, psychological or mental, or both as well. For example, the visual perception of a table is conditioned not only by the physical contact between the sense organs of eyes and the object but also by the internal operations of the visual organ, then its contact with manas or the mind, and that of the mind with the soul or atman. It is also the same with the other sources of knowledge, namely, inference, verbal testimony, comparison, etc... That is, in an inferential knowledge and verbal knowledge there are such specific physical, psychic conditions as the knowledge of a universal relation and understanding of the meaning of a proposition and, so on. Thus, the term, prama is taken to mean the entire complex or collocation of all the specific physical and psychical conditions that are actually operative in bringing about a valid and assured cognition of objects, prama.

Let us now consider the characteristics of aprama. According to J.N. Mohanty “prama is those that are true or possess the property called pramanya and aprama is those that are not true or do not possess the property of pramanya.⁶ As I noted earlier, the Nyaya philosophers proposes some cases of knowledge which are presentational in nature but not valid. Invalid knowledge or aprama can be defined as the wrong apprehension of object, hence does not correspond to reality. Based on these characteristics, Naiyayikas proposes three kinds of non-valid presentation or ayatharthanubhava, namely, doubt, error and hypothetical reasoning. According to the Naiyayikas, in doubt or samsaya we have cognition of uncertainty or an indeterminate one. It originates when the mental reference of two or more contradictory notions with regard to the same object. In that type of conflicting notions (vimarsa) the subject unable to know the reality. The doubt arises when the mind oscillates between different alternative characterizations of some given object.⁷ Because of this conflicting nature the subject cannot make a decision on it, nor do we claim to know what it is, and, even cannot say that it must be either this or that. It neither affirms nor denies anything, but only raises a problem for thought, hence doubt has been an incomplete or indecisive cognition, (anavadharanatmaka), that characterizes an object in mutually conflicting ways. That is, we have seen an object but cannot fix the cognition of that object as it is one thing or another. For example, when we perceive a tall object, but we cannot decide whether it is a man, a coconut tree or a post. In this type of doubtful cognition, we may have two or more interpretations of a perceived data but, the mind does not arrive at any fixed decision (niscaya). Thus, as it lacks the essential mark of validity of firmness, doubt is not regarded as a valid knowledge.

When we look at the second type of aprama, error, it is to be distinguished from that of doubt. According to the Naiyayikas, in an erroneous cognition, we have an assertion which makes contradictions with the real nature of the object of cognition, known as viparitanirnaya. They assert that unlike doubt, error is not only non-valid knowledge but also positively invalid or false knowledge (bhrama). Error arises whenever there is a contradiction between our cognitive experiences and volitional experiences. It is contradictory, because, we perceive one thing, while the presented data is some other thing. Thus, the erroneous knowledge is the cognition of an object as what it really is not (atattvajnana). Here, an object is cognized as having some characteristics that are really fall outside of its being. Hence it has been described as the wrong apprehension (mityopalabdhi) in which an object is taken for what it is not (atasminstaditi pratyayah). For example, the cognitions of a shell as silver, or a rope as snake, are instances of error or wrong cognition, because, in each of these instances there is the cognition of an object as other than what it really is. This theory of Nyaya tradition known as anyathakhyati. According to this theory, error is a case of misjudging, i.e., the presented object is perceived elsewhere and the represented object exists elsewhere. In the above-mentioned example, the shell and the silver or rope and the snake are both separately real, but only their synthesis as shell-silver or rope-snake is unreal. Thus, the error arises due to a wrong synthesis of the presented objects, and, hence the Naiyayikas recognizes it as an invalid cognition.



Yet another invalid knowledge according to Nyaya, is hypothetical argument or tarka. It is a type of implicative argument by which we may test the validity of the conclusion of any reasoning. In this argument the process of reasoning consists in the deduction of an untenable proposition from a certain position (anistaprassanga). This has the logical effect of exposing the invalidity of that position and thereby lending support to the counter position. For example, when we consider the inference of fire from the perception of smoke, we can see that there are two alternative positions. The first one is like, ‘that the smoky object is fiery’, and the second is like, ‘that it is not fiery’. From the second position we deduce the proposition that the object is not smoky, which is contradicted by our direct experience. This is expressed in the form of a hypothetical proposition, like, ‘if the object be fireless, it must be smokeless. Here tarka validates the inference of fire through the deduction of an unacceptable proposition from the contrary hypothesis. It is based on the general rule that whatever has a mark (the vyapya), has that which it is a mark (the vyapaka). Here, the absence of fire is the mark of the absence of smoke. The knowledge that the smoky object is fiery is acquired by means of inference from smoke as a mark of the given fire. The tarka only confirms this inferential knowledge. Hence, it does not originate true knowledge, although it confirms a pramaṇa which brings about the knowledge in question.

However, the Nyaya philosophers distinguish this presentational valid and invalid knowledge from smṛiti or memory. Memory according to the Naiyayikas, is knowledge of one’s own past experience. It is a representative cognition of past experiences exclusively due to the impressions produced by them.⁶ That is, as Smṛiti is not independent knowledge, its object is the same as that of the original perception which produced it. They recognize two types of memory, such as true (yatharthā) and false (ayatharthā). It is true when it has its basis in some valid presentation (pramājanya) and is an agreement with the real nature of the remembered objects. It is false, on the other hand, when it arises out of such original cognitions as were erroneous (apramājanya) and so does not accord with the nature of the objects recalled in it. Thus, the truth and falsehood of memory depend on those of the corresponding original presentative cognitions (purvanubhava) that constitute the ground of all memory. Thus, the analysis of instances of aprama including doubt, error and hypothetical reasoning affirm that they are cognitions but false in nature. We can see that, when one is said to have a doubt, he is not satisfying a purpose, because doubting does not have any purpose. Similarly, the perceptual errors may mislead us by frustration, like the mirage frustrates our purpose by making misleading to us. Finally, in a tarka or in a hypothetical argument the purpose is to prove one's own position but it does not provide any proof, and it merely conflict the opponent.

Conclusion

Thus, we can see that, as a realistic theory of knowledge, the Nyaya epistemology is discusses its epistemological problems based on the evidence of direct experience. According to it, knowledge is a quality of the soul, which manifests the objects of the world. All knowledge of objects is not valid. For this reason, they differentiate between the valid and invalid knowledge. However, the valid knowledge is possible only through the valid means or pramaṇas. They are perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony. And, as far as we are concerned with the valid knowledge, there is an important role for the invalid knowledge also. Nyaya proposes doubt, error and hypothetical arguments as the invalid sources of knowledge. For the sake of the smooth analysis on the classification of knowledge they also discussed about the nature of memory knowledge. Within the scope of Indian epistemological tradition, the surprising factor is that, they have never made any attempt to reduce false cognitions to true cognition and nor is there any attempt to exclude them from the field of knowledge. However, a question arises here: what then is common to true cognition and false cognition? In Nyayadarsana, Uddyodakara, the 6th century Naiyayika, answers that it is the ability to manifest the generality (samanyakarichchhedakatvam) could be considered as the common factor prevalent in both prama and aprama instances of cognition. There seems to be an unbroken line of speculation in the Nyaya school regarding the attempt of classifying the nature of prama and aprama.

References

1. Vatsyayana, Nyaya Bhasya, 1.1.10.
2. Annambhatta –Tarkasamgraha –sutra 39
3. Udayana. "Yatharthanu-bhavamanam" - Nyaya Kusumanjali, 4/1,
4. J.N. Mohanty, Gangeśa's Theory of Truth, p.37.
5. Chapter on Nyaya Philosophy.
6. J.N Mohanty, Classical Indian Philosophy, p.11
7. Tarkasamgraha.p.82
8. Tarkasangraha., p.32
9. J.N. Mohanty, Classical Indian Philosophy, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2000.
10. R.N.Sharma, Indian Philosophy, Orient Longman Ltd, New Delhi, 1972.
11. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, The Macmillan and Co. London, 1962.
12. C.D. Sharma, A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarsiidas Publishers, New Delhi, 1987.



Cover Page



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

ISSN:2277-7881; IMPACT FACTOR :7.816(2022); IC VALUE:5.16; ISI VALUE:2.286

Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal: VOLUME:11, ISSUE:7(4), July: 2022

Online Copy of Article Publication Available (2022 Issues): www.ijmer.in

Digital Certificate of Publication: <http://ijmer.in/pdf/e-Certificate%20of%20Publication-IJMER.pdf>

Scopus Review ID: A2B96D3ACF3FEA2A

Article Received: 2nd July 2022

Publication Date: 10th August 2022

Publisher: Sucharitha Publication, India

DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.07.52>

13. S.C.Chatterjee, The Nyaya Theory of Knowledge, University of Culcutta, Culcutta, 1950.
14. M. Hiriyanna, The Essentials of Indian Philosophy, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1949.