

Nyaya Theory of Pramana

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ABSTRACT

Nyaya school of philosophy is one of the famous school in Indian Philosophy. This school founded by Maharshi Gautama. Nyaya theory of knowledge has great importance in philosophical world. Knowledge according to Nyaya, reveals both the subject and the object which are quite distinct from itself. Knowledge or cognition is defined as apprehension or consciousness. Maharshi Gautama in his 'Nyayasutra' says that, perfection is attained by the correct knowledge about true nature of sixteen categories. Pramana is the primary and major of these sixteen categories. In Indian philosophy knowledge may be valid or invalid. Valid knowledge is called prama and it is defined as the right apprehension of an object. Nyaya maintains the theory of correspondence. Invalid knowledge is known as aprama. The source of valid knowledge is called pramana. Naiyayikas believe in four pramanas – Perception, Inference, Comparison and Testimony. As there is a detailed discussion about the pramanas in Nyaya Philosophy, so this system is also called 'pramana-sastra.'

Keywords: *Nyaya philosophy, valid knowledge, pramana, perception, inference, composition, testimony.*

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Nyaya school of philosophy is one of the famous school in Indian Philosophy. This school founded by Maharshi Gautama. Nyaya theory of knowledge has great importance in philosophical world. Knowledge, according to Nyaya, reveals both the subject and the object which are quite distinct from itself. This is why Nyaya is called as realist system. Knowledge or cognition is defined as apprehension or consciousness. Like other Indian philosophical school Naiyayikas consider moksha to be the ultimate goal. In order to gain this ultimate goal it is necessary to gain knowledge about the meaning of categories. That is why Maharshi Gautama says in the first sutra of the first chapter of 'Nyayasutra' that, perfection is attained by the correct knowledge about true nature of sixteen categories. The categories are : Pramana which means of right knowledge, Prameya which means object of right knowledge, Samsaya which means doubt, Prayojana which means purpose, Drishtanta which means familiar instance, Siddhanta which means to established tenet, Avayava which means the members of an inference, Tarka which means reasoning, Nirnaya which means ascertainment or result, Vada which means discussion, Jalpa which means sophistic disputation, Vitanda which means cavil, Hetvabhasa which means fallacies of hetu, Chala which means quibbles, Jati which means futile rejoinders and Nigrahashtana which means methods of losing an argument. Now we will discuss on *pramana*.

Pramana is the Primary and major of these sixteen categories. In Indian philosophy, valid knowledge is called prama and the source of valid knowledge is called pramana. Annambhatta in his 'Tarkasamgraha' says that, "Pramayah karanam pramanam" -that means, the uncommon cause or karana of valid knowledge or prama is called pramana. It is the general characteristics of pramana. Acharya Vidyananda in his 'Tattvarthaslokavartika' says that, 'Pramana is that which establishes the correct and well-defined knowledge'. 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'. The analysis of the nature of pramana shows that there is no difference between the knowledge and pramana.

Naiyayikas said that valid knowledge (prama) are of four types – pratyaksa, anumiti, upamiti and sabda and the source of valid knowledge (pramana) are also of four types- pratyaksa, anumana, upamana and sabda. Now we are discussing the pramanas one by one.

Pratyaksa (Perception) : Pratyaksa refers to the first of the four *pramanas* which in turn is classified as the first of the sixteen categories, according to Gautama's 'Nyayasutra'. Perception (*pratyaksa*) is the most primary and fundamental of all the *pramanas*. The Naiyayikas, maintain that all other *pramanas* depend on perception. Perception is the final test of all knowledge. Inference, verbal testimony requires confirmation by perception, while perception does not require any such confirmation.

Gautama defines perception as 'non-erroneous cognition which is produced by the interconnected of the sense-organs with the objects, which is not associated with a name and which is well-defined.' He says that, "Indriyarthasannikarsotpannam jnanam avyapadesyam avyabhicari vyavasayatmakam pratyaksam." It means, Pratyaksa jnana or knowledge of perception is which arises from the contact of the sense-organ with its object, which is unnamable, uncontradicted and determinate.

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 *yogajolaksana*. 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.

Anumana (Inference) : Anumana refers to the second of the four *pramanas*, which in turn is classified as the first of the sixteen categories, according to Gautama's 'Nyayasutra'. Annambhatta states in his work that *anumana* (inference) is the instrumental cause of inferential knowledge (*anumiti*). There are two parts in the word *anumāna*. 'anu' meaning after and 'mana' meaning knowledge. Hence, the literal meaning of *anumana* is that it is a knowledge (*mana*) which originates after (*anu*) other knowledge. Annambhatta in his 'Tarkasamgraha' says that, "Anumiti-karanam-anumanam." It means, Anumana is the cause of Anumiti.

Gautama divides *anumāna* into three kinds— *Purvavat*, *Shesavat* and *Samanyatodrishta*.

The first two types of *anumana* are based on causation and the last one is on mere co-existence. When we infer the unperceived effect from a perceived cause we have *purvavat* inference. When we infer the unperceived cause from a perceived effect we have *Shesavat* inference. When inference is based not on causation but on uniformity of co-existence, it is called *Samanyatodrishta* inference.

Annambhatta accepts two kinds of *anumana* in his work— *Svarthanumana* and *Pararthanumana*. In *Svarthanumana* we do not require formal statements of the members of inference. It is a psychological process. And the *Pararthanumana*, which is a syllogism, has to be presented in language and has to be done to convince others.

Another classification of inference gives us the *kevalanvayi*, *kevalavyatireki* and *anvayavyatireki* inference. It is based on the nature of *vyapti*.

Upamana(Comparison) : Upamana refers to the third of the four *pramanas*, which in turn is classified as the first of the sixteen categories, according to Gautama's 'Nyayasutra'. Upamana can be stated as the source of knowledge of the relation between a name and the nameable object or between a word and its denotation. Annambhatta in his 'Tarkasamgraha' says that, "Upamiti-karanam-upamanam." It means, Upamana is the cause of upamiti. It also means getting the knowledge of an unknown thing by comparing it with a known thing. For example, assume a situation where a man has not seen a *gavaya* or a wild cow and doesn't know what it is. A forester told him that a wild cow is an animal like a country cow but she is more furious and has big horn in her forehead. In a later period he comes across a wild cow in a forest and recognizes it as the wild cow by comparing the descriptions made by the forester. This knowledge is possible due to the upamana or comparison. Thus, upamana is the knowledge of the relation between a name and the object it denotes by that name.

Sabda : Sabda refers to the fourth of the four *pramanas*, which in turn is classified as the first of the sixteen categories, according to Gautama's 'Nyayasutra'. A sentence which is a means of valid knowledge is called verbal testimony. It is the fourth kind of valid knowledge in Nyaya philosophy, it is called Sabda or *agama* or authoritative verbal testimony. Its means is called Sabda. It is defined as the statement of a trustworthy person (*aptavakya*) and consists in understanding its meaning. A sentence is defined as a collection of words and a word is defined as that which is potent to convey its meaning. The power in a word to convey its meaning comes, according to ancient Nyaya, from God, and according to later Nyaya, from long established convention. Testimony is always

personal. It is based on the words of a trustworthy person, human or divine. Testimony is of two kinds – Vaidika and secular or laukika. The vaidika testimony is perfect and infallible because the vedas are spoken by God, And secular testimony, bring the words of human beings who are liable or error, is not infallible. Only the words of trustworthy persons who always speak the truth and valid, others are not. A word is potent symbol which signifies an object and a sentence is a collection of words. But a sentence in order to be intelligible must conform to certain conditions. These conditions are four – Akanksa, Yogyata, Sannidhi and Tatparya.

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. Naiyayikas said that we can attain valid knowledge from four sources which are perception, inference, comparison 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.

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