

Perception: A Source of Cognition From Epistemological and Methodological Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Epistemology involves the philosophy of how we come to know the world. Methodology involves the practice. Leaving the Madhyamika Buddhists, all other systems of Indian Philosophy recognize perception as a source of valid cognition. The controversy over the forms of perception is sought to solve here from the Nyaya point of view through the method of *purvapaksa* and *uttarapaksa*. The Mimamsa theory of *svaprakasa* and the Nyaya theory of *paratah pramanya* are appealing.

Key Words : Perception, Epistemology, Methodology, Nirvikalpaka, Savikalpaka, Vyapti, Svaprakasa, Paratah Pramanya

INTRODUCTION

Research is an art of scientific investigation. It is a systematic effort to gain new knowledge. It is a movement from the known to the unknown. The present paper is an analytical research from epistemological and methodological perspectives- it makes a critical evaluation of the arguments and counter arguments given by some systems of Indian philosophy in regard to the treatment of Perception as a source of cognition. The paper will deal with the method of the Philosophical discourse (*katha*), a friendly discussion in a friendly assembly through *purvapaksa* and *uttarapaksa*, as admitted by the Indian philosophers. Foundation of one's own standpoint refuting the views of the opponent (*paramatakhandana purvaka svamata pratistha*) is a unique technique of Indian philosophy. This is technically called *tantrayukti*. The purpose of writing this paper is to get an intellectual joy of doing some creative work.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

The term 'epistemology' comes from the Greek word *episteme*. It means the philosophy of knowledge. In Indian

context, it is the philosophy of how we come to know. Methodology is also concerned with how we come to know, but it is much more practical in nature. Methodology is focused on specific methods- that we can use to understand our world better. Though both epistemology and methodology are very much related, the former involves the *philosophy* of how we come to know the world, whereas the latter involves the *practice*.

Perception – a source of valid cognition:

Each system of Indian philosophy, except the Madhyamika Buddhist, recognizes perception as a valid cognition. The word 'perception' means *pratyaksa pramana*, *pratyaksa pramiti* and the perceived object as well. *Pratyaksa pramana* gives rise to *pratyaksa prama*, while *pratyaksa pramanabhasa* causes *pratyaksa bhrama*. According to Pracin Nyaya, *pratyaksa prama* is a non-erroneous cognition which is produced by the intercourse of the sense-organ with the objects, which is not associated with a name and which is well-defined¹. This definition of perception fails to cover the divine and yogic perception. So the Navya Naiyayika defines it as direct or immediate cognition, which is not

derived through the instrumentality of any other cognition². The self comes into contact with the *manas*, the *manas* with the sense-organs and the sense-organs with the objects concerned³. 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*. The *manas* is the mediator between the self and the sense-organs. The external objects, through the sense-organs and the *manas*, make an impression on the self. The different schools of Indian philosophy define *pratyaksa* differently as it is consistent with their own ontology. But they all agree with the thesis that perception is a direct experience.

Controversy over forms of Perception:

(Opponent's question -1):

The Carvakas say that the determinate perception or *savikalpaka* *pratyaksa* is the only form of perception. The Yogacara Buddhists are of the view that sense perception or *nirvikalpaka*

pratyaksa is the only form of perception and the judgments or determinate cognitions are indirect cognition. The Carvakas argue that indeterminate cognition does not stand to reason. The Yogacara Buddhists argue that determinate perception is not a percept, but a concept.

(Proponent's reply-1):

Leaving the Carvaka and the Yogacara all other Indian philosophers meet the objection raised by the Carvakas and the Yogacara Buddhists by saying that there are two stages in a perception. The first is called *nirvikalpaka* or indeterminate and the second, *savikalpaka* or determinate. The latter is a qualified cognition in which the qualificandum (*visesya*), the qualifier (*visesana*) and their relation are cognized. The former is a non-judgmental cognition or simple awareness in which the *visesya* and *visesana* are cognized in their own essences, but their relation is not cognized⁴. The determinate cognitions presuppose the indeterminate cognition for their justification.

(Opponent's question -2):

The Carvaka and the Mimamsaka are of the opinion that perception should necessarily be ordinary (*laukika*). When the sense-organs come into contact with the objects present to them, we have *laukika pratyaksa*. They

argue that there is no justification in admitting a perception in an unusual way. The extraordinary (*alaukika*) perception does not stand the test of logic.

(Proponent's reply -2):

The Nyaya, the Samkhya-Yoga, the Buddhist, the Jaina, the Advaita Vedanta and the Visistadvaita Vedanta hold that perception may be ordinary (*laukika*) and extraordinary (*alaukika*). They refute the charge of the opponent. They maintain that when the sense-organs come into contact with the objects in the usual way, we have the *laukika* perception. And if the objects are not ordinarily present to the senses but are conveyed to them through an extraordinary medium *i.e.* *samanyalaksana*, *jnanalaksana* or *yogaja sannikarsa*, we have *alaukika* perception. *Alaukika* perception is of three kinds, namely *samanyalaksana*, *jnanalaksana* and *yogaja pratyaksa*. *Samanyalaksana* perception is the perception of all individuals (*vyakti-s*) belonging to a particulars class. Whenever one perceives a cow he perceives 'universal cowness', and then, through the medium of universal cowness he perceives all particular past, present and future cows. In *jnanalaksana pratyaksa* an object is revived in memory through the past cognition of it and is perceived through representation. The third kind of extraordinary perception is *yogaja pratyaksa*. It is an intuitive perception of all objects, past, present and future⁵. The *kevalajnana* of the Jainas, the *Bodhi* of the Buddhists, the *kaivalya* of the Samkhya-Yoga and the *Aparoksanubhuti* of the Advaita Vedantins are examples of intuitive, super-sensuous cognition.

Controversy over Inference as a means of Cognition:

(Opponent's question-3):

The Carvakas hold that matter is the only reality. It alone is cognizable by the senses. So perception is the only means of cognition. What is not perceivable is non-existent, because it is not perceived. They reject Inference as a distinct source of cognition. When we see smoke, we are reminded of fire, through association or memory of past perceptions. The Carvakas argue that Inference cannot be a means of valid cognition, as invariable concomitance (*vyapti*) between the *probandum* and the *probans*, the ground of inference, can never be known⁶.

(Proponent's reply-3. 1) :

All Indian philosophers, expecting the Carvakas, maintain that Inference is a distinct source of valid cognition. In the project, the Naiyayika and the Buddhist are the proponents of the thesis. To meet the objection raised by the Carvakas, the Naiyayikas reply that invariable concomitance (*vyapti*) between the *probans* and the *probandum* is capable of being known by the methods of agreement (*anvaya*) and difference (*vyatireka*), i.e. A is where B is, A is not where B is not⁷. The invariable concomitance (*vyapti*) is an induction, and as such, it does not lead to certainty, but to the remote possibility. Any doubt with regard to the past and future and present but unperceived can be removed by the application of *tarka*. Here, they put question to the Carvakas: Do they offer argument or not in support of their view? If not, their view would be unacceptable. If they give argument, it would be treated as inference. So the Naiyayikas consider inference as a distinct means of cognition.

(Proponent's reply-3.2):

The Buddhist philosophers also share the view of the Naiyayikas. But they avoid the difficulties of ascertaining invariable concomitance in a different way. They hold that invariable concomitance between the *probans* and the *probandum* is easily cognizable by means of identity and causality⁸. Doubt with regard to the past and future instances can be removed by the relation of cause and effect. A supposition that an effect may be produced without any cause would destroy itself by putting a stop to activity of any kind. Doubt terminates where there is a practical absurdity. Similarly, an invariable concomitance is cognizable by the ascertainment of identity. An ascertainment of the identity of *sisu* and tree is competent in virtue of the reference to the same object- "This tree is a *sisu*". The Buddhists assert that an effect or a self-same supposes a cause or a self-same as invariable concomitance. So there is no difficulty in knowing of invariable concomitance. Inference, they claim, is a distinct *pramana* apart from *pratyaksa pramana*.

Controversy over Apprehension of Cognition

(Opponent's question-4):

The Naiyayika and the Bhatta Mimamsakas argue that cognition, technically known as *vyavasaya jnana*, is revealed by a second cognition known as

anuvyavasaya jnana. *Vyavasaya jnana* or the first cognition reveals the object, but it cannot reveal itself. It needs another introspective cognition (*anuvyavasaya*) for its revelation. As for example, O stands for object, C¹ stands for first Cognition i.e. *vyavasaya* and C² stands for introspective cognition. C¹ reveals O, and C² reveals C¹. The opponents advocate the theory of *paratah prakasa*. They argue that C¹ can never reveal itself.

(Proponent's reply-4):

The Prabhakara Mimamsaka and the Advaita Vedantin are the upholders of the theory of *svatah prakasa*. They seek to disprove the position of the opponents. They say cognition reveals its object and also reveals itself automatically. The aggregate of revelation that reveals the object of the cognition, reveals cognition intrinsically. As in the cited example C¹ (better to say C) reveals both O and C¹ (better to say C). If C¹ is cognized by C², C² by C³, C³ by C⁴ and so on then this process would lead to ad infinitum. So the proponents defend the theory of *svatah prakasa*, rejecting the theory of *paratah prakasa*.

Controversy over Validity of Cognition:

(Opponent's question -5):

The Prabhakara, the Bhatta and the Advaita Vedantin maintain that in cognition validity is generated by the same casual factors that produce cognition. Validity is automatically produced in cognition. It does not depend on any additional cause for its generation. This is called the theory of *utpattigata svatah pramanya*. Those philosophers argue that theory of *paratah pramanya* in respect of generation does not stand to reason⁹.

(Proponent's reply-5):

Here the Naiyayikas appear as the proponents. They refute the position of the opponents. They are of the view that validity is generated in cognition by an additional factor i.e. quality or *guna*¹⁰. If validity comes into being from the conditions that produce cognition then it would be impossible to make a distinction between valid cognition and invalid cognition. Suppose C stands for cognition, A & B stand for casual factors of cognition, D stands for additional factor of generation of validity and V stands for validity of cognition According to the Naiyayika, A & B > C

A, B & D > V.

Conclusion:

On our epistemological and methodological survey it reveals that perception is a source of valid cognition. It is admitted by the upholders of each system of Indian philosophy. It comes to light that the Mimamsa theory of *svatah prakasa* and the Nyaya theory of *utpattigata paratah pramanya* are more appealing. It would be wrong to include inference into perception. Perception is the *upajivya pramana* on which other *pramana*-s depend.

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3. *atma manasa samyujyate, mana indriyena, indrayamarthena—Nyayasutra 1.1.4*, *Vatsyanabhasya*, p. 104
4. *nisprakarakam jñānam nirvikalpam, saprakarakam jñāna savipalpakam- Tarkasamgraha* p. 113
5. See *Bhasapariccheda*, karika 63-65
6. See *Sarvadarsanasamgraha*, chapter on Carvaka, p. 7- 10
7. *vyabhicarajnanavirahasahakrtasahacarajnanasya vyaptigrahakatvat- Dipika* p 141
8. *karyakaranabhavad va svabhavad va niyamakat / avinabhavanīyamo' darsananna na darsanat // - Sarvadarsanasamgraha*, Ch. on Bauddha, 16.
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