

## Nyaya Conception of Perception

**KALO SONA ROY**

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy, Dr. G.M. Roy College, Monteswar, Purba Bardhaman (W.B.) India

### ABSTRACT

Gautama 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. ‘Indriyartha sannikarso utpannam jnanam avyapadesyam avyabhicari vyavasayatmakam pratyaksam. The definition of perception is given first because without perception no other instrument of valid knowledge is possible. Gautama begins with the statement that perception is the knowledge resulting from sense-object contact. By way of explaining this, Vatsayayana first raises a possible objection against it. Gautama uses the expression ‘knowledge resulting from sense-object contact’ to exclude inferential and other forms of knowledge from perception. In all cases of perception, the knower has the definite knowledge of an object through the senses, for persons with impaired sense-organ cannot have any ‘after-knowledge’(anu-vyavasaya).

**Key Words :** Perception, Yatha, Artha, Sannikarsa, Avyapadesyam, Avyabhicari, Anavadharana-jnana, Vyavasayatmaka, Anu-vyavasaya

### INTRODUCTION

Gautama 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. ‘Indriyartha sannikarso utpannam jnanam avyapadesyam avyabhicari vyavasayatmakam pratyaksam<sup>1</sup>. Perception is the knowledge resulting from sense-object contact (and which is) ‘not due to words’ (avyapadesya), ‘invariably related’ (to the object) (avyabhicari) and is ‘of a definite character’(vyavasayatmaka).

The definition of perception is given first because without perception no other instrument of valid knowledge is possible. Hence perception is considered ‘supreme among the pramanas’ or pramana-jyestha, literally ‘eldest of the pramanas<sup>2</sup>. The words used in the sutra, ‘perception’ stands for the object defined and the others constitute the definition proper. These are: i) knowledge (jnanam), ii) resulting from the sense-object contact

(indriyartha-sannikarsotpannam), iii) not due to words (avyapadesyam), iv) invariably related (to the object) (avyabhicari), and v) of a definite character (vyavasayatmakam). The omission of any of these expressions makes the definition ‘too wide’ (ati-vyapti). As Uddyatakara explains, these five expressions exclude respective the possibility of applying the term perception to the following five: i) pleasure (sukha), ii) inference, iii) knowledge derived words (sabda-jnana), iv) illusive perception (viparjaya) and v) doubtful perception makes (samsay pratyahara)<sup>3</sup>.

But we shall presently see, there are difference of opinion regarding the exact relevance of these five expressions. Vacaspati Misra, Jayanta Bhatta and others suggest that the sutra is to be understood by adding to it the word yatha, *i.e.* ‘from which’. The sutra will thus mean that perception is that from which results the form of knowledge referred to by the sutra. The word yatah added to the sutra will thus give the definition of the instrument of valid perceptual knowledge and not of

perceptual knowledge itself. Gautama clearly designs the present sutra to define the instrument of valid knowledge called perception as mentioned in the preceding sutra<sup>4</sup>.

Gautama begins with the statement that perception is the knowledge resulting from sense-object contact. By way of explaining this, Vatsayayana first raises a possible objection against it. Mere sense-object contact cannot result in perception for according to Gautama's own view, in the case of perception the self first comes in contact with the mind, next the mind comes in contact with the sense and lastly the sense concerned comes in the contact with the object perceived. In the present sutra, however, Gautama does not mention all these and simply says that the sense-object contact results in perceptual knowledge. Thus the present sutra appears to go against Gautama's own view<sup>5</sup>.

In answer to this Vatsayayana says that Gautama here does not really mean that the sense-object contact alone is the cause of perception, the purpose of the sutra being to state the definition of perception and not to enumerate all its causes. Gautama defines perception by mentioning only its 'special cause' (asadharana-karana). The sutra does not, therefore, exclude the contact of the self with the mind from the causes of perception. On the contrary, such a contact being a common cause of all forms of knowledge, perception cannot be defined as the knowledge derived from the contact of the self with the mind. Gautama uses the expression 'knowledge resulting from sense-object contact' to exclude inferential and other forms of knowledge from perception.

In Nyaya-Sutra, Gautama mentions only five senses, namely olfactory, gustatory, visual, cutaneous and auditory, *i.e.*, only the external senses. According to him, however, the mind also is a sense. The word sense in the present sutra stands for all these six senses. From the Vaisheshika point of view, Prasastapada also mentions these six senses<sup>6</sup>.

The word artha or object in the sutra is used in the sense of only perceptible objects. There is no perception without a contact between such an object and the sense. Only through the mediation of such a contact, the sense gives a perceptual knowledge. To emphasise this, Gautama uses the word contact or sannikarsa in the sutra. He uses the word artha or object to indicate that only the contact of the sense with its appropriate object results in its perceptual knowledge. The contact of the sense with empty space or akasa does not result in any perceptual knowledge, because empty space is

imperceptible, *i.e.* is not an object appropriate for any one of the senses.

Even for perceptible objects, any and every form of sense-contact does not result in perceptual knowledge. The words 'resulting from' (utpanna) in the sutra implies that the sense-object contact means here only that form of contact which actually results in perceptual knowledge, example.

According to Uddyotakara, the sense-object contact is of six kinds<sup>7</sup>.

1. Conjunction (Samyoga).
2. Inherence in what is conjoined (samyukta-samavaya).
3. Inherence in what is inherent in the conjoined (samyukta-samaveta-samavaya).
4. Inherence (samavaya).
5. Inherence in the inhered (samaveta-samavaya).
6. Adjunct-substantive relation (vishesana-vishesya-bhava).

Inclusion of the word 'avyapadesyam'<sup>8</sup> in the definition of perception. (Objection) There are as many 'naming words' (namadheya-sabda) as there are objects (artha). Every object has a word standing for it. By these words the objects are known properly. Usage (vyavahara) depends on the proper knowledge of the object. Now this knowledge of object resulting from sense-object contact assumes the form: 'It is colour' (rupa) or 'It is taste' (rasa). The words like rupa and rasa are names of objects. Pieces of knowledge being referred to by these, *e.g.*, one knows that it is colour or one knows that it is taste. Such pieces of knowledge being referred to by words naming these, there is the apprehension of considering them as but due to words.

To remove such an apprehension, Gautama says, not due to words (avyapadesyam).

Knowledge on the part of those unaware of the relation between the word and its corresponding object (*e.g.* of the infant and the dumb) is not referred to by the words naming the objects. Even if the relation between the word and the corresponding object is known, there is the name of this object, *i.e.* even for those who are aware of the relation between word and its corresponding object, the knowledge of the object is not due to word naming it. When that object is known, the knowledge does not differ from the afore-mentioned knowledge of the object (*i.e.* infant and the dumb). This knowledge of the object is but similar to that. But this knowledge of the object has no other word to name it, being conveyed by which (word)

it can be subject to usage, because there is no usage with what is not properly known. We use like this-rupam-iti-jnanam, rasa-iti-jnanam. Thus the word naming the object has no efficacy in producing the knowledge of the object. But it has use only for the purpose of communication. Therefore, the knowledge of the object resulting from sense-object contact is not due to word.

[The word sabda in the Vatsyayana-bhasya is not to be taken as knowledge due to verbal testimony. It is to be taken as knowledge having word for their objects]. Inclusion of 'avyabhicari' and 'vyavasayatmakam' in the definition of perception.

During the summer the flickering rays of the sun intermingled with the heat radiating from the surface of the earth come in contact with the eyes of a person at a distance. Due to this sense-object contact, there arises, in the rays of the sun, the knowledge: this is water. Even such a knowledge may be taken for valid perceptual knowledge. Hence Gautama says, 'invariably connected with the object (avyabhicari). An erroneous or avyabhicari perception is the perception of an object as something which is not. A right or avyabhicari perception is the perception of an object as it actually is'<sup>9</sup>.

Perceiving with eyes an object at a distance, a person cannot decide whether it is smoke or dust. As such, an indecisive knowledge (anavadharana-jnana) resulting from sense-object contact may be taken for perceptual knowledge. Hence Gautama says, 'of a definite character' (vyavasayatmaka)<sup>10</sup>. It cannot, however, be claimed that this indecisive knowledge is due only to the contact self with mind (*i.e.* is not due to the contact of the sense with the object). Indecisive knowledge (like this) arises only after one sees the object with the eyes. Just as the object perceived by the senses is eventually perceived by the mind, so also an object is indecisively apprehended by the mind after being indecisively apprehended by the senses. Doubt is only the 'vacillating knowledge' (vimarsa) with a drive for the perception of some unique character which is apprehended by mind after being apprehended by the senses, and not the previous one (*i.e.* not the indecisive knowledge which is apprehended by mind alone after the termination of the function of the senses). In all cases of perception, the knower has the definite knowledge of an object through the senses, for

persons with impaired sense-organ cannot have any 'after-knowledge' (anu-vyavasaya).

## REFERENCES

1. *Indriyārtha sannikarso utpannam jnanam avyapadesyam avyabhicari vyavasayatmakam pratyaksam - Nyayasutra* 1.1.4
2. See Vatsyayanabhasya page 105
3. Samastam ithyaya yasmadakasohnumana sukha sabdha biparyaya samsayjananani nibartanta iti- Nyayavartika Vatsyayanabhasya page 105.
4. Yat pratyaksa jnanasya bisistakaranam tatyachta, yattu samanamunamadi jnanasya na tnnibartya iti-Nyaya sutra 114
5. See Vatsyayanabhasya page 106
6. Nyaya sutra 1.1.12
7. See Vatsyayanabhasya page 110-111
8. See Vatsyayanabhasya page 116-117
9. Grishma marichoyo bhomanoshmana sansrita spandamana durasthasha chaksusa sannikrishanta- Vatsyayanabhasya page 126
10. Sabartra pratyaksa bisaya jyaturindrina vyavasaya upahata indriyanam anuvyavasaya abhabat- Vatsyayanabhasya page 133

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Annambhatta, *Tarkasamgraha*, ed. Niranjanasvarup Brahmachari, Rajaguru Sumeru Math, Varanasi
- ..... *Dipika*, ed. Niranjanasvarupa Brahmachari, Rajaguru Sumeru Math, Varanasi
- Gotama, *Nyayasutra*, ed. PhanibhusanaTarkabagisa, W.B. State Book Board, Calcutta (1981)
- Madhavacharya, *Sarvadarsanasamgraha*, ed. V.S. Abhyankar, BORI, Poona (1978)
- Vatsyayana, *Vatsyayanabhasya*, ed. Phanibhusanatarakabagisa, W.B.State Book Board, Calcutta (1981)
- Visvanatha, *Bhasapariccheda*, ed. Asutosh Bhattacharya, Vijayayana, Calcutta (1405 BS)
- ..... *Muktavali*, ed. Asutosh Bhattacharya, Vijayayana, Calcutta (1405).

\*\*\*\*\*