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Nyaya on Valid Cognition (Prama) – A Study

Sri Sayan Bhattacharyya
State-Aided College Teacher
Department of Philosophy
Galsi Mahavidyalaya

Abstract

Vatsyayana frames two *lakshanas* of valid cognition which do not deviate from its object. It includes memory. The later Naiyayikas headed by Vacaspati refuse to accept *smrti* as prama. Valid cognition is independent, whereas *smrti* is dependent. Udayana, a Pracina Naiyayika, frames the *lakshana* of *prama* from the Nyaya point of view, refuting the Mimamsa *lakshana* of *prama*. Gangesa, the father of Navya Nyaya, defines *prama* as the apprehension with predication content about an object that possesses it. All later Naiyayikas follow Gangesa's definition. It reveals that the *lakshana* of *prama* given by the Pracina Naiyayikas is mostly negative in character, whereas the *lakshana* of *prama* framed by the Navya Naiyayikas is positive in character.

All fruitful human activity follows a valid cognition (*prama*). A cognition which does lead a cognizer to an unsuccessful end is invalid (*aprama*). So we seek to know the validity of cognition in everyday life. In India, the philosophers also spend much energy in analyzing the nature of valid cognition. They are of the view that determination of each category (*prameya*) depends on *pramana* i.e. a source of valid cognition (*prama*) (cp. *manadhina meyasiddhih*). Notably, the different systems of Indian Philosophy widely differ in defining a valid cognition. The present paper will deal with the nature of valid cognition from Nyaya point of view.

Aksapada, also known as Gautama or Gotama, is the founder of the Nyaya System of Indian Philosophy. He is the author of the *Nyayasutra*. This book is enriched by the commentary, and sub-commentaries, namely Vatsyayana's *Nyayabhasya*, Uddyotakara's *Nyayavarttika*, Vacaspati's *Nyayavarttikatatparyatika* and Udayana's *Tatparyaparissuddhi*. These five monumental works are collectively designated as "Pancagranthika" which represents Pracina Nyaya. Pracina Nyaya deals with both metaphysics and epistemology. But Gangesa is the father of Navya Nyaya. In course of time two Schools of Navya Nyaya are developed, namely Navya Nyaya in Mithila and Navya Nyaya in Bengal. Gangesa's *Tattvacintamani* is a source book of Navya Nyaya.

In Gotama's *Nyayasutra* we do not find any *laksana* of valid cognition (*prama*). Vatsyayana is the first Naiyayika who frames the *laksana* of *prama*. In the commentary on the *Nyayasutra* Vatsyayana gives two *laksana*-s of valid cognition at different places. In the 'Adibhasya' he defines *prama* as *yad arthavijnanam sa pramitih*¹ i.e. 'whatever is the cognition of the thing is valid cognition'. Perhaps he realizes the ambiguity of this definition, and subsequently, frames *tasmin taditi pratyayah*² "cognition of that as that" as an improved *laksana* of *prama*. In the valid cognition of a jar the cognizer cognizes the jar as jar. But in the mistake of the snake on the rope the erring person knows the rope having the property of the snake. As *prama jnana* does never deviate from its object, *arthavyabharitva* is the desired meaning of Vatsyayana's *laksana* of *prama*. Consequently, this *laksana* of *prama* includes true memory cognition (*yatartha smrtijnana*).

The later Naiyayikas refuse to accept *smrti* as *prama*. Like apprehension (*anubhava*) *smrti* is of two kinds, true and false. True apprehension is *prama*, but true memory is not. True apprehension (*yatartha anubhava*) corresponds to the object as it is, whereas true memory (*yartha smrti*) entirely depends on the validity of *anubhava* from which it originates and does not correspond to the previously apprehended object having the properties *taddesatva* and *tatkalatva*. A valid cognition (*prama*) gives rise to a successful activity, whereas memory cognition (*smrti jnana*) does not produce any activity. Keeping the distinction in mind Vacaspati in his *Nyayavarttikatatparyatika* frames a *laksana* of *prama* that excludes *smrti*. He defines *prama* as "the cognition that does not deviate from its object and that is other than memory cognition"³. According to him, both doubt (*samsaya*) and invalid cognition (*viparyaya*) are not *prama* as these two cognitions deviate from the objects (*arthavyabharin*). Vacaspati inserts the term *smrtibhinnatva* in the *laksana* of *prama* in order to exclude *smrti* that deviates from its object. According to him, *prama jnana* does not deviate from its object and it is different from memory and doubt.

Udayana is the last *Pracina* Naiyayika who writes *Parisuddhi* on Vacaspati's *Nyayavarttikatatparyatika*. He is the author of the *Nyayakusumanjali* and *Atmatattvaviveka*, the two monumental works in Nyaya systems. Notably, he seeks to make a bridge over the Nyaya and Vaisheshika systems. He writes the *Kiranavali*, an authentic commentary on the *Prasastapadabhasya*. Some critics hold that he is the last teacher of *Pracina* Nyaya as also the first teacher of *Navya* Nyaya. The technicalities of *Navya* Nyaya begin with his writings. In the *Nyayakusumanjali* Udayana frames a *laksana* of *prama* from Nyaya point of view, refuting the Mimamsa's *pramalaksana*. The Mimamsakas define *prama* as *agrhitagrahitva* i.e. 'cognition of uncognized object'. Memory is not a valid cognition as it cognizes an object which is previously cognized. Udayana claims that cognizing the uncognized cannot be the *laksana* of valid cognition (*prama*) as it is vitiated by the defects of narrowness (*avyapti*) and over-extensiveness (*ativyapti*).⁴ A continuous perceptual cognition (*dharavahika jnana*) is valid. But the *laksana* of *prama* given by the Mimamsakas fails to cover *dharavahika jnana* which reveals an object already comprehended by the prior cognition.⁵ Udayana further asserts that the Mimamsaka's *laksana* of *prama* over-covers a false cognition (*viparyaya*) as its object is

uncognized by the corresponding true cognition.⁶ To avoid the defects Udayana rejects the *laksana* of *prama* as framed by the Mimamsaka, and defines it as *yathartha anubhava* i.e. ‘true apprehension’. All reliable people say that a cognition that corresponds to the fact is a valid cognition.⁷ *Smrti* or recollection cannot be treated as valid cognition because there is no usage regarding *smrti* that it is a kind of valid cognition. No experts in the theory of knowledge use the term ‘means of knowledge’ to refer to the means of *smrti*.⁸ Besides, a valid cognition is *anapeksa* i.e. independent, whereas *smrti* is dependent.⁹ The former does not depend on any other cognition for its genesis whereas the latter does necessarily depend on the prior cognition that produces it. The cognition is false or true by itself. But the truth and falsehood of *smrti* depend on the truth and falsehood of the previous cognition that produces it.

Gangesa is the founder of *Navya Nyaya* School of Mithila. Although *Navya Nyaya* begins its journey from the writings of Udayana, it receives its full-bodied form in Gangesa’s *Tattvacintamani*. It mainly concerns with epistemology and logic. In the *Pratyaksacintamani* Gangesa offers two definitions of valid cognition. The first *laksana* is: *yatra yadasti tatra tasyanubhavah prama*¹⁰ i.e. ‘apprehension of something there where it is’. An apprehension of a jar as a jar with jar’s being a jar is a valid cognition. This *laksana* of *prama* is close to the *laksana* Udayana gives in his *Nyayakusumanjali* that we have already discussed. The false cognition is the cognition of something there where it is not. The second *laksana* of *prama* Gangesa gives in the *Pratyaksacintamani* is: *tadvati tatprakarakanubhavah*¹¹ i.e. ‘apprehension with predication content about an object that possesses it’. The word *prakara* means predication content. Having ‘p’ as predication content is to have “being qualified by p” as object. It may be interpreted as that which is capable of being generated by the cognition of ‘p’ as object¹². A false cognition is the cognition with ‘p’ as predication content about an object that is not ‘p’¹³. Gangesa, then, gives an alternative simple *laksana* of *prama*. An apprehension other than invalid cognition is valid cognition. According to him, valid and invalid cognitions are mutually exclusive.

Annambhatta, a Tailanga Brahmin, is a versatile Naiyayika affiliated to *Navya Nyaya* of Bengal. He writes *Tarkasamgraha* and its commentary, *Tarkasamgrahadipika* in order to make his students acquainted with the philosophy of Gadadhara Bhattacharya, one of the three pillars of *Navya Nyaya* of Bengal. As a matter of fact Annambhatta’s *Tarkasamgrahadipika* is known as ‘Balagadadhari’. It is a very popular work and today its study is extended all over the country. Following his predecessors Annambhatta defines *prama* as *yatharthanubhava* i.e. true apprehension in which the object is cognized as it is. He interprets *yatharthanubhava* as *tadvai tatprakarakanubhava*¹⁴. The term *tadvati* signifies determinandum (*visesya*) and the term *tatprakaraka* refers to *determinans* (*prakara*). A valid cognition is that which has for its determinans (*prakara*) as something ‘p’ (*tat*), when its determinandum (*visesya*) ‘has that something’ (*tadvat*). ‘This is a pot’ is an example of valid cognition as ‘potness’ here is the *prakara* of cognition and the *visesya* ‘pot’ also has that potness.

An opponent argues that the *laksana* of *prama* as framed by Annambhatta is too narrow. It cannot cover the valid cognition 'in pot potness' (*ghate ghatatvam*). Inasmuch as there is the absence of 'pot in potness'. The opponent points out that according to Nyaya, the class 'potness' is said to be in a 'pot' in the relation of inherence (*samavaya*), but 'pot' is never said to be in 'potness'. Annambhatta meets the charge of under-coverage by saying that the phrase *tadvat* occurred in the above *laksana* of *prama* does not mean 'that which has that something'. It means 'that which bears a relation to that something' (*tatsambandhi*). Both 'pot' and 'potness' are related to each other. 'Potness' is related to 'pot' in the relation of *pratiyogita* whereas 'pot' is related to 'potness' in the relation of *anuyogita*. In the instance *ghate ghatatvam* 'pot' can be said to be in 'potness' in the relation of *anuyogita*. So the charge of *avyapti* does not arise.¹⁵

From our rapid survey it comes to light that the *laksana* of *prama* given by the Pracinai Naiyayikas is mostly negative in character, whereas the *laksana* of *prama* framed by the Navya Naiyayikas is positive in character. Further, both *prama* and *viparyaya* are determinate cognitions, relational and have predication content (*saprakaraka jnana*). They fall within the province of linguistic practice. But indeterminate perception (*nirvikalpaka pratyaksa*) is non-relational, non-linguistic and does not have predication content (*nisprakaraka jnana*). So it is neither *prama* nor *viparyaya*.

References

1. *Nyayasutra* .1.1.1, *Vatsyayanabhasya*, p. 24/ 3
2. op. cit 2.1.36, *Vatsyayanabhasya*, p. 503/9
3. *na ca samsayaviparyasarupopalabdihikarana prasangah, arthavadityadhikarat. tayoscopadarsitarthavyabhicarenanarthakatvat.* op cit 1.1.1, *Nyayavarttika-tatparyatikatika*, p. 15/ 22-23
4. *avyapteradhikavyapter alaksanamapurvadrk/- Nyayakusumanjali* 4.1^a
5. *napi yatharthatvavisistametadeva, dharavahanabuddhy' avyapteh-* op. cit *Vrtti*, p 497/ 1-2
6. *na ca anadhigatarthatvameva tannimittam, viparyaye'pi pramavyavaharaprasa-ngat.-* op. cit, pp.496-497
7. *yatharthanubhavo manam //* - op. cit 4. 1^b
8. *yathartha hyanubhavah prameti pramanikah pasyanti.* -op. cit, *Vrtti* p 504/ 2
9. *anapeksatayesyate-* op. cit. 4. 1^b
10. *Tattvacintamani*, chapter on 'Pratyaksa', p. 401/ 2
11. op. cit. p. 401 /3
12. *tatprakarakatvanca tadvaisityavisayatvam-* op. cit, p. 401/ 6

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