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The Concept of Valid Cognition According to Buddhist Logic

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In Indian logic deal the *pramāna* regarding the sources or means of knowledge or cognition in the field of epistemology. The Nyāya-Sūtrakāra Akasapāda (150 A.D) introduces in his Nyāya text, *pramāna* the first in the list of sixteen categories.¹ In the Nyāya aspect *pramāna* is a means of things and it is quite evident from the etymology of the word itself.² So the word *pramāna* is different from *pramiti*, *pramātā*, *prameya*. *pramāna* is the source of valid knowledge or means of cognition where as *pramiti* or *pramā* is valid knowledge, *pramātā* is the knower of knowledge and *prameya* is the object of valid knowledge. In this respect, the nature of *pramana* is not same between the Nyāya and Buddhist view point. In Buddhist view point there is no distinct between *pramā* and *pramāna*. In Tibetan rendering of word *pramā* and *pramāna* is *tshad ma* only which means measure referring to the evaluating of the knowledge. There are no separate Tibetan rendering for the words *pramā* and *pramāna*. These two are same in the sense of valid knowledge or *samyag jñāna*.³ The means of valid knowledge is true knowledge (*samyagjñāna*) referring to an object not known before. It is means of it an object is measured.⁴

Different Indian Schools of Philosophy recognized different number and kinds of *pramānas*: Cārvāka, who are the foremost materials, accepts only one *pramāna*- perception (*pratyakṣa*). The Vaisesika and Buddhist admit two *pramānas*- perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). The Sāṃkhya and a branch of Naiyāyikas add one of above two- word or verbal testimony (*śabda*). The Naiyāyika accepts four *pramānas*- analogy (*upamāna*) along with the above three. The Pūrva Mīmāṃsā School of Prāvākara recognizes five *pramānas*- implication (*arthāpatti*) in addition to the above four. The Purva Mimamsa

1. *Pramāna-prameya-saṃsaya-prayojana-daiṣṭānta-siddhāntāvyava-tarka-nirya-vāda-jalpa-vitandā-hetvābhāsacchala-jāti-nigrasthānānām –tattvajñānānni –shreyasādhigamah. Nyaya Sutra: 1.1.1.*

2. *arthavati ca pramāne pramātā-prameyaṃ-pramātirityarthvanti bhavanti. Nyaya-Bhasya: 1.1.3.*

3. *tadeva ca pratyakṣam jñānam pramānaphalam II Nyāya-Bindi; 18 First chapter.*

4. *Pramānam samyagjñānamapurvagocaramiti lakṣam. Pramānavārtika Virtti, og Momoratha Nandi*

School of Kumārila Bhāṭṭa and the Vedānta accepts six *pramānas*- absence or negation (*abhāva*) together with the above five. The Paurāṇikas admits eight *pramānas*- possibility of inculcation (*sambhava*) and historical traditions (*aitihya*) along with the above six. In the case of Vaiyākaraṇa accepts two *pramānas* which are perception (*pratyakṣa*) and word or verbal testimony (*śabda*). According to the Jains there are two which are *pratyakṣa* direct and *parokṣa* indirect. In their view point there are five kinds of knowledge: ordinary cognition obtained by sense perception (*mati*), Scriptural knowledge (*śruti*), knowledge of things even at a distance of time and space (*abadhi*), knowledge of thoughts of others (*manaḥ-paryaya*) and lastly omniscience (*kevala*). *Pratyaks* or direct deals the knowledge of *manaḥ-paryaya* and *kevala* on the other hand *poraksa* or indirect contracts with the knowledge of *mati*, *śruti* and *abadhi*.

The means of valid knowledge is which knowledge do not disagreeing with experience *avisamvādaka* is called true knowledge. Dharmakīrti did not offer any clear definition of *pramāṇa* in his famous logical treatise Nyāya-Bindu⁵. But from the first *sūtra* of Nyāya-Bindu the definition of *pramāṇa* may be derived. The first *sūtra* runs as *samyajjñānapurvika sarvapuru-ṣārthasiddhiriti tad vyutpadyate* II⁶ (*sūtra*.1.N.B), we see in this *sūtra* the word *samyak jñāna* has been applied and this *samyak jñāna* may be taken as the definition of *pramāṇa*. To say clearly *samyajjñāna* is *pramāṇa* here. *Samyaka* means valid or non contradictory *jñāna* means knowledge or cognition. Now this *samyaka jñāna* has been described as *avisamvādi jñāna* by the commentator of Dharmottara.

Now this *avisamvāda jñāna* means *yathārtya* or valid knowledge. So this short of definition has been indicated in the *sūtra* also. Therefore both *sūtra kāra* and *tīkā kāra* accept that the *avisamvādaka jñāna* is *pramāṇa*⁷. For this reason we can guess that Dharmakīrti also accepted the same definition of *pramāṇa*. So the definition of *Pramana* is *avisamvādadaka jñāna*, according to the Buddhist Logicians. *Pramana* is true knowledge (*samyajjñāna*) referring to an object not known before. It is called *pramāṇa* since by means of it an object is measured. However it is not different from the true knowledge itself,⁸ because it is free from the

5. Dharmakīrti's (600 – 650 A.D.) Nyāya-Bindu is an ideal manual on Buddhist logic. Many commentaries and sub commentaries were written on it and these are Nyayabindu Tika of Vinitādeva (700 A. D.)', Śāntabhadra (700 A. D.), Nyayabindu Tika of Dharmottara (1st quarter of the eight century A. D.), Dharmottartippanaka of Mallavadin (700–750 A. D.), Nyayabindupindirtha of Jinamitra (900 A. D.), Nyayabindupurvapaksa- samksepa of Kamalaśīla (725- 788 A. D.) Dharmottarpridapa of Durvekamiśra (10 – 11th century A. D.) Many commentaries or sub commentaries. The original Sanskrit texts of Vinitādeva, Jinamitra and Kamalashila are lost but the Tibetan translations are still exist in bstan 'yur.

6. Nyāya-Bindu: sūtra-1.

1. *Pramāṇam samyajjñānam apurvagocaram iti lakṣaṇam* I Pramanavarttikavrtti of Manoratha Nandi, ed. Rahula Sankrtyana. 1937. as quoted from the text of An Introduction To Buddhist Philosophy by Yuichi Kajiyama. University of Wien.

2. The Buddhist theory that the means and the result of cognition are one and the same dealt with in. *pramāṇatah phalam nanyat pramāṇam na phalāt parām* I Tattvasamgra. Vers-1344-1349.

fault of uncertainty and erroneousness (*samdeha* and *viparyāsa*). Knowledge not disagreeing (with experience) is called true knowledge. And this non-disagreement is not found in uncertain knowledge as e.g. the knowledge (which cannot determine its object) to be either a man or a post, nor in erroneous knowledge as the the knowledge of water seen in a desert. Referring to an object, not yet known, (*apurvagocara*)⁹ means that the object of it has not been experience before.

In this connection, a question may be raised that what do we mean by *avisamvadi- katva*. Dharmakirti himself also in his work *Pramānavārtika* said that “*pramāṇam avisamvādi jñānam*”. So, in explaining the word *avisamvadi jñāna* from Nyāya Bindu tīkā. The said definition may be accepted as intended by him. In explaining, the meaning of this definition it may be said that in our mind the stream of knowledge is always flowing like the weaves of water. Such a situation can not be imagined which is devoid of knowledge. Though it is accepted that the stream of consciousness is always taking place but all pieces of cognition are not *yathārtha* or valid. All pieces of cognition can not inform about the real objects, this kind of cognition informs the object wrongly.

All pieces of cognition are not *avisamvāda*. There are some pieces of cognitions which are invalid and there are some pieces of cognition which are valid. The cognition of *śukti rajata* or *sarpa rajju* are never valid. It is invalid or *apramāṇa*.

It is very clear from the above discussion that cognition cannot always represent true or real object. So there may be a doubt about whether this piece of cognition is valid or invalid. To solve this problem Buddhist Philosophers said if a piece of cognition is *avisamvādaka* then it must be *yathārtha* or *pramāṇa*. Suppose somebodies sees a jar and takes the jar also then his knowledge or cognition about the jar is valid. In fact *avisamvādikatva* is *yarthārthatvata* or validity. At first the knower sees the thing and then if the thing is useful practically then the cognition of the knower of that thing is valid. Such is the position of Dharmakirti in explaining the validity of *pramāṇa*.

Dharmakirti himself said in his *Pramānavārtika* “*arthakriyāsthitih avisamvādana*”. Manoratha Nandi explains this in his *vrtti* as “*yathopadarśitarthasya kriyayā sthitih pramāṇayogyatā*”. It means existing as capable to be proved with the action of the object which is presented. Three points should be noted in this regard. 1. A piece of knowledge presents a piece of object. 2. The presented object has usefulness action. 3. The action is capable of being proved. If these three conditions are fulfilled then the piece of knowledge concerned is *avisamvāda*. If the *arthakriyā* is observed when the piece of knowledge is acquired then even in the case when the observer does not physically proceed to take the object the knowledge in question is valid it's object has capability for being taken. If the *arthakriyā* is observed of the object presented by the piece of knowledge then even without physical procedure of the observer the piece of knowledge should be taken as

In Tibetan *pramā* and *pramāṇ* is used for translation only one word i.e. *tshad ma*.

9. *apurvagocara* or *anadhigatārthagatṛ* is the qualification given to the *pramāṇa* by Mimamsaka also

valid. The inner intention of this explanation is as following. When the *arthakṛiyā* of the object of knowledge is observed through the knowledge itself then also the piece of knowledge is valid. So in other words *arthakṛiyā sthiti* is *pramāṇa योगyatā* (capability of being proved) and thus the valid knowledge represents the things and make the observer attain the the object of knowledge.

Now a question may be raised that if *arthakṛiyā* or the needful action of the object is not proved how we could know that the piece of knowledge has capability to be proved. For example when a piece of knowledge in the form of fire is produced then it should be examined by touching to know that the knowledge of fire is valid. In other words without examining *arthakṛiyā*, validity of knowledge can not be proved. So at the first moment by noticing only a piece of fire and thus attaining the piece of knowledge, one cannot be sure that the knowledge in question is valid. So acceptance of the object and examining its needful action is very necessary for understanding the validity of the knowledge of it.

To answer this question the Buddhists say as follows. A number of similar experience makes a habitual practice in the case of acquiring knowledge in question, this habitual practice creates the ability in the knower to be sure *that* this piece of knowledge is valid. Through the habitual practice he knows it. Through experience he earns the ability to understand the validity of the knowledge of the object. For instance an expert of a jewellery can understand a real jewel by merely noticing it, without examining through manifold experience and hence he realizes that his acquired knowledge is in fact real. In this way he becomes free from doubt.

From the above discussion, about this definition *pramāṇam avisamvādi jñānam*,¹⁰ we can say that after gaining the outer object when its *arthakṛiya* is comprehended then the validity of a piece of knowledge (i.e. initial knowledge which represents the object) can be determined. It can be described step by step as follows, at first somebody notices an object like a jar or some water then he attains the jar or water and by using the jar he can understand that this is a jar or water it is not false. So the knowledge of it is valid.

Dharmakirtti in his treatise Nyāya Bindu clearly indicates some characteristics of valid cognition which can be described as follows, one of the characteristic of *pramāṇa* is its being *avisamvādaka jñāna* i.e. non-contradictory cognition. Dharmottara explain *samyag jñāna* as *avisamvādaka jñāna* and by *avisamvādaka jñāna* he means contradicted cognition which can be explain as follows. The *pramāṇa* or *samyag jñāna* has the ability to produce a *pravṛtti* in the knower which can prompt the knower either to receive the object or avoid the object. If the man attains or avoids the object in question then the said cognition is to be taken a non contradicted cognition. In the case of illusory cognition is contradicted by later experience and it is not valid i.e. *visasmvādaka*.

10. Pramānavārtika. Chapter-ii

Dharmottara points out in this context that whatever is obtainable must be a real object having casual efficacy (*arthakriyasamartha*).¹¹ One form of a causal efficacy is the objects capacity to fulfil a human desire or to service a needful purpose. Contracted or imaginary object have no casual efficacy. Any desire can not be fulfilled by it. Whatever can fulfil a desire must be a real existing object.¹²

According to the Buddhists, all objects are momentary; the water obtained must be different from that initially perceived. So, how an identity will be established between the obtained water and initial one. Dharmottara answers this question by pointing out that the water obtained is a member (*santāni*) of a causal conditioned series (*santāna*) initiated by the momentary water particular (*jalasvalakṣaṇa*) initially perceived. Dharmottara answer this question that the water obtained is a member (*santani*) of a causally conditioned series (*santān*) initiated by the momentary water particular (*jalasvalakṣaṇa*) originally known. The water particular obtained is undoubtedly numerically different from the water particular of the initial perception. Nevertheless because of its being a member of the series of the originally recognized water particular, it may for practical purpose, be considered as being not different from the originally recognised water.¹³

Pramāna has another characteristic and that is *niyatajñāna*. Dharmottara said that a valid cognition must be *niyatajñāna*. A valid cognition lead to the successful attainment of an object only if such a cognition is connected with a definitely existing (*niyata*) positive object (*bhāvavastu*). An illusory cognition (*viparyāsa*) is not a valid cognition. This kind of cognition is not connected with definitely existing water which is attainable.¹⁴ Both perception and inference are thus valid cognition in as much as both these cognition are connected with definitely existing object. Perception is a direct awareness of such an object and inference also acquaints with us a definite object.¹⁵

11. *tato arthakriyasamartha vastu pradarśakam samyaka jñānam*” Nyāya-Bindu P-3: (Beng)

12. *nanvidam prāpaṇayogyamidam naityakriyāprāptimantreṇa nishcetumaśakyam I jñānotpattimātreṇa tu na bhrāntabhrantayorbhadoṣvadhāryate I tataśca katham tatsmyajñānamiti cet? naiṣa doṣah yadyapi jñānamātrodayād vaiśiṣṭyamanayoravadhārayitum na śakyate tathāpi jñānaviśeṣodayāddathaikasya vaiśiṣṭyam tathocyate I Tarkabhāṣā* by Mokṣakara Gupta: Sanskrit & Tibetan texts critically edited by Losang Norbu Shastri. P-2.

13. a. *noyate yasminneva kāle paricchidyate tasminneva kāle prāpayitavyamiti II anyo hi darśana kālah anyaśca prapti kāla II kintu yatkālam paricchim tadeva tena prāpaṇīyam abhedādhyavasāyācca santānagatamekatvam draṣṭavyamitiII* Nyāya-Bindu P-4: (Beng).

b..*Tatra pradaśītādanyad vastu bhinnākāram vhinnaśam bhinnakālam ca II viruddha dharma samsargāt hi anyad vastu II deśakālākārabhedaśa viruddha dharma samsargah II* Nyāya bindu P-3: (Beng)

14. *ābhyām pramānābhyāmanyena jñānena darśito artha kaśidatyantaviparyastah, yathā marīcīkāsu jalām II sa cāsattvāt prāptumaśakyah II* Nyāya bindu P-3: (Beng).

15. *tathā ca pratyakṣam pratibhāsamānam niyatamartham darśyati II anumānam ca liṅga samvaddham*

Arthasārūpya is another characteristic of *pramāṇa*. *Arthasārūpya* is explained in detail by Dharmakīrti in his discussion about the identity of *pramāṇa* and *pramāṇa phala* in both *Pramānavartika* and Nyāya-Bindu. Dignāga also refers this correspondence or similarity as *arthasārūpya*.¹⁶ Cognition is not valid simply because of its producing successful volition (*saphalapravrttijñānakatva*). It has been noted earlier, even an erroneous cognition of taking the lustre as the jewel itself may lead to the successful attainment of the jewel. This is not a valid cognition precisely because the forms (viz the spatial location) of the object perceived and the object attained are different. Dharmakīrti insist, there must be an exact correspondence between the form of the object presented in the initial cognition and the object ultimately attained.¹⁷

Dharmakīrti, strictly speaking, is aware of that an erroneous cognition (*mithyajnana*) cannot be a cause of successful action. If an erroneous cognition accidentally leads to the attainment of the desire object yet it cannot be considered as successful action. If an erroneous cognition accidentally leads to the attainment of the desired object yet it cannot be considered as successful action.¹⁸ For example a person having the optical illusion accidentally gets water in a nearby waterfall. However this optical illusion is not a valid cognition (*samyakjñāna*). It is valid only if there is a correspondence between the form of the presenting knowledge and that of the object finally attained. Only such cognition can be said to be the cause of successful action.¹⁹

Anadhigatarthajñāna is another characteristic of *samyakjñāna* or *pramana*. Dharmakīrti clearly introduce it in his *Pramānavārtika* and Nyāya- Bindu. He says that a valid cognition must have novelty as a necessary characteristic. A valid cognition reveals an object that is not already informed before. It provides us with additional information.²⁰ Buddhist logicians excluded both determinant perception (*svavikalpaka pratyakṣa*) and memory (*smṛiti*) from the arena of valid cognition in consequence of the fact that both have as their object something which is already grasped. They cannot give any new information. Although, both determinant perception (*svakalpaka pratyakṣa*) and memory (*smṛiti*) can lead us to successful attainment of the desired object but their power of thus leading us to the subject is a derivative power.

niyatamartham darśiti II *ata eta niyatasyārthasya pardaśake* II *tena te pramāṇe* II Nyāya bindu P-3: (Beng).

16. *arthasārūpyamasya pramāṇam* II *sūtra*-20. Nyāya-Bindu.)

17 . *Arthena saha yat sārūpyam sādṛaśyam asya jñānasya tat pramāṇam I iha yasmād viṣayād vijñānam udeti tadviṣayasadṛaśm tad bhavati I yathā nilād utpadyamānam nilasadṛaśam I Sūtra commentary*-20. Nyāya-Bindu.

18 . *mithyājñānād hi kākātālīyah opi nāstyarthasiddhih I tathā hi- yadi pradśitam artham prāpayatyevam tato bhavatyar- siddhih I pradārśitam ca prāpayat samyagjñānmeva (sūtra commentary 1. Nyāya-Bindu P-5.*

¹⁹ . *pradarśitam cā prāpayat samyagjnanameva I pradarshitam cāprapayat mithyagjñānmeva I Nyāya-Bindu: sūtra commentary- 1. P-5.*

²⁰ . **a.** *tato anadhigata viṣayam apramāṇyam I Nyāya-bindu: Sūtra commentary-1. P-3.*

b. *ajñātārtha prakāśo vā I Pramānavārtika. P-8.*

Before Vasubandhu, Dignaga in the history of Buddhist logic there are four types of *pramāna* and these are *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *upamāna* and *āgama*. Nāgārjuna said that- *atha katividham pramānam? caturvidham pramānam- pratyakṣmanumānam- upamānamāgamāsceti* I²¹ But Vasubandhu, Dignaga etc admit two kinds of *pramāna* on the basis of *premeya*.²² According to the Buddhist two area of two *pramānas* are absolutely different. One *pramāna* cannot operate in the area of other. Perception cannot operate in the area of inference and vice versa. This position is technically called *pramāna-vyavasthā*. On the other hand a position which is opposite of it is called *pramāna sampalobha*. For example fire can perceive and also can be inferred also. Fire can be object both perception and inference. This is called *pramāna sampalobha*. But the Buddhist does not accept *pramāna sampalobha*. They say that two types of object can be cognised by two types of *pramāna*. Object of *pratyakṣa pramāna* is *svalakṣana* and object of *anumāna pramāna* is *sāmānyalakṣana*. They can not trespass their particular area of application. Actually as there are two types of objects. Hence two types of *pramānas* are necessary. The two foldness of *premeya* leads two foldness of *pramāna* also. There are two *pramāna* because there are only two *premeyas* which leads *svalakṣana* and *sāmānya lakṣana*. Hence Buddhist philosophers say that *pramānas vyavasthā* disposition of *pramāna* should be maintained because on the basis of this we can fix the number of *pramānas*. Th. Stcherbatsky said that “the Buddhist from the time of Dignaga fall in line with Vaiśeṣikas, they admit only two different sources of knowledge, which they call perception and inference.”²³

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