

ABSTRACT

The Nyāya Critique of *Akhyātivāda*: Some Reflections

‘Error’ is very important subject-matter of epistemological thoughts. Theories of erroneous knowledge are known as ‘*khyātivāda*’ in Indian philosophical system. The word ‘khyāti’ is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘cakṣa’ alongwith ‘*ktin*’ inflection.¹ Actually, ‘*khyāti*’ means ‘knowledge’. But, the word ‘*khyāti*’ technically is used in Indian Philosophy that is ‘knowledge of an object which is appeared in error.

It is necessary to mention that, the ‘soul’ is the absolute knowable entity or ‘*prameya*’ in accordance with the orthodox philosophical point of view. ‘*Prameya*’ means that which is accurately knowable. The orthodox schools of philosophers incessantly have tried to realise this Absolute Soul since the succession of ages. Erroneous knowledge regarding Absolute Soul is the ultimate cause of all worldly miseries. In this regard, ‘error’ means the imposition of Absolute Soul in the non-soul. The living-beings identify the non-soul entities like body, mind, reformation (‘*samskāra*’), knowledge (‘*buddhi*’) and so on with the ‘Absolute Soul’. We feel that the soul would be realized through the negation of the non-soul entities. As a result, our minds become full of miseries. So, the first and foremost motivation of Indian Philosophy is to bring the eternal emancipation of all living-beings. So, the

ultimate purpose of all saviours is to gain the absolute true knowledge rejecting the fallacious knowledge for ever. So, we have to accept the existence of the invalid cognition or the erroneous cognition for being aware of the nature of valid cognition. Because, valid- invalid, good-bad, red-non-red etc. these all are relative terms. It will be impossible to separate the valid cognition from the invalid one without having the nature of invalid cognition. Besides that, we cannot deliberate correctly the truthfulness-falsity of daily happenings also due to the absence of valid cognition. For this reason, it is necessary to know the nature of erroneous knowledge in order to reject this. After all, 'error' is an important epistemological problem and also a psychological phenomenon. Actually, it is also a fact of our life.

The well-known kārīkā in regard to the theories of error is:

“Ātmakhyātirasatkhyātirakhyāti khyātiranyathā.

Tathā 'nirvacanakhyātirityetat khyātipañcakam'”²

According to this kārīkā or verse, the 'asatkhyāti', 'akhyāti', 'anyathākhyāti', 'ātmakhyāti', 'anirvacaniyakhyāti' - these five-fold theories of error are particularly well-known in the Indian Philosophy. Besides these, the theories called 'satkhyāti', 'viparītakhyāti', 'sadasatkhyāti', 'aloukikakhyāti' etc. are also well-known in the Indian Philosophy.

The main aim of this thesis is the substantiation of the theory of ‘*anyathākhyāti*’ refuting the theory of ‘*akhyāti*’. The present thesis is divided into mainly five chapters. In the introductory chapter or the first chapter it will be discussed about the above-mentioned various types of theory of error in a nutshell. It is necessary to discuss about the definition of ‘error’ and to give proper evidence concerning this subject-matter. Because, the nature of all objects are proved by means of their definitions and also their proper evidence. Because, the evidence in accordance with the principle - “*lakṣaṇapramāṇābhyām hi vastusiddhiḥ*” which is approved by all schools of Indian philosophers. For this reason, the subject-matter of the second chapter of this thesis is “Definition of ‘error’ in the light of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy”. After that, it will be discussed about ‘error’ in accordance with Prābhākara Mīmāṃsaka and Nyāya schools through various arguments in the next three chapters. After that, the discussion about the Prabhākaras’ theory of ‘non-error’ is the subject-matter of the third chapter of this thesis. The title of this chapter is “Elucidation of ‘*Akhyativāda*’ and background of such theory”. “A Critique of ‘*Akhyātivāda*’ by the *Naiyāyikas*” is the subject-matter of the fourth chapter of this thesis. Last of all, the thesis is concluded through some critical and evaluative remarks, which is the fifth chapter or last chapter of this thesis.

According to the ‘*ātmakhyātivādins*’, the error is actually the appearance of the attribute existing in the internal world or the ‘*ātmān*’ on the external object. The silver appears in the shell which is known as the external thing. Actually the *Yogācāras* do not admit extra-mental realities. The *Yogācāra* school of Buddhism points out that ‘*jñāna*’ or cognition is only real entity. There is no external thing besides cognition in their view. For this reason, their view or theory is known as ‘*vijñānavāda*’. In pursuance of this opinion, the ‘knowledge’ and the ‘object of knowledge’ is identical; so the fictitious external things are also knowledge by nature. The invalid knowledge or the erroneous knowledge regarding the external things also is acquired by feelings like the valid knowledge. In the shell-silver case, the fictitious shell is knowledge by nature. The silver is the form of knowledge. The erroneous knowledge of the silver which is the form of cognition becomes in the fictitious shell. In this case, the error becomes in the one type of cognition. It is called ‘*ātmakhyāti*’

According to the *Śūnyavadins* or the nihilists, the ‘*śūnya*’ or the ‘voidness’ is the absolute reality. So, in pursuance of the nihilists, the internal thing or the ‘*ātmān*’ and the external world --- all these are non-existent or no-being or ‘*asat*’. So, according to their view, all internal and external things are erroneous. They hold that, non-existent thing manifests itself as existent.

The ‘*Śūnyavādins*’ or the *Mādhyamika* school of Buddhism holds that, the real entity or the reality is not real or ‘*sat*’, not unreal or ‘*asat*’, not real-unreal or ‘*sat-asat*’, even it is not the different category besides real and unreal. There are no other alternatives besides these four-fold category. For this reason, the nature of reality is not eligible for determination. So, their point of view about reality is ‘*śūnya*’ or ‘void’ or ‘nothing’.¹⁴ *Mādhavācārya* said in his *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* regarding this view of the *Mādhyamika* school of Buddhism is that “*atastattvaṃ sadasadubhayatmakacatuṣkotivinirmuktaṃ śūnyameva*”. According to the *Mādhyamika* school, actually all external things are fictitious. These fictitious things are called the ‘*saṃvṛti sat*’ or the ‘*vyāvahārika sat*’. These ‘*saṃvṛti sat*’ things are called by the *Mādhyamika* school is ‘*anirvacanīya*’ or ‘undeterminable’. According to him, in the ‘shell-silver’ case, the shell is unreal and the silver also is unreal. In this case, the ‘silver’ which is unreal imposes on the another unreal thing ‘shell’. In this view, the object of error is unreal or ‘*asat*’. So, their view regarding error is called ‘*asatkhyātivāda*’.

Madhvācārya also accepts the theory of ‘*asatkhyāti*’. According to *Madhvācārya*, the object of erroneous knowledge is unreal or ‘*asat*’. So, their theory of ‘*khyātivāda*’ is also known as ‘*asatkhyātivāda*’.

These two views of error imply a fundamental contrast between the two schools of the *Śūnyavādin* Buddhists and the *Mādhva* school of *Vedānta*. According to the

Śūnyavādin Buddhists, the resort (‘*adhithāna*’) of error is unreal or ‘*asat*’ and on the other hand, the *Mādhva* school of *Vedānta* point out concerning this view the resort of error is real or ‘*sat*’.

According to the Advaita Vedantins, ‘*adhyāsa*’ or the erroneous knowledge is as such : The appearance of any other object in another object like that object seen by the knower in previous time. The meaning of the term ‘*bhāsa*’ is ‘knowledge’ and ‘*ava*’ is ‘*avasanna*’ (apparent) which are included in ‘*avabhāsa*’. So, the meaning of the term ‘*avabhāsa*’ is ‘*avasannajñana*’ or ‘the apparent knowledge’. That is called apparent which is taken as the depression. The depression of knowledge is to be ‘*vādhita*’ or to be proved false. After the knowledge of silver in the shell the inclination may be originated to the knower but, the cognition in the form: ‘it is not silver, it is the shell’ --- does not allow inclination to the thing. So, the knowledge of silver in the shell will be apparent. The apparent knowledge is known as the erroneous knowledge.

According to the *Advaita Vedānta*, the object of erroneous knowledge is ‘indescribable’ or ‘*anirvacanīya*’. In this opinion, the erroneous object is a new object like the object which was seen in previous time. For example, in the shell-silver case, the silver is a new object like that silver seen in the previous time.

It is relevant to refer that, in accordance with the *Advaita Vedānta*, the real entity or ‘*sattā*’ is three-fold --- ‘*pāramārthika*’, ‘*vyāvahārika*’ and ‘*prātibhāsika*’. That is the ‘*pāramārthika*’ entity which exists in all time or which is not proved as false in any time. According to them, the ‘*pāramārthika*’ entity is only ‘*Brahman*’ or ‘*Paramātman*’. That is to be taken as the ‘*vyāvahārika*’ entity which is not proved false in the time of use (‘*vyāvahārikakāla*’). For example, pot etc. That is the ‘*prātibhāsika*’ entity which is not proved in the level of apparent reality (‘*prātibhāsikakāla*’) but, it is proved false in ‘*vyāvahārikakāla*’ or the time of use. For example, in the case of illusion, the entity of silver exists on the shell. So, it is proved that, in the shell-silver case, the silver is proved false in the time of use. For this reason, it is not the ‘*vyāvahārika*’ entity, it is ‘*prātibhāsika*’ entity. Again, the silver is not unreal entity like the ‘sky-lotus’ case. Because, the perception of the silver originates from the fault after shell and the knower’s sense-organ becomes related. The unreal entity is not a perceptual object. So, this new-born silver may not be real or unreal or real-unreal. For this reason, the silver or the erroneous object is ‘*anirvacanīya*’ or false. That is why, the Advaita theory of error is known as ‘*anirvacanīyakhyāti*’.

Maharsi Gautama has pointed out in his sutra that, the locus of the imposing entity is called ‘*tattva*’ and ‘the imposing entity’ is called ‘*pradhāna*’ in the erroneous case. So, the erroneous cognition is valid in so far as *the part of the locus is*

concerned and valid so far as the imposing property is concerned. In this way, the erroneous cognition is of two-fold. In the erroneous case of the cognition of the human-being in the tree', the subject or 'the tree' is called '*tattva*' and on the other hand, 'the human-being' is called '*pradhāna*'. The erroneous cognition of the human-being originates in the tree due to the similar perception between them. In this present case, the tree is not actually the human-being, but, really it is tree. For this reason, it is called '*tattva*' in which the human-being becomes imposed on the tree. So, the main imposed object which is called '*pradhāna*'. The error originates from the similarity between them. So, the human-being is the main object to create error.

Prābhākara Mimāṃsaka and *Sāṃkhya* school of Indian Philosophy do not accept the existence of erroneous cognition. So, their theory of error is known as '*akhyātivāda*' or '*vivekākhyāti*'.

According to *Sāṃkhya* Philosophers, cessation of sorrow for ever is possible with the *laukika* and *Vaidika* activities but, that result is not eternal. The better way to get the eternal emancipation is the knowledge of an outward relation. Gaining the metaphysical knowledge between the *Prakṛti* and *Purusa* is the better way to gain the eternal emancipation. We or all human-beings think that, 'illness of the body' means 'I am ill'. But, 'I' means only the 'Soul', not body. We do not understand this fact. As a result, we inherit all worldly miseries. The absence of

this factual cognition is known as ‘sublation’ in Indian Scripture. It is the cause of error. So, ‘error’ or ‘illusion’ means ‘ the absence of the cognition of discrimination’ (*vivekājñāna*) in accordance with the *Sāṃkhya* school of Indian Philosophy. So, this theory is called ‘*vivekākhyāti*’ or shortly ‘*akhyāti*’.

‘*Akhyātivāda*’ is a doctrine about the erroneous knowledge advocated by *Mīmāṃsakācārya Prabhākara* and his followers. They maintain that an invalid cognition is not possible. All cognitions are valid according to them.

According to *Prābhākara*, the ‘*pramātva*’ is the property of all cognitions. According to him, all cognitions are valid. The property of the valid cognition is called ‘*pramātva*’. In the same way, the property of the invalid cognition is called ‘*apramātva*’. According to *Prabhākara*, the ‘*apramātva*’ or invalidity is not the property of cognition. Always the ‘*pramātva*’ or validity exists in cognition, ‘*apramātva*’ does not exist in cognition. The ‘*apramātva*’ or invalidity exists in usages. The invalidity or ‘*apramātva*’ of the usages imposes on the cognition which cognition is the originator of the usages. *Prābhākara* has pointed out that, cognition is pure for ever and self-luminous.

The view of the *Prābhākaras* has been challenged by the *Naiyāyikas* who has defined error as ‘*yatra yadadhyāsastasyaiva viparītdharmatva-kalpanamadhyāsadh*’. That is, the superimposition is nothing but the assumption of

the opposite character on something. It is the imposition of the opposite character i. e. silverness in place of shell. These arguments are not developed by Gangesa but they are very strong to support the Nyāya standpoint.

The Naiyāyikas argue how the Mīmāṃsakas prove the absence of the knowledge of discrimination between the remember content (*smṛta*) and acquired content (*grhīta*). From the fact of one's inclination towards getting silver it is proved that there is cognition of non-discrimination between 'thisness' (*idantā*) and 'silverness' (*rajatattva*). Such inclination proves and absence of doubt about its nature of object and its causal efficiency.

Secondly, if there is the cognition of non-discrimination (*bhedāgraha*) between the two as told earlier, how does an individual know the same as 'two'? 'The cognition of the non-discrimination of the two' proves that there is the knowledge of 'two' leading to the contradiction of the knowledge of non-discrimination.

Thirdly, it may be argued that the knowledge of the similarity between shell and silver may lead an individual to the knowledge of identity. It is not tenable, because if someone has got the knowledge in the form: 'Tiger is similar to cat', does an individual being desirous of tiger incline to have cat?

Fourthly, if it is argued that one inclines to have silver, as it was not known as non-silver, the Naiyayikas are of the opinion that the object was neither taken as ‘silver’ nor as ‘non-silver’. If it is so, there would have been an ‘indifferent attitude’ (*upekṣābuddhi*) towards the object. But a clear inclination is found instead of indifference which proves one’s cognition of what is conducive to the desired (*iṣṭa-sāadhanatā-jñāna*). It ultimately proves the object as silver.

Lastly, it has been told by the Prābhākaras that if there is a defect in the cause, it cannot produce an effect, but it is not true that it produces a different type of effect. The Naiyāyikas do not agree with this. To them a defective cause may produce a different type of effect (*kāryāntara*). For it is found that a particular creeper called *Betralata*, if burnt by forest-fire (*dābānala*) can produce a banana tree. This is an example taken from the botanical world. Another example is put forth from the physiological world. It is pointed out that an ulcer in the stomach increases the hunger of an individual instead of loss of it.

In fact, the theories of error are formulated in such a way so that their notion of *pramā* (right cognition) is protected. If the nature of right cognition is determined in a particular system, error is also to be determined in the light of that. In each and every theory something is superimposed on something else (*sarvathāpi tu anyasyānyadharmāvasatām na vyabhicarati*). The Vijñānavādin-s have imposed extra-mental things on mental one, the Prābhākaras impose silver on shell

due to the cognition of non-discrimination, and the Naiyāyikas impose the opposite properties to something else (*anyathā*). In all the cases error is nothing but superimposition of one thing on another.

The Prābhākaras do not believe in the existence of any erroneous cognition while the Naiyāyikas believe in illusory cognition or error. We would like to point some points which indicate the pragmatic value of error. From the fact of its pragmatic value it is known to us that there is the existence of the phenomenon of error, which ultimately disproves the Prābhākara position.

First, error has been taken as invalid cognition, because it can only mislead an individual. Now an effort will be made to show that error serves a virtuous role also in our life as envisaged in *Mārkandeyapurāṇa* where error has been taken as a form of Mother Goddess existing in all creatures (*'yā devī sarvabhūteṣu bhrāntirūpeṇa samsthitā'*). In fact, forgetfulness can also be included under the causes of error. An individual would be able to survive in this empirical world amidst sufferings, arising out of lust, misunderstanding, ego etc. due to having the forgetfulness (*bhrānti*) in his life. Had there been no such quality, he would have been mad being overburdened by the sorrows and sufferings. Hence *bhrānti* or error sometimes occupies a prominent role for psychological balance. Sometimes the tranquilizers are applied to make a man psychologically normal after removing his over-concerned situation towards a particular matter. That is why; we come

across a definition of human being which runs as follows: 'To err is human'. In fact, error lies in the very nature of a human being. In other words, the essential characteristic of a man is to commit error. In other words, we cannot get rid of this error as it is in the very nature of a man.

Secondly, error has got a positive value in the sense that it serves as a rectifier of certain policy or principle. Error provides us certain lesson through which we can correct ourselves. Hence error can be taken as a means of rectification or correction. That is why, the *trial and error* method is still a valuable method in the field of learning or Psychology.

Thirdly, it is found in our life that error which is not a reality provides us some picture of reality indirectly. As for example, when the driver sees the reflection of a following car in the looking glass, he becomes cautious of it. Though the reflection is not the real object, it provides an idea of the real object. Though the photograph pasted in an application form does not entail reality yet it can provide some idea of the real applicant to the authority. Even now-a-days a computer sketch which is not a reality can help the investigating officer to identify a criminal. In the Advaita text *Pañcadaśī Vidyāraṇya* Muni has taken the help of picture which may act as a lamp to illumine the Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*) in a section called *Citrādīpaparakaraṇa*. Moreover, Sankara in his *Adhyāśabhāṣya* has admitted the necessity of falsity or superimposition. To him, all our behaviours,

Vedic or secular, all the usages of means of knowing (*pramāṇa*) and knowable objects (*prameya*), injunctions and liberation are possible due to the falsity (superimposition) between self and non-self. In order to go beyond the range of duality we must begin with duality which is nothing but falsity between self and non-self.

Lastly, the theory of error is taken as one of the methods of philosophizing. If any error in the opponent's arguments is not shown, the proponent's standpoint cannot be substantiated. Therefore, error is to be pointed out only to save-guard our own philosophical position. No philosophical position is final and hence each and every standpoint is subject to challenge. To challenge means to show error in a theory. That is why; philosophy becomes a flowing water, but not stagnant. Had there been no error, no new philosophical standpoint would come up. In Indian Philosophy the fundamental function is the show fault or error to other's view (*paramatadūṣana*) and establishing one's own standpoint.

END NOTES:

1. *Cakṣin* 1017, 'bhavadi, vyaktāyām vāci. Ayam darśane'pi. "Cakṣinh khyā"
(2436, 2/4/54) *Paṇini Sūtra*.
2. Viswarupananda, Swami (Trs.): *Vedantadarśana*, Swami Cidghanananda Puri and Vedantabagisa Sri Ananda Jha, Nyayacarya (Ed.), 1st chapter, page no. 31