

### CHAPTER III

#### PRIMACY OF PERCEPTION AMONG THE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Questions concerning a problem are of two kinds viz. External and internal questions. (1) External question regarding the establishment of points of agreement or concurrence by proponents and opponents offering different solutions of the problem. This admits of determination of degrees e.g., "what is cognitive experience"? is an external question and answer to this question is to be arrived at by means of an agreement or concurrence as to what degree of articulation makes human experience a cognitive experience.

(2) Internal question is a question which is raised within the ambit of concurrence already made or an agreement already arrived at and admits of 'Yes' 'no' type of

answer, e.g., a question whether a cognitive experience is or is not an interpreted experience. To make the said distinction clear I like to quote a few lines from Alan Pasch : "... a question of degree is an external question; once a decision about a convention has been made, <sup>and</sup> a context determined, then - and within the context - any question about the context is an internal question. Furthermore, the answer to an internal question will have the form of a definite ("yes-no") assertion, and this answer is determined by the nature of the context which gives the question significance. The answer to an external question, however, will be a statement of degree, or a proposal about establishing a convention"<sup>1</sup>.

The question of primacy of perception is an external question while other questions regarding the role played by perception are arbitrary in cases of conflict between different sources of knowledge and as such are internal questions. Likewise the question whether perception with or without interpretation is possible, is an internal question.

From the perusal of the list of sources of knowledge as enunciated by different schools of Indian Philosophy, it will be evident that everyone of them accepts perception as the first source of knowledge.

The philosophers belonging to different schools of Indian philosophy, despite irreconcilable difference on

other points, are unanimous in bestowing primary status on perception as a source of knowledge. The reason for this will be evident if the nature of perceptual experience be analysed in depth.

Experience, according to them, can be divided into two groups : (i) experience which is generated without the help of any other knowledge as part of the sumtotal of its generative conditions and (ii) experience which is not so generated. And perception or perceptual experience is a cognition which is generated by sumtotal of conditions of which knowledge as a mental mode is not a part. Thus, it is evident that the agreement to accord primacy to perception or Pratyakṣa as a source of knowledge involves a tacit agreement by all schools of Indian Philosophy to the effect that a knowledge the cause of which does not contain in itself any knowledge is perception. This agreement is an external question and answer to this question is the basic reason for unanimity without which no discussion can commence.

Perception is the basic source or primary source of knowledge, as other modes of knowledge or cognition e.g. anumāna or inference, Śabda or testimony, upamāna or comparison, arthāpatti or presumption, anupalavdhi or non-apprehension etc. presuppose perception. We will try to show this in the sequel. It is common knowledge that all

Indian Philosophers except Cārvāka admitted anumāna or inference as a distinct source of valid cognition or pramā. Etymologically 'anumāna means 'after knowledge. "Here, 'after knowledge' means after perceptual knowledge i.e. this knowledge is produced depending on perception. From the Gaūtām Sūtra we find that inference depends on perception.

The word 'Tatpurvakaṃ' or 'before this', used in the Gautam Sūtra means 'pratyakṣa purvakaṃ'. The question may be asked why does experience depend on perception? Inference is dependent on the knowledge of Vyāpti (concomitance) and Vyāpti-jñāna (Experience of concomitance) is due to pratyakṣa, Hence, inferential knowledge presupposes perceptual cognition and therefore, perception, being the basic source of knowledge, is primary.

Like anumāna (inference), Śabda (Testimony) is also dependent on perception. Śabda functions as the correlative between the object and situation. It required collection of appropriate letters in consecutive order constituting word which are appropriate for expressing the knowledge the speaker possesses and is desirous of communicating verbally the same to the listener. Thus, the speaker must perceive the relation between the appropriate word and object. Again the listener has to listen the spoken words of the speaker, and thus, listening is also a perception i.e.

auditory perception.

Śabda is dependent on perception in the sense of perception by a native speaker of the presence or absence of fittingness in the use of that language in a society to which he belongs although he may or may not have a formal training i.e. grammar e.g. "I is". Here in this example, there is absence of fittingness. In ākankhyā (expectancy). Yogyatā (fitness) Tātparjya (significance) which are pre-requisites for Śabdajñāna or verbal knowledge there is fittingness. In the case of testimony there is perception of fittingness and for this reason we can say that testimony is dependent on perception.

Now it will be shown that Upamāna or comparison like inference and testimony depends on perception. We find that the Cārvākas do not admit comparison as a source of knowledge. The Vaiśeṣikas and the Sāṅkhyaists do not admit comparison as a distinct source of knowledge. They include it under inference and perception respectively. The Buddhists reduce comparison to perception and testimony. The Naiyāyikas, Mimāṃsakas and Advaitins admit comparison as a separate irreducible source of knowledge. Now our business is to give the meaning of Upamāna as given by different Indian thinkers.

According to Gautama, upamāna is the knowledge of what comes to be known from well known similarity, Later

Naiyāyikas define upamāna as samjñā-samjñi-Jñāna i.e. it is the knowledge of the relation that obtains between name and the thing named. According to the Mimānsakas, upamāna is the knowledge by means of similarity where we arrive at the second likeness between objects by means of first likeness e.g. 'Gosadvāsa Gavayapadavācya' i.e. that which is like cow is Gavaya.

To the Mimānsakas, knowledge from comparison arises when we perceive 'X' and were told that 'Y' is like 'X'. Then when in another situation we perceive 'Y' we remember what we were told. And this perception together with the remembrance gives rise to the knowledge that 'Y' has likeness to 'X'.

A comparison of the linguistic articulation of these two perceptions of similarity shows that they are different. In the first likeness similarity goes from 'X' to 'Y' whereas in the second it goes from 'Y' to 'X'. However the basic presupposition of the Mimānsakas is that the relation of likeness or similarity is not necessarily a symmetric relation like the relation of equality. Again, according to the Advaitins, the knowledge which comes from the knowledge of different objects by means of similarity is called upamiti. Be it noted that according to the Advaitins, Knowledge by comparison can also be arrived at by means of dissimilarity.

Now we like to sum up our discussion. As the Vaiśeṣikas include upamāna under inference we can say that upamāna depends on perception, because inference depends on perception. Again, although Sāṅkhya's view, cannot be taken for granted as valid. Yet it cannot be brushed aside lightly. Their view is not valid because perceptual knowledge is not indubitably shown to be the source of the knowledge of Upamāna. The Nyāya, Mimāṃsā and Advaita views are that Upamāna is due to similarity. If it be so, it depends on perception because the knowledge of similarity or dissimilarity can be obtained by perception. Thus, we can say that upamāna in a sense presupposes perception but not the other way about. Hence, we can say that perception is the basic source of knowledge and as such is primary.

Arthāpatti or presumption is admitted by the Mimāṃsakas and Advaitins as a separate irreducible source of knowledge. It is the legitimate hypothesis of an unperceived fact which explains successfully some known discrepancies in experience. Two inconsistent facts become consistent by means of presumption. According to Śābara, arthāpatti is "the presumption of something not seen on the ground that a fact already perceived or heard would not be possible without that presumption; for instance, it is found that Devadatta who is alive is not in the house, and this non-existence in the house leads to the presumption that he is

somewhat outside the house"<sup>2</sup>.

Arthāpaṭṭi is of two kinds viz. (a) dr̥stārthapatti and (b) śrutārthāpatti. As for example of Dr̥stārthapatti we can cite of the 'Hidden face'. Here, the perceiver perceives a picture of one thing from one angle without use of words; as soon as the picture is set in a different angle he sees another content in the picture. This contention has its corroboration from an unexpected source, namely, Wittgenstein's explanation of 'Seeing as' in his 'Philosophical Investigation'.

Again, 'you are the tenth' is an example of Śrutārthāpatti. The fact of existence of 'tenth person' is in the field of visual perception, but has remained unnoticed by the perceiver. When the perceiver is told or when field of visual perception of the perceiver is reorganised or differently regulated he started perceiving the previously unnoticed object of perception although the said object remained in the field of perception all the while.

As arthāpaṭṭi is a Pre-supposition, it obviously requires observation which is other name of regulated perception. From this, can we not say that arthāpaṭṭi is based on perception? Moreover, Kapil, Pātanjali, Mādhva, Rāmānuja etc., think that arthāpatti is a kind of inference and not a separate irreducible means of



knowledge<sup>3</sup>. The Naiyāyikas and the Vedāntins also included it under inference. If it be so, then arthāpatti no doubt is dependent on Pratyakṣa or perception. That is why perception should be considered to be the basic source of knowledge.

Now, we shall discuss the status of anupalavdhi as a separate source of knowledge. This instrument of knowledge has been admitted by the Bhāṭṭa Mimāṃsakas and the Advaitins.

Anupalavdhi means absence of upalavdhi or cognition which causes a cognition of absence. This means of knowledge cannot function without perception because the apprehension of the non-apprehension of an object is a kind of perception. If the object is not previously perceived, we cannot assert the non-existence of that object. Hence, knowledge of non-existence i.e. anupalavdhi depends on perception of particular object. For example, "there is no flower on the table". Here, we perceive 'a table' and not the 'flower', i.e. flower is not perceived. Here, non-apprehension of the flower is perceived by perceiving only 'table' as the locus having no flower on it. In anupalavdhi there is anuyogi (locus) and Pratiyogi (object), and we may say that anupalavdhi is the perception of the absence of perception of object from a locus. It is apprehension of the non-perception of the conjectured existence of an object. From this it follows that non-apprehension depends on perception.

From the above discussion we find that every means of knowledge except perception depends on other means or presupposes perception. Therefore, we can conclude, not perhaps without justification, that perception is the basic source of knowledge. Every knowledge other than perception depends on perception i.e., all knowledge pre-supposes perceptual cognition as its generative condition. However, perception alone does not depend upon any type of cognition for its generation. So we can say that perception is immediate and for this characteristic we can say that perception is the basic source of knowledge. The question of immediacy or directness of perception is also an internal question. The posing of this question pre-supposes (1) agreement regarding the status of perception as cognitive experience, (2) the status of perception as first among the equals, and (3) arbiter for the dissolution of conflict which may arise among the different sources of knowledge.

Indian philosophers of all schools held that human perception comes through a combination of two different factors. The first, they have called direct or immediate awareness and the second interpretation (Kalpana) integrating this immediate awareness with the similar awareness of object of the past resulting in perceptual knowledge of object. For the operation of the second factor objects of common experience, viz. Brksa, manusya, ghata and pata are required.

Corresponding to the direct awareness this is another kind of object viz. the unadulterated given (svalakṣaṇa) i.e. object unalloyed by qualities and relations. In relation to the object of direct awareness, the second is called the constructed or thought constructed (Buddhinirmāna) because integration of kalpanā is done by buddhi.

If this explanation of perception is correct, the question about the nature of our most intimate and indubitable primitive experience, the kind to which these philosophers ardently desire to tag all discursive knowledge, has an answer. Thus the philosophers who explained perception by the distinction between the given and the taken, find in the given the foundations of all knowledge, external and internal, describing awareness of it as an indubitable presupposition for a knowledge of empirical facts.

This distinction of the given and non-given or taken in perception is the end result of an analysis of experience from a particular point of view, and it may be objected that the analysis is not pushed far enough to arrive at an end result which itself is unanalysable. To this objection it may be said in reply that to push the analysis beyond the point of the distinction between the given and non-given is to push it beyond the range of significance.

It may again be objected that the question about the distinction of the given and non-given in the primitive

direct experience being a psychological question recourse must be had to empirical psychology. And the verdict of the empirical psychology is that direct experience does not contain such distinct elements. To this objection it may again be replied that the opinion of psychology in this context has no epistemological significance. It is epistemology rather than psychology that is to be looked for the guidance in the enunciation of the distinction between given and non-given, and accordingly the said distinction must be examined in a purely epistemological light. What this is tantamount to is that whether or not the given has real existence, all that an upholder of the distinction between the given and non-given needs claim for the given is logical or analytic existence. As Russell points out, "the atoms I wish to arrive at as a last resort in analysis are logical atoms"<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the contention of Mimāṃsakas to the effect that the given is the psychological atom arrived at by means of experience, is untenable. For C.D. Broad observes that pure sensation is "an ideal limit rather than the observable fact"<sup>5</sup>. In this context the contention of the Nyāya to the effect that the given is the atom of logical analysis is cogent. It is a common experience that verdicts of different types of knowledge are often opposed to each other and unless the opposition or conflict be removed the knowledge is incapable of translating itself into action. But how are

we to resolve such a conflict ? Again the Indian Philosophers are generally in agreement that perceptual experience normally is to be used for the resolution of such conflict of experience. For example, when we are assailed by doubt whether 'idam' in front of us is 'Brksa' or 'Tree' or a 'man', the doubt is ultimately resolved by the perception of the specific characteristics, common and peculiar to either of the alternatives, i.e. perception of either leaves and branches, or hands and feet. Likewise the conflict between inferential cognition is usually dissolved by perceptual experience. And the same is true when Upamity or Śābdajñāna is in conflict with another type of knowledge. It is not out of place to mention here that in Western Philosophy perception is accorded a Primary place in the resolution of doubt resulting in knowledge. Thus, western philosophers almost universally admit that "each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience"<sup>6</sup>. This primacy of perceptual experience in resolving doubt is also unequivocally admitted by the supporters of the verification theory of meaning, the theory that "the meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming or infirming it"<sup>7</sup>.

We have found that every thinker has admitted perception as a valid source of knowledge and in all the cases other than perception there is probability of it being false. It is to be noted in this connection that if the sense-organs of the individuals are not defective, then the perceptual

knowledge will be valid no doubt. In the conflict between different types of knowledge perception generally overrides, and in this sense we can say that perception is the basic source of knowledge. In some cases perception gives absolutely true knowledge which can never be attained by other types of knowledge. For example 'I have tooth ache.' Here, by no means it can be proved conclusively that I am not feeling tooth ache. This absolute validity of perception shows that perception overrides other types of knowledge. To quote Prof. K.K.Banerjee "All the systems agree in holding Pratyakṣa (perception) to be a pramāṇa, but then they differ in their accounts of it and this difference is owing to their differences in ontology"<sup>8</sup>.

The above discussion shows that perception is the primary source of knowledge.

At this point an important question arises which demands a discussion and if possible an answer. The question is : Perception being primary or there being primacy of perception, are all other pramāṇas reducible to perception without remainder ? In other words, is there an irreducible element in every pramāṇa other than perception ?

In reply to the above question the Cārvākas claimed that all pramāṇas other than perception are in the last analysis reducible to perception. The reason for this, according to them, is the unargued assumption that if one pramāṇa is dependent on another for its generation, it is

reducible to that pramāna on which it is dependent. If we take this assumption to be true, then all other pramāṇas such as inference, comparison, Testimony, Presumption, non-apprehension etc. are reducible to perception without remainder. But why should we accept this unargued assumption as true ? There is neither rational nor heuristic justification for taking this assumption as true. For example, 'X is dependent on Y' does not and cannot mean necessarily that 'X is reducible to Y'. Dependence does not necessarily imply reduction of one thing into another. Hence, with the exposure of the hollowness of the unargued assumption of the Cārvākas, the ground beneath their conclusion is cut off. Thus we can say that although other pramāṇas are dependent on perception yet they are not reducible to perception. The same applies to the contentions of other schools of Indian Philosophy to reduce one pramāṇa to another.

In this connection, it is of interest to note that Indian Philosophers admitted, in addition to the major sources, some minor sources of cognition also. They are : (a) Aithiya or tradition, (b) Sambhava or inclusion, (c) Cestā or gesture, and (d) Parisēṣa or elimination.

As regards aitihiya or tradition it has been regarded by the Paurānikas as a source of cognition. It is taken by them to mean a body of traditional beliefs which have their origination in immemorial past and which have been handed down from generation to generation. However, as the source of these beliefs are unknown and as we have no dependable

means of ascertaining their reliability, aitiḥya or tradition is, in principle, unacceptable as a source of cognition. However, if by any means these beliefs are rendered believable they are acceptable, not as an independent source of cognition, but as a kind of Āptavacana or testimony.

Sambhava or inclusion is taken as the process knowing something mediately or indirectly on account of its being included in something else which is already known. Sambhava is of two kinds : (a) possible inclusion & (b) certain inclusion. As regards the former it is generally uncertain and as such cannot be regarded as a source of cognition at all. For example, 'a Kṣatriya may not normally possess powers a brahmin is endowed with. But it is uncertain whether a Kṣatriya will never possess these powers. As an example of it we can mention that Viśvāmitra exhibits an exception to the rule. So far the latter is concerned this is illustrated in such cognitive judgement as 'Ten includes one' which is valid. This being so sambhava of the latter type may be accepted as a source of cognition. Still the question remains whether it should be recognised as an independent source of cognition or reducible to another source of cognition. The answer, it goes without saying, is that it is a form of inference. But this inference is not the type of inference which is admitted by Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, the Mimāṃsakas and the Sāṅkhyāist.



Rather this form of inference is dependent upon the application of the principles of implication. Thus the list of the major sources of cognition is badly in need of enlargement. For the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, the Mimāṃsakas and the Sāṅkhyaists should, but did not, recognize two altogether different types of inference, one syllogistic and the other implicative.

Ceṣṭā or gesture is regarded by Tāntrika as a source of cognition on the ground of its having a special epistemic significance. Gestures consists of certain bodily movement and facial expression conveying certain meanings or serving as directions to the performing of certain actions. As such they are non-verbal. Gesture which consists of bodily movement and facial expressions conveying meaning may be regarded as a form of inference which is based on the invariable concomitance between the said gestures and their meaning. As regards the gestures which serve as direction to the performance of certain actions, they, being of the nature of Kāraka (action) and not jñāpaka (knowledge) cannot be source of cognition whatsoever.

Parīśeṣa or elimination is a source of cognition in the process of knowing something by means of the elimination from a group of objects. Undoubtedly things are sometimes cognised after this fashion, consequently elimination as a process of cognition is genuine. But this is not an

irreducible source of cognition. Elimination is after all the same as the process of perceiving subject to the exercise of circumspection and discrimination, i.e. a process of observation. Thus *pariśeṣa* is in the last analysis a variant of perception.

"What, then", according to Dr. N.V.Banerjee, "was really needed for the determination of the identity and the number of the sources of cognition was the judicious employment of the principle represented by the law of parsimony. The *Cārvākas* are, perhaps, the only group of Indian Philosophers who accepted this principle whole-heartedly. But then, the trouble with them was that they went too far in their employment of this principle, ... . This is evident from their rejection of all sources of cognition except perception ..., the *Vedānta* and the *Bhāṭṭa* school of *Mīmāṃsā* Philosophy, on the other hand, paid no heed to the principle under consideration at least in respect of their treatment of the sources of cognition. As a result, they indiscriminately inflated their number so as to recognize as many as six of them. As regards the remaining schools of Indian Philosophy, they sought to steer clear of the Scylla of the extremism of *Cārvākas* and the Charybdis of the counter extremism of the *Vedānta* and the *Bhāṭṭa* school of *Mīmāṃsā* Philosophy. Accordingly the number of the sources of the cognition admitted by them ranged between

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two and five. But it was given to Sankhya ~~philosophy~~ alone to arrive at a satisfactory decision with regard to the identity and number of the sources of the cognition. This is evident from the fact that perception, inference and testimony, the three sources of cognition which they have admitted are each independent of the others, and, what is more, they together constitute the entire corpus of unquestionably legitimate sources of cognition"<sup>9</sup>. Intend to join issue with Dr. Banerjee with regard to his use of the word "independent" at the fág end of the quotation stated above. With him we also admit that inference and testimony are not reducible to perception nor are they reducible to others. But absence of reducibility does not and cannot necessarily mean absence of dependence. What is later in time is certainly dependent for its origination on what went before. But this dependence does not mean what is later in time is reducible to what is earlier in time. Nor does it mean that son is reducible to father because son is dependent on father for origination. Therefore, although we accept other contentions of Dr. Banerjee we are enable to accept his verdict to the effect that perception, inference and testimony are each independent of the other.

Therefore, at the fag end of our discussion we may, perhaps not without justification, come to the conclusion that (a) there is primacy of perception as source of knowledge, (b) that there are sources of knowledge other than perception and (c) that these other sources of knowledge are dependent on but not reducible to perception.

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