

Some Epistemological Problems of Indeterminate Perception

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Abstract

In the present paper some epistemological problems of indeterminate perceptions are focused. There are already some pioneer work done on the topic yet here some other epistemological problems of indeterminate perception have been highlighted. To discuss indeterminate perception the definition of perception have to be discussed first. In *Nyāya Sūtra* Maharshi Gautama formulated the definition of perception as *Indriyārthasannikarṣoṭpannam jñānam avyāpadeśyam avyabhicāri vṛavasāyātmakam pratyakṣam*. In this definition there is a defect of under-coverage. So, some other *Naiyāyikas* like Gangeśa, Viśvanātha, Uddyotakara also have discussed on the definition of perception. There are some problems of *nirvikalpaka* perception in which one cannot have any concept or '*dhāraṇā*' of an object. The truth of *nirvikalpaka* perception is not been determined. There is no relation between qualifier and qualificand. So, the question arises here- what is the proof of such type of perception? The *Naiyāyikas* also forwarded some solutions of the problems. It is to be said that when an object is not endowed with name, universal and definition, there is no question to accepting or rejecting it. Under this situation *upekṣābuddhi* arises. So *nirvikalpaka* perception is the producer of *upekṣābuddhi*. Like this, the *Naiyāyikas* forwarded some other solutions of problems of indeterminate perceptions.

Keywords: *Perception, nirvikalpaka perception, vikalpa, dhāraṇā, extrinsic truth, upekṣābuddhi, infinite regress.*

[I]

Indian philosophers have admitted six sources of valid knowledge. Perception is one of the sources of valid knowledge and all the schools of Indian philosophy accept perception as the instrument of knowledge. In this present paper some epistemological problems of *nirvikalpaka* perception have been discussed and an effort has been made to give probable solutions of these problems.

Though the pioneer textual works on *nirvikalpaka* perception of Gangeśa have been done by Bimal Krishna Motilal and Shibjiban Bhattacharya, yet it involves some other problems which have remain untouched.

The *Naiyāyikās* admitted perception as the source of valid knowledge which comes from the Sanskrit word '*Pratyakṣa*'. The word *pratyakṣa* consists of the two

words- 'prati' (to, before, near) and 'akṣa' (sense-organ), or 'prati' and 'akṣi' (eye). So, in common parlance it means 'present to or before the eyes of any other sense-organ' and hence 'direct', 'immediate'. [1]

In *Nyāya-Sūtra*, Maharshi Goutama is the pioneer in formulating *Nyāya* definition of perception as cognition of an object. Goutama formulated the definition as follows-

“*Indriyārthasannikarṣotpannam jñānam avyapadeśyam avyabhicāri v̄yavasāyātmakam pratyakṣam*” [2]

This definition of perception has been accepted by Viśvanātha with a single note of reservation. According to him, the definition of perception is not applicable to perception of God and hence it suffers from the defects of under-coverage (*avyāpti*). As the perception of God is not generated through the contact of the sense-organ with the object, it does not come under the purview of the above-mentioned definition.

In order to accommodate such perception Viśvanātha has accepted another new definition of perception which is as follows:

Jñānākaraṇakam Jñānam Pratyakṣam. That is, the knowledge that is not generated through the instrumentality of knowledge is called perception.

Keśava Miśra in his *Tarkabhāṣā* has interpreted the term 'sākṣātkāra' as perceptual knowledge and the term 'Pratyakṣa' as the means of perceptual knowledge. He formulated the definition as follows:

“*sākṣātkāri pramākaraṇam pratyakṣam*” [3]

According to Uddyotakara the term 'Pratyakṣa' literally means what is related to the senses, it formulated as –

“*Indriyenārthasya sannikarṣādutpadyate jñānam tat pratyakṣam*”. [4]

But Praśastapāda formulates in his *Praśastapādabhāṣya* –

“*Akṣāmakṣam pratītya utpadyate iti pratyakṣam*” [5]

Here 'Pratyakṣa' means knowledge which is dependent on the senses.

In the *Nyāya* system perception is defined as the knowledge which arises out of the contact as the sense-organ with the object.

“*Indriyārtha- sannikarṣa- janyaṁ jñānaṁ pratyakṣaṁ*” [6]

But in the *Nyāya-sūtra* Goutama defines perception as quite different from above mentioned definition. In his definition, the three main terms are ‘*avyapadeśya*’ which is not explained with words- *vāvasāyātma*, which is certain and ‘*avyabhicārī*’ - which is invariably connected with the object. So, the sense – object contact is ‘*Pratyakṣa*’ and Goutama included the term ‘*Sannikarṣa*’ in the place of ‘*Pratyakṣa*’.

So in conclusion a definition of perception that sense-object- contact is perception which may be visual, tactual, auditory olfactory or gustatory.

II

As per the nature of the sense-object-contact which is instrumental to all perceptions, perception has been divided by the Naiyāyikas into two broad classes’ viz., *laukika* and *alaukika*. Again, *laukika* has been divided into six classes and *alaukika* in to three classes. There is another classification of normal perception viz., *nirvikalpaka* and *savikalpaka* perception.

Though the distinction between *nirvikalpaka* and *savikalpaka* perception is generally admitted in Indian philosophy yet there is a difference of opinion among the different systems of Indian philosophy. Some of them have accepted that *nirvikalpaka* perception is not perfect type of perception. All the perceptions are determinate or *Savikalpaka*. Some of the Indian scholars admit that the term ‘*avyapadeśyam*’ has been inserted in the definition of perception in order to include indeterminate perception. When external sense-organs come in contact with a particular object but the knowledge of the object cannot express at first, at that position we cannot ignore the knowledge of that object. To get the knowledge of the object we must have some description which is absent in indeterminate perception.

Actually, *nirvikalpaka* or *niṣprakārāka* perception means without *vikalpa* and *savikalpaka* or *sapprakārāka* means with *vikalpa*. Here ‘*vikalpa*’ means name,

universal, quality etc. So, in a *niṣprakārāka* perception of the object, we know the object without name, universal and quality etc. This type of *niṣprakārāka* perception means which has no 'prakāra' or qualifier. So, the indeterminate perception is a cognition which does not apprehend the relation between the qualifier and the qualificand. So, indeterminate perception is a simple perception.

In ordinary perception of the determinate kind we have a qualificative cognition having a qualifier, a qualificand and a relation between them. For example, when we perceive something as a cow or something as cowness-possessing, the thing is the qualificand of the perceptual cognition, cowness is its qualifier and inherence is the qualification. Now the *Nyāya* argument is that the qualification cognition requires cowness. But this cognition of cowness produces the determinate perception (cognition) itself. If a determinate cognition is admitted as final, this will lead to an infinite regress, and hence, every determinate perception requires an indeterminate knowledge of cowness having no knowledge of a relation. This indeterminate knowledge has to be perceptual.

This indeterminate perception of Navya-Nyāya has some similarities with Western philosophers like Russell, Hume etc. For the knowledge of an object according to Russell we can get the knowledge through 'knowledge by acquaintance' and 'knowledge by description'. Direct contact or relation between object and knower is knowledge by acquaintance, here knower just acquainted with the object but without description. This type of knowledge is indeterminate cognition. But when knower knows the object with description, this will be like determinate perception. So, indeterminate perception cannot be expressed by language. So, the Navya Naiyāyikas accept inference to postulate the primitive kind of perception. The Western philosopher Hume admits impression and idea in his philosophy. According to him, in impression part a knower only has the impression of the object without any clear knowledge of the object, which is the first step of knowledge like indeterminate perception. But in the stage of idea knower has some clear cognition of the object, which is the second step of knowledge.

III

From the above discussion a critical estimate of *nirvikalpaka* perception can be made as follows. In the *nirvikalpaka* type of perception we find something having no substitute at all. But the object when we see will be associated with the substitutes or *vikalpas*. So, it is understood that the necessity of the particular object cannot be determined by some another objects. Here we find some essential features of the object that are not common in others. Here the term essential means it's inherent uncommon properties which may be expressed by (essence). If we express object by language etc. it is determinate perception.

There are two types of awareness-

- a) The perceptual awareness being purely private cannot be communicated to others.
- b) Perceptual awareness though not wholly manifested to us cannot be denied totally.

Our mental construction is that pure objects are known through concepts and concepts are clear with name, quality universal etc. but through *nirvikalpaka* perception we cannot have any 'concept' or '*dhāraṇā*' of an object. So *nirvikalpaka* perception is unable to clear the cognition of the object. So, there arises some problems with indeterminate perception.

Now the discussion of some epistemological problems of *nirvikalpaka* perception

- a) The term '*dhāraṇā*' is related to the phenomenon of 'bearing' ('*dhāraṇā*'). The name, quality and universal etc are the bearers of the *qua*-object. The pure-object is called substratum (*ādharma*) while the concepts are called *ādheya*. With the substitute the object is *savikalpaka*. But the *Naiyāyikas* accept *nirvikalpaka* perception as the first stage of perception with substitution. But there is the problem of *prāmāṇya* of such type of perception.
- b) Now, we will discuss the problem of *prāmāṇya* of *nirvikalpaka* perception because the truth of *nirvikalapa* perception has not been determined. It needed extrinsic truth condition. Though indeterminate knowledge has no

concept of name, quality and universal of the object, there is no relation between qualifier and qualificand and – *Viśeṣaṇa-Viśeṣya-samsargānavagāhī*. There are no other means through which the validity of such type of knowledge can be determined by two criteria –

- c) (i) *Saphalapravṛtṭījanakatva* and (ii) *Viśamvadipravṛtṭījanakatva* of determining *prāmāṇya* are not applicable here. The question may arise how an object can exist without being characterised by its qualifying features? What is the proof of such type of perception?
- d) The another problem of *nirvikalpaka* perception is, according to some Naiyāyikas, the object of knowledge is three- fold : *Prakāratā*, *Viśayatā* and *Samsargatā*. But *nirvikalpaka* perception has a special type of *Viśayatā* which cannot be explained that is called *turīyaviśayatā*.

“*Nanu trividhā jñānaviśayatāprakāratā viśeṣyatā samsargatābhedāt. Tatra jñānamātrasya svaviśayatvena nirvikalpe’pi kācid viśayatāpekṣiteticet. Turīyaviśayatāyā eva tatrābhyupagamāt.*” [7]

If we accept ‘*turīyaviśayatā*’ then the problem arises- how can the truth of *nirvikalpaka* perception be determined extrinsically?

For such problem of *prāmāṇya* of *nirvikalpaka* perception Viśwanāth does not agree with *nirvikalpaka* perception.

IV

The Naiyāyikas also forwarded some kinds of solution of such problem of *prāmāṇya* of indeterminate (*nirvikalpaka*) perception ontologically. The Naiyāyikas accept extrinsic truth or *parataḥ prāmāṇya* of knowledge. So, the truth of cognition is ascertained by its successful inclination or *samvādipravṛtṭījanakatva*. Then the *prāmāṇya* of the perception is taken to be acceptable. The argument can be expressed as follows: The perceptual cognition is acceptable if it becomes auspicious to the successful inclination –

“*Pratyakṣānubhūtiḥ pramā saphalapravṛtṭījanakatvāt*” [8]

In reply *Naiyāyikas* admit that to know indeterminate cognition as knowledge is to presuppose the existence of content.

If we want to solve the problem of *prāmāṇya* of *nirvikalpaka* perception in different manner with intrinsic validity of truth then *nirvikalpaka* perception may be taken as self-evidently true which would be against the *Naiyāyikas prāmāṇyāvāda*.

In conclusion there are some probable solutions for the *prāmāṇya* of *nirvikalpaka* perception can be offered from the Nyāya point of view. The *Naiyāyikas* accept the view that a man's action is of three types, which are *hānabuddhi*, *upekṣābuddhi* and *iṣṭāsāadhanatājñāna*. It is to be said that when an object is not endowed with name, universal and definition etc, there does not arise any question of accepting or rejecting it. In this situation *upekṣābuddhi* (in this case of the acceptance and rejection comes into being due to the result of the desire of being indifferent) arises. So, the *nirvikalpaka* perception is the producer of *upekṣābuddhi*.

The *Naiyāyikas* discussed another argument in favour of *nirvikalpaka* perception. The *Naiyāyikas* are of the opinion that an object, just after its coming into being remains attribute less and action less for a moment –

“*Dravyasya guṇakriyāsamavāyikāraṇatvāt guṇakriyayorutpatteḥ prāktatsattavaṁ. Ata evotpannam dravyam kṣaṇamaguṇam tiṣṭhati niyamaḥ.*” [9]

Another argument may be forwarded in favour of the acceptability of *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*. The *Naiyāyikas* admit the opinion that an object coming into being remains attribute less an action less for a moment, of the origination of *Dravya*. If *Dravya* and *Guṇa* are produced simultaneously, substance cannot be antecedent and hence it cannot be *samavāyikāraṇa* of the *Guṇa*. And object may be described as *kārṇya* by virtue of the fact that it is produced. That which is *kārṇya* must exist, for as per the Nyāya view (an object is produced) means the *prāgabhāba* of it is lost and hence, it becomes an absentee of its *prāgabhāvapratiyogī*. So, it is shown that an object exists, but due to its attribute less ness it does not come to our direct awareness and hence, it cannot be rejected or accepted.

If we know the substance with its qualities then there is no question for which is the antecedent. That is why, the attribute of a substance and the action are produced just after a moment of the origination of *Dravya*.

For the existence of the indeterminate perception (*nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*) the Buddhists argument may be recalled here. To them cognition free from mental constructions (*kalpanāpoḍha*) is a perceptual one. In this case the Buddhists believe in the existence of an object which is free from mental ascriptions as well as non-erroneous (*kalpanāpoḍham abhrāntam pratyakṣam*). The Nyāya concept of *nirvikalpaka* is also free from the concepts, but it cannot be said as non-erroneous (*abhrānta*). Because, in order to understand its validity or truth we need certain extrinsic proof behind it, which is not possible. The indeterminate cognition is taken to be super sensuous and hence cannot be assigned any truth-value to it. It is very difficult to say that this piece of knowledge is either true or false due to not having a holistic cognition (*vaiśiṣṭya*) abiding in two components- qualificand (*viśeṣyā*) and qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*). Truth and falsity are available only in the case of relational cognition, but not in the indeterminate cognition which is of non-relational nature. Some think that the indeterminate cognition lies there where the two components, *viśeṣyā* and *viśeṣaṇa*, remain in a non-relational manner without being bound by a relation (*samsarga-anavagāhī*). If it is admitted, it will lead to another type of contradiction. If *viśeṣyā* and *viśeṣaṇa*, remain without any relation, the *viśeṣyā* or *viśeṣaṇa* cannot be known as such. For, it is relation through which we can know the relata. If there is no relation then there cannot be any relatum like qualificand or qualifier.

In this paper this is the last point to establish the indeterminate perception that when we admit determinate perception, we have to face an infinite regress, for instance the cognition of a ‘cow’ is due to the cognition of the determinant ‘cowness’ and if ‘cowness’ is cognised with ‘cowness-ness’, the latter is for the same reason to be cognised as with ‘cowness-ness-ness and so on .[10] This will face an infinite regress. So the existence of such indeterminate perception has to be admitted as a logical necessity only to avoid such infinite regress in the case of determinate perception. This is the acceptability or tenability of *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*.

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