

THE CONCEPT OF *PRAMĀ* AND *PRAMĀṆA*: AN ANALYSIS IN THE LIGHT OF *PRAMĀṆASĀSTRA*

V. Sujata Raju

Abstract

The present paper enunciates the meaning, definition and nature of “pramā-pramāṇa” among the diverse schools of Indian philosophy. An attempt is made to represent the nature, form and method of valid knowledge enriched with the commentaries, sub-commentaries of original sources/literature of epistemological traditions in Indian philosophy (Pramāṇasāstra). An overview of various issues, views, and comparative exposition of any system of epistemology deals with the following disputational questions: “What is knowledge?”, “What is valid knowledge?”, “How to distinguish valid knowledge from invalid knowledge?”, “What are the instruments/means of arriving at valid knowledge?”. To these ends, the paper attempts to synthesize the divergent views of all the concerned schools of Indian epistemology.

Keywords: *pramā, pramāṇa, prāmāṇya, pramātā, pramāṇasāstra*

Introduction

In the annals of history of epistemological tradition in India several attempts have been made to define *pramā-pramāṇa* in different schools of philosophical thought. The manner in which knowledge originates is the most crucial topic of discussion in Indian philosophy. The doctrine of *pramāṇa* has got the most authentic value, which provides, that, for each piece of knowledge there is some accredited means. The *pramāṇa* is regarded as "cause" of cognition because it is from the *pramāṇa* that the cognition proceeds. It is regarded as an "instrument" because the cognition of an object is accomplished through the use of *pramāṇas*. The instruments of right cognition must be regarded as rightly effective, because it is only when a thing is recognised through means of an instrument of right cognition that there exists a possibility of its giving rise to fruitful and effective exertion. As a matter of fact, nothing can be known except through an instrument of cognitions nor can fruitful exertion be aroused, except when things have been known.

Every branch of Indian philosophy generally admits that *pramāṇa* is what gives *pramā* and that *pramā* is true knowledge. *Pramā* designates a true cognition which is attended with a belief in its truthfulness, The English word knowledge, in its strict sense

stands for a cognition which is true and un-falsified. The concept of *pramā* thus stands for a cognition which is necessarily true and assured. But there is much difference of opinion among them as to the nature of the truth, which each of them claims for its *pramāṇa*. The realist schools hold that the means of cognition and its result are altogether two different entities. It is a well-known fact, according to them, that an instrument is always different from its result. The Buddhists, on the other hand, discard the soul and hold that cognition itself is the cognizer (*pramātā*), the cognisable object (*prameya*), the means of cognition (*pramāṇa*), and the result (*pramīti*).

The Definition and Nature of Veridical Cognition (*Pramā*)

‘Knowledge is what leads to attainment of the highest good¹’. Now the English word ‘knowledge’ means true or veridical cognition. It being understood that, whereas cognition may be either true or false, knowledge qua knowledge is true, although its inherent truth-value is in no need of indication by means of the addition to it of the adjective ‘true’, nor does the distinction between truth and falsity hold good in its case. Knowledge thus understood is the same as what is called *pramā* or *yathārthajñāna* (veridical cognition) in Indian Philosophy.

Gautama, Vātsyāyana, Uddyotakara, Vācaspatimiśra and Jayanta refer to knowledge as *buddhi*, *upalabdhi* and *jñāna*, regardless of whether a particular form of understanding is valid or not. Old Naiyāyikas used *pramā* as valid knowledge. Moreover, whatever terms might have been used by the different philosophers and systems in different times, it is evident that all have tried to approach in their unique manner to analyse valid knowledge (*pramā*) and the means of arriving at it. A detailed analysis of valid knowledge is to be taken in the ensuing pages.

Various Indian Philosophical systems possess contrasting viewpoints concerning the essence of nature of *pramā*. According to Prof. D.M. Datta, “*pramā* is generally defined as a cognition having the two-fold characteristics of the truth and novelty (*abādhitatva* or *yathārthatatva* and *anadhigatatva*), and that as regards the first characteristic - truth - all schools of Indian Philosophy are unanimous”.² Knowledge, in its precise interpretation, signifies a true belief that inherently assures its truthfulness. Even individuals who consider truth as a fundamental standard of knowledge differ among themselves regarding the significance of truth.

First, let us consider the Naiyāyika’s view. According to Nyāya, *pramā* refers to a definite and assured knowledge of an object that is true and presentational in

¹ *Tattvajñānānīḥśreyasādhigamaḥ, Nyāya-Sutra*, 1.1.1

² D.M. Dutta, *The Six-ways of Knowing*, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1997), 17-18.

character.³ Jayanta defines *pramā* as that knowledge of objects which is free from doubt and illusion.⁴ Hence, it is that *pramā* excludes all kinds of non-valid knowledge, such as memory, doubt, error, hypothetical argument (*tarka*), etc. Gaṅgeṣa maintains that *pramā* is that which informs us of the existence of something in a place where it really exists (*Yatra-yad asti tat ratasyānuvahbah*).⁵

Memory is not considered valid knowledge because lacks direct presentation (*anubhava*). Doubt, error, illusion and others are excluded as they are neither true nor definite and assured cognitions. Thus, for the Naiyāyikas the presentativeness, the non-contradictoriness (i.e., the correspondence between a cognition and its object) and the coherence between the cognitive and conative activities are the essential defining characteristics of knowledge that is considered valid. We can conclude that *pramā* has three primary attributes, namely, assuredness, truth and presentativeness.⁶

As to the first, *pramā* or valid knowledge is firm and explicit assertion, separate from uncertain, ambiguous or hypothetical understanding. In *pramā* there exists a sense of feeling of assurance or conviction in what is known. Valid knowledge is consistently associated with a firm belief. All assurances or firm beliefs, however, are not *pramā*, *pramā* implies something beyond simply a subjective certainty.⁷

The second characteristic of *pramā* is its truthfulness or unerring (*yathārtha*) knowledge. Every philosopher holds that truth should be the differentia of knowledge or *pramā*. Knowledge is true when it reveals its object with that nature and attribute which abide in it despite all changes of time, place and other conditions. Knowing something truly means understanding it in a way that aligns with a characteristic of knowledge (*tadvātitatprakāraka*), which remains true without contradiction (*arthāvyabhicāri*).⁸ In the view point of Naiyāyikas, the truth of knowledge lies within its correspondence to facts.

The third characteristic of *pramā* is that, it represents a presentational cognition. Otherwise, memory will have to be considered as *pramā*. Memory does not fall under *pramā*, because it is does not involve direct presentative. A valid piece of knowledge should be distinguished from ones that are imagined or supplied by the mind.⁹

³ S. C. Chatterjee, *The Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1978), 50

⁴ *Nyāyamañjari*, 1-20.

⁵ *Tattvacintāmañī*, 401/3.

⁶ *The Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*, 50.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

Vātsyāyana defines valid knowledge as the cognition of an object in something in which it is, that is, the cognition of an object as it really is. Uddyotkara accepts the same definition. According to later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika *pramā* is the knowledge of the generic nature as abiding in its own subject (*tadvati tat-prakāraḥ jñānam pramāatadvati tat-prakāraḥ jñānamapramā*). *Pramā* represents experiencing the true essence of things. Viśvanātha agrees with the same position. Udayana defines *pramā* as the true ascertainment of an object.

Diñnāga was possibly the first to highlight that valid cognition is self-revelatory. He noted that valid cognition should represent the object's form concerned (*viśayākāra*) by true knowledge, the Buddhists mean the identity of content between the cognition and the cognitum. According to Diñnāga, "such mental faculties as recollection (*smṛti*), desire (*icchā*), anger (*dveṣa*), doubt, error etc., are not independent means of valid cognition, since they operate upon an object already cognised".¹⁰ This idea has been indicated by Diñnāga in his *Pramāṇa-Samuccaya-Vṛtti*. Again, this idea has been supported by Dharmakīrti in his *Pramāṇa-Vārtika*¹¹ and also by Dharmottara in his *Nyāya-Bindu-Tikā*.¹² Dharmottara characterises valid knowledge as comprehending things that were previously unknown.

Dharmakīrti defines "true knowledge as harmonious or non-discrepant (*avisamvādi*) in the sense that there is no conflict between the cognition of an object and the practical activity meant to obtain it (*pramāṇamavisamvādi jñānamarthakriyāsthitiḥ/ avisamvādanam...*).¹³ Moreover, for Dharmakīrti "valid cognition is a new cognition, the cognition of an object not yet cognised" (*ajñātārthaprakāśo vā...*).¹⁴ It might be urged that on this definition even the cognition of the universal (*sāmānyavi jñāna*) arising in the wake of the cognition of the unique particular would become valid because the former cognises an object not yet cognised by a previous cognition. Inasmuch as things, according to Buddhism, are momentary, two cognitions can never arise with regard to one and the same object. Therefore to be consistent with the prime doctrine of momentariness, Dharmakīrti deems it proper to put down 'grasping the hitherto ungrasped object' as a differentiating mark of valid cognition.

Akalaṅka has also introduced in his definition of valid cognition the adjectival phrase 'grasping the hitherto ungrasped' in order to qualify valid cognition. (*pramāṇam*

¹⁰ *Pramāṇa-Samuccaya-Vṛtti*, 1.2

¹¹ *Pramāṇa-Vārtika*, 1.7.

¹² *Nyāya-Bindu Tikā*, p.11, line 2-5.

¹³ *Pramāṇa-Vārtika*, 1.3.

¹⁴ *Pramāṇa-Vārtika*, 1.7.

avi samvādi jñānam anādhigatārthādhigamalakṣaṇatvāt).¹⁵ He also considers harmony or non-discrepancy (*avisamvāda*) to be the true mark of valid cognition. By non-discrepancy he means the correspondence of cognition with the nature of its object. Apart from non-discrepancy, definiteness/determinateness is regarded by him as one among essential characteristics of valid cognition (*vyavasāyātmakam jñamātm ātmarthagrahakam matam/ grahaṇam nirṇayas tena mukhyaṁ prāmāṇyam aśnute*).¹⁶ Here we can say that for the Buddhists who are momentarists it is alright to consider valid cognition to be a cognition pertaining to quite a new object. According to Jaina teachings reality is relatively permanent. Akalaṅka says, since it is relatively permanent, it possesses innumerable modes. So, when Akalaṅka uses the phrase ‘grasping the hitherto ungrasped’ he means determining ‘the hitherto undetermined mode’. The influence of Dharmakīrti is evident here. Thus, the essential characteristics of valid knowledge, according to Akalaṅka, are its non- discrepancy, its ability to enable us to attain the object capable of purposive activity and its determinate nature.

Prabhākara defines valid knowledge as direct and immediate apprehension, is different from recollection (*smṛti*), as latter cannot be valid as it necessitates a preceding cognition. **Kumārila** defines “valid knowledge as a firm or assured cognition of objects, which does not stand in need of confirmation by other cognitions”. Pārthasarathi specifies knowledge to be valid as “a true cognition which relates to something previously uncognised”. He characterises it as grasping that which has not been previously grasped, that which truthfully portrays the object and is unaffected by faulty causes and which remains devoid of contradiction. Sucarita Mīśra states that valid knowledge is definite, true and informative cognition. Thus, according to Mīmāṃsakas, a valid knowledge must fulfil these four conditions. Firstly, it should not originate from faulty causes (*kāraṇadoṣarahita*). Second, it needs to be devoid of contradiction. It has to be self-consistent, and it should not be invalidated by later knowledge (*bādhaka jñāna rahita*). Third, it needs to grasp an object that has not previously been apprehended. Novelty is an essential feature of knowledge (*agr̥hita gr̥hi*). Therefore, memory is excluded from valid knowledge. Fourth, it must truly represent the object (*yathārtha*).

Here, the Buddhist definition of valid knowledge is also similar to that of Kumārila's view. They agree on this point that a valid knowledge apprehends an object hitherto unknown (*anādhigatārthagantṛ pramāṇamiti*).¹⁷ Both agree on this point that novelty and non-contradiction are the essential features of knowledge that is considered

¹⁵ *Aṣṭasati*, p.175.

¹⁶ *Akalaṅkagranthatrāya*, p.20.

¹⁷ *Tarkabhāṣā*. p.39.

valid. Prabhākara also means by *pramāṇa* that valid cognition is not regarded as the means of valid knowledge. He identifies the *pramāṇa* with *pramā* like the Buddhists. As per his perspective all cognitions are inherently valid and any invalidity arises from inconsistency with the real essence of their objects.

Advaita Vedānta also upholds that *pramā* is commonly characterised as a cognition possessing the dual attributes of truth and novelty (*abādhitatva / yathārthatva and anadhigatatva*).¹⁸ The main difference here is that the Advaita Vedantin does not necessarily exclude recollection (*smṛti*) from valid knowledge, though they agree on this point that novelty is a key feature of knowledge.

According to Śāṅkara, Brahman alone is the ontological Reality, and the other objects are super-imposed on the eternal consciousness by nescience, and have only an empirical existence (*vyavahārika sattā*) as set apart from ontological existence (*pāramārthika sattā*). The knowledge pertaining to one undifferentiated consciousness, Brahman has ontological validity, and the understanding of empirical objects/ the world of appearance has empirical validity. As per their perspective the knowledge is empirically valid if it represents the essence of its object, and remains unchallenged by any other method of cognition (*pramā dvividhā, pāramārthika vyavahārika ceti. smṛtivyāvṛttaṁ pramātvamanadhigatā bādhitārthaviṣaya jñānatyamsmṛti sādharānantu abādhitārthaviṣayajñānatvam*).¹⁹

For Advaitins, the truth of valid knowledge lies in its essence, which includes the content of knowledge being uncontradicted (*abādhitārthaviṣeyakatva*) and the content of knowledge should be new or previously unacquired (*anadhigata*). The experience which reveals the new (i.e., knowledge proper) is called *anubhūti*, whereas reproduced knowledge is called *smṛti*. Thus, novelty comes to be considered as essential quality of knowledge. Every moment we possess knowledge about an object that is distinct from the object of the previous moment and is, therefore, as good as a new object.

In memory, novelty is described as being absent, in the context that memory is wholly a replication of a past knowledge; it is solely induced by the impression of a past experience (*saṁsakāramātrajanya*). In a persistent knowledge, the cognition of the subsequent moment does not replicate the cognition of the prior moment; it is brought about not by the impression of the previous experience, but by the very objective conditions which cause the first knowledge. So, memory by its very nature falls back on a past experience. It is in this important respect that memory has to be

¹⁸ *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, p. 19f.

¹⁹ *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, p. 19-20.

excluded from the definition of knowledge and the other has to be included therein. This is the Nyāya resolution regarding the issue.

But the Advaitins maintain that ‘knowledge persists so long as fresh knowledge does not come to replace it.’²⁰ Whether knowledge changes or remains the same can solely be determined by whether the logical activity of the self, i.e., the judgement affirming the knowledge, changes or remains the same. They admit that even if novelty be considered as crucial aspect of knowledge, any real case of knowledge, such as persistent perception, or repeated perception, is not excluded from the definition of knowledge. The meaning of knowledge (*pramā*), therefore, applies to the case of a persistent cognition as well, the quality of novelty being present also in that case. A *pramā* or knowledge, therefore, can be accurately regarded as a form of cognition, the object in focus is neither contradicted nor previously recognised as an object (*anadhigatā-bādhitārtha-viṣayam jñānan*).²¹

Definition and Nature of the Instruments/Means of Veridical Cognition (*Pramāṇa*)

We have explored the definitions of valid knowledge. But what is the means/source of valid knowledge? Among the orthodox *sūtrakāras*, Jaimini is credited as one of the first to provide a definition of *pramāṇa* as different from *pramā*. Now, let us consider the Naiyayika's view first. The Nyāya Philosophy is nothing if not a defence of *pramāṇa*. In the *Nyāya-Sutra*, it stands the foremost position in the enumeration of major philosophies. The comprehensive definition of *pramāṇa* is implied by the etymological meaning of the word itself.

The word *pramāṇa* is derived by adding the suffix “lyuṭ” in the instrumental (*karaṇa*) to the root *mā*, with prefix *pra* (*pra+mā+lyuṭ*). The root *mā*, with prefix *pra* i.e., (*pra+mā*) means to know rightly. The suffix ‘lyuṭ’, being in the instrumental, *pramāṇa* means the instrument by which something is rightly known. According to Vātsyāyana, “That the *pramāṇa*-s are the instruments of right knowledge is to be understood by the etymological analysis (*nirvaçana*) of the epithet (i.e., *pramāṇa* itself). The word *pramāṇa* signifies the instrument because 'by this is rightly known' (*pramiyate anena*).²²

The theory of *pramāṇa* is the pivot of the Nyāya-System. *Pramāṇa* heads the list of Gautama's sixteen categories and the categories of *pramāṇa* and *prameya* (object of cognition) have a pre-eminent position in the scheme. Gautama has not defined

²⁰ *Six Ways of Knowing*, p. 24.

²¹ *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, p.20.

²² *Pramāṇa in Nyāya-Sutra and Vatsyāyana's Bhāṣya*, p.17

pramāṇa in any of his aphorisms (*sūtras*). According to Vātsyāyana, the *pramāṇa* is a means of cognizing things, and this is quite evident from the etymology of the word itself. The *pramāṇa*-s must be regarded as rightly effective, because comprehension happens solely only when something is acknowledged by means of a *pramāṇa* that it has the power to arouse fruitful and effective activity (*pramāṇataharthapratipattaupravṛtti sāmārthyāt arthavatpramāṇan*).²³

The **Buddhist** philosophers exhibit differences in their perspectives concerning the definition of *pramāṇa*. The Sautrāntika and the Vaibhāṣika, the two realistic schools of Buddhist philosophy, upholds that *pramāṇa* is that which gives us true knowledge of objects.²⁴ By true knowledge (*pramā*) they refer to the coherence between the content of cognition and the object being cognised. The idealist school of Buddhism, namely Vijñānavāda, which is also referred to as Yogācāra, maintains that *pramā* is practically beneficial knowledge, and *pramāṇa* is that which facilitates the attainment of such knowledge.²⁵

Diñnāga incorporates in his definition of *pramāṇa* the characteristic ‘*sva-samvitti*’ implying that the consequence of a *pramāṇa* should involve self-cognition.²⁶ So, we can say the essence of a *pramāṇa* according to Diñnāga, consists of comprehending an object (*viṣayādhigama*) and in self-cognition (*svasamvitti*). According to Dharmakīrti, *pramāṇa* is an experience that remains unchallenged / uncontradicted.²⁷ He also discusses *arthasārūpya* as the essence of *pramāṇa* in his *Nyāya-Bindu*.²⁸ Śāntarakṣita attempts to integrate the definitions of *pramāṇa* by Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti.

As per the realists (Bāhyārthavādins) the similarity (*sārūpya*) between cognition and its object is to be regarded as *pramāṇa* and the cognition of the object as *pramītī* but according to the idealists (Vijñānavādins), self-cognition is *pramītī* and the ability to obtain such a cognition is *pramāṇa*. The Buddhists maintain that a method of valid cognitive understanding (*pramāṇa*) has two characteristics, viz, *avisamvādatva* (non-contradiction) and *anadhigantatva* (hitherto unknown). An uncontradicted cognition is that which is capable of producing the efficient action, indicated by the

²³ *Nyāyabhāṣya*, p.1

²⁴ C.D. Bijalwan, *Indian Theory of knowledge based upon Jayanta’s Nyāyamañjari*, (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1977), p. 42.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, 1-10.

²⁷ *Pramāṇa-Vārttika*, II-I

²⁸ *Nyāyamañjari*, 1-20.

object. Anyway, to the Buddhists *pramāṇa* and *pramītī* are non-distinct, since, according to them, they are not different entities.²⁹

The **Prabhākara**s define *pramāṇa* as immediate experience (*anubhūti*). Śālikanātha states that valid knowledge is an encounter, distinct from mere memory (*anubhūtiḥ, pramāṇam sasmrteranyāsmṛtiḥpunah*).³⁰ Prabhākara also defines *pramāṇa* as direct and immediate experience which is different from mere recollection (*smṛti*). Recollection is invalid as it depends upon the subconscious impression left by past experience. All cognitions per se are valid. Prabhākara says, “It is strange indeed how a cognition can be said to apprehend an object, and yet be invalid”.³¹ Here Prabhākara means by *pramāṇa* valid cognition, not the means of valid cognition. He identifies the *pramāṇa* with *pramā*. Siddhasena, though a Jaina logician, accepts the same view.

Kumārila asserts that *pramāṇa* constitute a conclusive and assured perception of objects that does not necessitate validation from other cognitive perception (*Tasmād dṛḍhamyadutapannam nāpi Sambāḍmṛchhati jñānāntarenaviññānatatpramāṇampramiyatām*).³² Umbeka claims that the expression '*dṛḍha*' and *avisamvāda* exclude doubt and error as its components from valid knowledge. Pārthasārathi says, “*pramāṇa* is that which apprehends an object hitherto unknown which is free from the defects of its causes and which is uncontradicted”. Therefore, according to Bhāṭṭa's standpoint, a *pramāṇa* is a means of comprehending an unspecified object, that is not susceptible to be sublated by subsequent experience.

Kaṇāda in *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*, says that the general definition of *pramāṇa* should adhere to the principle that the source/origin of knowledge must be devoid of any imperfections/defects (*aduṣṭamvidyā*).³³ *Upaskāra* on the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*, affirms that a *pramāṇa* is that which yields true knowledge.³⁴

Siddhasena Divakara, the Jaina logician describes “*pramāṇa* is the knowledge which illumines itself and also other objects (*svaparābhāsi*), without any obstruction”.³⁵ It should be pointed out that the term ‘*bādhavivarjita*’ is the same as ‘*bādhavarjita*’ of the Mimāṃsakas and ‘*avisamvādi*’ of Dharmakīrti. Samantabhadra

²⁹ C.D. Bijalwan, *Indian Theory of knowledge...*, p.42.

³⁰ *Prakaraṇapañcikā*., p.127.

³¹ C.D. Bijalwan, *Indian Theory of knowledge...*, p.45.

³² *Ślokaṅkārtika*, 11-80.

³³ *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*, IX, 2.12.

³⁴ *Vaiśeṣikabhāṣya*, p.224.

³⁵ *Nyāyāvtāra*, 1.

pointed out that its nature is to reveal itself as well as the object it pertains to and remains unaffected/unchanged.

The Jainas also take *pramāṇa* in a general sense, in a manner it is applicable to both immediate presentational knowledge (*pratyakṣa*) and mediate knowledge (*parokṣa*), so far as they are true. Under mediate knowledge they include sense-perception, inference, memory and recognition.

The Sāṅkhya defines *pramāṇa* as a modification of ‘*buddhi*’ which apprehends an object, undoubted, real and not known before. Kapila claims that *pramā* is a determinate knowledge of an object not known before and *pramāṇa* is that which is most conducive to such a knowledge. Īśvarakṛṣṇa maintains that *pramāṇa* is that which brings about the cognition of objects (*pramāṇam svaparābhāsi jñānam bādhavivarjitam*).³⁶ Vācaspati explains as a modification of the *citta* it has a content free from all that is doubtful and erroneous. Vijñānabhikṣu holds that it constitutes the role of the intellect (*buddhivṛtti*) that is regarded as *pramāṇa* or the specific cause of true knowledge, *pramāṇa* is that mental function which leads to correct knowledge; to achieve this object, it should be free from doubt and error and should relate to what is not already known. The *Yoga Sūtra* by Patanjali do not provide a direct definition of *pramāṇa*, but *Bhāṣyakāra* Vyāsa has indicated in the *bhāṣya* that *pramāṇa* is that which perceived a real object.³⁷

As per Advaita Vedānta, the special origin of a particular *pramā* or knowledge is called *pramāṇa*. *Prāmāṇa*as defined is the *kaṛaṇa* of a *pramā*. The instrument of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is the consciousness determined by the mental mode or function of the internal organ. *Apramāṇa* is then, such an active and unique cause (*kāraṇa*) of a *pramā* or knowledge. Here, the Advaita Vedānta also regards cognition as, the *pramāṇa*. In fact, according to the Śāṅkara, the fourfold distinction of *pramāṇa*, *pramātā*, *pramiti* and *prameya* is within the eternal consciousness modalized by different determinants. One and the same eternal consciousness or Brahman is differentiated into four kinds of consciousness by four different determinants or limiting conditions (*upādhi*). The cognizing self (*pramātā*) is the consciousness determined by the internal organ (*antahkaraṇa*) which is a modification of nescience. The instrument of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is the consciousness determined by the mental mode or function of the internal organ. The object of valid knowledge (*prameya*) is the consciousness determined by an empirical object. And the

³⁶ *Prameyasiddhiḥ pramānādi/ sāmṅhyakārika.*, p.4.

³⁷ *Yoga-bhāṣya.*, 1.8/bhutartha-*viṣayattvāt Prāmāṇayasya.*

consequence of engaging in valid knowledge (*pramiti*) is the consciousness manifested by the apprehending mental mode or function of the internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*).

The Comparative Analysis of Nyāya and Buddhism

The difference between Buddhist and Nyāya view is primarily relies on their primary differences stem from their contrasting evaluation of the *pramāṇa-pramiti* relationship. As per the perspective of Buddhist, a *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) is always in the manifestation of knowledge, and in the absence of difference between a *pramāṇa* and its resultant *pramāṇa-phala*) called *pramā* (knowledge), they are identical. They discard the soul and hold that cognition itself is the cogniser, the cognisable object, the methods by which cognition, and the result. Dharmakīrti declares that cognition serves as the method for acquiring valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*); that which does not represent cognition (*ajñāna-jñāna-bhinna*) such as the sense-object contact, is not the method to obtaining valid knowledge (*jñānampramāṇamna-jñānamindriyārtha-sannikarṣādi*).³⁸ It is held by Dharmottara that "one and the same cognition is the means of valid knowledge and also the result (*pramāṇaphala*). (*tadevajñānampramāṇamtadevapramāṇa-phalam*).³⁹ According to them knowledge only is *pramāṇa* and not non-knowledge like sense object contact. We call the cognition itself, *pramāṇa* a means of cognising, because it is usually conceived to include the act of cognising, although primarily it is a result. Diñnāga, Sautrāntika and several representatives of Yogācāra tradition maintained that the form (*ākāra*) of the object which is possessed by the cognition within itself, is the means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and the cognition serving as the manifestation of the perception of the object (*viśayādhigati*) is the outcome/result (*pramāṇa-phala*).⁴⁰ This fact is true in case of perception along with that of inference.

As for the question of identity/difference between the resultant cognition and its instrument, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas consider the two to be absolutely different. This view of theirs seems to be a corollary of their fundamental position according to which an effect is quite different from its cause (*ārambhavāda*). They perceive each phase within the process of cognition as an instrument and resultant cognition i.e., an instrument with regard to the succeeding stage that is generated by it and a resultant cognition with respect to the preceding stage whose result is this (*yadāsannikarṣas tadājñānampramitiḥ, yadājñānamtadā hānopādānopekṣābuddhayaḥphalam*).⁴¹ Thus, the instrument of perception is *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa* while the resultant perceptive

³⁸ *Pramana-vārtika*, 1.3

³⁹ *Nyāyabindu-Tikā...*, p.86.

⁴⁰ *Śloka-vārtika*, p. 55.

⁴¹ *Nyāyabhāṣya*.. I, 1.3.

knowledge is *pratyakṣa pramā*. Similarly, the means of inference is different from the resultant inferential cognition. The initial one is designated as *anumāna*, the suffix *ana* denoting instrumentality. The second one is called as *anumīti*, the suffix *ti* denoting the resultant state.

Here, Jayanta emphasises that the term ‘*pramāṇa*’ etymologically signifies the instrument. Only by *pramāṇa* something is correctly known with precision i.e., a truthful understanding of objects. In common parlance when we say, we know through the use of *pramāṇa*, this tends to support the standpoint that *pramāṇa* and *pramiti* are two distinct entities. The Naiyāyika as argue that a piece of knowledge, if it is other than doubt and illusion, produces another piece of knowledge, then the first one will be regarded as *pramāṇa* and in this case *pramāṇa* and *pramā* are identical. Again, in the sphere of knowledge, which produces another aspect of knowledge is encompassed within the collocation of conditions and it is to be called *pramāṇa* and not *pramā*. (Jayanta’s view). He refutes the Buddhist view, and expresses that *pramāṇa* perhaps in the context of knowledge as well as non-knowledge. The subsequent logicians within the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition also endorse the views of Jayanta on this important and vital-issue.

The second point of difference is that of *Pramāṇa-saṃplava* vs. *Pramāṇa-vyavasthā*. According to the perspective of Buddhism, each of the two *pramāṇas*, specifically, perception and inference, has its exclusive and distinctive sphere. A unique particular can only be grasped by perception, and never by inference; and vice-versa, a universal (which is merely a mental entity) can be grasped only by intellect (inference) and never by perception. This restriction between these two *pramāṇas* to its own sphere is precisely referred to as *Pramāṇa-Vyavasthā*. They hold that perception and inference have their own special fields of action to the former grasps the particular only and the latter universals only (*syān matireṣā viśiṣṭaviśayāṇipramāṇāni/viśeṣaviśayampratyakṣam sāmānyaviśayamanumānamiti*).⁴² And there is no third type of object that might be supposed to be common to both. So, perception can never grasp what is grasped by inference. The co-operation of different organs of our knowledge is present within the process of perceiving of one and the same object is impossible.

This is opposed to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of *Pramāṇa-saṃplava*, which means that the same object can be comprehended by perception, inference or any other means of knowledge. Uddyotkara, Vācaspatimiṣra and other Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika writers argue this point against the Buddhist. The Buddhist contention is that it is futile to

⁴² *Nyāyavārtika*, p.4.

comprehend by another *pramāṇa* an object that has previously been comprehended by one of those *pramāṇas*. Uddyotkara says that we do not hold that an object is comprehended by inference and other *pramāṇas* in the same way as it is comprehended by perception. By perception it is comprehended in a different way, i.e., through sense-contact. By inference it is comprehended without sense-contact (through inferential mark). By *upamāna pramāṇa* the relation of a word with the object (denoted by the word) is comprehended, and by *Śabdapramāṇa* the comprehension is by using words/language.

Vātsyāyana clearly states that there are objects that could be grasped by all the organs of knowledge while there are other objects that could be grasped by someone organ only. As instances of the objects of the first type are cited *Ātman* and fire they are cognised by the verbal authority, inference and perception successively. Then he gives instances of the objects in whose case only one organ can operate. The knowledge of Heaven could be acquired through verbal testimony only, the knowledge of clouds, after having heard the rumbling sound could be had through inference only and the knowledge of one's own hand could be had through perception only.⁴³

Uddyotkara too accepts both *Pramāṇa-Vyavasthā* and *Pramāṇa-Samplava*. To give an illustration, he says that only visual sense-organ grasps the quality colour, only auditory sense-organ grasps the quality of sound and so on yet all the sense-organs grasp the universal Being and the universal Quality. Again, he observes that though only visual sense-organ cognises colour and only tactual organ cognises touch, yet both these organs cognise the solid body pot.⁴⁴

However, it seems that the debate between these two schools of thought is due to their different metaphysical theories. To the Buddhist, the external reality is of an undivided unitary nature. It has not many aspects which may be comprehended by different *pramāṇas*. The Buddhist asks: "when once the nature of a unitary object has been directly perceived, what other aspect of it remains which are to be perceived by other means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*)? (*ekasyārthasvabhāvasyapratyakṣyasatasvayam, ko 'nyanadr̥ṣṭobhāgaḥsyād yahpramāṇaiḥparikṣyate.*)"⁴⁵ To this question, we have already discussed the Nyāya presentation of *Pramāṇa-samplava*. The Mimāṃsakas also hold the same view that one and the same object can be cognised by different *pramāṇas*.

⁴³ *Nyāyabhāṣya*, 1.1.3

⁴⁴ *Nyāyavārtika*, p.5

⁴⁵ *Nyāyamañjari*, Vol. I. p.87.

The third point of difference is that for the Buddhist, the external objective reality is in the form of isolated, discrete point-instants called moments (*kṣaṇas*) which are unique particulars (*svalakṣanas*). There are only two *pramāṇas* corresponding to two kinds of objects i.e., *svalakṣana* (unique particular) and *Sāmānya-lakṣaṇa* (generic form). They hold that the world of appearance is only a construction of our intellect, and consists of generalized images (*Sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*) which are negative as they are purely mental and objectively unreal. Thus, there being two kinds of objects, the *pramāṇas* are also only two, each having its separate and distinct sphere.

But the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is opposed to this view. Uddyotakara says: “we do not accept that there are only two *pramāṇas*, or that there are only two kinds of objects, nor do we accept the view that there is not any intermixture of *pramāṇas*” (*na tāvat-pramāṇadvayaṃ pratipadyām ahenaviṣayadvayam nāpyasamkara*).⁴⁶

The Nature of *Pramāṇa*

According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, *pramāṇa* derivatively means the instrument of valid knowledge (*pramāyāḥ karaṇam*). “*Pramāṇa* is that which is invariably related to *pramā*, or, to be *pramāṇa* is never to be disconnected from a lower possessing right knowledge”.⁴⁷ There cannot be any right understanding of things except by means of *pramāṇa*. A subject arrives at the valid knowledge of objects by means of *pramāṇa*, for the existence and nature of objects are to be ascertained only by such cognitions as are based on *pramāṇa*. So, we can say that, “*pramāṇa* is the cause of valid cognition of objects, inasmuch as it gives us a knowledge of objects as they really are and exist in themselves”.⁴⁸ *Pramāṇa* has a real correspondence with objects, in the context of the inherent characteristics and attributes of objects, as revealed by *pramāṇa* are uncontradictory true of them, despite all variations in time, place and other conditions. All this means only that *pramāṇa* is the *karaṇa* or means of *pramā* or valid knowledge. Let us discuss what then is a *karaṇa* and how is it constituted?

It is said by Vātsyāyana that the cause of valid cognition (*upalabdhi-hetu*) is its instrument (*upalabdhi sādhanāni pramāṇāniti*).⁴⁹ The instrument (*karaṇa*) is a form of cause (*karaṇa*). But any and every cause is not an instrument. Only the most-efficacious (*sādhakatama*) of the causes is called the *karaṇa*. Thus, though the knower (*pramātā*) and the object known (*prameya*) too are causes of valid knowledge (*pramā*),

⁴⁶ *Nyāyavārtika*, p.13.

⁴⁷ *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, p. 228.

⁴⁸ *Nyāyabhāṣya*, I.I.I., 4.2.29.

⁴⁹ *Nyāyabhāṣya*, 1.13.

these are not considered *aspramāṇa*, because these are not instruments or the most efficacious ones of the causes of valid knowledge.

Jayanta Bhaṭṭa holds that the totality (*sāmagri*) of all the causes producing the effect, rather than any one of these by itself, is to be considered as the *karaṇa*. But Jayanta's view of *karaṇa* as the totality of all the causes producing the effect is rejected by others. Paṇḍitī defines *karaṇa* as 'the most efficient one' (*sādhakatama*) of the causes. In fact, only the 'special' (*asādhārana*) cause is to be considered as the *karaṇa*. This 'speciality' (*asādhāranatva*) or 'being the most efficient one' (*sādhakatamatva*) consists, according to Gaṅgeśa and other representatives of Navya-Nyāya, in "the production of the effect through some functional intermediary." As Gadādhara explains, *karaṇa* is not a mere cause it is only that cause which is possessed of the function (*vyāpāra*) which invariably and immediately produces the effect.

According to Advaitins 'a *karaṇa* is conceived as the unique or the special cause through the action to which a particular effect is produced'.⁵⁰ (*vyāpārvad asādhāraṇam kāraṇam karaṇam*). A cause, to be called a *karaṇa*, must not be merely unique (*asādhārana*), it must also possess some active function (*vyāpāra*).

Dharmakīrti maintains that nothing but cognition (*jñāna*) deserves to be called an instrument of valid cognition because it is the most efficient cause required to generate valid cognition. This is so for two reasons:

- (1) Sense organs being non-conscious, it is impossible for them to generate cognition, and
- (2) It is mainly cognition that can enable us to attain the desirable and to avoid the undesirable.⁵¹

From this it can be deduced that out of the four causal conditions (*pratyaya*) it is the *samānantarapratyaya* (the immediately preceding cognition-moment) which is considered by him to be the main or the most efficient cause of valid cognition. He observes that the capacity of cognition to cognise itself is the instrument and its actual cognition of itself (*svasaḥvedanā*) is the resultant cognition.⁵²

Even **Akalanka** agrees with Dharmakīrti in so far as he holds that it is a cognition that should be regarded as *pramāṇa*(instrument). He, like Dharmakīrti, observes that because a particular piece of knowledge is determined to be knowledge of the blue, on the basis of the form it bears, it is this for that should be regarded as

⁵⁰ *Vedānta-paribhāṣā*,

⁵¹ *Pramāṇavārtika*, 1.5.

⁵² *Pramāṇavārtika*, II, 366.

pramāṇa (an instrument). (*artha sārūpyam asyapramāṇam tadvasadarthapratiti siddheriti*).⁵³ And a particular piece of knowledge and its form being absolutely identical. Dharmakīrti regards the resultant cognition and its instrument as identical.

According to Hemachandra (the Jaina logician), because knowledge is determined to be “knowledge of the blue” or “knowledge of the yellow” on the basis of its mode, it is this mode that should be regarded as the *pramāṇa* and the knowledge as a whole of that particular time as the resultant cognition. Here the word *pramāṇa* means the determinant of a particular piece of valid cognition. The influence of Dharmakīrti is evident here also.

Conclusion

The function of the *Pramāṇaśāstra* in Indian epistemological tradition investigates and evaluates evidence, justified true belief, method of reasoning, criteria upon which knowledge claims are grounded. All the schools of Indian philosophy have generally admitted that *pramāṇa* is what gives *pramā* and that *pramā* is true knowledge. *Pramā* designates a true cognition which is attended with a belief in its truthfulness. But there is much difference of opinion among them as to the nature of the truth, which each of them claims for its *pramāṇa*. A *pramāṇa* gives rise to a cognition that is veridical and *pramā* is *yathārtijñāna*. Each school regarded its own method of obtaining valid cognition as indispensable for fulfilling human goals. The right knowledge (*yathārtijñāna*) of an object can lead to successful activity (*saphal*) and *pramāṇa* alone gives right knowledge.

References:

1. Akṣapāda Gautama (Gotama). *Nyāyasūtra* (Vol. 1) edited with *Vātsyāyana's Nyāyabhāṣya* by Ganganath Jha, Poona: Oriental Series, 1939.
2. Bhaṭṭa, Jayanta, *Nyāyamañjari*, ed. Suryanarayana Sukla, Banaras, Chowkhamba, 1936.
3. Bhaṭṭa, Kumārila - *Mīmāṃsā Ślokavārtika*, ed. R.S. Tailanga Manavalli, Varanasi, Chowkhamba, 1898.
4. Bhaṭṭa, P. Govardhan, *Epistemology of the Bhāṭṭa School of Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā*, Varanasi, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1962.

⁵³ *Nyayabindu*, I. 20-21.

5. Bijalwan, C.D., *Indian theory of knowledge based upon Jayanta's Nyāyamañjari*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1977.
6. Chatterjee, S.C. *The Indian Theory of Knowledge*, University of Calcutta Press, 1978.
7. Datta, D.M., *The Six Ways of Knowing*, University of Calcutta Press, 1997.
8. Dasgupta, S.N. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, (Vol.I), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1922.
9. Dharmakīrti's *Pramānavārttika*, ed. Swami Dwarikadas Sastri, Varanasi, Bauddha-Bharati, 1968.
10. Dharmarājadhvarindra-*Vedanta-Paribhāsā*, ed. by S.S. Surya Nārāyana Sastri, Adyar Library, 1942.
11. Dinnāga-*Pramāṇasamuccaya*, ed. with Sanskrit retranslation by Muni Jambuvijayaji in his edition of Vaiśeṣika Sutra.
12. Gaṅgeśa - *Tattvacintāmaṇi*, ed. Kamakhya Natha Tarkavagisa, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1897.
13. Gangopadhyaya Mrinalkanti- *Gautama's Nyāya Sutra* with Vātsayāyana's Commentary, Calcutta, Indian Studies, 1982.
14. Hiriyana, M., *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*. London, George Allen and Unwin, 1967.
15. Iśvarakṛṣṇa - *Sāṃkhyakārika*, Eng. trans. by, S.S. Suryanārāyana Śāstri, University of Madras, Madras, 1935.
16. Jhā, Ganganātha - English translation of Gautama's *Nyāya Sūtras with Vātsayāyana's Bhāṣya*, Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 1939.
- *The Prābhākara School of Pūrva Mimāṃsā*, ed. Motilal Banarsidas. Delhi, 1978.
17. Jwalaprasad, *History of Indian Epistemology*, Delhi, MunshiramManoharlal Publishers, 1987.
18. Kanāda - *Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra*, ed. Muni Sri Jambuvijayaji, Baroda, Gaekwad's Oriental Series 136, 1961.
19. Kesavamitra - *Tarkabhāsā*, trans, by Ganganath Jhā, Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 1924.
20. Mādhayācārya - *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, with English trans. by E. B. Cowell and A.E. Gough, ed. K.L. Joshi, Delhi, Parimal Publications, 1986.

21. Patañjali - *Yoga-bhāṣya*, Eng. trans. by Ganganath Jhā. Theosophical publication Funde Bombay, 1907.
22. Radhakrishnan, S. - *Indian Philosophy*, Vols. I and II, The MacMillan Company. George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, working. 1930.
23. Śabara - *Mimāṃsāśūtra bhāṣya*, ed. M. Nyāyaratna, Bibliotheca Indica 45, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1889.
24. Śālikanātha - *Prakaranapañcikā*, ed. A. Subramanya Sastri, Hindu University, Banaras, 1961.
25. Satprakashananda Swami, *Methods of Knowledge*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1965.
26. Sundaram, P.K., *Advaita Epistemology*, University of Madras, Madras, 1984.