

NYĀYA PHILOSOPHY

OBJECTIVES

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain different kinds of perception
- discuss nature and characteristics of inference
- examine Nyāyika's arguments on testimony as a valid source of knowledge

INTRODUCTION

The Nyāya School is founded by the sage Gotama, who is not confused as Gautama Buddha. He is familiarized as 'Aksapāda'. Nyāya means correct thinking with proper arguments and valid reasoning. Thus, Nyāya philosophy is known as tarkashāstra (the science of reasoning); pramāṇashāstra (the science of logic and epistemology); hetuvidyā (the science of causes); vādaṇḍīyā (the science of debate); and anvīkṣikī (the science of critical study). The Nyāya philosopher as a practitioner and believer of realism seeks for acquiring knowledge of reality.

The crux of Nyaya system – Epistemology

The subject matter of the Nyaya School can be summarized in three headings:

a. Metaphysics – Deals with the enumeration of 16 categories or *Padartha* which are essential to be known in all the aspects. These include *Pramana* (means of investigation), *Prameya* (objects of investigation), *Samshaya* (doubt), *Prayojana* (objective), *Drishtanta* (illustrative example), *Siddhanta* (principle) etc.

b. Epistemology – This is the cynosure of the Nyaya doctrine. The first category is the *Pramana* i.e. the means of validation which is studied as the separate branch of

philosophy as Epistemology. This proposes a detailed methodology of logical reasoning along with the approval of Analogy and Perception as the competent instruments of scientific approach.

c. Twelve objects of investigation – The system of *Nyaya* promulgates the twelve points of investigation (*Prameya*) like the body, Sense organs, objects of senses, intellect *et al.*

The Epistemology or the *Pramana Shastra* promulgated by the *Nyaya* school comprises of four methodologies of examination, namely the *Pratyaksha* (Perception/Direct Observation), *Anumana* (Inference), *Upamana* (Analogy) and the *Shabda*, (Authentic testimony).

The knowledge obtained through these four methods is determinate and categorical and hence valid. All the examinations and investigations are based on these tools.

The Direct Observation/Perception (*Pratyaksha Pramana*)

Nyaya defines the direct perception as the knowledge produced by the conjunction of the senses and their objects. This knowledge should be non-contradictory, free of fallacies

and categorical. The perception is a direct cognition through the five senses. This includes visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile and olfactory perceptions.

Six - fold steps of Perception –

The *Nyaya* unravels the six stages involved in the perception process. These steps are termed as *Sannikarsha* (Contact). This is again a scientific systematic exposition involving the observation from the gross/superficial to the minute/in depth. These six points of contact are

i. *Samyoga* (Conjoined) – The first step that includes the contact of the substance with the sense organ.

ii. *Samyukta Samavaya* (Inherently joined) – The second step involving the contact of the quality of the substance. This is the perception of shape, size, colour *et al* which are inherently present with the substance.

iii. *Samyukta Samaveta Samavaya* (Inherence in the inherently joined) – The third step that perceives the degree of the quality like the intensity of redness in various watermelons.

iv. *Samavaya* (Inherence) – The perception of the sound.

v. *Samveta Samavaya* (Inherently inherent) – The perception of the quality of Sound. The intensity of sound with regards to pitch, frequency and wavelength is perceived in this stage.

vi. *Visheshana Visheshya Bhava* (relation of the qualification and qualified) - The non – existence (absence) is perceived at this stage.

The Inference (*Anumana Pramana*)

The direct perception although, is the first step towards the attainment of knowledge, is not the only one to rely at to arrive on the valid conclusions. There are number of limitations of the direct perception like the non-acuity of the senses, covering of the object to be perceived, group of similar objects *et al* . Thus, there arises a need to look for other means of attaining valid knowledge to overcome the restrictions of the perception. The complete knowledge is therefore obtained with the other instruments of Inference (*Anumana*), Analogy (*Upamana*) and the Authoritative testimony (*Shabda*). The inference is defined as that which is preceded by the perception and is classified into three varieties and provides the inference of all the three stages of time i.e. the past, present and the future . The three types of inference are illustrated by the examples like-

(i) The inference of the hidden fire from the smoke. (Present)

(ii) The inference of the sexual intercourse from the pregnancy. (Past)

(iii) The inference of the fruit from the seed. (Future) The inference is explained as the judgement produced by the knowledge of the minor premise qualified by the knowledge of the universal proposition, the major premise. On the basis of continuous observation of the relation of the concomitance as that of the smoke

and fire, the observer infers the relation of cause and effect. Thus, the inference is widely used as a tool of validation.

The Analogy (*Upamana*)

The Analogy (*Upamana*) is the knowledge of the minute and far (unfamiliar) by the virtue of similarity with the well-known. The essential cause of the Comparative/Analogous knowledge is the Comparison/Analogy. The cause of this knowledge is the cognition based on the similitude. The development of various sciences has taken place by the observation of the natural phenomenon and their application for the betterment of mankind. The invention of the air plane is an excellent example of the utility of analogy, as the streamlining principle is attributed to the birds and fishes.

According to the Nyāya Philosophy, comparison (*upamāna*) is the third source of valid knowledge. The expression ‘*upamāna*’, is derived from two words, ‘*upa*’ and ‘*māna*’. The word ‘*upa*’ means similarity or ‘*sādrusya*’ and the word ‘*māna*’ means ‘*cognition*’. Thus, generally speaking, *upamāna* as a source of knowledge is derived from the similarity between two things/objects. It is a source of knowledge of the relation between a word and its denotation (what the word refers to).

Example of Upamāna:

A person does not know what a ‘squirrel’ is? S(he) is told by a forester that it is a small animal like rat, but it has a long furry tail and strips on its body. After some period of time, when s(he) sees such an animal in the forest, s(he) knows that it is a squirrel. There are four steps involved in acquiring knowledge of an object in comparison (*upamāna*).

First: We have an authoritative statement that a word denotes objects of a certain description.

Second: When one observes any such objects she/he has the knowledge that it answers to the given description.

Third: There is a recollection of the descriptive statement received from authority.

Four/Finally: There is the resulting knowledge that, this kind of objects are denoted by the word is same.

Here, it is important to note that Buddhism (Buddhist philosophy) does not accept comparison as an independent source of valid knowledge. On their account, comparison can be reduced to perception and testimony. The Sāmkhya and the Vaisesika Philosophy believe that comparison can be reduced to inference.

Authoritative testimony (Shabda)

According to the Nyāya Philosophy, sabda (verbal testimony) is the fourth and last valid source of knowledge. 'Sabda' literally means verbal knowledge. It is the knowledge of objects derived from words or sentence. But all verbal knowledge is not valid. Thus, Nyāyikas expressed that sabda is a pramāna of valid verbal testimony. Sabda is the instructive assertion of a reliable person. Now a question probably comes to your mind, i.e. who is a reliable person? A reliable person may be a risi, mlechha, arya who is an expert in certain matter and is willing to communicate his/her experience of it.

The authoritative testimony is defined as

- a) Statements of the persons/seers who, by the virtue of the power of penance/great spiritual effort and knowledge attain the state which is aloof of the mental states of attachment, detachment and ignorance which is the root cause of falsehood and bias.
- b) Possess the all-time knowledge which is unblemished and correct sans any shortcomings.
- c) The statement made by such seers is beyond doubt and is acceptable.

Example

Suppose that a lady came to the side of a river to cross the river and can't ascertain depth of water in the river. In this case, she asked a fisherman who is fishing there that 'can I cross the river?' Since the fisherman is a local person over there and has

no enmity with her replied that you can cross the river easily. Here, the word of the fisherman man is to be accepted as a means of right knowledge called verbal testimony.

Types of Sabda

These are two different kinds of Sabda:

- a) i) Drustārtha
- ii) Adrustārtha
- b) i) Laukika
- ii) Alaukika

The former classification is made on the basis of objects of meaning and the later classification is based on the origin of words. Sabda deals with perceptible object is called drstārta, e.g. table is brown, grows is green etc. A sabda deals with imperceptible object is called 'adrsta', e.g. Duty is god, Truth is noble, etc.

Laukika sabda is known as secular whereas alukika sabda is known as divine or vaidika. The Vedas are spoken by god. This vaidika testimony is divine and perfect. According to Nyāyikas, since human beings are not perfect only the words of trust worthy person can be considered as laukika sabda.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a brief note about ordinary perception.
2. Give an example of comparison (*upamāna*) on your own.

FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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