

PRĀMĀNYAVĀDA (An Examination)

The controversy over the truth (prāmāṇya) of knowledge in Indian Philosophy is well known. The main participants in this controversy (whom I have considered here) are the Mīmāṃsā and the Nyāya schools of thought. The whole discussion centres round two questions: (1) what are the conditions generating truth? and (2) how is the truth of a knowledge known? For the Mīmāṃsā, both the generation and knowledge of truth are intrinsic (svataḥ), while for the Nyāya, both are extrinsic (parataḥ). So far as falsity is concerned there is no disagreement between the two. Both agree that both the generation and knowledge of falsity are extrinsic. I do not propose to re-state here the arguments and counter arguments of the rival schools in defence of their own views, for such an exercise would be fruitless. I intend to analyse the positions of the contending schools and attempt a re-evaluation of their doctrines. I propose to consider in this regard the following questions: (i) What is the nature of knowledge? (ii) Is the classification of knowledge into true and false legitimate? (iii) Is the question about the generation of truth meaningful? (iv) Can the knowledge of truth be intrinsic? and (v) Are the two theories of truth totally defective, or there is some element of truth in both which may be combined to formulate a more defensible position?

I

We may begin with the consideration of the Mīmāṃsā theory of intrinsic truth of knowledge (svataḥ prāmāṇya-vāda). True knowledge is defined by the Mīmāṃsā as that which has for its content something which is not already known (anadhigata) and is not sublated (abādhita). Thus truth of a knowledge consists in 'newness' and 'unsublatedness' of its content. Truth thus defined is, according to the Mīmāṃsā, intrinsic, i.e. it is generated by the conditions generating knowledge without requiring any additional con-

dition, and it is also known along with the knowledge to which it belongs, without requiring another knowledge. I would consider first the latter part of the theory concerning the knowledge of truth. It is held that a knowledge arises along with the knowledge of its own truth. Now, if 'newness' and 'unsublatedness' of content are the criteria of truth, how can its knowledge arise along with knowledge? Obviously the knowledge of truth would depend upon another knowledge with reference to which the 'newness' and 'unsublatedness' of the content of a knowledge would have to be determined. Hence, if the above characteristics are regarded as the criteria of truth, there arises an incompatibility between the Mīmāṃsā definition of true knowledge and the theory of intrinsic truth of knowledge advocated by it. The criteria would in fact support the rival theory of extrinsic truth of knowledge.

To save its theory the Mīmāṃsā maintains that knowledge is true by nature. Truth of knowledge is nothing but its character as knowledge (jñānatva). To be knowledge is to be true knowledge, and *vice versa*. This would mean that false knowledge is a contradiction in terms; it is not knowledge at all, though it masquerades as knowledge. Thus the knowledge of truth would be intrinsic, for if I have knowledge and I know it, I also know that it is true.

The above view of knowledge also accords with our usage of the words 'know' and 'knowledge'. These words are never used to refer to false beliefs. For instance, one cannot assert without absurdity that 'I know that it is raining outside, but it is false'. If I am mistaken about something, I cannot be said to have knowledge about it, although I might have thought or said so. Thus knowledge is intrinsically true, for truth is its essential nature. If I know that I have knowledge, I also know necessarily that it is true. Knowledge is never proved false; but the character of what is not knowledge, and yet poses as knowledge, becomes exposed.

If the Mīmāṃsā accepts the above view of knowledge, then it must reject the classification of knowledge into true

(*pramā*) and false (*apramā*). But the *Mīmāṃsakas* (except the *Prābhākaras*) accept such a classification and consider both truth and falsity of knowledge under the theory of truth (*prāmāṇyavāda*). Besides, the *Mīmāṃsakas* use the term 'true' in two different senses. The first when they say that all cognitions as cognition are 'true' and the second when they say that some cognitions are 'true' and some false. In the first sense even error is 'true', while in the second sense it is not. These anomalies can be removed if error is excluded from the category of knowledge.

Thus the theory of Intrinsic truth of knowledge would have to maintain that all beliefs appear to be knowledge in the beginning, though some of them are false from their very inception and are, therefore, not knowledge at all, and their falsity is known later on when they are put to practical test. So far as the knowledge of truth is concerned the theory would insist that knowledge is intrinsically true and is always known in its essential nature. There is no criterion of truth, though there is one of falsity. No criterion can prove truth, but it can prove the falsity of what was taken to be knowledge and was not knowledge at all. Thus 'newness' and 'unsublatedness' of content are not the criteria of truth, but the nature of truth; they, however, function as the criteria of falsity when some belief is found lacking in one or the other of these two features. It is however important to ask whether knowledge is known to be true (or known as knowledge) without any reference to other knowledge which confirms or justifies it. I shall return to this question in a subsequent section.

II

The traditional opponent of the theory discussed above is the *Nyāya* which advocates the theory of extrinsic truth of knowledge. Knowledge, according to this school, is of two kinds: true (*pramā*) and false (*apramā*). True knowledge is defined as that which has as its feature what is also the feature of the object (*tadvati tatprakāraka*). In other words, truth is correspondence with reality. In the case of false knowledge this correspondence is lacking, at least in

part. Truth thus defined is, according to the Nyāya, extrinsic, that is, both the generation and knowledge of truth depend upon external factors. The generation of truth depends upon an additional excellence (guṇa) associated with the normal conditions of knowledge. Similarly, the knowledge of truth arises when our knowledge is confirmed either by some other knowledge or by fruitful activity. It is clear that the Nyāya distinguishes between the conditions of knowledge and conditions of truth and falsity. If the former alone is said to generate truth, there would be no false knowledge. Hence it is necessary to admit that generation of truth involves an additional factor. However, this does not mean that, according to the Nyāya, knowledge, when it is born, is neither true nor false. It is from its inception either true or false. But whichever of the two (truth or falsity) be the feature of knowledge, its generation involves a factor (excellence or defect) in addition to the normal conditions of knowledge. I shall consider the merits of this view in the next section.

As regards the knowledge of truth the Nyāya maintains that it is extrinsic, otherwise there would be no place for doubt about any knowledge. Does it mean that truth of a knowledge, with regard to which there is no doubt, is known intrinsically? The Nyāya does admit some species of knowledge in the case of which there is no doubt, such as inferential, introspective and familiar knowledges, and knowledge of fruitfulness of activity. If the truth of these is admitted to be known intrinsically, there would be no logical ground for denying the same in the case of other knowledges which are free from doubt. And if their truth is also said to be known extrinsically, there would be an infinite regress. The Nyāya position in this regard is that the truth of inferential knowledge etc. is known intrinsically. However if there is any doubt regarding their truth, then it has to be ascertained with reference to some other knowledge. But the question is, can the Nyāya consistently regard the truth of any knowledge as known intrinsically? It is true that knowledge of fruitfulness of activity, inferential

knowledge, etc. are accompanied by certainty, but so are other forms of knowledges also, even error is not an exception to it. Then why not regard the truth of all certain knowledges as known intrinsically? In fact, for the Nyāya, truth of no knowledge can be intrinsically known. The question here is not about certainty, or absence of doubt, but about the truth as defined by the Nyāya. Although inferential knowledge etc. are accompanied by certainty, their truth is known only extrinsically. 'Being certain' must be distinguished from 'knowing truth'. Only such a position would be consistent with the Nyāya doctrine.

III

The dispute between the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā concerning the knowledge of truth is quite intelligible, but the dispute regarding the generation of truth passes comprehension. The question is, can we talk meaningfully of the conditions of truth as we do talk of the conditions of true knowledge? Truth is the common feature of all true knowledges. It has to be admitted by both the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā as a universal (sāmānya) which, in their view, is eternal. It is not a temporal event as true knowledge is. Hence the dispute between them over the generation of truth is not only meaningless but also inconsistent with their positions. The Mīmāṃsā admits that truth is not generated separately from knowledge. But it should consistently maintain that truth is never generated at all and this is why it is intrinsic to knowledge. A self-consistent theory of intrinsic truth of knowledge would refuse to entertain the question of generation of truth altogether. Even for the Nyāya truth cannot be generated, as it cannot be any thing else but universal. It cannot be a quality of knowledge as knowledge itself, in the Nyāya view, is a quality of the soul and there can be no inherence of quality in a quality. Besides, quality, according to the Nyāya, is a particular feature of a substance, while truth, as defined by it, is a universal feature. Hence the dispute between the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā over the conditions generating truth has no significance.

However, if the dispute is understood to pertain to the conditions generating true knowledge, it becomes quite meaningful and points to a deeper difference between the two contending schools. For the Nyāya, knowledge is of two kinds: true and false. Hence it is necessary for it to admit positive conditions, in addition to the normal conditions of knowledge, that make a knowledge true or false. But for the Mīmāṃsā, knowledge, by nature, is true, and false knowledge is not knowledge at all, though, somewhat inconsistently, it distinguishes between true and false knowledge. If knowledge is by nature true, there is no necessity of admitting a condition, in addition to the normal conditions of knowledge, that makes it true. But so-called false knowledge which, in fact, is a pseudo-knowledge, does necessitate the admission of an extrinsic factor, viz. a defect (*doṣa*), which by its association with the normal conditions of knowledge vitiates them and generates what is called 'false knowledge'. Thus the dispute over the conditions generating true knowledge points to a fundamental difference between the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā concerning the nature of knowledge.

IV

The question about the knowledge of truth is more important from the point of view of epistemology. According to the Nyāya truth of a knowledge is known extrinsically, i.e. on being confirmed by a subsequent knowledge or on the basis of fruitful activity to which the knowledge leads. Two main objections are raised against this view. (1) If truth of a knowledge is known by another knowledge, or by the knowledge of fruitfulness of activity, there would be infinite regress. And (2) if truth of a knowledge is not known intrinsically, it would fail to inspire unwavering activity. Fruitfulness of activity, it is contended, cannot give us the knowledge of truth, for the very possibility of motivated activity depends upon such knowledge.

Clearly there are two assumptions underlying the above objections. (1) That no knowledge can give us certainty about its object unless its truth is known. It is on this

assumption that the charge of infinite regress is made against the Nyāya theory. And (2) that a knowledge can give rise to unwavering activity only when its truth is known. The Nyāya rejects both these assumptions as unfounded. A knowledge does give us certainty about its object even when its truth is not known. Also for unwavering activity knowledge of truth is not necessary; absence of the knowledge of falsity is sufficient. Later on if there is doubt concerning a knowledge, ascertainment of its truth becomes necessary, otherwise not.

The Nyāya raises two main objections against the theory of intrinsic truth. First, if the truth of a knowledge is known intrinsically, i.e. along with the knowledge, then it cannot be proved false subsequently. This objection seems to be very sound. It would be absurd to say that "I knew that 'p' was true, but it was false". I should instead say that "I believed or thought that 'p' was true, but it was false. My belief can be false, not my knowledge." But if the Nyāya accepts this position, it implicitly admits that knowledge is true by nature, though its truth is known through another knowledge. Consequently, the distinction of true and false knowledge would have to be abandoned. As a matter of fact the term 'knowledge' (jñāna) is used by the Nyāya in a very loose sense; it is used in the sense of 'belief'. In its strict sense it can only mean 'true knowledge'. However, there is no radical difference between knowledge and belief. When a belief is proved true, it is recognised as knowledge or 'true knowledge'. Even if the Nyāya accepts the strict sense of the term 'knowledge', it need not abandon its theory of extrinsic knowledge of truth. For there is no inconsistency in holding that though a knowledge is true by nature, its truth is known subsequently when it is justified by another knowledge.

The second objection of the Nyāya against the theory of intrinsic truth is that mind cannot know the truth of a knowledge by itself, for it is incapable of knowing external facts independently. Mind can apprehend knowledge, but it cannot know latter's truth or falsity by itself, for it can-

not know whether the latter corresponds to facts or not without the help of another knowledge. But this objection would be invalid against the view which holds that knowledge is true by nature. If mind apprehends knowledge (as knowledge) it necessarily apprehends latter's truth also. But the important question is: can the mind know introspectively that a particular state of it is a case of knowledge? It seems that the question cannot be answered in the affirmative. Some states of mind, such as pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, belief, repentance etc., can be known introspectively, not knowledge. If I claim to have knowledge of something and I am challenged, I cannot know by introspection that I have knowledge. I will have to find evidence for it. It follows that even though knowledge is true by nature, its truth cannot be known without reference to some other knowledge which justifies it. This is the nature of all empirical knowledge. The charge of infinite regress levelled against this view is not serious. There need not be an endless series of justifications. The justifying knowledge may be taken as relatively basic and posited as true for the time being. This however is only provisional and open to revision. So far as certainty about the object or unwavering activity generated by a belief is concerned, knowledge of truth, as shown by the Nyāya, is not necessary. It is enough if the belief is not known to be false.

V

The conclusions reached by our investigation may now be summarised as follows: (1) knowledge is by nature true; it cannot be distinguished into true and false. Its truth is intrinsic in this sense. (2) The dispute between the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā over the conditions generating truth is without significance. However, the question about the conditions generating knowledge, or true knowledge, is intelligible and important. And (3) truth of a knowledge is always known extrinsically, i.e. by reference to some other knowledge which justifies it, though it is intrinsic to knowledge in the sense that it constitutes the very nature of knowledge.

While considering the theory of extrinsic truth of knowledge I had remarked that the Nyāya uses the term knowledge (jñāna) in a loose sense and the proper term for it would be 'belief' (buddhi), for belief can be false while knowledge cannot. I had also indicated that it was necessary to distinguish between knowledge and certainty. It would be worthwhile attempting here a brief analysis of the natures and mutual relationships of the three — knowledge, certainty and belief — for it would help in clarifying my position on the problem under consideration.

It has been held above that truth is an essential feature of knowledge. But this by itself does not reveal the nature of knowledge completely. In addition to truth certainty or definiteness is also an essential feature of knowledge. It would be absurd to assert, for instance, 'I know it is raining outside, but I am not certain.' However there is an important difference between 'knowing' and 'being certain'. I may be mistaken about something even though I am certain about it, but not so if I know about it. Thus 'knowing' entails 'certainty', but not *vice versa*.

However, it is possible that even when my belief is true and certain, it is not a case of knowledge. I may draw a true conclusion by invalid means from false premises, or believe a truth on the strength of a dream. In such cases as these I do not really know the things I believe, although what I believe is true. Hence, knowledge involves something more than truth and certainty; it involves justification, i.e. there must be sufficient evidence in its favour. Thus there are three essential features of knowledge: truth, certainty and justifiedness.

Let us now consider the nature of belief. If I believe that 'p', where 'p' stands for any proposition, two things seem to be necessary. (1) I must be prepared to say 'yes' to the question 'p?'; and (2) I must have some evidence for 'p'. If the evidence is relevant my belief would be rational, otherwise irrational. If there is total absence of evidence, it would not be a belief. For a belief evidence is essential, although what is taken to be evidence may not actually be evidence at all.

When there is definite and conclusive evidence for a belief, it is accepted as knowledge. Thus knowledge is not radically different from belief; it is the limiting case of the latter. When for a true belief there is sufficient justification, it is called knowledge. About one and the same thing we might first have belief and then knowledge. Normally this is the order; we begin with belief and later, usually if not always, arrive at knowledge. When belief is justified, it becomes knowledge.

Now, how are we to decide between belief and knowledge? Two-fold tests seem to be essential. The first is concerned with what is believed or known. If 'p', which is believed or known, is proved false, it is belief. But if it is proved true, we cannot decide by this test whether it is belief or knowledge. A second test would be required, which is related to the person having belief or knowledge. If I am certain about 'p' on conclusive evidence, it is knowledge, otherwise it is belief. I may have a true belief on wrong or inconclusive evidence. It would qualify for knowledge only if evidence in its favour is right and conclusive.

If the above account of belief and knowledge is correct, then the position I have held regarding the problem of truth (*prāmāṇya*) becomes justified. I have held that knowledge, though true by nature, does not come into being declaring its truth. In other words, knowledge does not certify itself as knowledge. There is a difference between knowing something and knowing that we know it. I can know that something is the case without knowing that I know it. Nevertheless, knowledge is invariably born with certainty about its truth. But such certainty may also accompany a belief. It is for this reason that all beliefs, true or false, generate unwavering activity as knowledge does. The *Mīmāṃsā* assumes the certainty of truth to be the knowledge of truth. But if the two are not distinguished, it would have to be admitted that knowledge can be false, which, as we have seen, is logically impossible. It is also opposed to the basic tenet of the *Mīmāṃsā* that knowledge is by nature true. The only way out is to admit that truth of a knowledge is known

extrinsically. The Mīmāṃsā, however, would not admit this, because, if it does so, the validity of scriptural knowledge (śruti) would be endangered, as its truth would not be established independently and absolutely. Thus at the root of the insistence on the intrinsic knowledge of truth lies the resolution to safeguard the validity of scriptural statements. The Nyāya, on the other hand, rightly maintains that knowledge of truth is extrinsic, but it fails to distinguish between knowledge and belief. If it recognises this distinction (which recognition would not give rise to any inconsistency in its theory), its doctrine of extrinsic truth of knowledge would be more logical and can claim greater acceptability.

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