

## DIGNĀGA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE PERCEPTUAL UNIVERSE

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The purpose of this paper is not a detailed study of Dignāga, the leader of the Buddhist logical schools of the fifth century A. D. In this paper, an attempt has been made to classify Dignāga's attitude as reflected in his *Pramāṇa - samuccaya*, a compilation of aphorisms on *pramāṇa* or valid knowledge. The above book is a criticism and also a continuation of the principle of the four schools Buddhism. The perceptual universe has been explained by Dignāga in a phenomenological way, because he has introduced an objective element in it. His point of sensibility is transcendently controlled and not intellectually. According to him, inference can have no reference to ultimate reality and non-reality, because the function of inference turns wholly on the distinction of subject and predicate, a distinction which is illusorily imposed on reality by thought (*kalpanā*). Inference has just as much reality as the ideal-construction to which alone it applies. The whole business of knowledge and its object is on the phenomenal plane.

While explaining the perceptual universe and the inferential knowledge, let us first explain what Dignāga's interpretation of *pramāṇa* is. According to him, *pramāṇa*, its object and the effect are not actually three different entities. They can all be represented by a single piece of cognition. The object would be the cognized aspect (*grāhyākāra*), *pramāṇa* would be the cognizing aspect (*grāhyākāra*), and the cognition itself would constitute the effect.

Dignāga accepts two *pramāṇas*-----perception and inference.

So far as inference is concerned, Dignāga is a thorough going idealist.

It is only in his doctrine of pure perception, as something putting us in touch with the unique moments of existence which constitute the ultimate reality, that realistic tendencies show themselves in his logic. When we have removed all the ideal elements which overlay the pure percept and constitute what is ordinarily called perception, something still remain. But, of course, about this "something" nothing at all can be said, which is in Udyotakara's language *Muka svapnavat* i.e. like a dumb man's dream or as Wittgensteine says "where of we cannot speak, we must keep silent". But from this paper, it will be seen that Dignāga is continuously speaking but he is not heard."

The thinker of the four Buddhist schools Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Mādhyamika and Yogācāra were interested in the intellectual analysis of the presented perceptual universe, but only tentatively. Since a thorough study of Dignāga's works only reveal the fact that a complete shape of a developed Buddhist logic can be traced to Dignāga alone and not to his predecessors. His predecessors could not reach the stage of Dignāga's new dynamism. In Mādhyamika philosophy and also in Yogācāra philosophy we find that their main aim was to prove the *śūnyatā* of all intellectual modes-the roots of the presented universe, by drawing attention to the real experience, which is transcendent (atīndriya). The transcendental experience, being neither intellectual nor sensuous, is realized only by the Buddhist triadic discipline viz. conduct (śīla) meditation (samādhi) and insight (prajñā).

According to Dignāga, positively the ultimate reality (*paramārtha sat*) i.e. the, real is the efficient (*arthakriyākārin*) and negatively it is non-ideal (*nirvikalpaka*). The ideal is the constructed, the imagined, the workmanship of our understanding (*kalpanā*). This word *kalpanā* needs to be explained here. Dignāga's definition of perception is *pratyakṣam kalpanābōdham nāmajātyādyasaṃyutam*. (*pramāṇa samuceaya* chapter I). That is, perception is that which is devoid of any preconception, and is unconnected with name, genus etc. *Kalpanā* is of five types *nāma*, *jāti* *dravya*, *guṇa* and *karma*. Santarakṣita in his *Tattva samgrahs* (verses 1219 ff) has objected to this five fold classification of *kalpanā*. He argues that *nāma kalpanā* is the only form of genuine construction and the other forms of *kalpanā* cannot be admitted on the ground that, firstly that universals

etc. are themselves unreal and secondly these cannot be separated from their substrata, hence they do not have any separate existence of their own. He thinks that Dignāga has actually referred to two classes of kalpana, viz. *nāma yojanā* and *jātyādi yojanā*. According to Santaraksita, in the cases of constructing a universal or the like, the meaning is always conveyed through a *nāma* and thus all the forms of *kalpanā* may be included under the only class of *nāma kalpanā*. This controversy regarding the number of *kalpanā* is a separate issue. We are not concerned here with the number of *kalpanā*. But it should be remembered that the special form of perception peculiar to the Buddhist view is first mentioned by Dignāga, who however, does not offer any further indication as to its exact nature or a full fledged definition.

Now, according to Dignāga, the real, which is grasped only by means of *pratyakṣam*, is a process or efficiency, but this efficiency is not intellectual. It corresponds to pure sensation alone (*Sattā Mātram*) as distinguished from pure reason (*Śuddha kalpanā*) or imagination. For him, the transcendent experience of pure sensation is unique, absolutely dissimilar. It has no extension in space nor duration in time, it is a point instant (*Kṣaṇa* or *svalakṣaṇa*), it is infinitesimal time, the differential in the running existence of a thing indivisible, ultimately simple, pure existence (*Sattā Mātram*), pure reality (*Vastu Mātram*) the own existence (*svalakṣaṇa*) particular (*Vyakti*) and efficient. It stimulates the understanding in the sensible aspect to construct images and ideas but by itself it is transcendental (*nirvikalpaka*) and unutterable (*anirvacaniya*) It is only something which "I know not what", but it is not zero. It is the only reality, the ultimately real element of existence, all other reality is borrowed from it. An object which is not connected with a sensation, with sensible reality, is either pure imagination or a mere name or a metaphysical object. Reality is synonymous with sensible existence, with particularity and a thing-in-itself i.e. *vastu-sattā-svalakṣaṇa-paramārthasat*. It is opposed to ideality, generality and thought construction, i.e. *avastu-anartha-sāmānya-āropita-parikalpita*. A fire which burns and cooks is a real fire i.e. to say its burning and cooking is real. But the fire which we extend mentally to all fires, to all burning and to all cooking, represents its general shape, it is not at all real. This general fire can neither burn, nor cook, it can only be imagined.

To compare the real with the empirical order of experience, we find that they are correlated as the real and the unreal, the particular and the universal. That is, they are mutually defined as the negation of one another. It is the transcendent basis of all empirical experience, without the sensuous empirical character it cannot be abstractly located as 'there'. The pure sensuous reality of the moment is unutterable- a reflex whose scope is strictly limited to the objective reality of one moment which cannot be conceptualized hence unutterable i.e. without any linguistic expression. It is not a vacuity, but a productive experience in so far as it produces a sensation which is followed by a vivid image (*sphuta-pratibhāsa*) as distinguished from vague image (*asphuta-pratibhāsa*), which is produced in memory by the thought process of an object or by the name in speech. The vivid image as referred to in the case of momentary experience is before the operation of conceptual thought or productive imagination, e.g. the jar is not the extended body having a definite shape or colour but the efficient moment represented in the fact of pouring water, the rest is imagination. The external reality is the force which stimulates imagination but not the extended body -stuff or matter, it is energy alone, our image is only the effect of the efficient reality. Thus the reality is dynamic without the intellectual imagination. All elements of the world are forces in the background of inspiring transcendental experience, the forces are the unique points of sensuous efficiency - the particulars. the reality refers only to a "transcendent pure sensation "of the moment, stimulating the intellect to construct an image, but it is not that constructed image in actuality. This affirmed reality is only existentially it self, it cannot be expressed as *it is*, for that would be repetition, nor can it be expressed as it is not for that would be contradiction (e. g. we can say "there is a cow" and "there is no cow". If the concept of a cow did imply existence, the judgement 'the cow is' would be superfluous, it would contain a repetition, and the judgement 'the cow is not' i.e. 'there is here no cow' would contain a contradiction). It should be noted that here the reference is to a sensible point, it is not a purely intellectual process of imaginary experience of a sky flower, it is also distinguished from the illusory and hallucinatory experiences of any concrete sensible, a situation which one finds in one's day to day experience as a tendency but not as a fact. This is the view adhered to by Dignāga.

Thus by real he means the transcendent experience which is a sensibility (efficiency) without sensation or without ideation, i.e. it is not a deduction from a sensuous experience or from a concept; it is prior to a formed sensation or ideation. It is the transcendent core of sensuous experiences and has transcendent existence before there is any shaping of a sensation or glimmering of an intellectual activity. It is an external object in the sense of efficiency only of a transcendent background, it is the first flash of sensation and the point where the subject and the object coalesce, hence it is the absolute experience-the transcendent situation. Thus the real is the transcendent non-sensuous experience and not post intellectual construction. It is a discipline of controlling oneself to a sensibility before it is a sensation. Perceptual experience, to Dignāga, is such a discipline, a dynamic situation, not just there.

Thus Dignāga's transcendent experience is a disciplined condition of a pure efficiency of sensation, which is the bare particular, the point, the unique, unrelated, dynamic, non-extended, unutterable, non-enduring experience, yet stimulating the intellect for the production of a corresponding image or imparting vividness to image, and constituting an assertive force of a judgement. It cannot be empirically cognized, it is not a predication. It is *nirvikalpaka*, it is pure sensation. But pure sensation and the corresponding pure object are not two things existing on equal terms of reality. They are one ultimate Reality, dichotomized into subject and object by that same faculty of constructive imagination (*grāhya - grāhaka kalpanā*) which is the architect of the whole empirical world and which always works by the dichotomizing or dialectical method. The forms-idealism and realism-are mental constructions from Dignāga's standpoint and hence they are to be shown off. The dichotomizing intellect has always to be distinguished from the pure intellect-transcendentally based.

Dignāga is critical of the formal or static view of the universe which might follow the Nyāya - Vaiśeṣika doctrine of the classification of the universe from seven possible aspects as *dravya, guna, kārma, viśesa, sāmānya, samayāya and abhāva*. He puts forth his five fold dynamic modes-proper names (*nāma*), classes (*jāti*), quality (*guṇa*), motion (*karma*) and substances (*dravya*), not as things but as names only. (*these are panca vidha kalpanā*). In his view of the perceptual situation, a dual process

is involved, viz (a) a process of analysis or differentiation and (b) a process of synthesis. In the first aspect, the movement of thought is from the point of pure sensation to the images; here the passage is from unity to plurality. In the second aspect, the movement of thought is in a reverse direction, viz. from the images to the point of pure sensation. The jar e.g. to Dignāg, in perceptual situation, as the transcendent point of pure sensation, is only an efficient moment from a transcendent basis, representing the fact of pouring water, and in the aspect of its image (which is its intellectual aspect) it is variously interpreted as having a shape, colour etc. Judgement, in these dual aspects, is a continuous process of establishing identity or similarity between the apparently dissimilar aspects of analysis and synthesis in togetherness. It is a process of projection and a return to the original position or transcendent condition. Hence the whole emphasis of the intellectual process as a projection should be on the transcendent basis and not on the apparent sphere of perceptual experience.

The realistic (or rather objectivistic) element in Dignāga's reflection becomes clear when he tries to show that the perceptual judgement is a line between the reality reflected in pure sensation and the images constructed by the intellect. Perceptual judgement is really an actual intellectualising process and not a mere glimmering of intellect due to the stimulation of the point of pure sensation. Dignāga says, however, "As soon as our intellectual eye begins to glimmer our thought is already beset with contradiction". The whole process of perceptual judgement can be compared with the present day advanced physics as media. The moment our thought has stopped running and has fixed itself upon an external point so as to be able internally to produce the judgement say 'this is blue', we have separated the universe of discourse into two equal halves, the limited part of the blue and the less limited part of the notblue. The definite thought or judgement of the blue is nothing more than the definite thought of the not blue. There is nothing intermediate. Thus to Dignāga to think actively is to think dichotomisingly and phenomenologically, but at the same time not losing the transcendent basis.

According to Dignāga, the terms construction (*Kalpanā*) and dichotomising (*vikalpa*) in their application to thought are synonymous, they embrace every act of consciousness. To Dignāga, the terms conception,

representation, presentation and judgement express constructive imagination and also dichotomisation and at the same time possess the transcendental basis. Thus the similarity or identity as well as the process of dividing or separating are both important in thinking, with the transcendental basis, of course. Thus for Dignāga, the intellectual function as expressed in perceptual judgement is not accepting of a presentation (sense-datum) merely, but selecting it from its opposits or from other aspects which oppose it in some ways and behind all these a unifying process, an inner sense is implied. According to him, in all perceptual activity, we find the negative judgement and the judgements implying otherness both of which are quire independent kind of judgements standing at par with the actual perceptual judgement. Here in the case of such negative judgements and judgements implying otherness the reference is not to the basic general character of negation or otherness operative behind the perceptual judgements but to such concrete situations of an inner feeling where the judgements themselves are definitely of a negative sort or of the types implying judgement of otherness. As Dignāga says "just as we arrive at the negative judgements viz. there is no jar on this place after hypothetically imagining its presence on this place and after having repudiated that suggestion, just so do we decide that the blue is not yellow, after having hypothetically assumed the presence of blue on the yellow patch and having repelled that imagined presence. This judgement with a dual consciousness, according to Dignāga, is not possible without a unifying core, transcendently based.

Now from the above discourse, we know that the intellectual activity is a kind of outspeaking, an effort to utter, while its stimulating background is unutterable. The intellectual activity and utterability are inextrinsically bound together. The intellectual activity and language, therefore, are on the same line, they are stimulated by the point of pure sensation, but they cannot touch the point or reality which is only existentialist standpoint of an impulse to utter, perhaps has no paralld in Western thought and yet it is not a mystic notion in the sense of a vague experience. It is an inner continuous consciousness transcendently inspired. Rahul Sankrityāyana in his preface to his commentary on Dharmakīrti *Pramāṇavārtikā* considers Dharmakīrti as the central figure round whom all the creative minds of India resolved, "but one must bear in mind that the germ of his reflexion

can be traced back to his master Dignāga.

#### NOTES

1. Th. Stcherbatsky - *Buddhist Logic* vol. I, Dover publications, Inc. New York.
2. H. N. Randle- *Fragments from Dignāga*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi.
3. S. Chandra Vidyabhusana - *A History of Indian Logic*. Motilal Banarasidass.
4. *Vinitadeva's Nyāyabinduṭīlā*. tr. by Mrinalkanti Gangopadhyaya. Indian Studies. Past + Present.