

ON THE VALIDITY OF INFERENTIAL KNOWLEDGE IN INDIAN LOGIC

The problem concerning the validity of inferential knowledge can be approached in the context of Indian Logic from two different angles. It can first be asked whether it is a *pramāṇa* (valid knowledge). The Cārvāka thinkers, Bhartṛhari, Śrīharṣa, Citsukhācārya etc. reject the validity of *anumāna* (inference) as a medium of authentic knowledge on the ground that it is not possible to ascertain the universal concomitance between the probans and the probandum upon which an inference is based.¹ Most of the thinkers, on the contrary, accord validity to inferential knowledge but differ among themselves with regard to its status vis-a-vis other *pramāṇas*. Some grant its independent operation as a mode of knowing whereas others circumscribe its independent operation by making it subservient to some other *pramāṇa*.

The above question has a methodological significance but the question epistemologically more significant is about the nature and the mode of apprehending the validity of an inferential knowledge. On the basis whether validity is an intrinsic (*svataḥ*) or extrinsic (*parataḥ*) characteristic of knowledge the epistemological thinkers of India are broadly divided into two opposite camps.

The Buddhist logician Dignāga, and following him Dharmakīrti also, advocates the theory of intrinsicity in opposition to the Nyāya thinkers most of whom insist on extrinsicity. Dignāga maintains that every true cognition (Knowledge) is *ab initio* valid and is apprehended as such at the very time of its origin. A true cognition is always caused by its proper object and therefore possesses *sārupya* (sameness of form) with that object. This *sārupya* is not something extraneous to the cognition and is a sufficient guarantee for its truth. He writes, "The *pramāṇa* of a true cognition is simply its having the form of the object".² Every cognition has two aspects, viz., *svākāra* (of itself) and *viśayākāra* (of the object). In the latter the truth of a cognition is grounded and in the former it is apprehended. Thus *svataḥ-pramāṇya* and *svataḥ-prakāśa* go together.

The intrinsic validity of a perceptual knowledge is *prima facie* itself a very plausible position but the intrinsic validity of inferential knowledge may not be that apparent. This is because of the complicated structure of the inferential process. In an inferential process there is a possibility of going astray at every step giving rise to fallacies. Further there is a greater need for adducing evidence in an inferential knowledge compared to the perceptual one and this may make its validity contingent upon the adequacy and conclusiveness of the adduced evidence. We may therefore state and examine the grounds on the basis of which the Buddhists insist on the intrinsic validity of inferential knowledge. In order to appreciate the sharpness of the Buddhist position it would be very much helpful to refer to Vācaspati,³ the Naiyāyika, who has accepted the intrinsic validity of inferential knowledge even in the context of the Nyāya tradition. His contention is that *vyāpti jñāna* is the basis of *anumāna* and there is certainty about it. There is thus no room left for having any subsequent doubt about *anumāna*. It should be pointed out that Udayana⁴ is not so very confident but he too hesitatingly concedes that validity is apprehended here *ab initio*. However, he also makes a desperate attempt to reconcile this with the *parataḥ* theory of the Nyāya by suggesting that it may be both. Gaṅgeśa is not oblivious of Vācaspati's inconsistency with the Nyāya standpoint and therefore proceeds to explicate what in his view is the true intention of Vācaspati.⁵ The general point that he makes is that in all these cases there is no scope for doubt though truth is apprehended extrinsically. In this he is following Udayana's comment on Vācaspati in his *Parisuddhi*.⁶ The crux of his argument is that it would be too much to claim that since there is no scope for doubt therefore truth of an inference is apprehended *ab initio*. Truth, in fact, is always to be known subsequently in *anuvyavasāya*. Thus, the general view in the Nyāya tradition is to accept the *parataḥ* theory.

As against the Naiyāyikas Dignāga is uncompromising in his advocacy of the theory of *svataḥ*. Being a *sākāra jñāna vādin* he insists on knowledge being in the form of its object. This sameness of form is a sufficient guarantee for its truth which also precludes any possibility of doubt. The question of doubt will arise only when there is a possibility of the intermingling of such

elements which are not caused by the object and which are due to subjective factors. For Dignāga therefore there is no distinction between knowledge (*Pramā*) and such factors which evidence its truth (*Pramāṇa*) in so far as the latter is not something extraneous to knowledge. The question of evidence, arises only when falsity is suspected. If, on the basis of any evidence, a particular cognition stands falsified it does not mean that something which was knowledge is now falsified. In fact knowledge by definition is true and truth follows from the very definition of knowledge as a matter of analytic necessity. Therefore knowledge can not be falsified. When on the basis of some evidence a particular cognition is falsified all it means is that a pseudo-knowledge which was masquerading as genuine knowledge is now exposed.

Following Dignāga, Dharmakīrti also subscribes to the *svataḥ* theory though he talks of knowledge necessarily leading to successful behaviour.⁷ Reference to successful behaviour is only a test and not a criterion of truth.⁸ The truth of a cognition can be tested on the basis of extraneous considerations like being a means to successful behaviour but this should not be mistaken as a criterion of truth. *Arthasārūpya* is a criterion of the truth of a cognition and it is not something extraneous to the cognition. It is rather its very nature or essence. In the *Nyāya-bindu* he states '*Artha sārūpyam asya pramānam*' (i.e. *artha sārūpya* is the *pramāṇa* of a true cognition). Commenting on this Dharmottara writes, "Sameness of form with its object is the sole evidence for its truth. For example, the cognition of blue arises because of some blue object and has a form of blue. This sameness of form is not different from the true cognition and therefore the true cognition itself is its own evidence."⁹

Just as every true cognition is necessarily of the form of its object, every erroneous cognition is a deviation from this. In other words, a true cognition has *arthasārūpya* whereas an erroneous one has *arthavairūpya*. So far as *arthavairūpya* is concerned it is due to factors extraneous to knowledge whereas *arthasārūpya* is not so. From this it follows that the criterion of truth is built in knowledge whereas the criterion of falsity is extraneous to it.

As pointed out earlier, the Nyāya thinkers differ from these

Buddhist logicians and insist on the *paratah* theory. According to them the originating conditions of knowledge are different from the evidencing conditions. The evidencing conditions are extraneous to knowledge and precede its occurrence. The presence of evidencing conditions along with the originating ones, gives rise to knowledge. Truth and cognition, according to them, are two distinct phenomena and the presence of truth in a cognition needs evidencing. This evidencing takes place in an *anuvyavāsāya* (Post-reflection) only after knowledge has taken place. No knowledge is self-revealing because it can not turn upon itself.

It will be relevant here to refer to the Mīmāṃsā position also. Prabhākara approximates the Buddhist position but Kumārila draws away from it. Though both of them claim to advocate the *svatah* theory in Kumārila it gets very much diluted. *Svatah* may mean *svasmāt* (by itself) or *svakīyā* (by something which is its own). In Prabhākara it is used in the former sense whereas in Kumārila only its latter sense is accepted. Though Prabhākara's position is as rigorous as that of the Buddhists, the Buddhist exposition of the *svatah* theory is more elaborate. Its real contrast and conflict is available in the Nyāya tradition.

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NOTES

1. It must, however, be made clear that ordinary inference which we make on psychological grounds in our practical life and experience, is not denied by them. They only question the ultimate validity of inference as an instrument of metaphysical thought.
Some Buddhist logicians also assign a status to *anumāṇa* which is at par with illusion but such a stand is to be understood in its proper metaphysical perspective which talks of two stand points about reality, namely, *pāramārthika* (transcendental) and *sāmvṛtika* (empirical). The validity of inference is denied only from the transcendental point of view but at the empirical level it is regarded to be very much valid, as valid as perceptual knowledge.
2. *Viśayākārātā evasya pramāṇam. Pramāṇa samuccaya, I.*
3. *Anumānasya tu nirasta samasta vyabhicara śamkasya svata eva prāmāṇyam anumeyā vyabhicāri linga samutthatvat. (Nyāya Darsana p. 9).*

4. See, Mohanty, Gangeśa's theory of truth, p 49 ff.
5. Ibid, p. 49.
6. Ibid p. 230.
7. Samyagjñāna pūrvikā sarva puruṣārtha siddhiḥ. Nyāyabindu I. 1.
8. It will be worth while here to draw a distinction between a criterion and a test. The purpose of a test is to ascertain or verify the presence or absence of a particular phenomenon. This can be done on the basis of the possible effects that a particular phenomenon gives rise to. The criterion, on the other hand, serves a different purpose. Its function is to distinguish a particular phenomenon from those which are different from it. According to Dharmakīrti successful activity is a test of true cognition whereas sameness of form with the object is its criterion for being true.
9. Arthena saha yatsārūpyam sādṛśyamasya jñānasya tatpramāṇamiha. Yasmātviśayajjñānamudeti tadviśaya sadṛśam tadbhavati. Yathā nīlādutpadyamānamnīla sadṛśam. Nanu ca jñānādavyatiriktam sādṛśyam Tathā ca sati tadeva jñānam pramāṇam. Tadeva pramāṇa phalam.

