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Nature of Perception according to Gautama

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1. Introduction

Buddhi is an ambiguous term and it is used in various senses in Sanskrit philosophical literature.

The *Naiyāyikās* are quite consistent and definite in their use of the term *buddhi*, and they always take it to be synonymous with *upalabdhi* and *jñāna*.

According to Annambhatta *buddhi*'s definition is as follows, “*sarvavyavahārahetuh buddhih*”. It means that a cognition which is the cause of all verbal expression is called as *buddhi*. Nirvikalpaka *jñāna* is called *avyapadeśya* and it does not admit to being embodied in words; so it cannot be regarded as the cause of intercommunication through expression. So the definition “*sarvavyavahārahetuh*” is vitiated by the defect of *avyāpti* [partial inapplicability].

In order to remove this defect *jatighatita laksana* is resorted by Annambhatta is *Dipika*. He says, “*Janamityanuvyavasāyagamyam jñānatvameva lakṣaṇam.*” Thus according to him, *jñānatva* (cognitionness), which is the generic attribute (*jāti*) characterizing all cognitions, is the distinctive feature (*asādhāraṇadharmā*) of cognition. So Annambhatta himself suggests that the first part of the text ‘*sarvavyavahārahetuh*’ may be taken to be merely explanatory and the latter part ‘*jñānam buddhi*’ is the definition. In *Nyaya Sutra*, Gautama says that the terms *buddhi* (cognition), *upalabdhi* (apprehension) and *jñāna* (knowledge) should be understood to signify the same thing.

2. Naiyāyikā's Conception Of Pramāṇa

The term *pramāṇa* is used in this section in the sense of the efficient special cause or instrument (*kaṛaṇa*) of valid experience.

Sutrakāra Gautama deals with *pramāṇas* specific varieties and their functions, but does not define it. He has given a clue to know it very easily from the expression *sādhyasāadhanam* mentioned in the definition of *upamāna* that a *pramāṇa* which produces the knowledge of the *sādhyā* may be either of the four namely perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony.

According to *Bhāṣyakāra* the definition of *pramāṇa* is the instrument of knowledge ie.”*sa yena artham pramiṇoti tat pramāṇam.*” According to *Vārtikāra* *pramāṇa* is called the cause of knowledge- ie – *upalabdhi hetuh pramāṇam*. According to *Vācaspatimiśra* the definition of *pramāṇa* is *pramāsāadhanam pramāṇam*. *Udayana* the author of *Nyāya parīśuddhi* also has given the same explanation of *pramāṇa*. And almost all *Naiyāyikās* have followed *Vācaspatimiśra*.

Jayanta Bhatta states in his *Nyāyamañjari* the definition of *pramāṇa* as follows: “a collection of factors which is both, of the nature of knowledge and of the nature of non-knowledge, which caused the knowledge of an object and which must be correct and undoubtful is *pramāṇa*,” or “*avyabhicāriṇim asandigdham arthopalabdhim vidadhāti bodhābodhasvabhāva sāmagri pramāṇam*.”

3. Varieties of Pramāṇa

According to Indian philosophy, there are different views on the number of means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*).

The Indian materialists, called Cārvākas, recognized only one *pramāṇa* viz. perception.

The Bauddhas and Vaiśeṣikas recognize two *pramāṇas* viz. perception and inference.

The Sāṅkhyas recognize three namely perception, inference and verbal testimony.

The *Naiyāyikās* recognize four, viz. perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony.

The Prabhākaras recognize five, viz. the above four and presumptive testimony (*arthāpatti*).

The Bhattas and Advaitins recognize these five *pramāṇas* and non-cognition (*anupalabधि*) as the sixth *pramāṇa*.

The Paurāṇikas recognize these six *pramāṇas* and in addition recognize necessary inclusion (*sambhava*) and traditional hearsay (*aitihya*) as the seventh and the eighth *pramāṇa*.

4. Nature of Perception

Let us analyse the nature of perception. Perception is the cognition which is produced through a sense-organ coming into relation with an object.

The term “*pratyakṣa*” consists of two parts, ‘*prati*’ means ‘before’ or ‘near’ related to and ‘*akṣa*’ means the ‘sense-organ eye’ which conjointly means immediate knowledge or the cause of immediate knowledge. This may be translated in English as perception.

According to Gautama, the definition of perception is as follows – *Indriyārtha sannikarṣoṭpannam jñānam avyapadeṣyam avyabhicāri vyavasāyātmakam pratyakṣam*. This sutra might be rendered thus: Perception is a cognition resulting from sense-object contact which is inexpressible by words, which is not erroneous and it is determinate i.e. - definite in character. Thus, the definition means that *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* is that from which arises the knowledge that is based upon sense-subject contact.

Let us analyse the meaning of the terms contained in the sutra –

indriyārtha sannikarṣa

According to Gautama *pratyakṣa* is brought about by the sense-object contact, ie- it has been depicted by him as the cause behind perception viz.: *indriyasya arthena sannikarṣāt utpadyate yat jñānam tat pratyakṣam*. (Nyāyābhāṣyam)

Vātsyāyana maintains that in every perceptual situation the self unites with the mind, the mind with the sense and the sense with the object, which is obviously intended by Gautama, i.e.:

Atmā manasā samyuḥyate mana indriyena indriyam arthena iti. (Nyāyābhāṣyam).

According to Udyotkara, the definition of perception is that knowledge which is brought out by the sense-object contact. in this connection as regards the term *utpanna*,

Vācaspatimiśra states that it is indicative of the fact that the contact of the ‘sense’ with the ‘object’, is instrumental in bringing about perceptual knowledge [*utpannagrahaṇena ca sannikarṣasya utpādakatvam sūcitam*. (Nyāya Vārtikā Tātparya Tīka)]

Avyapadeṣyam: the adjunct non-verbal (*avyapadeṣya*) in the sutra is understood in various ways by different scholars.

According to Vātsyāyana, in this world, all objects are associated with the words or names. By the help of these words the objects are properly cognized. Whatever comes to the framework of our knowledge is subjected to verbal expression. Our verbal behaviour depends on the fact that whatever is knowable is nameable. Therefore, while our sense-organs come in contact with the object, colour or taste, our perceptual cognitions of the objects, say, colour and tastes are, and it is, communicated with the words for colour and taste which stand as the name for the corresponding objects.

As such, a type of knowledge arises due to the words naming the object of knowledge, one may doubt that the knowledge is due to words and not a case of perception. Thus to remove this difficulty Gautama has used the word *avyapadeṣya* in the sutra. Udyotakara supports this above-mentioned view of Vātsyāyana for he is silent on the meaning of this word.

Some *Naiyāyikās* like Jayanta Bhatta would take *avyapadeṣya* in the sense of *aśabda* (non-verbal) and would explain its purpose of consisting in saving determinate perception (*savikalpaka*) from being merged in verbal cognition (*śabda*) on the ground that the cognitive process involved in such perception invariably results through the operation of a sense-organ in association with the recollection of a scheme of words with which the knower happens to be familiar.

Vācaspatimiśra and several; others who follow him would take the word *avyapadeṣya* (non-verbal) and *vyavasāyātmaka* (definitive and determinate) as referring to the two kinds of perception, viz. indeterminate (*nirvikalpaka*) and determinate (*savikalpaka*).

Avyabhicāri : the next epithet in the sutra is *avyabhicāri* (non-erroneous). According to Vātsyāyana, during summer when your eyes come in contact with the sun rays, the flickering of the sun rays along with the heat waves radiating from the hot surface of a desert appears as water. So in order to avoid this type of erroneous perception *avyabhicāri* is used in the sutra.

Jayanta Bhatta follows Vātsyāyana and states that the term *avyabhicāri* has been included in the sutra to exclude erroneous perception. For example, perception of a mirage is erroneous because what is presented to the consciousness does not correspond to reality later. Here one thing is mistaken for another and it is the epithet *avyabhicāri* in the sutra which excludes any such possibility.

Vyavasāyātmaka: the term *vyavasāyātmaka* has been mentioned in the sutra to convey the sense of another perceptual cognition which is definite in character, Vātsyāyana opines that the word is employed in the sutra to exclude the doubtful apprehensions like “is this smoke or is this dust?” from the scope of perception.

5. Gangeṣa’s Definition

The Nyāyā-Vaiśeṣika definition of *pratyakṣa* (sense-perception) generally insists that sense-data form its essential feature and that it is invariably the result of a special type of relation called *saninikarṣa* between a sense and an object.

This definition takes into account only perceptual experiences which are produced from certain causes and does not hold good in the case of the eternal omniscience which is also called *pratyakṣa* and which is ascribed to God.

Strictly speaking, the etymology of the word *pratyakṣa* would support its application only to perpetual experiences arising from the senses.

However, usage has extended the term to all cognitions, which are characterized by immediacy. God’s omniscience has the highest degree of immediacy conceivable. So, in order to cover *nityapratyakṣa* also perception is defined as a cognition, which does not arise through the instrumentality of cognition; [*jñānakaraṇam jñānam pratyakṣam*].

This definition is quoted in *Tattvacintāmaṇi* by Gangopādhyāya.

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