

Anviksiki : The epistemology of Indian Philosophy

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Contrary to the western view, epistemology is not a new or young study in India, It is studied here with its many of the related problems from the very beginning. Public debating was in fact an ancient custom as reflected in the Upanishads and in the earliest Buddhist texts; though naturally these were not in strict logical forms. It is not easy to ascertain the chronological order of the rise and development of Indian logic and epistemology as it is with other branches of philosophy. Yet, Buddha, being prominently a historical figure, the Buddhist writings seem to give us a type of chronology. The *Kathāvatthu*, a Pali text of the *Stahaviravādi* Buddhists compiled in the 3rd century B.C. a collection of more than two hundred debates where we find logic proper. A similar text is the *Vijnankāya* of the *Sarvāstivādi* Buddhists which present the debates and refutations in strict logical forms of propositions.

In India we see that here logic includes epistemology, or here the analysis of knowledge is related always with the study of reasoning. By Indian study of logic is meant particularly the Nyaya system of Gautama, alias Akshapada of unknown date, the author of the famous *Nyāyasutra*. Logic in India is of course studied by all the systems and it is there also in other fields of *Vyākarnana* and *Itihāsa* etc. It is taken in very high esteem, as 'knowledge' as opposed to 'ignorance' is considered here to be the means of liberation and hence it is discussed seriously by all the systems. Though the Carvaka materialist is an exclusion from this general remark, yet they used to make the destructive criticisms of the Brahmanical tradition. The Carvaka (or lokayata) is famous for developing a critique of the theories of inference of the logicians. The whole edifice of their materialistic

philosophy is supported by their sense-perception-based epistemology and for its establishment they were to refute the other sources of knowledge with the use of logic.

In India the prayer, '*Jyotirgamaya*' is only a part of the complete prayer of '*Satgamaya*' and '*Amrtam gamaya*', '*Jyoti*' or knowledge is prayed not for the sake of knowledge alone, but with a view to discover truth or reality as distinguished from the untruth and unreality and thereby to attain immortality. Hence, logic and epistemology are here studied not as separated from other topics of philosophy unlike in western philosophy. Not to speak of the logical and epistemological standpoints of *tarkasāstra* or *Ānviksiki*, the comprehensive philosophy of India studies the same reality from the different standpoints where we meet the different angles of *tattvavidyā* with *dharmatattva*, *manastattva*, *arthanity*, *dvandanity Baidyasāstara* (Science of medicine) *Jyotirvidyā*, *Jagat-tattva* and so on and so forth. All the studies again stand on the firm footing of *Vyākarnana* or the science of language.

As the supreme goal is liberation so the study of knowledge or *jñanavidyā* or *Ānviksiki* is only a means. In *Kautilya's Arthasāstra* there is mention of *anviksiki* as a separate study from the other three viz., the *trayee* (three vedas), *Vārtā* (commerce) and *Dvandanity* (Politics). But yet it is learnt that when it aspires to become an independent study being forgetful of its goal, then naturally it faces criticisms. In the Ramayana (11-100-36), *Ānviksiki* is censured as leading man away from the injunctions of the *dharmasāstras*. Manu also holds that those who being misled by the *hetusāstra* or logic and disregard the Vedas or the dharmasastras deserve ex-communication. But it is allowed to flourish even by Manu within its recommended limit to act as means to good life and he prescribes a course of *ānviksiki* even for the kings. Logicians were included in the kings' courts. The *Nyayasutravrtti* of Viswanatha states that Vyasa claims to have arranged the Vedas by means of *ānviksiki*.

Ānviksiki, which seems to include both the studies of *tarkavidyā* and *jñanavidyā* is referred to by different names. In the Chandogya Upanishad there is the term *Vākavidya* which Shankara interprets as *tarkasāstra*. But Mahabharata refers to both *ānviksiki* and *tarkasāstra*

and states that Narada was familiar with the Nyaya syllogism. In the Buddhist work *Milindaprasna* there is mention of Nyaya system under the name of *Nitya*. In the *Lalitavistara*, logic is called *hetuvidya*. Jayanta Bhatta, (the famous commentator of Nyaya of 9th century from Kashmir) says, “There was logic even before Gautama as *Mimānsā* was before Jaimini and grammar was before Panini.” In the *History of Indian Logic*, Dr. Vidyabhusan says, that a number of writers made contribution to Indian logic before the author of the *Sutra*. He mentions the names of Dattatreya, Punarvasu Atreya, Sulabha, the lady ascetic and Astavakra.” (History of Indian Logic, PP 9-17).

When the Heterodox systems made their destructive criticisms of the ancient tradition, the six systems took definite shapes by replacing poetry and myths with help of logical reasonings. They needed logical defence in order to codify their views, *Ātmavidya* or *Tattvadarshana* was to be supported by *Ānviksiki* or *science of an enquiry concerning human knowledge*.

One special feature of Indian studies of knowledge is its concern with language. The texts on knowledge are given in *sutras*, the concise statements or the aphorisms which are based on *vyākaraṇa* (grammar) and *Nirukta* (Etymology). The grammarians have claimed the status of an independent darshana for themselves. The *sutra* of the different philosophical systems were based on the principle of *lāghava* (economic criterion) of the grammarians, that description of language should limit repetitions and superfluous elements. Encyclopedia informs us that “the grammarians rejoice over the saving of the length of half a short vowel as over the birth of a child” (P: 52). The logicians too adopted the economy criterion from these grammarians. From them the logicians could obtain their *paribhāsā* or technical language and also the rules of ‘use’ and ‘mention’ in cases of conflicting views of opponents, which made the texts free from quotation marks. Due to these technicalities the original texts cannot be understood without commentaries and commentaries are also not easy to understand as the roots of the meanings may be only there in some texts of remote past coming in a chain of a long continuing tradition to the commentator. This is why, a certain scholar in Indian thought remarks,

“A person may be a perfect master of Aristotelian logic and the varied systems to which it has given birth in Europe. But such mastery, though acquired after years of toil, will not in the slightest degree help him through the tangled webs of logomachy and sophistry as also of correct reasoning, which stand out in bold relief from the pages of standard works of Hindu Philosophy. To be able to bring this enterprise to a successful issue, he must master the high sounding terminology and the cumbrous modes of reasoning by which the Indian logical system is differentiated from all other rival schemes.” (R.C. Bose-Hindu Philosophy, Asian Educational Service, New Delhi, 1986, page 198.)

In order to attain the goal of the study which Gautama refers to in the very first sutra as the attainment of the highest ideal of *Apavarga* or liberation, the aspirant must avoid the defects of ignorance. The Socratic maxim ‘Knowledge is virtue’ seems here not to be a mere theory but is a practice itself in India.

As the formation of the systems and the subsequent development of the sub-sects caused by different commentaries on *Sveswara* and *Nireeswara Sāmkhya*, *Purva Mimānsā* and *Uttara Mimānsā*, or of *Prabhākara* and *Bhāṭṭa Mimānsā* or of *Adaita*, *Dvaita*, *Visitadvaita*, *dvaitādvaita* etc. are seen to follow the logical three-fold method of *purva paksha*, *Khandana* and *uttarapaksha*, So the knowledge, of *Nyaya paribhāsā* is very much essential for these studies. Regarding analysis of knowledge, we see that the systems Samkhya, Yoga and Advaita Vedanta speak of a distinction between knowledge as it is in itself (*svarupa caitatnya*) and knowledge of experience (*vr̥tti caitanya*). The svarupa Caitanya is identical with self or atman itself in these three systems. Study of knowledge is related with three factors of *Pramatr* (Knower), *Promeya* (known) and the relation between the two. Viz. *Prama* or knowledge itself. According to the advaita vedanta, the distinction of the *pramatr* and *prameya (jnātā and jneya)* is only a practical make-belief untenable in the ultimate analysis both being apparent aspects of the only reality, Self/atman or Brahman. So knowledge here is nothing but self-shining consciousness, the very nature of existence, Regarding *vr̥tijnana* the Samkhya Yoga philosophers say that it becomes possible only when the

object produces some images of itself through the senses (which includes mind also) in the intellect (*buddhi or citta*). This is true according to the advaitins also, but to them, true only in case of dualistic belief of the *vyavahārikā sattā* alone.

The realistic and idealistic epistemological doctrines with which our students are much more familiar today, are there in Indian systems as well. To the *vijñānavadi Buddhistic idealism* every objective knowledge is an illusory externalization of a subject idea. It may be compared with the Berkeleyian idealism. In *Sautrāntika Buddhism*, there is a type of representationism like that of *John Locke* and the *Vaiśhāṣika* school's view is similar to the direct realism in western philosophy.

The Nyaya system gives realistic theory of epistemology. They say that all the basic categories of reality are given in perception from the beginning as the *Vaisesika Sutra* States, "Whatever is nameable is knowable."

In Western logic we see that its rise with Aristotle was simply with deduction and for the development of the inductive methods of J.S. Mill, it was to wait for several centuries. But in India from the very beginning the dual modes of deduction and induction or of formal and material reasoning seem to exist together. The Vaisesika system which formed a part of the old Nyāya is found to give stress on the material validity of its inductive arguments. According to them the basis of inference is an '*asya idam*', 'this of this', because of possessing this own quality, say 'touch' in 'air', we may establish 'air' as an independent substance, there being no other substance which has just this quality. In the realistic epistemology of Vaisesika, the causal theory of *asatkarya vada* is stated elaborately with such inductive finding as "from the non-existence of cause, non-existence of effect can be inferred, but not the vise-versa." They also introduced the method of 'exhaustion' when they say that if all other possibilities seem to be exhausted, the remaining one is to be accepted as the correct conclusion which resembles Mill's method of residue.

During the period of Buddha and Mahavira, argumentation was

enriched. Buddha's method of answering questions are 'true', 'false' or 'neither', became the touch stone of Nagarjuna's *Madhyamika* school. Mahavira developed the *syādvada*, the *saptabhanginaya*, a 'logic of perhaps'.

In the Jaina works—*Sthananga*, *Bhagavati*, *Uttarādhyana* etc. of the Svetambara school are seen development of epistemology, where many of the terms seem to be similar with those of the Buddhist text *Upayahrdaya*. Another Jain work *Niryukti* of Bhadrabahu introduces a ten-membered syllogism contrary to our familiar five-membered syllogism of *Nyāya Parārthanumana*. The constituent propositions are called *avayavas* like the *Naiyāyikas*, A.K. Warder thinks that the Jaina syllogism must be earlier than the Nyaya and the arguments were gradually reduced to its logical essentials in the system of Gautama, Bhadrabahu's form is like this—(i) *Pratijnā* (ii) *Pratijnavivhakti* (iii) *Hetu* (iv) *Hetubibhakti* (v) *Vipaksha* (vi) *Vipaksha Pratishedha* (vii) *Drstanta* (viii) *Āsankar* (ix) *Āsankā Pratishedha* (x) *Nigamana*.

Logic was there in India's study of medicine also. The *Caraka-samhita* a text on medical science introduces the debate under the name of *vāda*. In Caraka *vāda* proper "is a constructive discussion guided by the law of logic as between members of the same school willing to advance their philosophy." Other *Nyāya Prameyas* are also there in Caraka, as viewed from his standpoint, which may or may not be similar with the *Nyāya* use.

The *Pramānas* are dealt differently by different schools of philosophers. With reference to epistemology, within six-systems, *Mimāṃsā* may be placed as second to Nyaya only. *Mimāṃsā* is called *vākyasāstra* or the science of sentence interpretation. When the western logic is involved mainly in study of 'inference', in India we find discussions of one to six ways of knowing or *pramanas* like *pratyaksha*, *anumāna*, *sabda*, *upamāna*, *arthāpatti* and *anupalabdhi*. The logicians dealt with these *pramanas* intensively, for, they seemed to know the truth that 'knowledge of the thing to be measured' depends on the knowledge of the measures." This they realized centuries before the birth of Kant and

Locke, the precursors of western study of ‘knowledge of knowledge’.

Pratyaksha is defined as ‘*indriyārtha sannikarsa janya jnanam*’, i.e. knowledge generated by the sense-object-contact. But senses here mean not only the five organs related in perception in western epistemology. Here mind is also a senses organ and it is only an organ, never the knower or the owner of knowledge. Within perception (*pratyaksha*) they describe not only our ordinary perception or *laukika pratyaksha* but also of the *alaukika* types where there may occur immediate or direct perception without having the mediacy of the senses. Again they speak of *Savikalpaka* (linguistically expressible) and *nirvikalpaka* (concept free) *Pratyaksha*.

In addition to *anumāna* which is the central theme of logic, the *Ānviksika* deals also with *sabda pramana* which is given a separate consideration. In the Nyaya system it is also called *āptavacana*. To be a *pramāna*, the words constituting the propositions are to fulfil certain conditions of which the two important ones are *prakarana* (understanding of the context) and *Tātparya* (intention of the speaker.) Of the *sabda pramāna*, a noteworthy remark is seen in a passage of the C.H.I., That “If we disbelieve authority we have to go without so much of valuable knowledge obtainable from the statements of specialists, experts and the scriptures.” (The Cultural Heritage of India Vol-P 556).

The *Ānvikshiki* deals also with *upamāna* or comparison which is based on the perception of similarity with the knowledge of the object to be known. There is also the *pramāna* named *Arthāpatti* (implication) which is not in the list of the Nyāya system but is in *Mimāṃsā* and Advaita Vedanta etc. It is there also in Caraka, but he names it as *arthaprāpti*. It is a way of knowing by reconciling two apparent inconsistent facts. The stock example is of Devadutta, though not eating by day continues to be healthy and strong, leads to the conclusions that he should be eating by night. This *pramana* is like a hypothesis which is needed to explain any fact either observed (*drsta*), or heard about (*sruta*). So also we suppose a word in a sentence where it remains understood, or the supposition of a secondary or figurative meaning of a sentence, where the primary meaning does not suit. Of course, the upholders of this source of knowledge take

it to be necessary not as provisional unlike in the case of hypothesis.

Some thinkers like Kumarila and Shankara admit *anupalabdhi* or non-cognition also as *pramāna*. It is illustrated in the knowledge of the absence of something (a jar) through the perception of the locus (the room).

In addition to these six *pramānas* some minor schools admit *aitihya* (tradition) and *pratibha* (pre-sentiment) etc. as way of knowing.

Ānviksiki the term itself means *anumana* which is its proper study. Etymologically the term is derived from *anu* (after) and *ikshana* (apprehension). It is called *anviksha* or investigation, since it consists in re-viewing of a thing previously apprehended (*ikshita*) by perception and verbal testimony etc.

Inference is dealt extensively in Nyaya, the system of Indian logic and epistemology per excellence. History of this system is a long continuing one from the time of its propounder Gautama and then coming through a long listed commentators and sub commentators up to the time of Navya-Nyaya thinkers of Mithila and Bengal, and in Nava-Dvipa, Bengal, it is till nourished.

A full fledged *Ānviksiki* or study of knowledge is the *Nyayasāstra* based on the *Nyāyasutra* of Gautama whom Dr. S.C. Vidyabhusan placed in the 6th century B.C. although in some works he is placed in much earlier date, and according to Vidyabhusan Akshapda was another thinker who completed the *Nyāya sutra*. In popular usage the term *Nyāya* means what is ‘right’ or ‘just’ and hence the science of right reasoning becomes *Nyāya*. The term Nyaya means literally that by which the mind is led to a conclusion - ‘*Niyata anenaiti nyaya*’. In its narrower sense it means syllogistic reasoning and in its wider sense it means the examination of objects by *pramāna*. Thus, it becomes the *pranāma sastra* or the science of correct knowledge.

As the term *Nyāya* means both the system and the syllogistic reasoning, Vatsayana, the famous commentator of the *Sutra* uses the word *paramanyaya* for the five membered syllogism of the system and Dinnaga calls the members of a syllogism *nyayavayava*.

Anumana is defined as a kind of knowledge derived through a

relation of *vyapti* or invariable relation between *linga* (a sign) and the *lingi* (something bearing that sign). *Linga* is called the *hetu*, *Lingi* is the *paksha* and with the help of the *hetu*, *paksha* is related with the *sadhya*. This inference will contain only three propositions like that of the Aristotelian syllogism but it is only inference for oneself (*swārtha*), but when it means for others it must be of five propositions, where it is called *parathanumana*.

The reasoning based on *vyapti* which is to be established by different types of inductive methods as with *anvaya-vyatireka*, *kevala anvaya* and *kevala-vyatireka* according to applicability. *Anumana* may be again of three types. *purvavat*, *sesavat* and *samanyatodrsta*.

The items of the sixteen categories of *Nyaya sutra* show that Gautama's aim was to establish truth not only formally, but also materially, *Udaharana* or *drstanta* being an essential element. The first two categories of *pramana* and *prameya* clarify its specific standpoint that Nyaya concerns itself with the examination of the process of knowing. Other fourteen categories are also auxiliary either in the discovery of truth or safeguarding it against illogical attacks. The elaborate discussion of the *hātvabhasas* or fallacies help to guard the truth from the defects in reasoning. The list as a whole represent the stages in dialectical controversy intended to reach the goal of *nigrahasathna* or conclusion, by pointing out the *purvapaksha's* 'unfitness to be argued with.' Radhakrishnan's remark seems to be right here that, "There is no doubt that Gautama's logic sprang from the dialectal tournaments, the sound of which filled the durbars of kings and the schools of philosophers." (Indian Philosophy, Vol. II. p.). The history of Indian logic (*Vidyabhusan*) divides the history of the *Nyaya* philosophy into three periods—Ancient (650 B.C. to AD 100), mediaval (upto AD 1200) and thirdly the modern era started by Gangesha, the propounder of *Navya Nyaya*.

It is seen that the aim of old *Nyaya* was ascertainment or *nirnaya* of the normative forms of thought on the basis of the *prameyas* or the contents of thought, as Gautama considered in the first and the second sutras of his great work that correct judgement of the categories leads to perfection or *Nihisreyas* or *apavarga* for which wrong judgements must

be annihilated.

But the case is different with the modern *Naiyayikas*. These *Naiyayikas* were under 'constant pressure from a remarkable series of philosophical Buddhists who took *Nyaya Vaisesika* as their main target.' (Encyclo) Commentaries after commentaries are written by the Nyaya logicians to defend their view. With the composition of the *Tattvacintamani* in early 14th century by Gangesha starts the *Navyanyaya* literature where use of technical vocabulary and methods gets upper hand. They devote great attention to *pramana* and the theories of definition in neglect of the *prameyas*.

Several thinkers on knowledge develop *Navyanyaya* after Gangesha up to Raghunatha Siromoni both of whom are of particular mention. Thus *Ānviksiki* the old study is till nourished by these thinkers whole attempt is to make it an independent study. There may be neglect of the goal, but yet they are continuing the same age-old tradition of the study of logic and epistemology.
