KNOWLEDGE ANALYSIS IN INDIAN PRAMĀṆAŚĀSTRA-NYĀYA VIEW POINT

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In Indian philosophy, epistemology was always treated as a part of logic. Epistemologically the beginning of the analysis of knowledge in Indian philosophy is necessitated due to a need on the part of the thinkers to find means of proof, the beliefs which they had come to hold, for their own satisfaction, but still more, for producing convictions in others. This is evident from the fact that systematic logic in India originated from such rules and forms of debating as is found in some of the works of the early period. Hence to regard epistemology as a mere formal analysis of knowledge is not only erroneous but also against factuality. However, we find that while works on epistemology confine themselves to a general treatment of the means of knowledge and the criterion of truth, those on logic undertake a detailed analysis and classification of the forms of knowledge and error, such as rules of definition and division, syllogistic inferences and the classification of fallacies although the practice varies greatly.

All classical Indian epistemologists focus on the event that is, one might say, the first formation of a bit of knowledge. With many, pramāṇa is to be understood both as evidence and as proximate cause of the first formation of any bit of knowledge. While pramāṇa is a very important term in Indian philosophy, the sense of the word seems to be so comprehensive in some contexts. A group of classical philosophers in India to argue that all our knowledge must begin with sensory experience and that the ultimate court of appeal must be some observational data or other. This idea had evolved into the theory of pramāṇa is derived.

Indian pramāṇaśāstra theorists in general, and the Naiyāyikas in particular hold a very similar view on the conceptual scheme of analysis of the tripartite definition of knowledge construed upon by western tradition. In western tradition, the analysis of knowledge is again known as the JTB analysis which means that the analysis of knowledge is based on three conditions- truth, belief and justification. Nyāya also holds that the analysis of knowledge

must be based on three conditions-the first condition is the truth-hitting character, it means yathārthajñāna, the second condition is that of the non-dubious nature, it means aprāmāṇyasya samśayānāskandita and the third one is the causal factor, it means aduṣṭakāraṇajanyam jñānam.

B.K.Matilal[1] described that the end-product or the output of the Nyāya philosophical method is a decision or certainity (nirṇaya). What is decided would be claimed to be knowledge at least by the investigator, if he is satisfied. The end product takes the form of a mental episode called pramā, 'knowledge' or a knowledge episode it is this truth-hitting character of the episode that turns the cognitive episode into knowledge episode-a piece of knowledge. It is held that truth should be the differentia of knowledge or prama. The truth element is defined as: 'Knowledge is true when it is contradicted by its objects (arthavyabhicari).'[2] According to Naiyāyikas, the truth of knowledge consists in its correspondence to facts. More specifically to know a thing truly is to know it as characterized by what it is a characteristic of it (tadvati tatprakāraka).

According to one view, the truth of knowledge consists in its practical value. A true cognition is, therefore, variously defined as that which reveals an object that serves some purpose (artha or prayojana) or leads to the achievement of some end, or which favours a successful volition (samvādi pravṛtyanukūla). There seems to be an unbroken line of speculation in the Nyāya school regarding the nature of pramā. The truth or falsity of knowledge depends respectively on its conformity and non-conformity to objects. The conditions of truth or falsity must be different from the conditions of knowledge itself, they are characterized as special conditions other than the general conditions or specific causes of knowledge.

From the brief characterization of pramā, it is clear that knowledge is considered as yathārthajñāna, that it is a mental episode, thus suggesting a belief condition. The very aim and purpose of knowledge is truth, belief essentially means 'believing to be true'. If a cognition turns to be false, belief in it is immediately withdrawn and as such it would cease to be called knowledge. Belief usually stems from some actual cognitive episode, or is actualizable in some such episode. When one acquires a belief through some, presumably reliable method, one necessarily assumes it to be true, for to believe something

is to believe it to be true, the truth of belief needs to be justified through some conscious reasons or in some other ways. The pramāṇa theorists would say that the belief must be based upon a correct pramāṇa, a 'means' of knowing.

J. N. Mohanty concedes that the word belief has no equivalent in the Sanskrit literature, of course, in the dispositional sense. However, belief as an occurant comes close to that variety of jñāna which is a niscaya, a certainity. Even an occurant belief is either a feeling or an attitude which is attached to a proposition: it is a belief that the proposition being external to the attitude. Mohanty suggests that we need not put too much weight on whether niscayajnana is the same as belief.

Any philosophical activity starts from the unsatisfactory state of mind in which one feels curious uncertainity regarding something. The uncertainity referred to here is what Nyāya calls samsaya, dubiety. Knowledge is often arrived at through a process initiated by inquiry, doubt is the precursor of knowledge. According to Nyāya, doubt is not only the harbinger of knowledge or certainity, but it is also constituted by same knowledge in the minimal sense. Thus, a pramā is a type of awareness which has the property of being an ascertaining (niścaya), as opposed to another type of awareness (samśaya). So perhaps pramā is a belief after all, though in the occurent rather than in the dispositional sense.

Indian pramāṇaśāstra requires a third condition for analyzing knowledge-the justification condition. Naiyāyikas held that it is not enough for one's belief to be yathārtha, but it must be shown how it did. While constituting knowledge we have already seen that a belief in order to be knowledge must somehow be connected with the fact believed; without this connection we may have a true belief, but not knowledge. Pramāṇaśāstra explicates that we need to pay attention to the causal antecedents or the cluster or phenomena that converge to bring out the cognitive episode. In the episodic view of knowledge, the most relevant causal factor gets prominence and is called pramāṇa. Thus the justification condition can be put thus: S knows that P, if P is born of faultless causal or justification factor (aduṣṭakāraṇajñāna), or it is born of an unfailing or non-deviating causal factor (avyabhicari kāraṇajñāna).[3] The awkwardness of the alternation between causal and

justification in this condition is a necessary part of the explanation proposed by pramāṇa doctrine. Pramāṇa in the Indian tradition is conceived as combination of both evidence and causal factor.

Thus the Nyāya tradition understands the concept of knowledge in a way that could be spelled out as a tripartite definition of knowledge which definitely can be called a parallel to the traditional JTB analysis of western tradition. Knowledge is thus considered; (1) a truth-hitting episode (yathārthajñāna), (2) belief (aprāmāṇyasya saṁśayānāskandita) and (3) the most crucial condition is a causal factor, being caused by a pramā, a reliable means of knowledge (aduṣṭakāraṇajanyam jñānam). Thus Nyāya system presents a consistent analysis of knowledge on par with any prevalent analysis in the western tradition.

References:

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2. Mohanty. J. N., Gaṅgeśa's Theory of Truth, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1986.
3. Saha, Sukhranjan (ed.), Epistemology in Prācīna and Navya-Nyāya, Jadapur University, 2003.

