

# THE NYĀYA THEORY OF ERRONEOUS PERCEPTION: ANYATHĀ-KHYĀTI

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## ABSTRACT

Indian Philosophical tradition which is ancient and traditional in nature has three components namely, Metaphysics, Epistemology and Ethics. It is interesting to note that all the orthodox (astika) systems are metaphysical in nature and see their ontological standpoint to explain their position with regard to concepts like, God, world and moksa. Though there is a difference in their approach it is an established fact that all the astika systems use metaphysics in order to explain their supreme truths. In other words, it can be said that Epistemology is used in order to prove the metaphysical presuppositions of each systems of Philosophy. Though various means of knowledge (pramāṇa) is used in order to claim the metaphysical truth, there is no common agreement with the regard to the number of means or methods of valid knowledge. It varies from one to six. Some accept two, some three, some four and some five and some six. These means of valid knowledge are as follows: pratyakṣa, anumana, upamana, sabda, arthapatti and anupalabdhi. But the uniqueness is that all the systems of Indian Philosophy accept perception (pratyakṣa) as a means of valid knowledge. The main objective of this paper is to show how the Nyaya system of Philosophy has discussed the perceptual error (khyati). The word “khyati” means erroneous cognition or false apprehension. There are different khyatis mentioned in different schools of Indian Philosophy. They are as follows: Atma-khyati (Yogachara), Asat-khyati (Madhyamika), Akhyati (Prabhakara Mimamsa), Anyatha-khyati (Nyaya), Anirvaniya-khyati (Advaita), Sadasat-khyati (Sankhya), and Sat-khyati (Visistadvaita). The anyatha-khyati of Nyaya is also known as “misapprehension”. The Nyāya theory of perceptual error is sometimes attributed to the Buddhists. But what the Buddhists had was a theory of perception – not a theory of erroneous perception. To counteract the Nyāya stance of objects existing independently of consciousness, Buddhists advanced two theories: vikalpa and apôha. But while contesting the Buddhists, the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā fell unconsciously into the clutches of Advaita.

**KEYWORDS:** Nyāya, perception, erroneous perception, misapprehension, vikalpa, anyatha-khyati

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nyāya is the Indian Philosophical school that put forward Epistemological thought on an ideological base. Nyaya Philosophy is a realistic Philosophy which is mainly based on logic. It accepts four means of valid knowledge, namely, perception, (pratyakṣa), inference (anumana), comparison (upamana) and testimony (sabda) The primary text for this dharcana is Gautama's Nyāya Sutra. Vātsyāyana wrote a commentary for this work. It is notable that Dignāga, the Buddhist theoretician evaluated this work (Bigalwan, C.D., 2014). Several works based on Gautama's text appeared Nyāya dharcana which made its mark as an atheist doctrine transformed itself as a theist doctrine with the appearance of Gangesa's Tatvachinthamani. Thus, the later Nyāya dharcana is called navyanyāya. The logic of the Nyāya school has been so imbibed by other schools of Indian Philosophy that Nyāya could not last as a distinct Philosophy.

Nyāya considers that perception is the direct knowledge of objects produced by their relation to our senses. It may be due to external or internal organs. For example, it is external when received from the sense organs like eye, ear or internal, like the mind. This implies that according to the Nyaya, perception is possible both by external as well as internal organ. Nyaya lists sixteen padārthas: pramāṇa, pramāya samasaya, prayōjanā, drustānda, siddhānta,

avayava, harga, nirGaya, vâdha, jalba, vithandâ, hethvâbhasa, jala, jâthi, and nigrahasthâna. These are all Epistemologically oriented. After its coalition with Vaicecika, Nyâya presents seven dravyâs: guna, karma, sâmânyâ, viceda, samavâya, abhâva. It presupposes that knowledge points to the independent entity beyond the Self. It is also known as “pluralistic realism” (Shastri, D.N., 1976). Although at the early stages, the concept of God was not accepted, later it was accommodated (Hiriyanna, M., 2014). Hence, it can be considered pluralistic realism which attempts to establish its ideology through pratyaksa, anumâna, sabda and upamâna. Although it accepts what is obtained through pramânâs, as true knowledge it concedes that errors cannot be ruled out (Sinha, J., 1969).

The Buddhist refutes the idea that “This alone is Truth; and everything else is false”. Buddha says that to be attached to one thing and to look down upon other things as inferior —is the wise men call a deter”. The Buddhist Philosophy is explained as follows. Mind is not spirit as opposed to matter. It should always be remembered that Buddha does not recognise a spirit opposed to matter. Mind is only a faculty or organ (indriya) like the eye or the ear. Consciousness, according to Buddhism is this: Consciousness is named according to whatever condition through which it arises, on account of the eye, and visible forms arises a consciousness called “visual consciousness”. Similarly, one can talk about different consciousness. Thus, consciousness is named according to the condition through which it arises. Knowledge according to Buddhism has three degrees: (1) opinion (ditthi), (2) reasoning and reflection (vitakka-vicara) and (3) intuition. i.e. illumination (bodhi).

Two concepts of truth are discussed in Madhyamika Buddhism, the paramartha satya and samvrti satya. The first is the Absolute truth. It is the knowledge of the real without any distortion. Usually, the categories are distorting the real. The Absolute truth is beyond thought which is discursive, language and empirical activity. The samvrti satya is known as the so-called thought. It is defined as that which covers up entirely the real nature of things and makes them appear otherwise. The samvrti allows differences and degrees. Here there is also the distinction between the higher and lower. Nagarjuna says that words like, “I”, “mind”, “self” or “consciousness do not exist. They all are empty terms. However, one can use these words at the conventional truth level. They are only used to illustrate our speech. Negation is used in Madhyamika Philosophy as a weapon to deny their opponent’s Philosophy and reduce it to an absurdity. Normally we support the conventional truth and misunderstands it as ultimate problem. The problem comes arises here. The Buddha says: “No real thing is of such a nature that it passes away; A thing that is not does not exist at all. He who imagines that things exist and exist not will never make pain to cease. Nagarjuna uses the concept of emptiness as a powerful weapon to strike and undermine all concepts which are felt to have essence. He warns people not to look for essence but for their emptiness. He says: “Those who perceive self-essence as well as other essence, existence as well as non-existence, they do not perceive the truth embodied in the Buddha’s message”.

In Buddhism, perception is the contact between human organs and their respective objects; it is said to be the starting point of perception. Here mind plays an essential role in the process of perception. It is the sense perception caused by a dual relationship, i.e., individual as the perceiving subject and the world as the perceived object. Two schools of Buddhism, Madhyamika and Yogachara have dealt with the erroneous cognition. The Madhyamika rejects the existence of external objects as well as internal ideas, whereas the Yogachara rejects external objects but at the same time accepting the role of internal ideas. For them, there is no external objects apart from internal ideas. The Yogachara argues that illusory perception is the apprehension of the subjective cognition (atma-khyati). In the case of Madhyamika school of Buddhism, it is argued that in illusory perception something non-existent is apprehended as existent. In the example of shell and silver, the silver is cognized as real; but it does not exist at all. Not only the silver is unreal, but also the shell. Both are non-existent. This background is necessary to contextualize the Nyaya theory of erroneous perception.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

There has been such a wealth of literature, both classical and modern, on perceptual errors in Indian Philosophy. A comprehensive study of the various Indian theories of perceptual errors still did not exist and therefore this

approach is attempted in order to highlight the significance of perceptual error. The extremely competent and unified survey of the theories of perceptual errors done by Professor Karl.H. Potter in his *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*. Considering the very unsystematic treatment of this important topic of error until the early sixties, the presuppositions certainly filled a major gap admirably.

In later years, so far as this author is aware, only one full length study of Indian theories of perceptual errors has written by Dr. Bijayananda Kar, in his *The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy: An Analytical Study*. This work, no doubt, has analytical merits of its own but it suffers from a very severely inaccurate historical focus. The various theories of perceptual errors that developed on Indian soil over a period of several centuries have an intricate a complex pattern of interaction and growth and even the brief outline of this is missing from Dr, Kar's work. Therefore, it was felt that there was still some scope for pursuing this task.

In Dr. Dharmendra Nath Shastri's pioneering work, *The Philosophy of Nyâya-Vaiśeṣika and its conflict with the Buddhist Dignāga School*, the theories of perceptual errors had received little attention and therefore a greater encouragement was felt to continue the work. But at this stage it was realized that a dialectical reconstruction of the whole story of the evolution of the various schools of Indian thought with the concept of perceptual errors as a pivotal Epistemological idea was inevitable and it was taken up without any hesitation since it was an exciting adventure and almost definitely a Philosophically rewarding experience. Scholars of Indian tradition argue that the dispute between the Nyaya and the Buddhist is important in the context of global Philosophy. Bimal Krishna Matilal in his book, *Perception* argues that the dispute that lasted a little over twelve centuries between the Nyaya and the Buddhist over the nature of perception, the critique and criteria of knowledge, and the status of the external world, is undoubtedly an important chapter in the history of global Philosophy (Bimal Krishna Matilal, 1986).

The nature of erroneous perception has been discussed exhaustively by almost all Indian Philosophers. Important issues have been discussed in the debate on perceptual error. Why perceptual error looms large is a matter that has been highlighted by both traditional as well as modern scholars. The ideological basis of the Nyâya and the Vaicshika schools and the traditional views of the Nyâya proponents are not only discussed but also compared and contrasted with anti-Vedic ideologies. Although books have been written on this subject, this study focuses on an uncovered area: Theory of erroneous perception in the light of Buddhist ideology.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study is mainly a qualitative research solely based on literature review on the theory of perception. This is a descriptive, comparative study which relies on both primary and secondary material such as academic books, journals and online archives.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***4.1 The Nyâya Theory of Erroneous Perception (Anyatha-Khyati)***

Anyatha-khyati is an illusion which is perceived as other than what it is. For example, shell is seen as silver. This is nothing but misapprehension. The Nyaya explains how this khyati occurs. Due to the absence or insufficient light or due to lack of proper eyesight, the observer perceives shell as silver or rope as snake. What is seen somewhere else is apprehended here. As a result of this the rope is mistaken as snake.

Nyâya and Mīmāṃsâ were the first to develop a theory of erroneous perception and they seem to have developed it not as an alternative to the Buddhist theories of perceptual error but as a means to counteract the idealistic consequences of the Buddhist theory of perception itself. The strongly idealistic theory of the Buddhists had challenged the commonsense notion of objects existing independently of consciousness. In defence of their theory, the Buddhists had strongly relied on what is known as the theory of vikalpa and of apoha – two theories that have attracted the strongest opposition from all the non- Buddhists. (Stcherbatsky, 1967). There is an extraordinarily detailed account of the Nyâya- Vaiśeṣika school presented from an extremely novel perspective by Dr.Dharmen-

dranath Shastri in his 'The Philosophy of Nyâya- Vaiúecika and its conflict with the Buddhist Dignâga school (Delhi, 1964) which shows conclusively that many of the Nyâya- Vaiúecika theories which otherwise look very strange and inexplicable suddenly assume a purpose and meaningfulness if they are seen as evolving in order to counteract the theories of the Buddhists originating with Dignâga.

Since no Philosophical school grows and develops in isolation, it is indeed very surprising that the historians of Indian Philosophy have largely failed to see the theories and doctrines as developing essentially in reaction to other rival theories and doctrines. Perhaps the situation will not improve until the habit of writing histories on a school-wide basis is given up in preference to writing histories that focus on the individual Philosophers or the evolution of concepts. Looking at the evolution of the Nyâya concepts this way, we can clearly see one basic aim behind them all: the refutation of the conceptual scheme advocated by the Buddhists (Vidyahusana, S.C., 1971). The other realistic school of Pûrva Mimâmsâ also had a similar aim. Total opposition to the Buddhist scheme was so passionately pursued by Nyâya and Mimâmsâ that it was not even noticed by them that a logical development of some of their doctrines would lead to positions hardly distinguishable from the Buddhist position.

It is an interesting but little known fact or Indian Philosophical history that Nyâya and Mimâmsâ fought the Buddhist vehemently, and in this battle that lasted several centuries, developed various theories that undermined the Buddhist system as well as their own and thus fell a common prey along with the Buddhists to Advaita. Seeing in this light, it is possible to discern a sort of continuity from the Nyâya theory of anyathâkhyâti and the Kaumârila theory of viparîtakhyâti to the akhyâti of Prâbhâkaras which serves as a sort of threshold for the emergence of the anirvacanîya khyâti of Advaita (Sinha, J., 1969).

#### 4.2 Nyâya concepts

Nyâya postulates as real a series of entities like the dravya (substance), guGas (qualities), sâmânyâ (universal) etc. which were all unquestionable 'kalpita' and hence unreal according to the Buddhists. Some later thinkers of the Nyâya school added, the traditional six categories (padârtha), even a seventh 'absence' (abhâva) claimed to be known through perception like the other padârthas. It must also be noted that in the early phases of Nyâya only the first three categories (dravya, guGa and karma) had been regarded as 'artha' or objectively real (arthaitidravayaguGakarmasu, Vaiúesika Sûtra, viii.2.3) and the next two categories (sâmânyâ, viúeca) were regarded as 'padârthas' (literally, objects of words) which are dependent on mind and therefore possess no independent objective existence of their own (sâmânyâviúecaitibuddhyapekcam, ibid., i.2.3)

#### 4.3 Knowledge

The Buddhist firmly denied the theory that there were any external objects distinct from consciousness (vijñânâtp[thagarthâstiva). The Naiyâyika seems to have countered the above thesis by maintaining that there was always an external object involved in perception irrespective of whether the perception was veridical or erroneous. The view of the Naiyâyika that we can never properly account for either correct perception or erroneous perception without reference to a real external object finds its clearest expression in the Nyâya Sûtra,iv.2.26-37 and all the commentaries thereon. The Naiyâyika argues that only if there can be a notion of a pillar as a pillar (right cognition) a wrong notion with regard to a pillar (that it is a man) can also arise. The notion of a pillar as a pillar is called 'tattvajñâna' or 'tadhuddhi' and error consists in cognizing 'what is not that (atat) viz, the man, in 'that' (tat) viz., the pillar and this error is removed only by right knowledge "sthâGaupurucoyamiti,vyavasâyomithyopalabdhiG, atasmimstaditiJñânam. Sthâ Gausthâ Guritivyavasâya Gtattvajñânam. Tattvajñânenacamithyopalabdhi%nivart-yate".(Vâtsyâyana's Bhâcyâ on (Nyâyâ Sûtra iv.2.35).

#### 4.4 Viparîtakhyâti

Jayanta does not, of course, see any difference between the Naiyâyika theory of anyathâkhyâti and the Kaumârila theory of viparîtakhyâti and therefore refers to the Naiyâyika theory itself as 'viparîtakhyâti'(Kar, Bijayananda, 1978). This liberalism of Jayanta can be understood only in the context of his total opposition to Buddhist ide-



alism which he shares in common with the Kaumârilas. It is also a fact that there is no great difference between the two theories as they were evolved to meet the common purpose of combating idealism.

#### 4.5 Invalid knowledge (*Anyathakhyati*)

In Nyâya, erroneous perception is just one of the subdivisions of invalid knowledge (apramâ). But what is this invalid knowledge? It is what is other than valid knowledge as the very name suggests. Then what is valid knowledge (pramâ)? We have a neat formulation in Gangeœa that takes care of both the notions, He says: “Where something is present, the cognizing of that something there is pramâ. It is also a cognition which is after the manner of the object. Where something is not present, the knowledge of it there, the knowledge after the manner of something while that something is not present, is apramâ “yatrayadastitratasyânubhava%pramâ. Tadvatitratprakârakânughavovâ. Yatrayannâstitratata syajñânamtada bhâvavatitorakârakajñânânam vâapramâ” (Tat-tvacintâmaGi,p.401)

It is well known to any reader of Indian Philosophy that there is a famous division of all perception into determinate (savikalpaka) and indeterminate (nirvikalpaka). The very use of the term ‘vikalpa’ indicates its Buddhist origin. The Buddhist holds that the nirvikalpa alone is a genuine case of sense perception, pure and uncontaminated, in which a svalkacaGa is grasped and no vikalpas or ideas are involved in it. Cognition of all objective reality is confined to the nirvikalpaka and when a progression is made to the savikalpaka, only ideas come to be cognized instead of reality. The Buddhists hold that name, class (jâti), universal (sâmânya) are all ‘kalpita’ and all these, which are collectively named ‘sâmânyalakcaGa’ (in opposition to the svalkacaGa), are totally foreign to the nature of reality and are imposed upon it by the mind.

Hence, they are held to be the objects of inference and not of perception. But for the Naiyâyika the universals are not mental constructions. They are substantive and real and related to other reals like substances by way of a necessary relation (samavâya). The theory of samavâya relations was evolved and perfected precisely to establish the objective reality of the universal. Therefore, according to him, the determinate perception which involves the apprehension of universals, qualities etc. is, in fact, a state where various kinds of reals are apprehended. For this reason, it must be regarded as just as much perceptual in character as indeterminate perception which also apprehends reality. In the determinate perception, both ordinary sense-object contact and extraordinary sense-object contact are involved (Muhunthan,S ., 2016).

Let us take the cognition of silver as an example. When a particular silver object is cognized, the visual sense comes into contact with the silverness (rajatatva) which is inherent in that object though one of the six kinds of ordinary contact, ‘samyuktasamavâyasannikarca’. But when a particular object characterized by silverness is being apprehended specifically, the Naiyâyika thinks that all other silver objects (which are equally characterized by the same silverness) are also being apprehended in a general way since silverness is as much here in this particular silver object as it is there in all other silver objects.

That is, when there is an ordinary apprehension of silverness which characterizes this particular silver object, there is also an extraordinary apprehension of all other silver objects which equally reveal the same silverness. This extraordinary variety of perceptual apprehension is specifically called ‘sâmânya lakcaGapratyâsatti’ (Kârîkâvali – Mukâtavakî, p.459). This and the other two kinds of alaukika pratyakca were evolved by the Naiyâyika specifically to account for the reality of certain entities by claiming that they were perceived. In fact, even those entities that were not directly presented to a particular sense were claimed to be perceived in this extraordinary way. If one should escape the Buddhist idealist or even a realist who is close to the Buddhists like Prabhâkara, one must argue that what is perceived even in an erroneous cognition is real and this is precisely what the Naiyâyika has done. Hence in the shell-silver illusion, according to Nyâya, ordinary silver is perceived in an extraordinary (alaukika) way. But in the later stages of the history of the theory of error, the Advaitin came to hold quite then reverse view, viz, that in illusion an extraordinary kind of object (anirvacanîyavastu) is perceived in an ordinary way.

But the Naiyâyika's account is not yet complete. Even agreeing that when I look at a shell, I do not perceive the shell at all but perceive in an extraordinary way the silver that is present elsewhere. It is explained by the Naiyâyika in the following way. When the sense organ comes into contact with the object (shell) there is an indeterminate cognition wherein the bright-lustrous quality of the shell is grasped, a quality which it has in common with silver. This leads to the arousing of the impression of silver left behind by the previous perception of silver which in turn leads to the silver that is elsewhere. The memory does not itself present the silver but leads to an extraordinary cognition which presents the silver in question. In the nirvikalpaka pratyakca that precedes the definite, determinate cognition of silver the 'this' (shell) which is before oneself is only generically cognized, i.e., only those generic features of it in which it resembles silver alone are grasped, and since those are the features of silver, the memory impression of silver is naturally aroused and this leads to a determinate, specific cognition of silver through an extraordinary sense-contact with the silver that is elsewhere (Heith, A.B., 1919).

The basic feature of this account of erroneous and valid cognition by Nyâya is that both of them are regarded as referring to an existent external object. Therefore, neither validity nor invalidity is determinable by mere existence alone because the 'this' is as much existent as the silver (as which it is misperceived). One has to take into account the place where the object exists and the place where the cognition is taking place in order to account for validity and invalidity of cognitions. That is why in Nyâya if and only if the silver is preferable to the same locus to which the 'this' is also referable, the cognition of silver is valid. If it is preferable to some other locus, the cognition of silver is erroneous.

#### **4.6 Vikalpakas**

According to the Naiyâyika any definite, determinate cognition is nothing but a synthesis of various elements given separately in a series of indeterminate cognitions. These indeterminate perceptions, postulated by the Naiyâyika on certain logical grounds like whatever is complex must be made up of simple constituents, play a kind of limiting role in all perceptions. Nothing can appear at the savikalpaka level that has not previously figured in the relevant nirvikalpaka pratyakca, since the former is only a synthesis of the elements given at the level of the latter. Therefore, the silver that clearly appears at the savikalpaka level must have been 'given' at the nirvikalpaka level earlier, and only something real can be 'given'. The Naiyâyika could not at all persuade himself into believing that something can be 'given' in one's perceptions and yet not be real.

The claim of the reality of the object of erroneous cognition seems to go counter to the very erroneousness of that cognition and therefore it seems that either the reality of silver has to be given up or the belief in the erroneousness of cognition has to be given up. The Naiyâyika cannot have his cake and eat it too. But he is not willing to give up either of these. He also cannot because giving up the belief in the reality of silver leads to the unpalatable consequence of admitting a cognition of what is unreal and his position becomes Buddhist. If the belief in the erroneousness of cognition is given up, then there would be no genuine distinction to be made between valid and invalid cognitions and that would again mean a victory for the Vijñanavadins and Gauapâda. Therefore, the Naiyâyika decides upon the impossible course of having his cake and eating it as well and such a thing is possible, in the field of Philosophical thinking and certainly possible when one is absolutely determined as the Naiyâyika is, on avoiding idealism (Chatterjee, S., 2015). He uses the alaukika form of contact to present in the place where a shell is, the actual silver that is in a jeweller's shop.

The Naiyâyika is persuaded that the silver is presented in illusion; since there is a similar presentation to objects fallacies, he is equally anxious to maintain the distinctive erroneousness of the silver-cognition. Since one object is cognized as another object, this other object is regarded as equally real, the theory of the Naiyâyika could be better named 'anyathâ-arthakhyâti' which it really is (Datta, D.M., 2017). Even in the revised form, the theory has this extremely interesting feature: when the shell is cognized as shell, there is no error; but there is an object, and only one object. When the shell is mistaken for silver, there is an error and two objects are involved. And there just cannot be any error unless there are two objects.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Nyâya and Mîmânsa developed a theory of perception as a means to counter the idealistic consequences of the Buddhist theory of perception. The Buddhist theorists had challenged the notion of object existing independent of consciousness. The evolution of the Nyâya-Vaiúecika theories could be seen as an attempt to counteract the Buddhist Dignâga school. The Nyâya and Mîmânsa assumed a stance totally opposed to Buddhism. This conflict continued for centuries till Kaumârîla and Prâbhâkara appeared as exponents of Advaita. Whereas the Nyâya school maintained that there were entities like dravya, gunas and sâmânyâ, Buddhists denied that there were external objects apart from consciousness. In Indian Philosophy, perception is divided into two: determinate (savikalpaka) and indeterminate (nirvikalpaka). The Buddhist accept the only nirvikalpaka. The Naiyayikas assert that what is perceived even in an erroneous cognition is real.

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