

JUSTIFICATION OF THE TERM 'ABHRÂNTAM' IN DHARMAKIRTI'S DEFINITION OF *PRATYAKSHA*

***K.Bhima Kumar**

Epistemology in the context of Indian Philosophy evolved as an auxiliary to metaphysics. It provides the technique for correct understanding of the metaphysical issues concerning the nature of ultimate reality, the nature of empirical self and the relation between the two as well the origin and evolution of the objective world. It is true that all systems of Indian Philosophy devote considerable part of their discussion to the logical and epistemological investigation, yet their chief objective was to evolve a methodological explanation for metaphysical problems.

. In the different systems of Indian Philosophy we find minute details of the various problems of knowledge. It is true that the discussion is the result of the extension of their metaphysical problems. This however does not undermine the significance of the epistemological issues in the systems of Indian Philosophy. There is the universal approval that the true knowledge of the objects is the sure and indispensable means for the realization or the attainment of liberation. Since the methods of valid knowledge so to say the *pramânas* provide the path for the correct understanding of the objects as well as the metaphysical investigations, the problem of the nature and the number of *pramânas* find an important place in the systems of Indian Philosophy.

Knowledge in the context of Philosophical investigations may be roughly called convictions regarding reality. These convictions in general may be brought under the broad heading of *jnâna*, which denotes all kinds of knowledge, true or false. When however, we come across various convictions regarding the same thing, we feel to verify their validity through various methods which may be roughly

* Asst. Professor, Deptt. of Philosophy, University of Allahabad, Allahabad- 211002.

termed as *pramânas*. Perhaps, with this intension Vatsayana in Nyâya Bhasya states that Nyâya means the examination of an object through the *pramânas*. The basic aim of *pramânas* is to test the validity of various convictions. The convictions which stand the test of validity are *Prâma* which denotes true or valid knowledge, while those which fail are known as *aprâma* or invalid knowledge. Different systems have accepted different number of *pramânas* and that all these differences presuppose their divergent metaphysical commitments. *Pratyaksha pramânha* is the most primary and fundamental of all sources of valid knowledge as all other sources of valid knowledge depend on *pratyaksha* to begin with. For instance in *anumâna* the perception of a mark is the basis to the knowledge of the inferred object. In *upamâna* the perception of the similarity and in *œabda* the perception of words and sentences are the basis for their corresponding knowledge. Further, *pratyaksha* is regarded as the final test of all knowledge. We may require a conformation with regard to the knowledge derived from *anumâna*, *upamâna*, or *œabda*, but the knowledge derived from *pratyaksha* in general is in a way beyond question. *Pratyaksha* derivatively means, "The functioning of the sense organs each in relation to its particular object".

With regard to the nature of *pratyaksha* each school of Indian Philosophy has its own theory of *pratyaksha* that either leads to or follows from its peculiar position in metaphysics. For instance the theory of *nirvikalpaka pratyaksha* of Buddhists is in full accordance with their theory of *kshanabhangavâda*, while the theory of *savikalpaka pratyaksha* is not valid for Buddhists. But in contrast to Buddhists, Nayayikas accepted both *savikalpaka pratyaksha* and *nirvikalpaka pratyaksha*, perfectly in tuned with their realistic position. The Buddhists define perception as the unerring cognition of a given sensum in complete isolation from all ideata¹.

There are various views with regard to *pratyaksha* among the Buddhist scholars. These views can be discussed under three sections namely 1) Pre-Dignâga definition of perception 2) Dignâga definition of perception 3) Post-Dignâga definition of perception. An effort has been made in this paper for tracing the reasons for the inclusion of the term '*abhrântam*' by Dharmakirti in his definition of *pratyaksha*, for the term '*abhrântam*' is not found in Dignâga's definition of *pratyaksha*, who happens to be the predecessor of Dharmakirti.

Prè-Dignâga definition of Perception:

According to Vaibhasika, we have an immediate and direct apprehension of the nature of things as they are in themselves. We are directly aware of the external material objects and therefore the senses provide us with reliable knowledge. Sensory awareness is closely related to perceptual and conceptual knowledge. According to them, *pratyaksha* and conception as cognitive activities begin when we select and attend to connections, which are already gone through in sensory awareness. The distinction between *pratyaksha* and conception does not indicate a difference between two entities but rather between two modes of activity integrated in one knowledge – situation; while perceiving sets up a direct contact with other actualities, conceiving is a selective and interpretative activity.

While discussing the field of *pratyaksha*, Vaibhasika establishes three types of direct knowledge. The first one is immediate sensory apprehension, which is bereft of intellectual characterization. It apprehends the here and newness and individual existence of the objects perceived. In this kind of *pratyaksha* we are able to see colour forms and hear sounds. According to Vaibhasika this 'seeing' or 'hearing' is occasioned by the specific function characteristic of a particular sense-organ. Here the eye plays a vital role that, it is specifically charged with the function of seeing-forms, and in discharging its function it does not look for any higher quality. In this state it is called sensing. The second type may be called intellectual apprehension unfolding an immediate awareness of meaning without lapsing into the activity of ratiocination, which may develop in due course out of it. The third type may be described as mystical apprehension. It transcends the realm of concept and is not restricted to sensory apprehension.

Sautrantikas holds the theory of representationism, which postulates that external objects are not directly perceived but are only inferred. For Sautrantikas in a perceptual situation we are in cognitive contact with something other than ourselves on our mental states. At the other end of cognition contact, may be an object, which is commonly believed to be either actual or illusive. If it is actual there is an ontological object corresponding to the epistemological object, but if it is illusive we have an epistemological object without leading to the ontological object. The perceptual situation is distinctly direct while the conceptual situation is discursive and can extend to anything whether it is taken to be actual or illusory.

Mostly the Sautrantikas emphasized on the non-discursive, direct intuitive aspect of knowledge which alone leads to the real.

Vasubandhu describes *pratyaksha* as a cognition that is produced by the object of which it is the cognition. The cognition of rope, for instance is an instance of *pratyaksha* if and only if in so far as it is produced and wholly conditioned by rope as an existent fact. On the other hand the cognition of snake in the presence of a rope cannot be called *pratyaksha* for it is not caused by the object of which it claims to be cognition. In this instant the snake is non-existent at the time and place at which it seems to be perceived and so cannot causally determine the cognition in question. It is interesting to note the Buddhists out rightly denied the perceptual character of the so-called *pratyaksha* of individual object such as rope, tree and the like. For them what we directly perceived is only a quality or part of an object. What is directly sensed is combined with certain images and ideas of other associated qualities or parts and there by produces a complex cognition of an object. Such complex cognitions are not perceptions according to the Buddhists for they are not directly produced by the object alone.

Dignâga's definition of perception:

Dignâga brings out the implications of Vasubandhu's definition of *pratyaksha*. For him if perceptual cognition is solely determined by its object, it must be wholly given and not otherwise constructed by the mind. Dignâga defines *pratyaksha* as that cognition which is free from conceptual construction (*kalpanâpodham*)². *Kalpâna*³ consists in associating an immediate awareness with a word, which can be classified into 5 categories. They are 1) Name – the person whom I see is Devadatta 2) Genus – he is a man I see 3) Quality – he is dark 4) Action – he is walking 5) Substance – connection with other thing – he is carrying a stick. So, in order to be free from determination, it must be free from all the above determinates (*kalpânas*).

From this it follows that, *pratyaksha* is that which is not spoken of by a name or class or quality or action or connections. What is cognized by us is a unique individual that does not admit of any descriptive by concepts and words. Words and concepts express such aspects of things as are general or common to many things. Hence what is individual is to be directly felt or intuited, but not expressed by words or concepts. Thus, *pratyaksha* is just the cognition of an

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immediately given datum and is completely free from all subjective or conceptual determinations.

Post-Dignâga definition of perception:

Dharmakirti while endorsing Dignâga definition of *pratyaksha* in terms of *kalpânapodham* adds the term *abhrântam*⁴ to the Dignâga's definition of *pratyaksha*. According to Dharmakirti, of two means of cognition namely *pratyaksha* and *anumâna*; *pratyaksha* is that cognition which is free from conceptual construction and non-illusory.

To the Dignâga's definition of *pratyaksha* the addition of the word *abhrântam*, by Dharmakirti has been a subject of controversy within the Buddhist fold. According to Stcherbatsky⁵, there are three reasons for dropping the term '*abhrântam*' by Dignâga. Firstly, an illusion is in the form of a perceptual judgment while sensation alone does not lead to judgment. Pure sensation does not contain any judgment, right or wrong in as much as it is non-constructive. If illusiveness, necessarily involves mental constructiveness, then non-illusiveness implies the absence of mental or conceptual construction. Hence, the term '*abhrântam*' is a repetition of *kalpânapodham*. Secondly, Dignâga wanted his logic to be acceptable to both the realists, who admitted the reality of the external world and the idealists who denied its reality. In other words, the definition in terms of which pure sensation is passive and non-constructive is commonly acceptable both the realists and idealists. For Dignâga, inclusion of the term, '*abhrântam*' imply taking a sure side with the realists to the disregard of the idealists. Thirdly, the term '*abhrântam*' had many interpretations; its inclusion would lead to conflicting views⁶.

Among the reasons cited above the first reason is alone is sufficient to offer a reasonable justification for dropping the term '*abhrântam*' in Dignâga's definition. Because freedom from conceptual construction means absence of perceptual judgments and thus includes the essence of non-illusiveness. Dharmakirti differs with Dignâga on this issue. According to Dharmakirti if illusions were simple, mental, or conceptual construction, freedom from conceptual construction (*kalpânapodham*) would be enough as the defining feature of *pratyaksha*. But there are a number of cases of perceptual errors that are caused by the operation of senses. Whether Dignâga does not accord status of cause to the senses in the

emergence of illusions is a point worth proving, for there is a general impression that all illusions, for Dignâga are due to conceptual construction only. Does Dignâga holds the term '*abhrântam*' to the definition of *pratyaksha* to be logically unnecessary superfluous or repetitive or thinks it as contradictory to the self-sufficient definition is a matter of debate.

According to Dharmakirti the addition of the term '*abhrântam*' to the definition of *pratyaksha* is not superfluous. According to his free from conceptual construction (*kalpânâpodham*) is not the sufficient defining mark of *pratyaksha*. Perceptual errors are not the offspring of the mind alone. Certain cases of sense illusions like double moon occur only when the senses are under duress or defect. Identifying this essential empirical point is of utmost logical importance in providing a complete definition of *pratyaksha*.

While analyzing the concept of valid knowledge Dharmakirti mentions two characteristics of *pramânha* namely 1) lack of disharmony of knowledge with object 2) revealer of a hitherto unknown object. This is because cognition is *avisamhavadaka* if there is not lack of harmony between the putative cognition and the object there of. In case of *abhrântam* on the other hand, is absence of illusion or false cognition arising out of defects of the senses.

It is a fact that in our daily life like illusions, hallucinations and dreams resemble *pratyaksha* and are contradicted by subsequent experiences. Valid *pratyaksha* should not be contradicted by subsequent experiences, and should be effective in producing results. Had illusions, hallucinations and dreams are only mental episodes, *kalpânâpodhatva* as the only defining mark would have sufficed. But Dharmakirti holds that some illusions arise from the operation of specific sense organs and vanish with the cessation of the operation of the sense organ in question. If all illusions were purely mental errors than these errors would disappear if the persons experiencing them were convinced of their erstwhile understanding. If organic defect is not accorded the status of a cause, then it should be possible for a jaundiced person to cease to perceive things yellow even if the jaundice is not cured, by merely a suitable manipulation in mental conditions.

We have another justification for Dharmakirti's inclusion of the term '*abhrântam*'. As noticed earlier for Dignâga's the object of *pratyaksha* is a unique particular namely *svalaksahna* which is capable of appearing in *pratyaksha*.

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When we come across on perceiving, rope as snake how can Dignâga's definition explain the arising of snake form in place of rope form. That is snake *svalaksahna* in place of rope *svalaksahna*. If the term 'abhrântam' is not added to the definition of *pratyaksha* then the appearance of illusory snake will amount to grasping of a *svalaksahna*. Will this be then in harmony with reality? If this is a harmony in reality, then along with illusory snake, other illusory phenomena such as perception of moving-tree, double-moon, yellow-conch-shell will also have to be accepted as stemming from certain corresponding *svalaksahnas*. We are therefore left with two alternatives. We have either to suffer the pain of accepting the illusions as cases perceptions or rule out such cases of apprehension from the domain of *pratyaksha* as *pramâna*, by introducing the term *abhrântam*. Thus, to exclude such cognitions such as moving tree, yellow conch-shell etc from the domain of *pratyaksha* the term 'abhrântam' was introduced in the definition by Dharmakirti.

References

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