

# History and Content of Nyaya Philosophy

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Naiyyayikas or Nyaya is also the name of one of the six orthodox (astika) schools of Hinduism. This school's most significant contribution to Indian philosophy was systematic development of the theory of logic and methodology. The founder of the Nyaya system of philosophy was the sage Gautama and an influential collection of texts on Nyaya is his Nyayasutras. As he was also known as Aksapada, this system is also sometimes referred to as the Aksapada system. Nyaya philosophy is primarily concerned with the conditions of correct knowledge and the means of receiving the knowledge. Nyaya is related to several other concepts and words used in Indian philosophies: Hetu-vidya (science of causes), Anviksiki (science of inquiry or critical study or systematic philosophy), Pramana-Sastra (science of correct knowledge), Tattva Sastra (science of categories), Nyaya Vidya or Tarka Sastra (science of reasoning, logic and innovation) Vadartha (science of discussion) and Phakkika Sastra (science of uncovering fraud, error, finding fakes). Nyaya system analyses the nature and source of knowledge and its validity and non-validity. Using systematic reasoning, this school of philosophy develops and uses a concrete method of discriminating between true knowledge and false knowledge. Nyayasutras is said to have been composed between 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.C.

## Method and Aims

Nyaya philosophy asserts that obtaining valid knowledge of the external world and its relationship with the mind and self is the only way to attain liberation. If one masters the logical techniques of reasoning and applies in his life, he will be free from suffering. Determining true knowledge is not the final goal of Nyaya school. Logical criticism is viewed only as an instrument of discriminating valid from invalid knowledge. The ultimate goal of Nyaya philosophy, like that of the other systems of Indian philosophy, is liberation- freeing from pain and suffering. It is a philosophy of life, even though it is mainly concerned with the study of logic.

Naiyyayika scholars approached philosophy as a form of direct realism, stating that anything that really exists is in principle humanly knowable. To them, correct knowledge and understanding is different than simple, reflexive cognition; it requires anuvyavasaya i. e. cross-examination. Nyaya school like other schools of Hinduism believes that there is a soul and self. It holds that human suffering results from mistakes or defects produced by activity under wrong knowledge or ignorance. Moksha (liberation), it states, is gained through right knowledge or removal of ignorance or wrong knowledge. This led Nyaya to concern itself for the reliable means to gain correct knowledge and to remove wrong notions. False knowledge is not

merely ignorance to Naiyyayikas, it includes delusion. Correct knowledge is discovering and overcoming one's delusions, and understanding true nature of soul, self and reality.

### **History of Nyaya Sastra**

The historical development of Nyaya school is unclear, although Nasadiya hymns of book 10, chapter 129 of Rigveda recite its spiritual questions in logical propositions. Francis Xavier Clooney, an American priest and scholar in the teachings of Hinduism argues that in early centuries B.C., the Nyaya scholars began compiling the science of rational, coherent inquiry and pursuit of knowledge. Later in 2<sup>nd</sup> century A. C. Aksapada Gautama had composed Nyayasutras and subsequent Nyaya scholars that followed refined, expanded, and applied it to spiritual questions. Although early Nyaya scholars did not express their idea clearly on whether supernatural power or God exists or not, later scholars, such as Udayana, examined various arguments on theism and attempted to prove existence of God. Other Nyaya scholars offered arguments to disprove the existence of God.

### **Sixteen Padartas or Divisions of Studying Reality**

The Nyaya metaphysics recognizes sixteen Padartas or categories of studying both manifest and unmanifest reality. These sixteen categories are:

- a) Pramana, (source or means of valid knowledge)
- b) Prameya (objects of knowledge)
- c) Samsaya (doubt)
- d) Prayojana (aim)
- e) Drstanta (example)
- f) Siddanta (doctrine)
- g) Avayavas (constituents of inference)
- h) Tarka (hypothetical reasoning or argument)
- i) Nirnaya (conclusion)
- j) Baada or Vaada (discussion)
- k) Jalpa (wrangling)
- l) Vitanda (irrational reasoning)
- m) Hetvabaasa (fallacy)
- n) Chala (unfair reply)
- o) Jati (generality based on a false analogy) and
- p) Nigrahastana (ground for defeat)

### **Pramana (Source of Valid Knowledge)**

Pramana, a Sanskrit word, literally means 'means of knowledge'. It is a reliable or valid means by which or through which human beings gain accurate or true knowledge. The focus of Pramana is how correct knowledge can be acquired, how one knows, how one doesn't know, and to what extent knowledge related to someone or something can be acquired. The Naiyyayikas accepted four valid means (pramana) of obtaining valid knowledge:

- a) Perception (Pratyaksa): Perception is knowledge produced by the contact of the senses with the objects of the world. There are two types of perceptions: Laukika (ordinary) and Alaukika (extraordinary). Ordinary perception is based on direct experience of reality by eyes, ears, nose, touch and taste. Gautama says it as “non-erroneous cognition which is produced by the intercourse of sense-organs with the objects”. When the object is not directly present to the senses but is conveyed to the senses through unusual modes, is called extraordinary perception. Ordinary perception is either determinate (savikalpa) or indeterminate (nirvikalpa). The first is called nirvikalpa (indeterminate), when one just perceives an object without being able to know its features, and the second savikalpa (determinate), when one is able to clearly know an object. Extraordinary perceptions are of three kinds- perception of classes (samanyalaksana), perception based on association (jnanalaksana) and intuitive perception (yogaja). The realization that all people are mortal is an instance for the perception of classes. When one says that something looks delicious, or that a block of ice looks cold, or that a stone looks hard, he is saying on the basis of past experience. The perception of an object on the basis of one’s knowledge of the similar object in the past is called perception based on association. Intuitive perception is knowledge born of yoga practices. It does not depend on sense-object contact. It can never be false. It is perceived after the mind is cleansed through yogic practices.
- b) Inference (Anumana): Inference is the ‘cognition or knowledge that follows from some other knowledge’. The methodology of inference involves a combination of induction and deduction by moving from particular to particular via generality. It has five steps, as in the example shown:
- i) There is fire on the hill (called pratijna or statements- required to be proved)
  - ii) Because there is smoke there (called hetu or reason)
  - iii) Wherever there is smoke, there is fire, e.g., in a kitchen (called udaharana or example of vyapti)
  - iv) The hill has smoke that is pervaded by fire (called upanaya or universal proposition)
  - v) Therefore, there is fire on the hill (called nigamana or conclusion)

In Nyaya terminology for this example, the hill would be called as paksa (minor term), the fire is called as sadya (major term), the smoke is called as hetu, and the relationship between the smoke and the fire is called as vyapti (middle term). Hetu further has five characteristics: (1) It must be present in the paksa, (2) It must be present in all positive instances, (3) It must be absent in all negative instances, (4) It must not be incompatible with the minor term or paksa and (5) All other contradictions by other means of knowledge should be absent. The fallacies in anumana (hetvabhasa) may occur due to the following:

- (i) Asiddha: It is the unproved hetu that results in this fallacy. It is of three types- Ashrayasiddha: If paksa (minor term) itself is unreal, then there cannot be locus of the hetu. e.g., The sky-lotus is fragrant, because it is a lotus like any other lotus. Svarupasiddha: Hetu cannot exist in paksa at all. E.g., sound is a quality, because it is visible. Vyapyatvasiddha: Conditional hetu- ‘wherever there is fire, there is smoke’. The presence of smoke is due to wet fuel.
- (ii) Savyabhichara: This is the fallacy of irregular hetu. It is also of three types- Sadarana: The hetu is too wide. It is present in both sapaksa and vipaksa. ‘The hill has fire because it is knowable’. Asadarana: The hetu is too narrow. It is only present in the paksa, it is not present in the sapaksa and in the

vipaksa. ‘Sound is eternal because it is audible’. Anupasamhari: Here the hetu is non-exclusive. The hetu is all-inclusive and leaves nothing by way of sapaksa or vipaksha. e.g., ‘All things are non-eternal, because they are knowable’.

- (iii) Satpratipaksa: Here the hetu is contradicted by another hetu. If both have equal force, then nothing follows. ‘Sound is eternal, because it is audible’, and ‘sound is non-eternal, because it is produced’. Here ‘audible’ is counterbalanced by ‘produced’ and both are of equal force.
- (iv) Baadita: When another proof (as by perception) definitely contradicts and disproves the middle term (hetu). ‘Fire is cold because it is a substance’.
- (v) Virudda: Instead of proving something it is proving the opposite. ‘Sound is eternal because it is produced’.
- c) Comparison (Upamana) or Analogy: It means comparison and analogy. Upamana, states Lochtefeld, may be explained with the example of a traveller who has never visited lands or islands with endemic population of wildlife. He or she is told, by someone who has been there, that in those lands you see an animal that sort of looks like a cow, grazes like cow but is different from a cow in such and such way. Such use of analogy and comparison is, state the Indian epistemologists, a valid means of conditional knowledge, as it helps the traveller identify the new animal later. The subject of comparison is formally called upameyam, the object of comparison is called upamana, while the attribute(s) are identified as samanya. Thus, explains Monier Williams, if a boy says ‘her face is like the moon in charmingness’, ‘her face’ is upameyam, the moon is upamana, and charmingness is samanya. The 7<sup>th</sup> century text Bhaṭṭi-kavya in verses 10.28 through 10.63 discuss many types of comparisons and analogies, identifying when this epistemic method is more useful and reliable, and when it is not. In various ancient and medieval texts of Hinduism, 32 types of upamana and their value in epistemology are debated.
- d) Testimony (Sabda): Sabda means relying on word, testimony of past or present reliable experts. Hiriyanna explains sabda-pramana as a concept which means testimony of a reliable and trustworthy person (aptavakya). The schools of Hinduism which consider it epistemically valid suggest that a human being needs to know numerous facts, and with the limited time and energy available, he can learn only a fraction of those facts and truths directly. He must rely on others, his parent, family, friends, teachers, ancestors and kindred members of society to rapidly acquire and share knowledge and thereby enrich each other's lives. This means of gaining proper knowledge is either spoken or written, but through Sabda (words). The reliability of the source is important, and legitimate knowledge can only come from the Sabda of reliable sources. The disagreement between the schools of Hinduism has been on how to establish reliability. Some schools, such as Charvaka, state that this is never possible, and therefore Sabda is not a proper Pramana. Other schools debate means to establish reliability. Testimony can be of two types, Vaidika (Vedic), which are the words of the four sacred Vedas, and Laukika, or words and writings of trustworthy human beings. Vaidika testimony is preferred over laukika testimony. Laukika-sourced knowledge must be questioned and revised as more trustworthy knowledge becomes available.

### **Prameya (Objects of Knowledge)**

Prameya may be defined as ‘that which is knowable’ or ‘the object of true knowledge’. The term prameya has been derived from the Sanskrit word, ‘pramaa’, which means buddhi or cognition. That which is the object of buddhi is called prameya. Prameyas of true knowledge can be classified into twelve objects:

- a) Atman
- b) Body
- c) Five indriyas (panchendriyas) or senses such as, nose, tongue, eyes, skin, and ears
- d) Five arthas or the objects of the senses such as, smell, taste, sight, touch, and hearing
- e) Buddhi or cognition
- f) Mind or manas
- g) Karma or pravrti or activities such as, vocal, mental and physical
- h) Mental defects or dosa such as, attachment (raaga), hatred (dvesa) and infatuation or delusion (moha)
- i) Rebirth or pretyabhaava- life after death
- j) Results or phala, i.e., fruits of actions as pain and pleasure
- k) Suffering or dukkha, the bitter experience of the mind
- l) Freedom from suffering or apavarga, liberation from pain, i.e., moksa

### **Doubt or Samsaya**

It is the position in which the mind oscillates between conflicting views regarding a single object or keeps moving from one position to another. Doubt is a product of a confused state of mind, that is not able to ascertain uncontested knowledge. It implies the existence of at least two alternative positions. It is neither certain knowledge nor a mere reflection of knowledge nor is it invalid knowledge. It does not provide any definite conclusion.

### **Aim or Prayojana**

It denotes the objective or aim of actions. It is not important whether that aim is fully realized or understood or just presumed. One always tries to realize desirable objects or get rid of undesirable- the pleasing and unpleasing objects that inspires or motivates one’s activities are called prayojana.

### **Example or Drstanta**

Example is something such as an object, a fact or a situation which shows, explains or supports what one says. It is used to illustrate a common fact or to establish an argument or position. When one argues that there must be fire because there is smoke, he may use the example of smoke in the kitchen to establish the permanent relationship between the fire and smoke. It is a common occurrence and be readily accepted by both the parties.

### **Doctrine or Siddanta**

Doctrine is a set of beliefs accepted as an uncontested truth and that forms as the foundation for the theory of a particular system of philosophy. This truth may be derived either from direct experience or from

logic or reasoning. For instance, it is the doctrine of Vedanta philosophy that God is all-pervading and omnipotent.

### **Avayava or Constituents of Inference**

It means parts or constituents of inference. They are the sources or methods of obtaining correct knowledge. Nyaya philosophy says if an inference contains five necessary constituents, then it can provide correct or definite knowledge. Five constituents include:

- a) Pratijna or statements
- b) Hetu or reason
- c) Udaharana or example
- d) Upanaya or universal proposition, and
- e) Nigamana or conclusion

### **Tarka or Hypothetical Argument**

Tarka is a Sanskrit word that means 'reasoning', 'inquiry', 'conjecture' 'logic' or 'speculation'. It is a process of questioning and cross-questioning that leads to a particular conclusion. It is a method that can be used as an aid to the attainment of valid or definite knowledge. It can become an important instrument for analyzing a common statement and for segregating true or valid knowledge from false, uncertain and invalid knowledge.

### **Nirnaya or Conclusion**

Nirnaya is a definite knowledge obtained by using proper or legitimate means. The doubts of the mind regarding the correctness or validity of a conclusion can be resolved by the means of tarka. Conclusion may be based on direct perception, inference, testimony or intuition. But it is not always essential for a conclusion to pass through a doubtful state.

### **Baada or Vaada or Discussion**

Baada is a discussion that takes place between the exponent and the opponent on a particular subject. This is one of the effective methods of ascertaining true knowledge according to Nyaya philosophy. In baada, each party involved, tries to establish its own specific position as correct and refute the other by employing the means of reasoning or logic.

### **Jalpa or Wrangling**

Wrangling is a method by which the opposing parties try to attain victory over the other by hook or crook. There may not be an honest attempt to receive valid knowledge; there may be an involvement of ego being overtaking the path discovering the true or genuine knowledge. It possesses all the characteristics of a real and valid debate except that of aiming to unearth valid knowledge. In it, each group is prejudiced over its own view and thus, tries to gather all possible arguments in its favour.

### **Vitanda or Irrational Reasoning**

Irrational reasoning is a thinking, talking, or acting without inclusion of rationality. It is an action or opinion given through inadequate use of reason, or through emotional distress or cognitive deficiency. It is an argumentation aimed, exclusively, if not substantially, to refuting or denouncing opponent's position without concerning much about establishing or defending one's own position. In wrangling both the parties try to establish their respective positions, in vitanda either or both tries to refute each other's position.

### **Hetvabaasa or Specious Reasoning**

Hetvabaasa is an argument or analysis which has the apparent ring of truth or plausibility but is actually fallacious. Many specious arguments are used as support for strongly held beliefs but truly they are false. In short, it is an irrational argument. It is reasoning that appears to be valid but is really unfounded. It is a fallacy of inference.

### **Chala or Unfair Reply**

Chala is basically aimed to cheat or fool someone. In it, one takes a word or phrase that has been used in a particular sense, pretends to understand it in a sense other than that which was intended, and then denies the truth of this deliberate misinterpretation of the original speaker's words. It is a biased and not just method of getting the authentic knowledge.

### **Jati or Generality based on a False Analogy**

It is a technical term used to describe a debate in which an unfair reply or conclusion is based on false analogy. For instance, if someone argues that sound is noneternal because it is an effect of a certain cause, just as a pot is produced from clay, another may reply that sound must be eternal because it is nonmaterial like the sky. This counterargument of attempting to prove the eternity of sound by comparing it with the nonmaterial sky is fallacious, because there is not necessarily a universal relationship between the nonmaterial and the eternal.

### **Nigrahastana or Grounds for Defeat**

It may be defined as the grounds on which a person is defeated in his argument. When a proponent misunderstands his own or his opponent's premises and their implications, then he becomes helpless and must eventually admit his defeat in the debate. The point at which he accepts his defeat is called nigrahastana.

### **Concept of God**

Although early Naiyyayikas wrote very little about Isvara (literally, the Supreme Soul), evidences available suggest that they were non-theistic or atheists. Later, they attempted to answer a question: does God exist? Some offered arguments against and some in favour. According to the central aspect of Nyaya school, God is the efficient cause of creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe. God does not create the world out of zero or out of himself but out of the eternal atoms of space, time, mind and soul. The creation of the universe refers to the ordering of these eternal entities, which are in coexistence with God,

into a mortal world. Thus, God is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe and possess six perfections:

- a) Infinite glory
- b) Absolute sovereignty
- c) Unqualified virtue
- d) Supreme beauty
- e) Perfect knowledge, and
- f) Complete detachment

### **Concept of Liberation**

Like all other systems of Indian philosophy, the Nyaya system maintains that the ultimate goal of human life is to attain liberation. By liberation is meant absolute freedom from all pain and misery. This denotes a position in which the soul is completely released from all bondage and from the body. It is impossible for the soul to free itself from the bondage unless it is disassociated from the body and senses. The bondage is due to false knowledge, which can be annihilated by acquiring true knowledge. So, the opening aphorism of the Nyaya Sutra states that only the true knowledge led to nihsreyasa (liberation). But the Nyaya school also maintains that God's grace is essential for obtaining true knowledge. Jayanta, in his work Nyayamanjari describes salvation as a passive stage of self in its natural purity, unassociated with pleasure, pain, knowledge and willingness. Knowing and acquiring true knowledge is called tattvajnana. Thus, true knowledge leads a person to the state where there is no cycle of birth and death. This state is called liberation. Nyaya philosophy suggests a three-stage path for attaining liberation:

- a) Sravana- study of the spiritual scriptures and listen to the words of authoritative and learned persons and saints
- b) Manana- using reasoning powers to ponder over what he has learned.
- c) Nididhyasana- one must contemplate on the soul, confirm his knowledge, and practice that truth in his life.

### **Notion of the Individual Soul**

Nyaya philosophy argues that soul is a unique substance, of which all pleasures, pains, desires, aversions, and cognitions are qualities. It consists of the living physical body and its attributes. The body is not the soul because immaterial consciousness cannot be said to be an attribute of the material body, which in itself is unconscious and unintelligent. The soul experiences the external world through the mind and senses. There are different souls in different bodies. It is indestructible and eternal, and its attribute is consciousness. Because it is not limited by time and space, it is also seen as infinite and all-pervading. There are many souls, because one person's experiences do not overlap those of another person; one's experience is completely distinct from any others.

### **Nature of the Physical World**

Nyaya philosophy classifies the objects of the world into twelve major elements, such as, soul, body, senses, objects of the senses, buddhi, mind, activity, mental modifications, rebirth, feeling, suffering and

freedom from all sufferings. Not all these objects of knowledge are found in the physical world because the physical world is composed only of the four gross elements- earth, water, fire and air. Although the soul and the mind are involved in the physical world, they are not physical elements. Time and space are completely nonmaterial, but they nonetheless belong to the physical world. Akasa or space or ether is considered to be a physical element, but it is not considered to be a productive cause of anything. Thus, the Nyaya philosophy of the physical world is very similar to that of the Vaisesika school.

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