

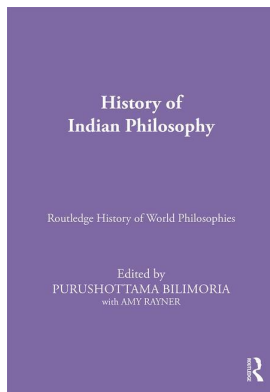
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Chapter 3

PRAMĀNA EPISTEMOLOGY: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENTS¹

Purushottama Bilimoria

While the Vaiśeṣika system began with an inquiry into metaphysics and ontological categories (*prameya*), and moved gradually towards strengthening its treatment of epistemology, the Nyāya school began with a specialization in epistemology and the methodology of investigation. The *Nyāya-sūtra* commences with the very expression *pramāṇa* ‘means of cognition’ and ends with a sūtra on *hetvābhāsa* ‘fallacious reasoning’, and *pramāṇabhāsa* ‘pseudo-pramāṇa’ (Thakur 1967, NS: 1, 18). Of the sixteen categories (*padārtha*-s) to be treated in the Nyāya system, fifteen are concerned with the *pramāṇa*-s; the remaining one is designated as *prameya* ‘objects to be correctly cognized [for gaining the highest good, *niḥśreya*] by means of the right deployment of *pramāṇa*-s’ (NB: 32, 183). In Nyāya, interestingly, these categories cannot be known without reference to the proper epistemic methodology: hence the supervenience on the *pramāṇa*-s. That is why the Nyāya has come famously to be known as *pramāṇaśāstram*, the science of correct cognition.

Where does the idea of *pramāṇa* come from, what are its origins, and is there treatment of this investigative methodology that pre-dates the Nyāya?

The first appearance of *pramāṇa* theory is arguably in medical literature, particularly in *Caraka-saṃhitā* and, to a lesser extent, *Suśruta-saṃhitā*. In the former, dated to around the first to second century CE, is to be found the theory of *pramāṇa*, i.e. the instruments or means by which knowledge is acquired. In *Suśruta* (dated around third century CE), the term *pramāṇa* seems to denote ‘measurement’ or size. Caraka was keen to suggest a form of inquiry that requires the practitioner to investigate the cause of the disease of discomfort as per the symptoms presented, the means by which the ailment could be alleviated, and the prognosis, or predictability of the healing and survival prospects of the patient. It is the first part of the inquiry – the search for the unobserved and perhaps unobservable cause of the disease – that calls

for perception, induction, abduction, analogy, and a conclusion: in other words systematic reasoning. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya added *naya* as calculative logic (in multivariate forms we get *nyāya*) to be part of the larger artful practice of *ānvīkṣikī* (inquiry, wisdom, investigation). Caraka offers a rigorous, detailed description of the components of ‘debate’ (*vāda*), that includes, among other methodological devices, a full discussion of the parts of formal inference, the *pramāṇa*-s, distinguishing sound from unsound arguments, and the value and protocols of argument (Lusthaus 2013, 151, 157).

Various schools proposed different *pramāṇa*-s as viable means of acquiring certain knowledge. Virtually all agreed that perception and logical inference were *pramāṇa*-s (with the Cārvākas or materialists rejecting inference, and some Buddhists rejecting perception). Other Hindu schools included in the list *śabdapramāṇa* or reliable testimony (see below), as a viable source of knowledge (which too the Buddhist rejected); additional *pramāṇa*-s proposed by others included ‘comparison’, ‘analogy’, and also ‘absence’ (either as stand-alone valid cognitions or subordinated to perception and inference, as for the Buddhist and the Vaiśeṣika). Caraka in his *Caraka-saṃhitā* (CS) describes perception (*pratyakṣa*) as contact between the self and what is present; inference, on the other hand, is explained as a cognition based on having previously perceived or learned something. There are three types of inferences, corresponding to inferences about the past, present, and future. ‘Fire is inferred from smoke, and sexual intercourse from pregnancy’ (present and past, respectively), and a future fruit can be inferred from a seed, based on having previously observed, i.e. perceived, that process (CS: 209 [ch. 11, passages 21–22]). Caraka also adds an intriguingly new *pramāṇa* not found anywhere else, namely, synthetic inductive reasoning (*yukta-pramāṇa*, or just *yukta*), which he explains with the help of examples, thus:

Growth of crops from the combination of irrigation, ploughed land, seed and seasons; formation of embryo from the combination of six *dhātus* (five *mahābhūta*-s and *Ātman*); Production of fire from the combination of the lower-fire-drill, upper fire-drill, and the act of drilling; cure of diseases by four-fold efficient therapeutic measures.

(CS, 11: 23–24; Lusthaus 2013, 160)

Lusthaus (*ibid.*) explains *yukta* here to mean something like: the coordination of multiple factors converging into a trajectory in which something is changed or transformed. It is a method of taking into account the coordination of multiple causes, a process with contributive factors that might affect the outcome, as in crops or medical treatments. There is no one-to-one cause–effect relation between a seed and the fruit; there are multiple contributing and additional factors that mediate it. So *yukta* (from *yukti*, to tie) carries out the task of connecting together or grouping *x* number of factors to produce a result; it later comes to be one of the numerous terms for ‘reasoning’ or ‘logic’. As can be seen, diagnosis is inductive, not purely deductive. Unlike *yukta*, inference or *anumāna* is treated as inferring from a specific condition or cause to a

specific effect, i.e. a fruit from a seed. Caraka also insists that inference requires previous perception (*pratyakṣa-pūrva*). One recognizes the relation between the fruit and seed on the basis of prior observations of this process, and so one can predict a future fruit is likely from a present planted seed.

We shall now leave the discussion of the origins of *pramāṇa* theory and move to its robust development in classical Indian philosophy, mostly during the medieval period.

So let us take it that as far as the theory goes, *pramāṇa* deals with the question of the possibility and grounds for means of knowledge, and issues relating to the justification of the knowledge so obtained, or the criteria for discerning correct knowledge from ignorance and false understanding. For valid knowledge (*pramā*) to be produced, the instrument (*karaṇa*) must be reliably valid also (*pramākaraṇaṃ pramāṇam* (VP 1971, #3). In other words, correct knowledge can be attained only through the instrumental efficiency (*karaṇa*) of a valid and reliable means of knowing. And there are distinct forms of *pramāṇa* for each kind of objective (and trans-objective) knowledge, beginning as we saw earlier with the more or less uniformly accepted *pramāṇa* of perception.

Mysore Hiriyanna (1973, 178), who was amongst the first modern Indian philosophers to attempt to make the discourse of *pramāṇa* intelligible to a non-Indian audience, explicated *pramāṇa* in terms of three basic functions: first, knowledge; second, a means of scrutinizing, criticizing, evaluating through ratiocination the understanding or knowledge-claim derived through the source; third, as *prāmāṇya*, the ‘measurement’ in terms of the criteria for ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’, which is characterized as the problem of validity. Together these constitute the grounds for the possibility of knowing.

In the rest of the chapter we shall delineate three major areas within *pramāṇa-śāstra* which have engaged modern minds, and describe the ways in which these have been interpreted and their ramifications explored or extended in the light of contemporary critical reflections. These comprise *jñāna* or ‘awareness-episode’ – and related to that *pramā* or ‘knowledge’ as *true* awareness – *prāmāṇya* or the notion of validity or ‘truth’, and, by way of illustration, very briefly, the *pramāṇa*-s of perception and *śabda* or linguistic statements as reliable testimony.

Jñāna

One of the concepts central to the *pramāṇa* theories is *jñāna*, which at a general level is cognate with the Western term ‘cognition’: only after much further qualification could it be rendered as ‘knowledge’. Not all schools, however, were agreed on the exact epistemic status of *jñāna*. It was ambiguously used for experience which is neutral as to its truth or falsity and for cognition with truth-value. Thus there could be *jñāna* that is neither true nor false, and there could be *jñāna* that could be true, as there could be *jñāna* that could be false or in error.

Recent authors have discussed this issue at length in the attempt to arrive at some consensus. The rendering of *jñāna* as ‘knowledge’ has, by and large, been

rejected, since the term *pramā* seems better suited for this. Very simply, *jñāna* may be taken to be a mental or psychical act or ‘episode’, and in this respect may denote ‘ideation’, ‘remembering’, ‘doubting’, ‘wondering’, ‘guessing’, ‘dreaming’, ‘inferring’, ‘understanding’, and so on, as modes of experience (*anubhava*) (Bilimoria 1985). More fundamentally, however, *jñāna* has the nuance of ‘cognition’ or, more correctly, ‘awareness’. Potter (1984) argued that *jñāna* should be rendered as ‘an act of awareness’ in the sense of cognitive or mental episode or occurrent, rather than as a disposition, which, say, ‘belief’ implies. In short, *jñāna* is an awareness, and only after such *jñāna* would amount to knowledge (*pramā*) as would yield truth. *Jñāna* as awareness, then, is the starting point in *pramāṇa* theory, for it provides the ‘subjective’ or phenomenological basis of ‘objective’ knowledge that is the supposed goal of epistemology (Matilal 1986, 23; 105–107).

But, again, a theory may circumscribe its conditions and requirements in such a way that *jñāna* may be identified with *pramā*, *ceteris paribus*.

At the outset two things should be said about *jñāna*: first, that it is direct and immediate (*vyavasāya*, *aparokṣānubūti*, at least in the case of sensory awareness); and, second, that it has a content (or ‘contentness’, *viśayatā*), that is to say, an awareness is intentional for it is *of* or *about* or *directed* towards an ‘object’ (either externally or internally) (Matilal 1986). Matilal links this observation with Peter Strawson’s notion of a pre-theoretic scheme or view of the world reflected in, and presupposed by, all our mature perceptual judgments (1986, 11). *Jñāna* has a relational-qualificative structure, which may be stated in terms of the two following stages: (1) whenever an object *x* features or ‘floats’ in my awareness, it presents itself there as something, ‘this’, ‘it’, i.e. under some guise or mode, distinguished in some way or other (this distinguishing element is called *viśeṣaṇa*); (2) the guise of mode (*prakāra*) under which the object is presented is the purported property or qualifier of the object *x*, the qualificand. This qualifier–qualified structure is regarded as implicit in the content of any cognitive episode that has a claim to be regarded as cognition: *F(a)* or *a* as qualified by or distinguished by *F*-ness. Using a different formulation, the oblique object I notice on the table would be like this:

Q (*this, cupness*).

In the next moment when tea is being poured into this vestibular object, I have this more complete qualificative experience (*viśiṣṭa*) in which the substratum is qualified by the property of object (*tadvidviśeṣyakam*):

Q (*cup, tea-ness*).

Although there is a causal element involved, this by no means amounts necessarily to a representational theory of cognition, though in some realist epistemologies it does (Matilal 1986, 374ff.). In other words, according to the Nyāya, the object of cognition, the sense-contact with the object and the contact with the qualified object of the form *a* is *F* are the appropriate causal conditions of a true perceptual cognition (Shaw 2007, 14).

A further observation is made that the structure of a qualificative awareness-episode can – but need not necessarily – be represented linguistically. The qualification is meant to restrict the stronger view supported by some Indian philosophers, such as Bhartṛhari (c.400–500 CE), that all knowledge is, as it were, shot through with language, i.e. that the phenomenological datum is itself essentially linguistic or conceptual. Some earlier Nyāya commentators seemed also to have maintained that the penetration of conceptual and verbal elements is necessary for an immediate but unformed experience to be presented as a well-formed judgment to consciousness. For most others, cognition and language are two distinct events (Sibajiban Bhattacharyya 1977; Bilimoria 2008b).

Prāmāṇya

Prāmāṇya is the other important category that we have chosen to discuss. *Prāmāṇya* has been rendered as ‘truth’ by Mohanty (1966, 77), and hence *prāmāṇya* has to do with a theory of truth and criteria for evaluation of truth and falsity of *jñāna*. But the theory is complicated by the fact that there are two wide divisions within Indian epistemology on the notion of ‘truth’, and how truth is constituted. The two divisions fall roughly into what are called the *svataḥ* (‘intrinsic’) and *parataḥ* (‘extrinsic’) theories or theses of truth. Either the conditions that generate the cognition also generate its truth (i.e. a *jñāna* is self-validating or is self-evidentially true), or the two conditions are different such that the ‘truth’ of the cognition requires certain supplemental factors or conditions *ab extra*. *Prima facie*, the *svataḥ* thesis seems to analytically rule out the possibility of error, for if the conditions that generate a cognition are those that yield its truth then no cognition would arise without its truth tagged on to it, so to speak. The *parataḥ* thesis would seem to be more in keeping with common-sense recognition of the possibility of error in every instance of awareness-episode. Mohanty (1966, 70–80), like a few other modern thinkers, tried to wrestle with the chasm between the two views, and came to the opinion that perhaps these views were responding to rather different sets of problems in the interests of quite different definitions and theories of truth. They might even be incommensurable (ibid., 1–2).

Karl Potter has tried to accommodate or reconcile the opposition between the two views by urging a radically different way of conceiving the relation between *jñāna* and its content. This relation is characterized by Potter (1984) in terms of purposive fulfillment, or satisfaction, taken as a mark of ‘fit’ for the content so ‘measured out’ by the awareness-episode in question. Potter construes the classical Sanskrit term that characterizes the relation of ‘fit’, namely, *yathārtha*, to mean “in accordance with the purpose that motivated J [jñāna]” (ibid., 312). The play obviously is on the troublesome term ‘*artha*’, which could mean ‘object’, ‘purpose’, ‘goal’, ‘system of ends’, and so on. The question, however, is whether any of these senses of *artha* are epistemically weighted as it appears to be in *prāmāṇya* discourse. Potter juxtaposes the thus-derived ‘purposive’ structure on the more familiar classical *prāmāṇya* theories, viz.: There is *prāmāṇya* where the qualificandum (i.e. the subject term) of a *jñāna* (1) possesses a certain property (*viśeṣaṇa*) which property is the chief qualifier (predicate term) of the

jñāna (J). Potter argues that the notion of ‘right’ awareness, implied in later Navya-nyāya definitions, as in certain Buddhist accounts, invariably relates itself to “previously identified purpose or purposive object” (1984, 313). But Potter has overstepped the strictures that the concept *prāmāṇya* is normally goaded with, and interpolates this in terms of another, albeit connected concept, namely, *sāmarthya* (or *samyaktva*), which has to do with satisfaction or purpose or desired goal. This enables Potter to argue, against the usual reading of *prāmāṇya* as ‘truth’, for a more or less pragmatic or ‘workability’ criterion in terms of the capacity of *jñāna* to effect satisfaction in action. If a ‘correspondence to reality’ is entailed in such a theory, for Potter this is to be interpreted in terms of the ‘fit’, or the ‘frustration’, of satisfaction that results from *jñāna*. Thus, ‘correspondence’ or *yathārthya* (literally, ‘such-as it actually is’) is subsumed under the satisfaction or *sāmarthya* principle (which might encompass ethical, normative, and aesthetic descriptions). In short, Potter opts for a reworking of the *prāmāṇya* concept towards a ‘workability’ theory of truth, wherein the chasm between ‘fact’ and ‘value’ is virtually collapsed (in the interest also of a noncognitivist approach to value theory).

A number of scholars have taken up Potter’s challenge indifferent ways, but virtually all are agreed that Potter’s proposal does not seem to square easily with the spirit of the classical theories. Mohanty, whose earlier ascription of a Justified True Belief theory of knowledge to the Indian philosophers was called into question by Potter, shifts his strategy and questions in turn the viability of the ‘workability’ interpretation of *prāmāṇya*. Mohanty (1984) first clarifies the two distinct understandings of *prāmāṇya* in the two opposing (Indian) theories of truth, in the following terms. It is true that the *svataḥ* theorists identify *prāmāṇya* with *jñānatva* (the property of ‘knowingness’) in such a way that the generating conditions of the two coincide. This *a fortiori* rules out error, which is opposed to *pramā* (true judgment), but by this definition *jñāna* is also opposed to error, considering also that *jñāna* reveals its object as having had no unknown existence prior to being apprehended while error does not. Thus, to have a *jñāna* (in the stronger sense) is to know something to be true. Either *apramā* or error and falsified judgments are not regarded as species of *jñāna* (excepting mistaken instances); or, alternatively, one might say with the Prābhākaras that all *jñāna* are *pramā*, there being no such thing as erroneous awareness or *apramā*. The Advaita Vedānta school opts for the former, while Nyāya maintains that even error or *apramā* is a species of *jñāna*, so that the generating conditions of truth (and falsity) do not coincide entirely with those of *jñāna*. Thus, to know (in the weaker sense) is tantamount to a ‘belief’ or simply a judgment that awaits confirmation or falsification. That is not to say, according to the Nyāya writers, that the truth of the cognition cannot arise simultaneously with the cognition; Nyāya says that their generating conditions are different. Hence, the judgment that it is raining outside might arise confirmed or with due certainty (*niścaya*) and without any doubt as to its truth. If a doubt subsequently arises, one might have to examine the special feature or ‘mark of excellence’ (*guṇa*) that gave the judgment its particular truth-value. There might have been a defect (*doṣa*) or a vitiating condition that gave rise to the error in the judgment, in which case the *jñāna* has to be rejected as being false or an instance of *apramā*.

As to the suggestion of *prāmāṇya* as ‘workability’, Mohanty and others have taken issue with Potter, arguing that:

- (a) it is based on a rather stretched interpolation of *artha* as purposive ‘object-value’ or *satisfaction*;
- (b) it involves testing in a practical action, when in fact *jñāna* need not as such entail in any action;
- (c) it equivocates on the dicta: *p* works because *p* is true, *p* is true because *p* works; and
- (d) practical outcome may well be significant for corroboration of the ‘truth-claim’, but is not essential to the determination of truth, which, according to the *svataḥ* thesis at least, is taken to be self-evidentially given (‘I know that *a* is *F*; it works, so I am quite sure that *a* is *F*’).

Thus, if falsification comes about as a result of doubt and subsequent tests or scrutiny, then the *a* is *F* is repudiated as being a conjecture and indeed its very claim to being a reliable *jñāna* is thereby undermined. Advaita would argue therefore that a *jñāna* is not a piece of knowledge which is not ‘true’ knowledge, and that ‘false’ knowledge is no knowledge at all: it is rather the opposite of knowledge, however mistaken one might have been about its truth-value. Clearly, an epistemological requirement is built into the Advaita definition of *jñāna*, and which therefore, under these circumstances, is quite appropriately translated as ‘knowledge’ (Mohanty 1984, 332).

Perception

There are several theories of perception in the Indian tradition, and the age-old controversies between idealism–realism–phenomenalism surface here as much as elsewhere. While the variety of phenomenism, and consequent anti-realism represented largely by the Buddhists (e.g. Dignāga, fourth century), has been expounded in earlier works (see relevant chapters in this volume), the overt realism in Indian theories of perception, represented largely by Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, has been contrasted with the ‘realisms’ of Anglo-American variety. On this Matilal has perhaps made the most advancement, and the ensuing discussion will draw on his *Perception* (1986) (see also Bilimoria 1980; Vaidya and Bilimoria 2015; Phillips and Chadha, both in this volume).

Bearing in mind the analysis in the foregoing sections, especially as regards the episodic (‘event-based’) interpretation of cognitive awareness, the general observation is made that all perceptual experiences, including those that we call illusory, imaginary, erroneous, even hallucinatory, have objects which they grasp, and that a causal explanation, in principle, is possible for each object grasped in perceptual experience. However, the precise ontological status of the perceptual object and the kind of causality involved are matters of intense dispute among the rival theories. While for the Buddhist, illusion is a ‘revelation of the non-existent’, for the Nyāya the principal object in illusion is a material object which, however, may not be present in the locus of perception but rather presented by memory, recollection, or sensory stimulation,

albeit wrongly connected with the experience, resulting in an experience overall of, but not a totally, non-existent object. Still, the question arises: what is it that one 'sees' first which triggers off this event? The answer to this has implications for the further analysis of non-illusory perceptual experience.

It might be argued that in the case of perceptual illusion, nothing is 'seen', that there is really no *perceiving* going on, only a belief or an inclination to believe that we are *immediately* perceiving something (Armstrong, in Matilal 1986, 218). The occurrence is said to be 'perceptual' in a rather loose sense of the term. But the Nyāya view, as explicated by Matilal, is that one does have a strong visual, tactical, etc. experience in such an illusion, and in this respect it is perceptual and so calls for explanation.

Alternatively, a sense-data theorist might say that what is immediately presented is a raw baggage of sense-data (even *unsensed* sense-data), which is mind-dependent, and that it is this that is causally responsible for our 'mediate' cognition of objects. She might further state that in the case of illusion a false inference is made of the existence of an actual object where none is present. Of course, much hinges on the coherence of the assumption, typified in most representationalist views, that our perception is based upon a causal inference from what is presented through the senses. Could it not be possible, as the phenomenalist maintains, that what we perceive is, in the final analysis, *constructed* out of what is presented through the senses? Let us say that for both the representationalist and phenomenalist views the *immediate* object of awareness is sense-impression, or a *sense-data*, or a sensible quality (thus the given in our sensory experience). The difference is in the way each links the sense-impressions to the external objects, regressively or progressively.

The Nyāya brings several objections to these two major positions, as well as against a variation of the phenomenalist view which considers the sense-data or percepts ('sensibilia') not to be mind-dependent but to be as *real* as the perception itself or the very object by which the awareness is also designated. Basically, it is argued that these views make a great deal of the distinction between immediate/direct and mediate/indirect, and that they posit entities (mental or physical) which are presented 'up front' as the properties or constituent parts and from which the perceptual object is (causally) derived or constructed piecemeal.

For one, the part-whole distinction seems to be spurious (Matilal 1986, 273) There are no parts without a whole: to speak of parts is to assume a whole of which they are said to be parts, even if they are now scattered apart. Do I see a 'part' of a chair (even if do not see its rear legs), or do I see the whole chair, and possibly the parts in virtue of seeing the whole chair? Do I see a tomato in virtue of the red patch that appears in front of me – for if I did, would I not be seeing two things, albeit in sequence, viz. the red patch and the tomato? Do we ever see properties, as it were, hanging in mid-air, independent of the substance which they qualify? Even those Buddhists who dismissed the existence of substantive entities were moved to grant nominal existence to the composite entity made up of the qualias of color, shape, tactical feel, etc., which in themselves might be imperceptible or 'unsensed' (ibid., 246).

Second, although it is true that our normal perceptual judgment ‘goes beyond’ the sensory experience which give rise to them, the ‘gap’ need not be as large as it has often been assumed; and while in many instances we do make inferences from what is immediately presented, a theory of perception need not devolve around these factors and these factors alone. Again, the Nyāya argument in favor of its own more radical theory of what Matilal has christened ‘naïve’ or ‘direct realism’ dwells on the inappropriateness of the part–whole distinction underlying most ‘indirect’ theories of perception (whether realist or idealist). Nyāya gets round the obviously common-sense assumption that the relation between parts and whole (e.g. branch and tree) is contingent by suggesting that the relation that obtains is in fact one of inherence (*samavāya*), such that one could say that the tree is as much in the branch as the branch is in the tree! Thus when I see a tree and someone asks me later, “Did you see that drooping branch?” I might well reply, “I can’t quite recall ... but I did notice the tree being uneven.” I may have to go back and take a second look to ‘see’ the branch (a part) apart from the tree (the whole). Thus Nyāya argues in favor of whole–part distinction at the ontological level; while talking about perception Nyāya claims that we see the *whole* first in virtue of its having parts.

Arguing in such a manner, Matilal takes the Nyāya theory a stage further in contending that the traditional distinction between mediate and immediate objects of perception does not quite hold (1986, 267). And this provides grounds for casting serious doubts on the representationalist theory of perception, in respect of both its long-suspected assumption of sense-data and its formidable view of the causal relation between the sense-data and the object – apart from being locked into the Lockean dualism of secondary and primary qualities, one of which is imperceptible and therefore has to be inferred on the basis of the other (presumably perceptible).

To be sure, the troublesome term is not ‘causal’, for Nyāya has its own way of making the part ‘causally responsible’ for the perception of the body–whole. The following quotation from Matilal clarifies this point:

Nyāya direct realism eliminates the third entity, sense-datum, entirely from the discussion of perception. By giving a different *causal* explanation of perceptual illusion and hallucination Nyāya aims at characterizing the causal factors in a naive or non-specialist conception of perception. Obviously, then, the consideration for the so-called causal relation between sense-datum and the material object (which has been the cornerstone of modern representationalist and causal theorists) is conspicuous by its absence in Nyāya. It is not contended here that a person claims to have a perception of a familiar body in virtue of the occurrence of some sense-impression.

(1986, 268)

On the contrary, Matilal goes on to argue, using the earlier example of the tomato (and switching to substance–property–language), that the visual perception is to be regarded as the material substance (tomato) not the property, or that the *thing* tomato is the substratum of a particular instance of the property red, which in its

turn, instantiates the property-universal *red*. In short, one sees the tomato *not because* one sees the red color patch (appearance) one first encounters, but that one sees the tomato because, among other things, it is colored, and one sees the red color because the color-particular resides (inheres) in a composite substance and it has a specific nature (Matilal 1986, 283).

Putting the view advanced in another way, the ‘in virtue of’ relation is moved from the ‘sense-data’ representationalist account, after denuding it of the sense-datum assumption, and placed differently. This is succinctly expressed in the following remarks, which may well be regarded as the veritable motto of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (direct) realism: “One does not see the tomato *in virtue* of seeing a coloured shape. Rather one sees the tomato *in virtue* of its having a coloured shape” (Matilal 1986, 285).

*Śabda*pramāṇa: ‘testimony as knowledge’

The other *pramāṇa* or means of knowing in Indian epistemology that has begun to receive considerable attention is *śabda*pramāṇa or knowledge derived from linguistic utterance or testimony (Bilimoria 2008b). Its origins go back to the traditional protagonists who made the intriguing claim that the Vedas (canonical Brāhmaṇical texts) are an inviolable resource of authority on all manner of things. The classical material on this is extensive and varied; initially concerned with providing grounds for accepting the wisdom of *Śruti* or ‘the heard word’, i.e. the canonical scriptures. What we present will only be the gist of the thinking. The Buddhists saw no need for taking *śabda* as an independent *pramāṇa*, arguing that any utterance (including the Buddha’s) that has not been tested in one’s own experience cannot be relied upon; and in any case, the operation can be accounted for in terms of inference and perception. The Nyāya, following the Mīmāṃsā, developed sophisticated analyses and a spirited defence of testimony for its viability, reliability and autonomy as a mode of knowing.

A key defining feature of any *pramāṇa*, as we saw in the foregoing section, is the distinctive instrument among the aggregate of conditions that has the unique function of presenting the ‘object’ (of cognition) to the (cognizing) subject. While in perception it is generally said to be direct contact via the senses (*indriya*-s) with the particular object of cognition, in the case of *śabda*pramāṇa it is non-trivially words themselves. This response underscores a swift and remarkable recognition of the deep connection between word and knowledge, beyond the usual preoccupations with words and objects, names and things, and even knowing words. It does not take much argument to point out that a vast body of our knowledge and beliefs are derived from resources other than perception and inference, namely, by relying upon words of others, notably through hearing in direct conversation, hearsay, rumour, listening-media, or from reading words written in books, newspapers, documents, lexicons, inscriptions, etc., not to mention the role of testimony under oath (‘nothing but the truth’) submitted as justifying ‘evidence’ in legal proceedings and courts of law. It is to be noted also that the account, thus far, is not committed to suggesting that words exhaust or constitute the sole set of conditions that deliver the knowledge, or that the delivery is unproblematic in every instance. A number

of factors are involved, and words arguably happen to be the primary causal antecedent without which the entire operation would flounder.

The basic element of *śabdapramāṇa* is said to be *śābdabodha* or linguistic understanding; and the distinctive ‘instrument’ or *karaṇa* for *śābdabodha* is said to be the ‘word’ or *śabda*, but not just any string of words, rather more specifically a *vākya* or sentence utterance. *Śābdabodha*, like any cognition, has a relational-qualificative structure, constitutive of ‘meanings’ or *arthas*, their relations (*saṃsarga*), and the intentionality relevant to the particular speech-act or utterance.

There are, however, other, perhaps even more challenging problems with the doctrine of *śabdapramāṇa* that we are not able to pursue in this short compass. For example, is all verbal knowledge of the relational, qualificative, kind? What of the ‘identity’ statements that Vedānta is seen to champion, such as ‘You are That’, ‘I am Brahman’? And, in what sense is a linguistic understanding a grasping of the relational ontological structure (or of a properly qualified individual)? Suppose the same object or state of affairs is perceived by one person and heard of or about by another person, do both their respective awarenesses share the same structure of propositions, or is one more directly related to the ‘objective’ reality than the other, or might one be more ‘linguistic’ than the other, and would they be interchangeable without compromising the significance and truth-claim of one against the other (i.e. is there verisimilitude)? If there is difference, is it in respect of the intentionality of each, or is it fundamentally in the way each is phenomenologically constituted and related to its ‘objective reference’? Further, what are the ramifications of this doctrine for a hermeneutics of the *text*, particularly of scriptures, and moreover, of that class of scriptures thought of, in the Hindu philosophic tradition, as embodying ‘authorless revelation’? These and other questions, only partly attended to in current research, stand in need of more thorough investigation. For more forays into this area see Bilimoria (1989, 2000).

Note

- 1 This chapter draws generously from previously published articles: Bilimoria 1993, 1998, 2008a; the introductory discussion is owed largely to Dan Lusthaus (2013); and the Advaita Extended Mind thesis portion to Anand Vaidya (from Vaidya and Bilimoria 2015).

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