UNIT 15: NYAYA: CONCEPT OF PRAMĀ

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After you read this unit, you will be able to:-

- define pramā
- discuss the sources of knowledge
- explain anumana as a source of knowledge
- explain inference as a source of knowledge
- explain upamana as a source of knowledge
- explain testimony as a source of knowledge

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you 'Nyaya concept of Pramā'. After going through this unit, you will find the basic issues related to this unit. The issues are i) definition of pramā, ii) perception as a source of knowledge, iii) Anumana as a source of knowledge, iii) Comparison as a source of knowledge, and iv) Testimony as a source of knowledge.

15.3 DEFINITION OF PRAMĀ

Definition of Pramā : According to Nyāya, knowledge is defined as the manifestation of objects. Just as the light of a lamp reveals the physical objects existing around us, so also knowledge can manifest objects or help us to know objects before us. Nyāya holds that knowledge is classified into two: the first one is anubhaba or presentative cognition and the second is memory or representative cognition. These two types of knowledge can be valid or invalid.

According to Nyāya, valid knowledge is called pramā. And invalid or representative knowledge is called aprama. There are different types of valid knowledge. They are such-perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. Invalid knowledge also is divided into three types. They are-doubt, error (bhrama or viparyyaya) and hypothetical argument (tarka).

According to Nyāya, Valid presentative knowledge is a certain, unerring, and non-reproductive experience of the objects. For instance, I perceive the book on the table and get the knowledge that there is a book on the table. And this knowledge is valid (prama) because there is a direct relation between knowledge and the object. Thus, valid knowledge is a certain, unerring, and a production of a direct relation between knowledge and the object.

As memory is a non-presentative or a mere reproduction of past knowledge, so it may be valid or invalid in a sense as it is a reproduction of a previous valid or in-valid presentative knowledge.

Doubtful cognition cannot be called pramā because it is not certain knowledge. Error is either considered undoubted knowledge or presentative knowledge, but it is not true to the nature of the object. For instance, when we perceive a snake as a rope in the dark then we cannot have any doubt at that moment about the reality of the object that we see. But, this perception is erroneous, because the knowledge which we gain from the perception of the object is not true knowledge. Tarka is also not a valid knowledge, because it does not give us any true knowledge of the objects. For instance, when we perceive smoke in our neighbors' house, we say that the house has

caught fire. But my friend contradicts the previous statement that the house has caught fire. He asserts that there is no fire. Now, the question arises, if there is no fire, how can there be smoke? This undoubtedly leads us to tarka or debate. Thus, it can be said that tarka can give us indirect knowledge which can be derived from inference. Therefore, it is not prama or valid presentative knowledge.

In case of valid knowledge Nyāya raises a significant query, that is, how does true knowledge differ from false knowledge? Nyāya in this context asserts that a true knowledge is that which corresponds to the real object. For instance, 'milk is white' is considered as true knowledge, because in reality we see that the colour of milk is white. On the contrary, it can be opined that we have never seen that milk is black, red, green etc. Therefore, the assertion of the colour of milk, apart from white colour cannot be held to be true. Thus, the question is necessarily involved-how can we know that the first assertion, milk is white, is true or the other assertion, milk is black, is false? It clearly involves another important question, that is, how do we test the truth or falsity of knowledge? It can be explained through an example. For instance, the statement or proposition water quenches thrust is true in the real sense that when we feel thirsty and take water immediately, it quenches thrust. Nyāya in this context significantly shows that truth and falsity of knowledge consists in its correspondence and non-correspondence to facts. If the proposition corresponds to fact, our knowledge is to be true. On the other hand, if the proposition or statement fails to correspond to facts, our knowledge regarding the statement or proposition will be false. True knowledge leads to successful practical activity, while false knowledge fails to correspond reality or ends in unsuccessful activity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is knowledge, according to Nyāya?

Ans : .....

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Q 2: What are the kinds of knowledge, according to Nyāya?

Ans : .....

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Q 3: What are the different types of valid knowledge, according to Nyāya?

Ans : .....

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Q 4: What is pramā?

Ans : .....

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Q 5: What are the different types of invalid knowledge, according to Nyāya?

Ans : .....

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Q 6: What is apramā?

Ans : .....

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Q 7: How does true knowledge differ from false knowledge?

Ans : .....

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15.4 NYĀYA: SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Nyaya admits four sources of true knowledge. They are: i) Anumana or inference ii) Perception or pratyaksa iii) Upamana, iv) Testimony

15.4.1 Perception

Perception: Perception is considered as true cognition in logic. Nyāyayikas define perception as a definite cognition which is produced by sense-object contact and which is considered true or unerring. For instance, when I perceive the table in my room, it is due to the direct contact of my eyes with the table. And it is also clear that my perception of the table is

definite with the object table. The distant or unclear perception regarding an object is a doubtful perception. Therefore, it is not considered as true perception. Again, the perception of the snake as a rope in the dark is a result of illusion. Therefore, this kind of perception is different from valid perception.

Another definition of perception is a kind of cognition which arises due to the stimulation of our sense organs by the perceived object. This definition is accepted by some Indian and Western philosophers. On the other hand, some Nyayikas and Vedantins reject this doctrine on the ground that there may be perception without sense-object contact. For instance, we can think of the concept of God, who is thought to be perceived in all things, without the sense-object contact. Again, when a person perceives a snake as a rope, there is really no snake to come in contact with the eyes. Besides, the feelings of pleasure and pain are perceived by us without the help of any sense organ. Therefore, the sense-object contact is not the defining condition of perception. But, the common fact is that perception is a directness or immediacy of the knowledge of the objects perceived by sense-organ. Again, some Indian logicians define perception as immediate cognition, although they admit that perception is, in most of the cases, conditioned by sense-object contact.

15.4.2 Inference

Inference: Anumāna is a kind of knowledge or cognition which follows some other knowledge. It consists of two words, one is 'anu' and the other is 'mana'. Anu means 'after' and 'māna' means a cognition or knowledge. Therefore, anumāna means a kind of knowledge or cognition which follows or comes from other knowledge. For instance, the hill has fire, because it has smoke. Therefore, we can say that 'whatever is smoky is fiery.' This example shows that we perceive the existence of smoke in the hill, and from the existence of smoke in the hill, we infer that there is fire in the hill. This also asserts an invariable relation between smoke and fire. Thus, inference is a process of reasoning in which we pass from known to unknown or observed case to the unobserved case. The basic character

of inference is that it depends on the invariable relation of concomitance between two terms- smoke (hetu) and fire (Sadhya).

15.4.3 Upamāna

Upamāna or Comparison: According to Nyāya, upamāna is the third source of valid knowledge. As a source of valid knowledge, it implies a relation between name and things or between a word and its denotation. We get knowledge through upamana or testimony when some authoritative person tell us of objects through description. On the basis of description of some objects, although we do not know the object before hand, we apply the word or knowledge of the object to the actual object and are able to know that the word corresponds to the object, and finally get knowledge of the object through upamana. For instance, a man does not know anything about a gavaya or wild cow, but he may be told by a forester that a wild cow or gavaya looks like a cow. Subsequently, he perceives such an animal in a forest and recognizes it as a gavaya. And this knowledge of a wild cow or a cow is due to upamana or comparison, because the word or the object fit with the description of the objects. Therefore, it can be said that upamāna is the way of knowing the description of the words (denotation of words) or the relation between the words and the objects denoted by them. On the basis of the description of the objects, which is considered the grounds of our knowledge in upamana, we perceive the similarity of the object and then recognize the object (gavaya or the cow) as such. It means that the gavaya is an animal which corresponds to the cow.

Upamāna or comparison, as a source of valid knowledge recognized by Naiyayikas, has not been acknowledged by other schools of Indian philosophy. Cārvāka holds that upamana is not a valid source of knowledge because it cannot provide us any true knowledge about the denotation of words. The Buddhist logicians also hold that upamana or comparison is not a distinct or independent source of knowledge, because it is the result of perception and testimony. Rather, they hold that it is a form of valid knowledge. The Vaiśesika and the Sānkhya system hold that upamāna is a form of inference. Therefore, it is neither a distinct type or knowledge nor

an independent way of knowing. The Jaina system holds that it is the result of pratyabhijna or recognition. Thus, this system reduces upamāna to pratyabhijna or recognition.

15.4.4 Testimony

Sabda or testimony: Nyāya system accepts sabda or testimony as a source of valid knowledge. Literally, it means verbal knowledge. It is the knowledge of objects derived from words or sentences. But, all verbal knowledge is not considered as valid knowledge. Nyāya defines it as a valid verbal testimony. Sabda, as a valid pramāna, consists of a trustworthy person. A verbal testimony becomes true when it comes from a person who not only knows the truth but also speaks the truth for the guidance of other person. It also shows that a sentence or a statement is not valid in itself and is also not considered as sufficient to provide ground for acquiring knowledge. Again, the mere perception of the words of a sentence does not lead to any knowledge of objects. Rather, it can be asserted that when we perceive the words of a sentence and understand the meanings of the words then we acquire knowledge from a verbal testimony. Thus, validity of a verbal knowledge not only depends on the statement of a trust worthy person but also on the understanding of the meaning of the statement. Thus, testimony as a source of valid knowledge depends on the understanding of the meaning of a statement of a trustworthy person.

Classification of Sabda: There are two ways of classifying sabda or verbal knowledge. According to one way, verbal testimony or sabda is of two kinds. The first one deals with perceptible objects in which we include the trustworthy assertions of ordinary persons, saints, and the scriptures. For instance, we can talk about the assertions of a reliable farmer regarding the proper cultivation of crops. On the other hand, scriptures prescribe some commands or directions to perform certain rituals in order to bring about rainfall to be free from draught situations. And the second one deals with imperceptible objects in which we include also all the trustworthy assertions of ordinary persons, saints, prophets, and the scriptures. As for instance, we can talk of the saints and prophets, who deliver the message

of humanity, brotherhood, tolerance, unity, harmony, virtue and vice etc. On the other hand, the scriptures talk of God, freedom and immorality.

According to another way of classification, there are two kinds of testimony. One is scriptural or vaidika and other is secular. The first one deals with the words of Gods. Therefore, it is perfect and infallible. On the other hand, the second one is not perfect and infallible. Rather, it may be true or false. But, it is not the case that laukika testimony is invalid in all cases, because the assertion of a trustworthy person becomes valid. From the above classification of testimony, it is clear that the first way of classification consists of the nature of objects of knowledge, while the other refers to the nature of the source of knowledge. Both the classifications agree on the point that testimony must always be personal, which is based on the assertions of trustworthy person whether human or divine. In respect of the truth, there is no difference among the assertions of trustworthy person, saint, prophet, and the scriptures as revealed by God.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What are the sources of knowledge, according to Nyāya?

Ans : .....

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Q 9: According to Nyāya, what is perception?

Ans : .....

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Q 10: Define inference or anumāna with an example.

Ans : .....

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Q 11 What are the two words consisting of anumāna?

Ans : .....

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Q 12: What is upamāna?

Ans : .....

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Q 13: Give an example of upamāna.

Ans : .....

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Q 14: Why do the Buddhist logicians hold that upamana or upamana is not a valid source of knowledge?

Ans : .....

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Q 15: Write the literal meaning of testimony.

Ans : .....

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Q 16: State the basic character of inference.

Ans : .....

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15.6 LET US SUM UP

- Nyāya holds that knowledge is defined as the manifestation of objects. Just as the light of a lamp reveals the physical objects existed around us, so also knowledge can manifest objects or help us to know objects before us.
- According to Nyāya, knowledge is classified into two: the first one is anubhaba or presentative cognition and the second is memory or representative cognition
- Nyāya advocates different types of valid knowledge. They are—perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. And invalid knowledge also is divided into three types. They are—doubt, error (bhrama or viparyyaya) and hypothetical argument (tarka).
- Valid presentative knowledge is defined as a certain, unerring, and non-reproductive experience of the objects. As for instance, 'x'

perceives the duster on the table and get the knowledge that there is a duster on the table. And this knowledge is valid (prama), because there is a direct relation between knowledge and the object. Thus, valid knowledge is certain, unerring and a production of a direct relation between knowledge and the object.

- According to Nyāya, Tarka is not a valid knowledge, because it does not give us any true knowledge of the objects. For instance, when we perceive smoke in our neighbors' house, we say that the house has caught fire. But my friend contradicts the previous statement that the house has caught fire, because he asserts that there is no fire. Now, the question arises, if there is no fire, how can there be smoke? This undoubtedly leads us to tarka or debate. Thus, it can be said that tarka can give us indirect knowledge which can be derived from inference. Therefore, it is not pramā or valid presentative knowledge.
- Nyāya significantly shows that truth and falsity of knowledge consists in its correspondence and non-correspondence to facts. If the proposition corresponds to fact, our knowledge is true. On the other hand, if the proposition or statement fails to correspond to facts, our knowledge regarding the statement or proposition will be false. True knowledge leads to successful practical activity, while false knowledge fails to correspond to reality or ends in unsuccessful activity.
- Nyāya prescribes four sources of true knowledge. They are: i) Anumana or inference ii) Perception or pratyaksa iii) Upamana iv) Testimony
- According to Nyāya, perception is a kind of cognition which is defined as a definite cognition and it is produced by sense-object contact, and which is considered true or unerring.
- Anumāna means a kind of knowledge or cognition which follows or comes from other knowledge. As for instance, the hill has fire, because it has smoke, is an example of inference. The unperceived