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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO INFERENCE AS A MEANS OF VALID KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Aloke Bhunia Assistant Professor, Raja Narendralal Khan Women's College

ABSTRACT

In the pre-Christian era, the inquiry concerning the means of knowing the unperceived has remained an eternal question of human thought. This paper explores the epistemology of valid knowledge (pram) and its instrumental causes (pram a and kara a) across classical Indian philosophical traditions. It examines the defining criteria of valid knowledge—namely being non-previously known (anadhigata) and unsublated (ab dhita)—while addressing objections such as continuous perception (dh r v hika jñ na). Furthermore, the study analyzes the relational framework of cognition (vi e ya, prak ra, and samav ya) articulated by the Naiy yikas alongside Jayanta Bha a's synthesis of sentient and non-sentient causal aggregates. A comparative classification of the number of valid means of knowledge recognized across orthodox (stika) and heterodox (n stika) schools is presented. Finally, the paper elaborates on the indispensable importance and scope of inference (anum na) and the science of logical inquiry (nv k ik) in liberating Indian philosophy from dogmatism, grounding jurisprudence and ethical conduct, and advancing scientific discovery.

INTRODUCTION

In the pre-Christian era, the inquiry that arose in the mind of the Aryan sage vetaketu regarding the means of knowing the unknown remains an eternal question of the human mind to this day: "O venerable one, what is that instruction by which the unperceived becomes perceived?" (*Ch ndogya Upani ad*, 6.1.3). In response, vetaketu's father explained that knowledge is the means to know the unknown. Through knowledge, what is unperceived becomes perceived. In the context of discussing this epistemology (theory of knowledge), two fundamental questions arise in our minds: What do we mean by knowledge? And what are the means of acquiring knowledge?

Knowledge is defined as knowing an object precisely as it is. For instance, if I see an object in front of my eyes called a 'chair' and know it as a 'chair', that is considered knowledge. However, if the object I have known as a chair is not actually a chair, it cannot be called knowledge. For example, seeing an object in front of me in the dark, I mistook it for a snake. But when I brought a light, I saw that the object was not a snake, but a rope. This cannot be called valid knowledge. Knowledge that is sublated (contradicted or corrected later) is called illusion (*bhrama*). Therefore, unsublated knowledge is termed valid knowledge (*yath rtha jñ na*).

According to Ved nta, being unsublated is not the only defining characteristic of knowledge (Dharmar ja Adhvar ndra, *Ved nta-Paribh*). Just as knowledge must be unsublated, it must also be non-previously known (*anadhigata*). 'Non-previously known' means something that has not been apprehended or known before. Since memory (*sm ti*) involves objects that were already apprehended previously, it cannot qualify as valid knowledge. Similarly, erroneous knowledge, being sublated, cannot earn the title of valid knowledge. To exclude memory and illusion, knowledge must possess the qualities of being non-previously known (*anadhigata*) and unsublated (*ab dhita*).

However, some raise an objection that continuous perception (*dh r v hika jñ na*) does not fit the aforementioned definition. When a single piece of cognition persists for a long time, it is called continuous cognition. For example, I can observe a pot continuously across multiple moments. But the problem is: the pot that is the object in the first moment remains the object in the subsequent moments as well. Consequently, in the pot-cognition of the subsequent moments, the object is already previously apprehended, lacking the quality of being 'non-previously known' (*anadhigatatva*). Thus, a defect of narrowness (*avy pti*) arises because the definition fails to apply to continuous cognition. To eliminate this apprehension, Ved ntists argue that in subsequent moments, not only is the pot cognized, but the respective moments themselves are also cognized. As the respective moments are different, there is no fear of lacking the quality of being non-previously known.

Views of the Naiy yikas (Logicians)

Naiy yikas define valid knowledge or *Pram* as an experience (*anubhava*) of an object having a particular attribute where that object actually possesses it (*tadvati tatprak raka anubhava*) (Anna bha a, *Tarkasa graha*). In a distinct cognition, the qualifier (*vi e ya*), the qualified attribute (*prak ra*), and their relation (*sa sarga* or *sambandha*) are manifested. For example, in the cognition "this is a pot", the pot is the qualifier (*vi e ya*), potness (*gha atva*) is the qualified attribute (*prak ra*), and the relation of inherence (*samav ya*) between the pot and potness are the objects of cognition. According to Ny ya, the form of this cognition is: "cognition having the pot as the *vi e ya*, potness as the *prak ra*, and comprehending the relation of inherence."

Now, if the attribute attributed to a particular subject truly resides in that subject, the cognition is called *Pram* (valid knowledge). For instance, in the cognition "this is a pot", the subject (pot) to which the attribute (potness) is ascribed actually possesses that attribute (potness). Consequently, the cognition is designated as *Pram* . However, if the attribute ascribed to the subject is not present in that subject (i.e., the subject possesses the absence of that attribute), that cognition is termed *Apram* (invalid or erroneous knowledge). An example is the perception of a snake in a rope. Here, the form of the cognition is "this is a snake". The subject is the rope, and the attribute is snakeness. This attribute of snakeness is ascribed to the subject, the rope. But the subject rope never possesses snakeness; rather, it possesses the absence of it. Therefore, since the attribute is absent in the subject, invalid knowledge (*apram*) arises. For this reason, Naiy yikas define *apram* as an experience where an attribute is ascribed to a subject that actually possesses the absence of that attribute (*tadabh vavati tatprak raka anubhava*).

The Instrumental Cause of Knowledge (*Pram a* and *Kara a*)

Although Indian philosophers differ regarding the definition of *Pram* , all agree that knowing an object as it truly is constitutes *Pram* . Knowing a pot as a pot or a cloth as a cloth is called knowledge. The instrument through which this valid knowledge (*pram*) is produced is called *Pram a*. In fact, the instrumental cause (*kara a*) of *pram* is *pram a* (*pram kara a pram am*) (Gautama, *Ny yas tra*). Just as there

are differing views among Indian philosophers regarding the nature of *pramā*, divergent views also exist concerning its instrumental cause (*kara a*).

Naiy yikas hold three distinct views regarding the nature of *kara a* (Vi van tha Ny yapañc nana, *Bh paricchedа*):

View of Ancient Naiy yikas:
According to one group (the Ancient Naiy yikas), the *kara a* is that which has an immediate connection with the fruit or effect (*phala*). According to this view, the cause unseparated from the fruit is the *kara a* (*phal yogavyavacchinna k ra a kara am*).

View of Navya-Naiy yikas:
According to another view (the Navya-Naiy yikas), a cause endowed with an intermediate operation (*vy p ra*) is called a *kara a* (*vy p ravat k ra a kara am*). A cause that produces an effect through an operation (*tajjanyatve sati tajjanyajanaka ca vy p ra*) is called a *kara a*.

View of Causal Aggregate:
According to a third view, the entire causal aggregate (*s magr*) is termed *kara a*. In the generation of any effect, the totality or collective assemblage of all recognized causes is the *kara a*. For instance, in the case of visual perception of a pot, the pot, the eye, the sense-object contact (*sannikar a*), etc., are all recognized as causes. However, designating any single one of them separately as the cause is not justified.

It is worth remembering that the above three types of causes are non-sentient (*abodhasvar pa*) in nature. However, according to Jayanta Bha a, a cause cannot be merely non-sentient (Jayanta Bha a, *Ny yamañjar*). The causal aggregate of both sentient (*bodhasvar pa*) and non-sentient elements is termed *kara a*. In the case of determinate (*savikalpaka*) perception of a pot, the causality of indeterminate (*nirvikalpaka*) perception must be admitted. This is because qualified cognition (such as "this is a pot") depends on the relation between the qualifier and the qualified. In other words, knowledge of the qualified is impossible without prior knowledge of the qualifier. From this perspective, indeterminate knowledge must be accepted as a cause of determinate knowledge. This indeterminate knowledge is sentient (*bodhasvar pa*), while objects like pots are non-sentient (*abodhasvar pa*). Consequently, both sentient and non-sentient components must be acknowledged in the cognition of a pot.

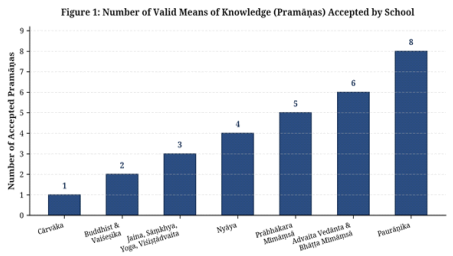
Incidentally, it may be noted that according to Jayanta, neither is a purely sentient entity alone the *kara a*, nor is a purely non-sentient entity; rather, the aggregate or collection of both sentient and non-sentient factors is called the *kara a*. Therefore, defining the aggregate of all causes—both sentient and non-sentient—as the *kara a* eliminates all discrepancies.

Number of *Pram*ā as in Indian Philosophy
Various views prevail in Indian philosophy regarding the number of *pram as* (valid means of knowledge) (Chatterjee & Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*). Some accept only one, while others accept multiple, as summarized in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Table 1 *Accepted Means of Valid Knowledge (Pram*ā *as) Across Indian Philosophical Schools*

Philosophical School	Count	Accepted Pram as (Means of Valid Knowledge)
C rv ka (Materialist)	One (1)	Perception (Pratyak a)
Buddhist & Vai e ika	Two (2)	Perception (Pratyak a) and Inference (Anum na)
Jaina, S khya, Yoga & Vi i dvaita	Three (3)	Perception, Inference, and Verbal Testimony (abda / gama)
Naiy yika (Ny ya)	Four (4)	Perception, Inference, Comparison (Upam na), and Verbal Testimony (abda)
Pr bh kara M m s	Five (5)	Perception, Inference, Comparison, Verbal Testimony, and Postulation (Arth patti)
Advaita Ved nta & Bh a M m s	Six (6)	Perception, Inference, Comparison, Verbal Testimony, Postulation, and Non-cognition (Anupalabdhi)
Paur ika (Additional)	Eight (8)	All six above, plus Tradition (Aitihya) and Probability (Sambhava)

Figure 1
Comparative Distribution of Accepted Pram as Across Classical Schools



Note. Adapted from classical classifications summarized in Chatterjee & Datta (1984).

The Importance and Scope of Inference (*Anum na*)
In truth, inference (*anum na*) is not merely a single *pram a* or a subject restricted to epistemology; rather, the process of inference has developed upon the foundation of logical and intellectual thinking. The influence and importance of inference are undeniable in liberating Indian philosophy from the confines of theology and dogmatism, rendering it logically reflective (Vidyabhusana, *A History of Indian Logic*).

Indian philosophy is divided into two categories—orthodox (*stika*) and heterodox (*n stika*)—based on the validity and unquestionable authority of the Vedas. Ny ya, Vai e ika, S khya, Yoga, M m s , and Ved nta are termed orthodox philosophies because they directly or indirectly follow or align with the Vedas. On the other hand, C rv ka, Buddhist, and Jaina philosophers are heterodox because they do not accept the authority of the Vedas. Although the widely practiced Jaina and Buddhist philosophies do not accept the Vedas, they nevertheless recognize Vedic-derived concepts such as rebirth (*janm ntara*), the law of karma, and liberation (*nirv a* or *mukti*). However, the materialistic C rv ka school entirely opposes or refutes the Vedas.

The rational analysis of a subject through logic is called *k* or *manana* (reflection). From this perspective, inference is *anv k* (investigation). The branch of learning that opens the path to true knowledge of objects with the help of inference or logic (*ny ya*) is called *nv k ik* (the science of inquiry) (Kau ilya, *Artha stra*, 1.2). This *nv k ik* science determines logical debate and reveals all principles of logic; hence, it is also referred to as the science of debate (*tarkavidy*) and logic (*tarka stra*). This inference and logic received utmost importance in the Vedas and Upani ads. By employing three terms consecutively—*dra avya* (to be seen/perceived), *rotavya* (to be heard), and *mantavya* (to be reflected upon)—the sage in the *B had ra yaka Upani ad* expressed the view that the unknown can be known

through perception, testimony, and inference (*B had ra yaka Upani ad*, 2.4.5). Furthermore, the *vet vatara Upani ad* states (*vet vatara Upani ad*,3.8): *"Tameva viditv atim tyum eti n nya panth vidyate'yan ya"*

Knowing Him alone, one transcends death; there is no other path to reach that supreme state.

In particular, acknowledging that ultimate reality can be discovered through the aid of inference, they referred to the Supreme Self (*Param tm*), Supreme Person (*Paramapuru a*), Supreme Brahman, or God as the cause of the diversity of the universe. Relying upon this inference, concepts such as rebirth, the afterlife (*paraloka*), the transmigration of the soul (*deh ntara pr pti*), heaven, hell, ghost-bodies, and the abode of Yama have been formulated. Through the application of inference, we generally acquire a vast amount of knowledge necessary for conducting life, and the application, effectiveness, and utility of inference in human life is an undeniable certainty. Inference serves as a logical medium for establishing one's views or arguments before others. Unlike the West, logic or inference did not develop as an entirely independent branch or category in India; rather, every *stra* (discipline) independently applies—and can apply—inference and epistemology according to its own objectives and theories.

Even within the stream of jurisprudence and religious law (*dharma stra*), which is built upon ancient, legal, and traditional rules, the importance of inference is recognized and undeniable. The validity of scriptural traditions (*sm ti*) is established precisely through the process of inference. Similarly, through inference, the M m s school theoretically discusses virtuous conduct (*sad c ra*), which is the behavior of wise individuals, and customary norms (*lok c ra*).

Furthermore, to reject inference means to reject thinking or discussion itself. Many of our fields of knowledge are derived from the valid source of knowledge known as inference. Relying upon inference, new discoveries and innovations are becoming possible in the world of science. Therefore, to reject inference means to halt the progress of science forever. Thus, there is no alternative but to accept inference.

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