



**International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)**

A Peer-Reviewed Monthly Research Journal

ISSN: 2394-7969 (Online), ISSN: 2394-7950 (Print)

Volume-I, Issue-V, June 2015, Page No. 63-70

Published by: Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.irjims.com>

**Nyāya treatment on Vaiśeṣika view of śabdapramāṇa**  
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**Abstract**

*Śabda means a source of knowledge; it is a type of knowledge which is derived from words and sentences. However any kind of cognition derived from words and sentences is not valid. We can distinguish between Śābdabodhā and Śābdapramā. Śābdabodhā means any kind of cognition derived from words and sentences. Naiyāyikas admit Śabda as a pramāna or Valid source of knowledge. Pramāna is not just a source of jnana but a valid source of presentative jnana (anubhava). Except the cārvāka, the Bauddhaists and the Vaiśeṣika's all the systems of Indian philosophy admit sabda as a pramana. But Vaiśeṣika's position in this regard is somewhat peculiar. The Vaisesika Philosophy refuses to give it an independent status but included it within another pramāna. In this paper I would like to present just the Naiyāyika treatment of this subject.*

**Key words - Śabda, pramāna, Vaiśeṣika, jnana, Naiyāyika.**

Naiyāyikas admit four pramānas or Valid source of knowledge. i.e. *Pratyaksa anumāna uapamāna and sabda. Pramāna is not just a source of jnana but a valid source of presentative jnana (anubhava). Except the cārvāka and the Bauddhaist all the systems of Indian philosophy admit sabda as a pramana. The Vaiśeṣika's position is somewhat peculiar. The position of the Vaisesika is peculiar in the sense that in spite of admitting sabda as a pramāna they refuse to give it an independent status but included it within another pramāna. In this paper I would like to present just the Naiyāyika treatment of this subject.*

In ordinary sense *Śabda* means a source of knowledge. *Śabda* is a type of knowledge which is derived from words and sentences. However any kind of cognition derived from words and sentences is not valid. We can distinguish between *Śābdabodhā* and *Śābdapramā*. *Śābdabodhā* means any kind of cognition derived from words and sentences. *Śabda* as a *pramāna* is defined as the source of valid verbal cognition, but not of mere verbal cognition. In *Prācīna Nyāya Śabda* consists in assertion of a trustworthy person (*āptavākya*).

According to Nyāya a verbal statement is valid when it comes from a person who knows the truth and always speaks the truth about anything for the guidance of other persons. But it is a matter of common observation that a sentence or statement is not by itself sufficient to give us any knowledge of things. Nor again does the mere perception of the words of a sentence lead to our knowledge of fact. It is only when one perceives or hears the words and understands their meanings that he acquires any knowledge from a verbal statement. Hence while the validity of verbal knowledge depends on its being based on the statement of a trustworthy person, its possibility is conditioned on the understanding of the meaning of that statement. Hence *Śabda* or testimony as a source of valid knowledge consists in understanding the meaning of the statement of trustworthy person.<sup>1</sup>

It appears from the above definition that the first step in Śabda or testimony is the perception of the words or a sentence or proposition set forth by some trustworthy person. In the case of spoken we have an auditory perception, and in that of written sentence we have a visual perception of the constituent words. Secondly, there must be an understanding of the meaning of the word perceived by us. It is through this understanding of the meaning of words that we come to the final step, namely, the verbal knowledge of objects or the truth about certain objects. Thus the *kāraṇa* or the special cause of Śabda or valid verbal knowledge is the knowledge of words (*padajñāna*) which leads to the knowledge of objects through its function (*vyāpara*) of recalling to our minds the meanings connected with words or sentences. Śabda is distinguished from the preceding *pramāṇas* by the fact that it is due to the knowledge of words or sentences, while perception is due to sense-object contact, inference is due to the knowledge of *vyāpti* or universal relation, and *upamāna* or comparison is due to the perception of similarity or dissimilarity.

The *Vaiśeṣika* although a sister – system of Nyāya does not agree with the Naiyāyika-s as regards to the status of *śabda pramāṇa*. According to the *Vaiśeṣika*-s *śabda* no doubt is a dependable source of knowledge, and there is no contradiction in holding the word function as instrument in the production of knowledge, but they do not constitute a distinct *pramāṇa*. This position is distinct from that of the *Cārvaka*-s on the one hand and from the position of the Naiyāyik-s on the other hand. The *Cārvaka*-s does not admit the validity of *śābdabodha*. So Śabda is not a *pramāṇa* or dependable source of knowledge at all. The *Vaiśeṣika*-s along with the Naiyāyika-s refuted the *Cārvaka* thesis and establishment the *pramāṇya* of Śābdapramā.

Gautama defines *sabda* as “*āptopadesah sabdah*”.<sup>2</sup> the term ‘*āptopadesa*’ in the definition means the statement or sentence of a trustworthy person (*āptasya upadesa*). It is a statement or *upadesa* of the *āptopadestā*. A statement can be treated as *āpta* only when its speaker is a *āpta*. The definition of *śabda* given by Gautama is not the definition of any type of *śabda* but of *śabdapramāṇa* or of a type of *śabda* which can be treated as a source of certain variety of *pramā* called *śābdapramā*.

Verbal cognition as a variety of *pramā* cannot be just knowledge through words or caused by words, but also correct knowledge of facts. Gautama and Gaṅgeśa were both aware of the point. That is why Gautama said that the verbal knowledge is knowledge caused by such words as have been uttered by some properly qualified person (*āpta*). Not only this, such cognition must also be non-recollective. In Nyāya epistemology recollective knowledge cannot be said to be knowledge proper or *pramā*. Thus verbal cognition in the sense of *śābda pramā* must be true and non-recollective and will be caused by the words of an authoritative person or an *āpta*. Gautama defined linguistic means (*śabda pramāṇa*) as well as *śābda pramā* referring directly to some authoritative person.<sup>3</sup>

Gaṅgeśa, however, does not make any direct reference to authoritative person or *āpta puruṣa* in defining *śabda pramāṇa*. It may appear that Gaṅgeśa does not think it necessary to refer to the notion of *āpta* in defining *śabda pramāṇa* although he concedes that the utterance as well as the understanding of it must conceive truth to be treated as *śābda pramā*.<sup>4</sup>

In verbal cognition a hearer’s knowledge of fact is usually determined by the memory-type of awareness of the meanings of words. This awareness, however, does not causally determine the *śābdapramāṇa* which is constituted by the speaker’s utterance. The words uttered by the speaker are rather instrumental in the production of the hearer’s *śābdabodha* in so far as they are being known by the hearer. Thus it is the utterance of the speaker which is to be taken as *śābdapramāṇa* causing the correct and non-recollecting type of knowledge known as verbal knowledge (*śābdapramā*). By this source, a hearer-qua-hearer, cognizes some fact of the universe which cannot be cognized by

any other means of knowledge. Vātsyāyana, the *Bhāṣyakāra* of Nyāya-Śūtra has elaborately discussed the characteristics of a trustworthy person (*āpta*).<sup>1</sup> According to him a *āpta* is one who has direct or intuitive knowledge of things, who wishes to make known the things as he himself has known them, and who is capable of speaking about those things. The word ‘*āpta*’ itself literally means one who operates through the direct or intuitive knowledge of things. The *Bhāṣyakāra* also insists on regarding those characteristics as the common characteristics of all *āpta*-s, whether they are (sages), *ārya*-s or *mleccha*-s. A *āpta* may be a *rsi* as well as an *ārya* or a *mleccha*. *Rsi*-s are seers, *ārya*-s are superior or noble ones and *mleccha*-s are ordinary common people.<sup>5</sup>

*Gautama* in his examination (*pariksa prakaran*) section of verbal testimony rejected the views of the opponent who does not admit the validity of verbal testimony as a separate *pramana*.<sup>6</sup> Before rejecting the view of opponent he first presented the possible reasons in favour of the opponent as follows.<sup>7</sup>

Firstly, *Sabda* is inference because the object indicated by it is not perceived but inferred, because cognitions yielded by the *sabda* do not involve any process other than inference. Secondly, *Sabda* is Inference because the connection between word and object, which is apprehended both in inference and *Śabdapramana* is the same. Thirdly, It cannot be denied that there is a definite relation (as between the *Hetu* and *Sadhya*) between words and objects (*sabda* and *artha*). *Sabda* is Inference because of the presence of this relationship.<sup>8</sup>

Vatsyayana elaborates *Gautama*’s above arguments as follows: the subsequent inferential cognition arises only when there is a relationship between the sign and the significant, and the relationship between them has been previously apprehended. Similarly, in the case of word and object the relation between word and an object has been previously apprehended. And this subsequent verbal cognition follows that relationship. Thus the cognitive processes involved in the operation of inference and of word are exactly the same. Since the processes are the same, it follows that inference and *sabda* cannot be treated as independent *pramanas*, in fact word is nothing but inference.<sup>9</sup>

Explaining the answer of *Gautama*, Vatsyayana observes that the cognition of an object denoted by a word is correct not simply because it arises from the word but because the word is uttered by an *apta*. This is quite evident from the fact that there is no such correct cognition when a word is not uttered by an *apta*.<sup>10</sup> For instance, when words like heaven, celestial nymphs, ocean, human settlements, etc., are uttered the objects corresponding to those words cannot be perceived; but we have the correct cognitions of these objects not simply because there are such words but because they have been uttered by an *apta*. And such correct cognitions cannot be obtained when the words are not uttered by an *apta*. Thus the cognitive processes involved in inference and word are different.

As regards the argument of *Gautama* that there is a connection between a word and an object, it is undoubtedly true, says Vatsyayana, that there is such a connection between them; but the connection is of the type that is conveyed in an expression like- this object is denoted by this word (*Vacya-Vacak*). The connection that could make verbal cognition inferential is one of invariable relation (*Vyapti*) between a word and an object, and it is this connection that must be rejected; for the simple reason that it cannot be cognized by any *pramana*. We cannot perceive such a relation, because the word is heard through the ear while the object cannot be apprehended by that organ. In fact, the relation can be perceived only when objects in contact are apprehended by the ear. Nor the relation can be established by inference. We cannot say that the object goes over to the word; for if it did go over when the word ‘food’ is uttered, the mouth where it is uttered should be filled with food; when the word ‘fire’ or ‘hatchet’ is uttered, the mouth should be burnt or split. If the whole

animal, cow, entered the mouth on utterance of the word 'cow', as Uddyotakara holds, no one would care to utter such a word. And a modern Indian might be tempted to say that the cows would still be with us but without their sanctity!<sup>11</sup>

Vatsyayana explains the objections mentioned by Gautama as follows: it is observed that there is a fixed arrangement whereby the cognitions of certain things arise from certain words. From this we infer that what causes such an arrangement is some kind of relation between the words and the things denoted by them. If there were no such relation, we would not have cognition of an object from a word itself. Since this does not happen, the existence of the relation cannot be denied.

To Explain Gautama's reply, Vatsyayana observes that the fact that certain words produce certain cognitions is due not to any natural relation but to convention (*samaya*). It is this kind of conventional connection between a word and an object that is conveyed in the statement 'this object is denoted by this word', and as already mentioned, this is the correct view.<sup>12</sup>

This convention, says the commentator, is of the nature of an ordinance which determines the denotation of words; it lays down injunctions like "such and such a thing shall be denoted or spoken of by such and such a word". In fact, it is only when the ordinance is known that cognition can arise from the use of a word; when it is not known, even though the word is heard when uttered, it does not give rise to any cognition. Even those who believe in a fixed relationship cannot dispute these facts. Ordinary people learn the convention by observing the use of words in ordinary parlance.

To preserve and protect this convention the science of grammar has been created. It explains and determines both forms of speech: the use of single words and the use of sentences. Words denote objects and a sentence which is a collection of words denotes the entire collection of objects denoted by those words.

Another reason why the relation between a word and an object is conventional and not natural (*svabhavika*), is the diversity of objects denoted by the same words. In fact, the sages, *aryas* and *mlecchas* make use of words for expressing things in any way they like (*yatha Kaman*). For instance, the word 'yava', according to Vācapati, is used by the *aryas* to denote barley, and by the *mlecchas* to denote long-pepper. If the connection was natural, such arbitrary uses of words would be impossible. For instance, light which has a natural relation to the illumination of things and to the making of colour perceptible, never fails to perform this function among any particular people. Light makes colour visible, and not a thousand artists, says Vacaspati, can establish a connection between light and taste. The diversity of usage in the case of words among different castes or peoples can be explained only on the basis of convention, which can vary among different people.<sup>13</sup>

In view of these considerations there is no justification for the theory of contact or natural relation between word and object.

The Vaiśeṣikas, hold that Perception and Inference are the only two means of valid knowledge. They hold that Verbal testimony is not to be considered as separate means of valid knowledge, rather it should be included in Inference. This is because the purpose of Verbal testimony is accomplished by inference. Naiyayikas Reject this opinion and establishes that both Verbal testimony and Comparison are to be accepted as separate means of valid knowledge. This is because knowledge of invariable concomitance is essential to inferential knowledge. And even without the knowledge of invariable concomitance after hearing words, there arises verbal knowledge.

In order to establish that Verbal testimony is included in Inference, the Vaisesika Persents the arguments to show how Verbal testimony is a means of valid knowledge in the capacity of inference (*anumanavidhayaiva śabdasya pramanyam*). This is done by means of an Inference as follows: Secular words such as 'bring the cow with a stick' or Vedic words like 'one who is desirous of

heaven should perform sacrifice' are preceded by the valid knowledge of the relation of recollected meanings which (i.e., relation) is the object of the intention of speaker, because they are group of words having syntactic expectancy etc. like the group words 'bring the jar'. Now the Naiyayikas Explain this Inference in detail. First of all, it should be noted that the subject of the inference is words or sentences. Such a sentence not to be taken as sentence in general, but as particular sentence, 'bring the jar', 'one who is desirous of heaven should perform sacrifice' etc.; therefore, the knowledge of specific semantic relation is obtained. Nyaya explain the purpose of the qualifications in the enunciation of the *sadhy*. The *sadhya* in the Inference is *tatparyavisayasmarithapadarhasamsargapramapurvakatvam*. Here is the qualification *tatparyavisaya* (the object of the intention of the speaker) is given to *samsarga* (relation) because, otherwise, there would be the following difficulty. Someone utters the sentence *brāhmane vidya* : this sentence can be understood in two ways : the Brahmin has knowledge (literally, there is knowledge in which Brahmin, i.e.. *adhikaranasaptami*) or someone else has knowledge of which the Brahmin the object (*visayasaptami*). The speaker, however, intends the first meaning. In order that the hearer also may infer then semantic relation of *adhikaranatva* and not of *visayatva*, the qualification of *tatparyavisaya* is given to *samsarga*.

If the qualification of *smarita* (recollected) is not given to *Padartha* in the enunciation of the *sadhya*, then from the expression 'ghatam' the inferential knowledge of the relation of meaning as meaning only would arise and not the relation of meaning as jar and so on. And the meaning should be recollected by means of the significatory function of the word; otherwise, by the word 'jar', by means of the relation of inherence, one can recollect also ether and infer the relation of ether. Hence there would not be the inferential knowledge of the relation of jar with the-state-of-being-the-object-of-action.

View of the Vaiśeṣikas cannot be admitted, because it is our experience that their arises verbal knowledge even without the knowledge of invariable concomitance which is essential to Inference. And in fact, after hearing words we do not have the knowledge of invariable concomitance.

It may now be objected that since there is the effect in the form of inferential knowledge after every instance of the hearing of the word, its cause, viz. the knowledge of invariable concomitance, is to be postulated. The answer to this objection is that, by a similar argument, it could as well be shown that every instance of inferential knowledge can be reduced to verbal knowledge in the following way. An instance of inferential knowledge like mountain has fire has as object certain meanings like fire etc. From such meanings one can have the recollection of words like 'fire' etc., through the relation of the-state-of-being-that-which-denotes (*vacakatvasambandha*). Further, one can postulate also such causes of verbal knowledge as knowledge of syntactic expectancy etc. Now all the causes of verbal knowledge are present and so the inferential knowledge that mountain has fire can as well be considered as verbal knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

The author of *Tattvacintamani*, Gangesā, refutes the opinion of the Vaiśeṣikas in another way. The Inference of the Vaiśeṣikas to establish that Words are means of valid knowledge in the capacity of Inference is as follows: These meanings have mutual relation because they have the-state-of-being-conveyed by words associated with semantic competency etc. Here, semantic competency is a qualification to the reason. But in order to have an instance of inferential knowledge, there should be definite knowledge of the reason. Therefore, there should be the definite knowledge of the qualification of the reason also. Here, in the Inference of the Vaiśeṣikas, *yogyata* (semantic competency) is a qualification of the reason, viz *yogyatadimatpadopasthapitatvam*. Therefore, in order to have the inferential knowledge, there should be definite knowledge of

semantic competency which is a qualification of the *hetu*. And a doubt of the qualification leads to the doubt of the qualified. But, on the country, even if there is doubtful knowledge of semantic competency, verbal knowledge arises. Hence, words have to be considered as separate means of valid knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

According to Jagadīśa, and Navay-Nyāya philosophers generally, conditions for verbal testimony (śabdabodha) prevent occurrence of inference. But if verbal testimony is reduced to inference, then this preventer-prevented relation cannot obtain.

Vaiśeṣika philosophers may argue that inference are of two kinds- verbal testimony is one kind of inference, and the usual inference are of another kind. Then one may say that inference of the first kind prevent of block inference of the second kind. This will explain how verbal testimony can be preventer of ordinary inference.

Jagadīśa, however, points out that this attempted explanation makes the theory too heavy. It will be simpler to hold that verbal testimony prevents inference. It is not necessary to hold that verbal testimony is an inference of one kind, and this kind of inference prevents inferences of the other kind. Thus when one hears that it is going to rain soon here, and has also may also infer it from the presence of black cloud there. The verbal testimony will prevent the inferential process.

Jagadīśa also considers a specific inference to which Vaiśeṣika philosophers reduce verbal testimony. If verbal testimony is to be reduced to inference, a probans has to be stated: (i) one form of inference shows (semantical) fitness as the probans. This may be explained by an example. The inference may be stated thus: The cow (is) existence-possessor (exists), because of fitness, when one hears the sentence 'the cow (is) existence-possessor'. Jagadīśa points out that fitness are a relation among objects; so, in this example, it is the existence in the locus of the cow. If one wants to infer existences in the locus of cow on the ground of existence in the locus of the cow, then the probans and the probandum become identical. The consideration will be 'The cow has existence as pervaded by existence', but this will make the inference invalid because of the palpable petition. (ii) A second inference may use expectancy as the probans of the inference. The inference will be: the cow (is) existence-possessor the reason being expectancy which is conducive to the cognition of existence in the locus of the cow. Now Jagadīśa points out that this inference, too, is invalid. For expectancy is relation among words. So in this inference, expectancy conducive to the inferential cognition of existence in the locus of the cow is the word; 'existence' following the word '(the) cow'. But the locus of the inference is the cow; yet the probans is not present in that object, but is present only the word 'cow'. The inference is invalid because the probans is not present in the locus of the inference. This defect is technically called 'svarupāsiddhi'.

Now neo- Vaiśeṣika philosophers present a modified form the inference. From the sentence, '(the) cow exists' one gets the cognition of the existing cow by inference of the following form : "(the) cow possesses existence, the reason being – being the object of memory of the meaning of the word 'exists' preceded by the word '(the) cow'. Here the probans is: being the object recalled by the word '(the) cow'.

Now it may be argued that the above inference is invalid according to jagadisha because the probans "being the object recalled by the word '(the) cow' may be located in a past or an absent cow'. The point is that the object recalled by the word 'cow' is not necessarily a cow present here; but the cognition produced by hearing the sentence '(the) cow exists' is of the existence of a present cow, not of a cow which does not exist now. So the probans is a deviating probans, and hence cannot be used to prove the sentence meaning.

The Nyaya philosopher's distinguishes between inference for the sake of others and inference for oneself (sarathanumana and parathanumana). Now in inference for the sake of others (parathanumana) defect of the probans may be brought to the notice by an opponent, showing that the probans does not establish the probandum. But in the case of inference for oneself (sarathanumana), even if the probans be actually defective, the defect cannot be brought to the notice, for one cannot do this while making the inference. Hence the defect, even though actually there, cannot do any harm to the process of inference, cannot prevent either the consideration or the conclusion. As testimony is reduced to inference for oneself, even if the probans be actually a deviating probans, that will not be harmful to the inference.

To refute the above theory of the neo- Vaiśeṣika, Jagadīśa points out that it is not necessary for the object meant by the word '(the) cow' to be recalled by the word. Even if there is absence of being recalled by the word 'cow', one can still cognize the meaning of the sentences '(the) cow exists'. The point is that the word when heard would actually recall the object meant by the word; but it is not necessary to be aware of the fact that the word has produced the memory. The memory of the object meant by the word; not the awareness of the memory, is the cause of the cognition of sentence-meaning. Moreover, if the word does not actually recall the object meant by the word, but is wrongly supposed to be recalled, even then, according to the neo- Vaiśeṣikas, the inference of the sentence-meaning will occur. The point is that from the sentence '(the) cow exists' one gets the cognition about the cow, not about the cow as an object of memory. So being the objects of memory of word-meanings cannot be the probans for an inference. So testimony cannot be reduced to inference in this way.

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