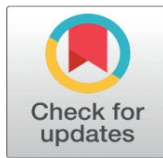
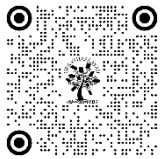


A BRIEF DISCUSSION ON DEFINITION AND TYPES OF DIRECT KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO DIGNĀGA

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ABSTRACT

Like many of their counterparts in the west, Buddhist philosophers realized a long time ago that our linguistic and conceptual practices are rooted in pre-predicative modes of apprehension that provide implicit access to whatever is immediately present to awareness. This paper examines Dignāga's contributions to what has come to be known as a part of Buddhist Epistemology, focusing on the phenomenological and epistemic role of perception and self-awareness.

Keywords: Buddhist Epistemology, Buddhist Philosophy, Dignāga, Perception, Self-Awareness



1. INTRODUCTION

Eminent Prof. Dr. Bimal Krishna Matilal once pointed out, that there are two distinct traditions of Logic in Classical India. They are the tradition of debates (vāda) and that of epistemology (pramāṇa). It is Dignāga who integrated those two traditions into one coherent system of what we may call 'epistemological logic'. His magnum corpus, *Pramāṇasamuccaya* with *Svavṛtti*, consists of the following six chapters: namely I. Perception, II. Inference, III. Proof, IV. Example, V. Apoha, VI. Fallacious Objections.

Saluting the teacher who is endowed with enormous merits, the author composed in order to establish the means of valid knowledge, *Pramāṇasamuccaya* or collection of the theory of knowledge by collecting passages from *Nyāyamukha* and other treatise¹ of the author himself. The purpose of composing this work is to reject the other's theory of knowledge and to elucidate the characteristics of the author's own theory of knowledge²; for there is a divergence of opinion with regard to the means of knowledge³ on which the apprehension of the object to be known depends.

Indian Buddhists traditionally accepted three *pramāṇas* like the *Sāṃkhya*s. Vasubandhu, for example, mentions in his *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* Perception, Inference and Verbal Testimony as *pramāṇas*. In the *Nyāyamukh*, Dignāga briefly mentions two *pramāṇas*, viz. Perception and Inference. In the, *Pramāṇasamuccaya* Chapter V he tries to prove

that Verbal Tetimony and other Pramāṇas are included in the category of the Inference. Thus at the very beginning of chapter I he insists that there are only two kinds of pramāṇas, viz. Perceptions and Inference, for there are only two kinds of the objects of pramāṇas, viz., the Particular (Svalakṣaṇa) and the Universal (Sāmānya-lakṣaṇa).

According to Dignāga there are two sources of valid knowledge, direct knowledge i.e. pratyakṣa and indirect knowledge i.e. anumāna; for the object to be known has two aspects. As regards cognitions of those objects which are related to these two aspects, no other independent source of valid knowledge is to be recognised. Nor is there other source in the case of recognitions because if the other source be admitted to be required in this case, the fallacy of infinitude would be logically concluded, just as in the case of recollected knowledge⁴.

Dignāga defines Perception as 'a cognition free from thought construction'⁵. The knowledge wherein there is no sign of thought- construction is direct knowledge i.e. pratyakṣa. Now a question arises that what is this thought construction? It implies to associate name (nāma), genus (jāti) etc. which are considered to be the efficient cause of the verbal designation (sabda-pravritti-nimitta) with the thing immediately perceived.

Now another question arises that why the direct knowledge is called 'praty-akṣa'?

According to Dignāga Direct knowledge is signified by the sense organ, not by the object, such as colour and the like. The reason is that the object is a common factor to other kinds of knowledge because of its being a cause of the mind i.e. mono-vijñāna or of the knowledge of other persons too. And it is generally known that a thing or a fact as designated by the name of its specific component i.e. asādhāraṇa, as for instance, we use verbal expressions 'the sound of a drum' to indicate a certain sound instead of naming it 'the sound of hand' although the hand is also a cause of the sound.

However, Dignāga's definition of Perception is not really the definition, he is simply trying to distinguish two kinds of knowledge, viz., Perception and Conception or, in other words, immediate sensation and conceptual judgment. Instead of giving the formal definition of perception, Dignāga gives ostensive definition by enumerating the cases of Perception. Just like the Naiyāyikas and others, Perception of Dignāga is a sense-cognition (indriya-jñāna). Buddhists traditionally lists the five of them:

- 1) Visual cognition
- 2) Auditory cognition
- 3) Olfactory cognition
- 4) Gustatory cognition
- 5) Tactile cognition.

According to Dignāga, the direct knowledge which is caused by five kinds of sense organ devoid of thought construction. Dignāga notes that an object possesses many natures that cannot be grasped by a single sense-organ. Furthermore, he characterizes the objective field of the sense-organ (indriyagocara) as rūpa (a matter) to be self- aware (svasaṃvedya) and beyond the verbal designation (anirdeśya).

The mind (manas), which leaning upon the object such as form and the like, operates in the form of an immediate awareness, is also free from thought construction. Desire, anger, ignorance, pleasure, pain etc. which are the functions of mind are also direct knowledge in the sense of internal perception, because those have nothing to do with sense organ.

The intuitive perception of yogins which is not mingled with thought-construction pertaining to the reliable words of the teachers and which relates to a bare object is also a direct knowledge.

Now a question may arise that is the idea i.e. kalpanā-jñāna a direct knowledge?

According to Dignāga, the idea is not a direct knowledge similar to desire etc. in so far as it is formed with regard to an object, but in the case of self-cognition the idea is not direct. Hence there is no harm in defining direct knowledge as being free from thought-construction.

Dignāga also says that illusion, cognition of empirical reality, inference, its result, recollection and affection are apparent direct knowledge and are accompanied by obscurity i.e. sa-taimir.⁶ Among these, illusive cognition, being caused through the conceptual understanding which takes, for instance, vapour floating over sands as real water, is an apparent direct knowledge. Cognition of empirical reality, functioning as a conceptual apprehension which, superimposing an extraneous element upon a thing itself, takes the latter as having the form of the former is an apparent direct knowledge. Inference and cognition resulted by it etc., comprehending conceptually what has been immediately perceived before, are not direct knowledge.

Dignāga adds a few other kinds of Perception, viz., (1) Mental perception (mānasa) that is further classified into object-awareness and self-awareness, (2) yogic perception and (3) self-awareness of concepts.

Mental Perception is one of the most difficult concepts in Buddhist Epistemology. It must somehow correspond to Mental cognition (mono-vijñāna) of the Early Buddhist philosophy (as a matter of fact, Dharmakīrti calls it manovijñāna in his Nyāyabindu). Buddhists traditionally hold that there are six kinds of cognition, viz., the five sense cognition and mental cognition (such as “This is yellow”) arises immediately after a sense-cognition (of tallow colour) taking as its object what is cognized by that sense-cognition. The object of mental cognition is called dharma that is in fact our concept or notion or idea of an object cognized by the sense-cognition. Thus mental cognition is a conceptual cognition in Dignāga’s terminology and it should be strictly distinguished from his perception.

Between an initial sense perception i.e. indriya-pratyakṣa of a certain external object and the succeeding conceptual determination (vikalpa) of that object Dignāga seems to place the mental perception (mānasa-pratyakṣa) of that external object. It is similar to the sense-perception because they take the external object and because they are free from conceptual construction i.e. nirvikalpaka and they are different because the former is not mediated by the external sense organ. It is similar to the succeeding conceptual cognition because they are not mediated by the external sense organ and they are different because the former is free from conceptual construction. Thus the mental perception is something between the two cognitive states. According to Dignāga the sense perception of a pot produces the mental perception of the pot, which, though he does not say, seems to produce the conceptual determination of the pot. Thus the mental perception plays a role of connecting the sense perception with the conceptual cognition.

According to Dignāga yogin’s intuition is also a kind of perception because it is not associated with any conceptual construction of the āgama and it apprehends only a thing in itself.

But Dignāga’s most important contribution to Buddhist epistemology is the concept of ‘self awareness’ or ‘self-cognition’ (svaśamvedana). Dignaga lists two kinds of self-awareness in his list of perception viz., (1) mental perception in the form of self awareness of mental events, such as desire and (2) Self-awareness of concepts. Most of our perceptions, including Yogic perception, may be called ‘awareness of objects’ (artha-samvedana). However, mental perception of mental events such as desire cannot be classified under the category of ‘object-awareness’ and should be regarded as a sort of ‘self-awareness’ that occurs in our mind.

Dignāga’s uniqueness is that he has clearly distinguished between non-conceptual perception i.e. nirvikalpaka-pratyakṣa and conceptual cognition i.e. kalpanā. Therefore conception is not to be regarded as perception. However, Dignāga lists ‘self-awareness’ of concepts as a kind of perception. He explains that conception is not perception as long as it is taken to be ‘object-awareness’ but it is perception if it is analyzed as ‘self-awareness’. Now, if conception in the form of ‘self-awareness’ can be considered perception, it will result that all kinds of cognition are perception as long as it is regarded as ‘self-awareness’. Furthermore, all kinds of cognition can be regarded as ‘self-awareness’. In fact, Dharmakīrti in his Nyāyabindu identifies svaśamvedana with self-awareness of all kinds of mind and mental events.⁷ Thus self-awareness can no longer be regarded as a class of perception. It is a general principle of Dignāga’s epistemology that can be applied to any cognition.

According to Dignāga when a particular external object i.e. Svalakṣaṇa is the object of cognition i.e. prarneya, it is grasped by means of cognition i.e. pramāṇa called perception i.e. pratyakṣa.

It is noted that Dignāga does not separate the means of cognition i.e. pramāṇa and its result i.e. pramāṇaphala. For him cognition has two aspects viz. (1) possession of the Form i.e. ākāra of an object and (2) awareness of that object. Since people say that cognition takes the shape or form of an object, although no action of taking is involved, the first aspect of cognition metaphorically called ‘the means of cognition’, while the second aspect is called ‘the result of cognition’. Therefore, the means of cognition is not a separate entity different from the cognition itself. By saying this Dignāga has launched the theory of two fold appearance of cognition– arthāhvāsa and svābhāsa. The possession of the form i.e. ākāra of an object is arthāhvāsa and the awareness of that object i.e. the cognition itself is called svābhāsa. The theory of dvirūpya of cognition reminds us of the traditional Yogācāra scheme of the two aspects of cognition, viz. the objective aspect, literally, the aspect to be grasped i.e. grāhyākāra and the subjective aspect, i.e. grāhakākāra. Dignāga’s basic position of epistemology is called sākāravijñānavāda according to which cognition i.e. vijñāna arises with a form or shape i.e. sākāra of an object. It is shared by other schools of Indian philosophy, such as Sāṃkhya and Vedānta. Dignāga in his former text Ālambanapariṅkṣa expresses his theory sākāravijñānavāda. There he establishes two conditions of an objective support i.e. ālambana. According to him an ālambana must be a cause of its cognition

(tadutpatti) and it must have a form or shape similar to its cognition i.e. tatsārūpya. The second condition of an objective support implies that cognition must have a form similar to its object i.e., sākāravijñānavāda.

Now, if we apply the scheme of Pramāṇa and prameya to the twofold aspect of cognition, the object of cognition i.e. prameya is the appearance of an object i.e. arthābhāsa or grāhyākāra in cognition and the means of cognition i.e. pramāṇa is the appearance of its cognition i.e. svābhāsa or grāhakākāra.

And now another question is that what is the result of cognition? Dignāga's answer is 'self-awareness' i.e. svasamvedana. If there is no external object to be cognized by perception, the result of perception cannot be called 'cognition of an object or object awareness', since the object of perception is its appearance as an object, i.e., perception itself, the result of perception can only be called 'cognition of itself' or 'self-awareness'.

According to Dignāga, when the cognition is caused, it has two sides, appearance of the subject and appearance of the object⁸.

The self-cognition between these two sides is the resulted content of the act of cognizing. The reason is that the nature of this self-cognition consists in determining the object i.e. artha-niścaya.⁹ When the idea, in which the form of the external object is represented, is taken as the object of cognition, the self-cognition which is corresponding to that idea determines the object either as something desirable or undesirable. But when the mere external things are thought to be the object of cognition then the appearance of the object in the mental reflex of the cognizant is the means of cognizing this object. Although the cognition should be self-cognizable in this case too, the appearance of the subject is disregarded, and to the mental reflex resembling to the object is attributed the role of the means of cognizing this object, for the object is cognized through that mental reflex. Whatsoever be the reflex of the object which has appeared in the cognition, whether it be the reflex of something white or non-white or of any other colour, this mental reflex which possesses the object within itself has the function of determining the object.

In this way Dignāga could maintain the threefold structure of cognitive event even in the system of Yogācāra. The crucial verse of the Pramāṇasamuccaya chapter I. 10 seems to indicate the importance of this theory in Yogācāra Buddhist tradition. It means that, that which appears in the image is the object of cognition, and the cognizing agency and the resulted content of cognition are respectively the apparent cognizant, i.e., the appearance of the subject and the self-cognition i.e. produced through the relation between apparent object and apparent subject, which actually are two sides of the same cognition. The verse emphasizes that the threefold division should not be taken literally; for no actual action is involved in the process of cognition and the names like pramāṇa are given only metaphorically. Therefore, these three factors of cognition are not different from each other¹⁰.

In this connection it is to be noted that there seems to be two different usages of the term 'self-awareness' in Dignāga's epistemology. It refers to the result of cognition i.e. pramāṇaphala that is distinguished from 'object awareness'. It also refers to the essence or essential operation of cognition, namely, cognition cognizes its own appearance of an object, whether it is given by an external object or not; in short, cognition cognizes itself. Of course, the two cases refer to one and the same cognitive event. Yet, they should be carefully distinguished in each different context. In Dignāga's epistemology, 'self-awareness' in the sense of essential operation of cognition is not restricted to perceptions but extended to conceptions. Thus Dignāga includes 'self-awareness of concepts' in his list of perceptions. Therefore, every cognition, not only perception but also conception, is characterized by 'self-awareness'.

END NOTES

(1) Dignāga's works preserved in the Tibetan Tripitaka are 14 in number, while Chinese Tripitaka enumerates 6, of which 4 are missed in the Tibetan

(2) In each chapter of this treatise, Dignāga, after elucidating his own theory, refutes the views of Vaśiṣṭhi, Naiyāyika, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya and Mīmāṃsaka.

(3) PSVT, IIb: vipratipatti = viruddha-pratipatti. Theories maintained by others are contradicting each other in 4 points of view, i.e., the result (phala), the nature (svarupa), the object (visaya) and number (samkhyā) of the means of valid language

(4) VPM.p. 140, cp. VA, p.242, 29.

pratyaksamanumanamcapramāṇelaksana-dvayam

prameyasatratrasandhanenapramāṇa-ram naca II 2 II.

Phnahpunar-abhijyane, nistha-asaktehsmrtadi- vat II 3a-b II

(5) pratyaksamkalpanapodham, name- jaty-adi-yojana II PS 3c-d II to associate name (nama), genus(jati) etc., which are considered to be the efficient cause of the verbal designation. (sabda-prarritti-nimitta), with the thing immediately perceived.

(6) VA, p. 332, 20, TSP, ad.k. 1324:

bhrānti-saṁvrtisaj-jñānāmanumānānumānikam//7c-d//

smārtābhilāśikamcētipratyakṣābhāsaṁsatairniram//8a-b//

PSVT, 27b, 2ff says that four sorts of apparent direct knowledge are enumerated here, namely (i) illusion (bhrānti), (ii) cognition of empirical reality (saṁvrtisaj-jñāna), (iii) Inference (anumāna, its result anumānika), recollection (smārta) and affection (abhilāśika) and (iv) Sa taimira. Sa taimira is according to ibid 28b, 2, an obscure knowledge caused by the defect of the sense-organ. Such as timira (eye-disease), and the like. This interpretation seems not to be faithful to the original thought expressed in this verse. The last word 'sataimiraṁ' is to be regarded as being in apposition with the preceding word pratyakṣābhāsaṁ; otherwise 'ca' is necessary to be added after 'sataimiraṁ'. Our opinion is supported by the fact that Dignāga explains in his own commentary on this verse three sorts of apparent direct knowledge only and not the fourth. It is obvious that PSVT modified the original thought of this verse basing upon the theory of Dharmakīrti, who thinking it to be the necessary to remove the erroneous cognition due to the defect of sense organ from pratyakṣa, adopted the qualification 'abhrānta' in his definition of pratyakṣa.

(7) Sarvacittacaittānāmsvasaṁvedanam II Nyāyabindu, verse 10

(8) The theory that ālayarijñāna appears or manifests itself (ābhāti) as both the apparent subject (grāhaka) and the apparent object (grāhya) is met everywhere in vijñānavāda treatises and we need no explanation of it here. It evident from the context of this passage that Dignāga established his theory of knowledge on the ground of the vijñānavāda philosophy, although he does not use the term 'ālayavijñāna'. The theory of self-cognition (svasaṁvit) which marks the specific feature of his theory of direct knowledge is understandable only on the basis of the vijñānavāda doctrine.

(9) Niścaya is synonymous with vikalpa, kalpanā, adhyavasāya etc. meaning thought-construction. Here, this term is used in different sense as is explained in the passages that follow.

(10) Yadābhāsaṁ prameyaṁ tat pramāṇaphalate punaḥ

grahakākārasaṁvittyostrayaṁ nātaḥ pṛthakkṛtam. II PS 1.10 II

Abbreviations:

PS: Pramāṇasamuccaya

PSVT: Viśālāmalavatī-nāma Pramāṇasamuccaya-tīkā

TSP: Tattvasaṁgraha-pañjikā of Kamalaśīla.

VA: Pramāṇavārtikabhāṣyam or Vārtikālaṁkaraḥ of Prajñākaragupta

VPM: Vibhūticandra annexed to Dharmakīrti's Pramāṇavārttika with a commentary Manorathanandin.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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