

# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON KHYATI VADA (THEORY OF ERROR) OF NYAYA PHILOSOPHY

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## Abstract

*“Error” is an epistemological concept. As such, it is contrasted with truth. While the truth-claim of a judgment is not challenged, it is accepted as true and when such truth-claim is challenged, it is regarded as erroneous. Philosophers, while dealing with the concept of error, have analyzed it from logical, metaphysical and psychological points of views. The problem of Error in Indian philosophy is discussed in the different theories known as the Khyati vadas. According to the Nyaya School of Philosophy error is known as anyathakhyativada. Here “anyatha” refers to something else from what it is, while ‘Khyati’ denotes false knowledge. Thus, this view indicates that the object of illusion is a real object that is seen by error as another real object. When taken separately the nacre and the silver are real on their own accord, but unreality creeps in when it comes to their relation as “nacre-silver”. In this instance, the nacre is mistaken to be silver that is found in some other locus like a jewelry shop, or in a Silversmith’s anvil. Great skill is exercised by the later Naiyayika school in trying to explain the perceptual character of illusory experience. Undoubtedly, in an illusion, there is the attribution of false character to a perceived fact.*

Key words: Khyati vadas, Naiyayikas, anyatha khyati

## Introduction:

Every school of Indian Philosophy developed its own theory of error (known as Khyativada) made to fit its epistemology and metaphysics. The Concept of Error (Khyativada) in Indian Philosophy is a discussion of the illusory or false knowledge (Aprma) as against True knowledge (prama). The concept of error is a very important one to the philosophers of India as it is related to the problem of knowledge. (Mohanty, J.N., 2000)

Khyativada, include the discussion of various theories pertaining to the problem of error in Indian philosophy. Since Khyati denotes knowledge, Khyativada may be inferred as the theory of knowledge. However, the question arises here as to how the theory of knowledge is inferred to be the theory of error! In India philosophy (unlike as in the western tradition).

Since knowledge includes both true and false perceptions and as the discussion of Khyativada are made only when it comes to Brahma or falsity, every theory happens to be an opinion about the nature of the cognitive content of the knowledge that is erroneous.

“Indian Philosophical schools try to reason and explain the phenomenon of the erroneous perception. In this regard, various arguments of Khyati have been put forward by various groups. Some of them are Satkhyati, Atmakhyathi, Akyati, Anyathikyati, Asatkhyati, Anirvacaniyakhyati, Viparita khyati, Alaukikakhyati, Yathartha khyati and Sadasdkhati are some of them.” (Gnanakumaran, N., 2015:52)

Indian philosophers come under two groups viz: 1. The idealists and (2) The realists. As regards reality, they have separate outlooks. These two groups give separate explanations towards reality and the various problems concerned with it.

There are two heads under which the main theories of error are classified:

1. Satkhyati
2. Asatkhyati

**Satkhyati:** In this theory, which hinges on existence, there is an objective reality in error which is the basic datum of an illusory object. This error happens to be the cognition of existence. Ramanuja Prabhakara and the Nyaya school of philosophy, as well as the Samkhya and Kumarila schools, hold this same view. Since the ground of illusion as the mental idea is not denied by the Yogachara school of Buddhism, but only its external nature is rejected, this group may also be considered as followers of Satkhyati. Thus, the Satkhyati theories of error include the following:-

1. Yathartha khyativada of Ramanuja
2. Akhyativada of Prabhakara Mimamsakas.
3. Anyathakhyativada of the Nyaya School.
4. Kumarila Bhatta's Viparita Khyativada
5. Sadasad Khyativada of the Samkhya school.
6. Atmakhyativada held by Vijnana Vada School.

### **Asatkhyati:**

Non – existence is the meaning denoted by the word, “asat”. This purports the idea that the content of illusory experience is pure non-entity. Thereby, error is treated as the cognition of the object that is non-existent. This view is also followed in the Sunyavada of Nagarjuna.

Thus, to view on the basis of the classification mentioned at the beginning herein, the idealists' groups of philosophy include (1) the Asatkhyati vada of Nagarjuna, (2) the Atmakhyati vada of Vijnanavada and (3) the Anirvacaniya vada of Advaita Vedantha while the remaining theories belong to the Realists; schools of philosophy.

### **Nyaya School of Philosophy:**

Nyaya School of Philosophy most likely had its origin in its attempt to formulate canons of argument for the use in debates, which pervaded the Indian philosophical scene for a long time. The Nyaya was first systematized by Gautama, also known as

“Aksapada”, in his Nyaya Sutras(250-450 CE), which belong to the post-Buddhistic period.(Gupta,B.,2012:171)

Nyaya literally means, “going into a subject”, i.e., that analytical reasoning by which the mind is led to a conclusion. The word “nyaya” popularly connotes “right” or “Justice” and hence the Nyaya system is known as the science of right judgment or true reasoning. Technically the word “nyaya” means a syllogism (or a speech of five parts). It is a science of right knowledge, Pramana sastra .(Vidyabhusan,S.C.,1921:40)

However, at present, Nyaya has two important sects, viz: prācina((the ancient one)and the navina/ navya nyāya (modern). The ancient Nyaya (prācina) developed out of the Gautama Sutras. The Neo-Nyaya (the modern or navya nyāya) begins with Gangesa, the author of Tattvacintamani, the most remarkable among them being Ragunath Siromani.

Beginning with Gautama who belonged to the third century B.C, a number of thinkers have dwelt on the Nyaya account of error. There is no explicit mention of the term Anyathakhyati in Gautama’s sutras. But there are occasions referring to wrong judgments.(Kar,B.,1978:58)

Vatsayana (of 300A.D) has commented on the sutras of Gautama. The comments of Vatsayana are defended by Uddyotaara (A.D.635) in his work known as Varttika. Both Vatsayana and Uddyotaara have analyzed and differentiated wrong judgments from the right ones.

The first occurrence of the term “Anyathakhyati” can be noted in Vacaspathi’s Nyaya-Varttika – Tatpatryatika which appears to be an annotation of Uddyotakara’s Varttika. Udayanacarya (of about the 10th century A.D) has commented on Tatpatryatika of Vacaspathi in his commentary known as “Tatparya Parisuddhi”.

Gangesa who lived around 1200A.D. was the founder of the Neo Nyaya School. In his work known as Tattva chintamani, Gangesa has departed from the classical account of error and knowledge. Gangesa has also many followers and commentators among whom, Raghunatha Tarka Siromani, the author of Didhiti is in the forefront.

### **The etymological meaning of Anyathakhyagati:**

According to the Nyaya School of Philosophy error is known as anyathakhyativada. Here “anyatha” refers to something else from what it is, while “khyati” denotes false knowledge. Thus, this view indicates that the object of illusion is a real object that is seen by error as another real object. (Vatsayana Bhasya on Nyaya Sutra iv.2.35.)

Such a view leads to the error being defined as the understanding of an object that does not have an attribute as one that possesses that attribute. This is a significant character of the old Nyaya maxim which holds that any judgment holds good so far as its subject is concerned. However, it may differ away from reality where its affirming element is concerned.

Thus, the error happens to be a perceptual cognition of an object as distinct from what it is, and so it refers to a thing that is outside of it.

The usage of the terms “else wise” and “elsewhere” to denote anyatha is really a matter of error. One perceives a presented object otherwise, while the existence of the represented object occurs somewhere else. It is further maintained that by nature anything known is not valid, but due to unrelated conditions (*paratahpramaya*) it becomes so during validity as well as invalidity. As held by this theory it will be seen that a real object is manifested as a different object which again happens to real. The understanding of an object differently is an error or illusion. In fact, it is the misunderstanding of one object like a nacre for another object, like silver. This theory of erroneous cognition is also known as *Viparitakyativada*.

The theory of error put forward by the Nyaya school is realistic and it treats the error as a single unitary perception. However, it has to be understood that all the qualities in the illusory judgment taken severally are real and only any identity presented between them is not real. The commentator of the Nyaya-Sutra, Vatsayana is of the opinion that no erroneous understanding could be treated as totally baseless. Thus, the error in the context of anyathakhyati is not an experience of totally unrelated contents but is the erroneous understanding of two real entities of which one is mistaken for the other.

### **Nyaya view of erroneous cognition:**

An “illusion” according to the Nyaya School is a fact applied to a wrong context. An illusory perception encompasses real and perceived facts which have been wrongly related. An example is the illusory perception of silver where the actual perception is that of a nacre. However both are seen as real facts. In this instance, the silver perceived at some other time and locality leads to the occurrence of any errors, being occupied by the perceived nacre. Alexander is of the view that error is consisted in the elements of reality getting wrongly combined.

According to the Naiyayikas, one cannot expect the concept of errors to clarify the perceptual error. But it can only reveal how the error is represented as a false characterization of objects. As done by Vacaspati in his discussion about error Naiyayikas too mention examples of erroneous perception like the nacre and silver. Yet for all the Naiyayika explanation of error as mistaking one object for another (*Sadantaram sadantarata mana grhayate*) is indicative of what the theory logically implies.

According to the Nyaya School, something seen as different from what it actually is, happens in an illusion, as in the case of nacre being mistaken as silver. Such mistaking could happen due to various causes such as insufficient light, or defective eyesight and the like, whereby the person concerned fails to recognize the actual nature of a nacre and understand it as something bright as silver. It is the effect of a real object being manifested in the form of a different object.

The error is not due to the indeterminate perception of the person concerned but due to the determinate perception operated and changed by some elements that presented the object. (Mohanthi, J.N., 2000:34)

One who perceives the qualities of silver in a nacre has an illusion which is a single cognition of a perceptual character. A nacre in conjunction with a visual organ, aggravated by some defect and prompted by the recollection of silver tends to appear as silver itself.

The sense of perception is bound to contact with something that is present before it. Although the sense understands the general features such as brightness etc, which are present in the object before it due to some unforeseen defects, the peculiar and distinctive features of the object are not discerned.

### **Jananalaksana Sannikarsa:**

The general features of the object being associated with something else, (Silver in this instance) receive the memory images of the special properties of silver which is mooted by the revival of its impression by the perception of its interest brightness. This is explained by modern Nyaya through Jananalaksana Sannikarsa. Hence in the case of illusion, the Jnanaakasanapratyaksā is accepted by Naiyayikas. Through the medium of the idea of silver recalled in memory and extraordinary intercourse related it is when the silver perceived somewhere else is referred to as a predicate to this as its subject that error creeps in giving rise to the “illusion”. This is the determinate knowledge as inferred by silverness.

When it comes to a matter of recognition (pratyabhijñā) one might refer to another person as the same man who helps him in some problem the previous day. Here one sees how certain elements of presentation and representation join together to produce one single perception. It is an instance of one kind of perception being qualified by a past perception. Here, one sees an object and recollects as to have seen it on some earlier occasion, whereby one is given the knowledge of how present objects are qualified by past events. (Radhakrishnan, S., 1983:70)

This way, one knows immediately that the thing once cognized is the same as that which was cognized earlier. Memory and perception combine to produce such an effect. How a given *sensum* combines with associated ideas to make up one perception, is generally explicit in any ordinary valid perception.

In the case of an illusive perception (illusion) the relation between the perceived “this” and “silver” is not objectively real. It is contradicted and proved as wrong. Thus, it will be clear that an error exists not in the presentations concerned with the perception, but in how one presentation is determined by another offered through association and memory.

### **Viparitakhyari**

The viparitakhyativada or the theory of error is advocated by Jayantha Bhatta who belonged to the Nyaya school of philosophy. This theory holds that it is the misinterpretation of something that leads to an error or mistake. Other Naiyayikas are of the view that viparitakhyati is identical with their anyatakhyati.

Jayantha Bhatta presents this theory in reputation of Prabhakara's theory of akhyati (knowledge). According to him, an illusion is a single cognition similar to a positive false knowledge. It amounts to the false perception of one object in place of a different object. It does not negate the discrimination between two cognitions. It is only a positive misperception, as in the case of a nacre being mistaken for a piece of silver.

This knowledge makes one to say (this knowledge is expressed as) "this is silver". The question now arises as to how such illusion occurs. What is perceived as per the "nacre – silver" illusion according to the older Naiyikas is that those features of nacre are, common to both nacre and silver. Due to the defect in the visual organ, one fails to note the peculiar qualities of the nacre. Thereafter, the perception of the common qualities reminds one of the peculiar qualities of silver by association. The perception of silver produced by the recollection of silver is caused by some perversion of the mind.

In order to explain illusion, a complicated form of illusion has been introduced by the so-called Navya Naiyayikas. According to them, through the idea of silver recalled in memory by association the visual perception of silver in a nacre depends upon the extraordinary relationship. By way of this relationship, the idea of silver recreated in memory by association, produces the visual perception of silver. (Devaraja, N.K., 1962:128)

In order to explain the perceptual illusion, Gangesa introduces a memory constant that provides the content of prediction and the qualification material. Gangesa analyses non-veridical sensory awareness as a matter of cognition whose predication content does not qualify the object related to the sense organ. The Navya Naiyayikas hold, that in the illusion the conch – the shell is misperceived as silver which exists elsewhere and is perceived where the shell is actually present.

### **Neo- Naiyayika point of view:**

The doctrine of anyatakhyati is also advocated by Gangesa who founded the Neo Naiyayika School. The appearance in one's consciousness in the form of an illusion, of a real object that exists somewhere else, is being explained by Gangesa. He holds the view that some special inter-connection exists with the visual organ producing the illusory perception of a nacre in silver. He says that through some alliance (jnanalaksanasannikarasa) such extra-ordinary connection is mooted. (Kar, B., 1978:69)

There is no other way to explain an illusion being perceived as a misrepresentation of an object as a different entity. This is explained by Nyaya through what is known as jnanalaksanapratyasatti. According to which, it is the revival of the idea of one's past experience of an object that brings in a kind of sense-objects.

Great skill is exercised by the later Naiyayika school in trying to explain the perceptual character of illusory experience, undoubtedly, an illusion, there is the attribution of false character to a perceived fact. But in this respect, the following questions have arisen.

- 1.How does one come to ascribe the false character?
- 2.How does this false character appear as something actually perceived in illusion?

According to Nyaya, an experience of illusion is a single perception. Unlike Prabhakara's opinion, it is not a complex of perception and recollection of which the distinction is blurred by obscuration.

### Conclusion:

**Thus as inferred** from anyatha khyati, error is not an experience of totally unrelated entities. It is only the erroneous understanding of two real things of which one is mistaken for the other. It is inflected a subjective conditioning or relationship to the perceiver. Thus, the sublimation of attribute is a correction rather than the rejection of the substance.

It is only in the sphere of description that Nyaya admits error, Anyathakhyati in this respect, stands for false judgment in matters where the correct description of the referent is not given by the judgment. From all points of view, to judge something as it exists is true and deviating from such a standard doubtlessly amounts to falsity. It is therefore clearly revealed that so far as error is concerned, Nyaya is interested in the logical problem of bringing error into a clearly defined formal category instead of confusing the problem of logic either with psychological or metaphysical; categories.

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