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## Nyāya Philosophy: A Critical Analysis Of Logic And Knowledge

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### Abstract:

This paper explores the *Nyāya* School of philosophy, a prominent classical Indian system, renowned for its emphasis on logic, epistemology, and analytical inquiry. *Nyāya* offers a comprehensive approach to understanding knowledge acquisition, grounded in four key *Pramāṇam* i.e. perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony. By systematically analyzing these sources of valid knowledge, *Nyāya* establishes a robust structure for discerning truth from error. The paper further explores *Nyāya*'s contributions to the field of logical reasoning, particularly its methods for constructing and evaluating arguments. Key contributions from influential Nyaya scholars are discussed, shedding light on their role in advancing analytical thought. By examining *Nyāya*'s analytical foundations, this study aims to demonstrate the enduring relevance of this philosophical tradition in contemporary discussions on epistemology and logic.

**Keywords:** *Nyāya* Epistemology, *Pramāṇam*, *Pratyakṣam* (Perception), *Anumānam* (Inference), *Upamānam* (Comparison), *Śabdaḥ* (Testimony), Knowledge Acquisition, Valid Cognition, Logical Reasoning.

### Introduction to Nyaya philosophy

Nyaya philosophy, one of the six orthodox schools of Indian thought, is distinguished by its systematic approach to logic, epistemology, and rational inquiry. Originating in ancient India, the Nyaya system was primarily concerned with the process of acquiring valid knowledge and using it to understand the nature of reality. Its foundational text, the *Nyaya Sūtras*, attributed to the sage Gautama, laid the groundwork for an intricate system of reasoning and debate that would profoundly influence Indian philosophical discourse. The Vedic texts and the Mimamsa School, which placed a strong emphasis on ritual and textual interpretation, were other earlier philosophical movements that had an enormous influence on the Nyaya School. However, Nyaya set itself apart by adopting a distinct focus on logic and reason as the primary tools for knowledge acquisition. At the same time, Nyaya philosophers actively engaged with competing schools of thought, most notably Buddhism, which posed alternative views on perception and reality. Through rigorous analysis, critical examination, and structured debate, Nyaya thinkers sought to develop a logically coherent framework for understanding the world, making rational inquiry the cornerstone of their philosophical exploration.

The term "*Nyāya*" translates to "argumentation", indicating that the system is primarily focused on intellectual assessment, logical reasoning, and epistemology. It is often referred to as *Tarkaśāstra*, the science of reasoning; *Pramāṇasāstra*, the science of logic and epistemology; *Hetuvidyā*, the science of causes; *Vādavidyā*, the science of argument; and *Ānvikṣīki*, the science of critical investigation. Nyaya embodies a system known for its atomistic pluralism and logical realism, stressing a sophisticated comprehension of reality by means of meticulous analysis and argumentation.

The sage Gautama (2nd century BCE)<sup>1</sup> also known as Gotama and Aksapada. He was the founder of the Nyaya School of philosophy. The evolution of Nyaya philosophy unfolded over several centuries, enriched by the insights and contributions of later

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thinkers who elaborated on its principles and theories. Notable figures in this development include Vatsyayana, Uddyotakara, Jayanta Bhatta, Vacaspati Mishra, Udayanacarya, Gangesa, Bhasarvanja, Keshava Mishra, Viswanatha Nyayapancanana etc. each of whom played a significant role in refining and expanding the scope of Nyaya thought. The primary text of Nyaya philosophy is the Nyaya Sutas, which is composed by Maharsi Gautama. This seminal work consists of five chapters (*adhyāya*), with two *āhnikam* in each chapter containing 528 sutras. It provides rules of cause and effect, logical Reasoning, epistemology and metaphysics. An essential companion to the Nyaya Sutas is the Nyaya-Bhashya, a commentary by Vatsyayana that further clarifies and expounds upon the principles and concepts outlined in the Sutas. As Nyaya philosophy evolved, a wealth of commentaries and sub-commentaries emerged, deepening the understanding of its various aspects. Notable contributions include Uddyotakara's *Nyāya-Varttika*, which addresses and elaborates on key ideas, and Jayanta Bhatta's *Nyāya-Mañjari*, both of which played significant roles in the development and refinement of Nyaya thought throughout the centuries.

### 1. Aim and Scope of This Paper

The main goal of this paper is to explore the rationalist principles present in Nyaya philosophy, especially delving into its epistemological framework and logical reasoning. By exploring the core principles of Nyaya, this study aims to clarify its unique method of acquiring knowledge, specifically focusing on perception, inference, and the significance of logical analysis in its methodology.

In addition to analyzing the core concepts of Nyaya, this article will highlight the contributions of significant Nyaya philosopher, such as Vatsyayana and Udayana, who played pivotal roles in advancing rationalist thought within this tradition. By exploring their insights and philosophical developments, we seek to illustrate how the evolution of rationalism in Nyaya has shaped its discourse over time.

Furthermore, this study aspires to demonstrate the broader relevance and significance of Nyaya's rationalist framework within the wider landscape of philosophical inquiry. By examining the fundamental teachings of *Nyāya* philosophy, this article intend to provide insights into the intellectual heritage of Indian philosophy that continue to shape contemporary discussions on logic and the pursuit of knowledge.

### 2. Essential Tenets of Nyaya Philosophy

1. **Epistemology:** Nyaya philosophy is rooted in a robust epistemological framework that identifies four primary sources of valid knowledge (pramanas): perception (*pratyakṣapramāṇam*)<sup>2</sup>, inference (*anumānapramāṇam*)<sup>3</sup>, comparison (*upamānapramāṇam*)<sup>4</sup> and verbal testimony (*śabdapramāṇam*)<sup>5</sup>. These pramanas serve as essential tools for establishing truth and understanding reality.

2. **Logical Reasoning:** Central to Nyaya is the emphasis on logical reasoning and argumentation. The philosophy provides structured methodologies for constructing sound arguments and effectively refuting fallacies, fostering critical thinking and rational discourse. One of the primary objectives of Nyaya is to provide a reliable framework for establishing truth through logical reasoning and empirical evidence.

3. **Analytical Approach:** Nyaya advocates for a systematic and analytical approach to philosophical inquiry. This involves careful examination of concepts, definitions, and distinctions to achieve a coherent understanding across various subjects, including metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology.

4. **Debate and Dialogue:** A key objective of Nyaya is engaging in rigorous debate and dialogue with other philosophical traditions like Vedanta, Mimamsa, Samkhya, Budhisim etc. This commitment to discourse sharpens its own principles and enriches the broader intellectual landscape of Indian philosophy.

5. **Pragmatic Application:** Nyaya is not just theoretical; it aims to apply its principles to practical aspects of life. By guiding individuals in the pursuit of knowledge and truth, it seeks to enhance decision-making, ethical behavior, and the quality of human understanding.

6. **Ethics and the Path to Mokṣaḥ:** Nyaya School of philosophy emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct (*dharma*) as a fundamental aspect of leading a righteous and meaningful life. It posits that ethical behavior is essential for personal and social harmony, guiding individuals in their interactions with others and in their pursuit of truth. In addition to its ethical dimensions, Nyaya delves into the concept of liberation (*mokṣa*)<sup>6</sup>, which is viewed as the ultimate goal of human existence. The philosophy asserts that liberation can be attained through the acquisition of right knowledge, which involves the removal of *ajñānam* and the realization of the true nature of reality. By fostering a clear understanding of oneself and the world, Nyaya aims to empower individuals to transcend the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsāra*) and achieve spiritual freedom. This dual focus on ethics and liberation underscores Nyaya's holistic approach to philosophy, integrating moral conduct with the pursuit of knowledge as pathways to a fulfilling life.

7. **Kārya-kāraṇavāda:** Nyaya places significant importance on understanding causality, exploring the nature of causes and effects (*Kārya-kāraṇavāda*), which contributes to a deeper comprehension of how events unfold in the world.

### 3. Analysis of Nyaya Epistemology

All philosophical systems have their own unique approaches to understanding the world. Within this framework, sorrow is identified as the primary challenge faced by humanity, and liberation from this sorrow is regarded as the ultimate goal of life. Achieving this goal

necessitates a deep and accurate understanding of various elements, which in *Nyāya* philosophy are categorized into sixteen elements (*ṣoḍaśa-padartha*).

“*pramāṇa-pramēya-samsāya-prayōjana-dr̥ṣṭānta-sidh-dhanta-avayava-tarka-nirṇaya-vāda- jalpa-vitaṇḍā-hētv-ābhāsa-chala-jāti-nigrahasthānām-tatvajñānānīsrēya-sādhigamaḥ.*”<sup>7</sup>

This is the first sutra of the *Nyāyasūtras*, which express that the valid knowledge of these sixteen elements (*padārthāḥ*) leads to *nīsrēyasa*, which signifies liberation (*mokṣa*). According to *Nyaya*, *mokṣa* is defined as the destruction of ultimate sorrow, highlighting the significance of acquiring accurate knowledge as a pathway to achieving true liberation and overcoming suffering.

In *Nyaya* philosophy, knowledge (*jñāna* or *buddhi*) is intricately derived as apprehension (*upalabdhi*).

“*Buddhirupalabdhirnjanamitynarthantaram //*”<sup>8</sup>

This conceptualization underscores the philosophy's commitment to a realistic perspective, positing that knowledge serves as a means to illuminate the relationship among the subject (the knower) and the object (the known), both of which exist independently of the act of knowing. The nature of knowledge is also described in *Tarkasamgrah*, i.e.

“*sarvavyavaharaheturjanam buddhiḥ //*”<sup>9</sup>

The knowledge is of two types. These are Mnemic Knowledge (*Smṛtiḥ*) and Non-Mnemic Knowledge (*Anubhavaḥ*).<sup>10</sup>

□ **Mnemic Knowledge:** This is knowledge based on memory or *samskāra* (mental impressions or imprints). It's called *smṛti* (recollection), where prior experiences or learned information come back to consciousness. Essentially, it is knowledge that is "remembered" or recalled due to previous imprints in the mind.<sup>11</sup>

□ **Non-Mnemic Knowledge:** This refers to knowledge that is not rooted in prior memory or mental impressions. Instead, it arises directly from present cognition or perception (*pratyakṣa*), without reliance on past experiences. This kind of knowledge is more immediate and can be associated with direct awareness or intuitive understanding. Again *Anubhavaḥ* is divided into two categories,<sup>12</sup> i.e.

I. Valid Knowledge (*Pramā*)

II. Invalid Knowledge (*Apramā*)

**I. Valid Knowledge (*Pramā*):** This is accurate knowledge that corresponds to reality which is called Valid Knowledge (*Yathārthānubhavaḥ*). It reflects the true nature of the object as it is. Valid knowledge is produced through reliable means that is called *Pramāṇa*. Gautama does not explicitly define *pramāṇa* in his works. However, Vātsyāyana, in his commentary, describes *pramāṇa* as that which generates cognition or valid knowledge.<sup>13</sup> This explanation is rooted in the etymological meaning of the term, “*pramīyate'neneti pramāṇam*”. Vācaspati Mīśra follows this tradition, defining *pramāṇam* as a means of

knowledge, but he distinguishes *pramā* (valid knowledge) from remembrance (*smṛti*), emphasizing its fresh and direct nature. According to *Nyāya* philosophy *pramāṇam* is divided into four.<sup>14</sup>

- Perception (*pratyakṣam*),
- Inference (*anumānam*),
- Comparison (*upamānam*) and
- Testimony (*sabdaḥ*).

#### **A. Perception (*Pratyakṣam*)**

Maharsi Goutama defines *Pratyakṣa* as non-erroneous cognition produced by the interaction of sense organs with objects (*sarṇnikarṣaḥ*).<sup>15</sup> ishvanātha expands on this to include both ordinary and extraordinary perception, excluding inference, comparison, and testimony. Perception, according to *Nyāya*, is a form of knowledge and an attribute of the self. Ordinary perception involves the interaction of the sense organs, objects, the mind (*manas*), and the self. The self first contacts the mind, the mind contacts the sense organs, and the sense organs interact with external objects. This chain of contact - from self to mind, mind to sense organs, and finally sense organs to objects - is essential for perception. The sense organs are composed of elemental materials that manifest specific qualities such as smell, taste, color, touch, and sound. The mind serves as a mediator between the self and the sense organs, allowing the external world to leave an impression on the self. This view underscores the realistic nature of the theory. *Nyāya* identifies two stages in perception:

- Indeterminate Perception (*Nirvikalpa*):** This is the initial stage where awareness of the object exists without any judgment or differentiation. It is pure, raw experience without the application of concepts.<sup>16</sup>
- Determinate Perception (*Savikalpa*):** This stage involves recognizing the object along with its attributes, applying conceptual knowledge, and making relational judgments.<sup>17</sup>

*Nyāya* further distinguishes between ordinary perception (*laukika*), involving direct sense-object contact, and extraordinary perception (*alaukika*), which involves more complex or unusual interactions. Ordinary perception can be either internal (perception of mental states) or external (perception of physical objects through the five senses). The external sense organs - sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell - are made up of elements that enable them to perceive corresponding qualities in the external world. Extraordinary perception is classified into three types:

- Sāmānyalakṣaṇā:** The perception of universals, such as recognizing a cow as part of the general category “cowness”.
- Jñānalakṣaṇā:** Associative perception, where past experience informs current perception. For example, seeing a rose from a distance may trigger the memory of its fragrance, even though the fragrance is not presently sensed.

3. **Yogaja**: The heightened, intuitive perception that yogis achieve through meditation, allowing them to perceive past, present, and future objects.

### B. Inference (*Anumānam*)

The *Anumānam* or inference, which is the second kind of valid knowledge in *Nyāya* School of philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Inference is indirect knowledge that arises from a previous cognition. It relies on a middle term (*linga* or *hetu*) that is invariably associated with the major term (*sādhya*) and is present in the minor term (*pakṣa*). The key concept is *vyāpti*, or invariable concomitance, which ensures that the middle term is always linked to the major term.

A classic example is seeing smoke on a hill and inferring that there is fire. Here:

- The hill is the minor term (*pakṣa*),
- Fire is the major term (*sādhya*),
- Smoke is the middle term (*linga* or *hetu*).

By knowing that “wherever there is smoke, there is fire” (*vyāpti*), one concludes that the hill has fire. *Nyāya* includes both induction and deduction, blending formal and material logic. There are two kinds of inference:

- **Svārtha**: A psychological process where formal statements aren't needed<sup>19</sup>.
- **Parārtha**: A formal syllogism used to convince others, expressed in five steps, known as *pañcāvayavavakya*<sup>20</sup>. It consists of five parts:
  1. **Pratijñā**<sup>21</sup>: Proposition (e.g., “This hill has fire”)
  2. **Hetu**<sup>22</sup>: Reason (e.g., “Because it has smoke”)
  3. **Udāharaṇa**<sup>23</sup>: Universal concomitance with an example (e.g., “Whatever has smoke has fire, like an oven”)
  4. **Upanaya**<sup>24</sup>: Application of the universal rule to the specific case (e.g., “This hill has smoke”)
  5. **Nigamana**<sup>25</sup>: Conclusion (e.g., “Therefore, this hill has fire”).

### C. Comparison (*Upamānam*)

*Upamāna* is used when knowledge is gained through comparison or analogy between a known and an unfamiliar object based on their resemblance.<sup>26</sup> For example If a person has never seen a wild ox (*gavaya*) before but someone has been told that it looks like a cow, upon seeing the *gavaya* for the first time, they recognize it as similar to a cow. This recognition of similarity allows them to gain knowledge about the *gavaya* through the concept of *upamāna*.

### D. Testimony (*Śabdaḥ*)

*Śabdaḥ* or verbal testimony as one of the valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇam*) in the *Nyāya* School of philosophy.<sup>27</sup> *Śabdaḥ* refers to the knowledge gained from the words of a trustworthy person (*āptavākya*). Testimony is of two kinds: *Vaidika* (divine, infallible, like the Vedas) and *Loukika* (human, fallible).<sup>28</sup> For verbal testimony to be effective, the sentence conveying it must meet four conditions:

- **Ākāṅkṣā** (Mutual Expectancy): Words should be interrelated and express a complete meaning. A collection of unrelated words makes no logical sense. e.g., ‘cow horse man elephant.
- **Yogyatā** (Fitness): Words must be fit to convey the intended meaning and must not contradict the intended sense. e.g., ‘Watering plants with fire is a contradictory statement.
- **Sannidhi** (Proximity): The words must be spoken or written in close proximity to one another for the sentence to make sense. For a meaningful sentence, its words must be spoken in quickly without any significant pauses. If there are long intervals between words, such as in the phrase “bring a cow”, where the words “bring”, “a” and “cow” are spoken too far apart, the sentence loses its logical coherence and becomes difficult to understand. This is part of the *Sannidhi* condition, which requires proximity in the sequence of words for effective communication.
- **Tātparya** (Intention): The speaker's intention matters, especially if the words have multiple meanings. For example the word “*saindhava*” can mean both “salt” and “horse”. If someone who is eating asks for “*saindhava*”, it is clear from the context that they mean salt, not a horse. The listener must understand the intention behind the words to avoid confusion and respond appropriately. This principle ensures that ambiguous words are interpreted based on the situation and the speaker's purpose.

### II. Invalid Knowledge (*Apramā*):

This type of knowledge does not reflect reality and encompasses aspects such as doubt (*saṁśayaḥ*), error (*viparyayaḥ*), and hypothetical reasoning (*tarkaḥ*).<sup>29</sup> Memory is deemed invalid because it retrieves information about an object without directly presenting it to the soul, relying instead on past experiences. Doubt arises from uncertainty in cognition, while error occurs when there is a misrepresentation of the object, leading to incorrect knowledge. Hypothetical reasoning is not genuine knowledge, as it is based on conditional premises; such as if there were no fire, there would be no smoke.

### Conclusion

*Nyāya* philosophy plays a crucial role in Indian thought, emphasizing logic and epistemology to define valid knowledge (*pramā*) and discern truth from falsehood. Its methodology revolves around four *pramanas* providing a systematic approach to knowledge acquisition. The logical structures established in *Nyāya*, particularly syllogistic reasoning, highlight the importance of argumentation and critical analysis, making significant contributions to modern logical thought. Furthermore, *Nyāya*'s engagement with other philosophical traditions, such as *Mīmāṃsā*, *Vedānta*, and *Buddhism*, enriches its discourse and showcases its adaptability. In essence, *Nyāya* philosophy

offers a critical framework for understanding the interplay between logic and knowledge, underscoring its relevance in contemporary philosophical discussions. By examining *Nyāya*'s contributions, we gain insight into the foundations of rational inquiry, enhancing our appreciation for its intellectual legacy and its importance in modern contexts.

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