International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering, Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.

CERTIFICATE NO : ICLTSEMH /2025/C0125294

Comparison of Knowledge-Nyaya, Mimamsa and Advaita: A Philosophical Study

Shatabdi Bhattacharyya

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the conceptualization and epistemology of knowledge in three classical Indian philosophical schools: Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, and Advaita Vedānta. Nyāya emphasizes logic and analytical reasoning, presenting knowledge (pramā) as a means to ascertain truth through perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. Mīmāṃsā, with its ritualistic and dharmic orientation, regards knowledge primarily as the understanding of Vedic injunctions, highlighting the authority of verbal testimony (śabda) as paramount. Advaita Vedānta, in contrast, approaches knowledge from a non-dualistic metaphysical perspective, positing self-realization (ātma-jnāna) as the ultimate liberation, where empirical and inferential knowledge are subordinate to intuitive realization of Brahman. Through comparative analysis, the study delineates how each school addresses the source, validity, and purpose of knowledge, revealing both convergences and divergences in their epistemological frameworks. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of classical Indian thought, demonstrating that while Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā focus on epistemic processes, Advaita emphasizes ontological insight, thereby offering a holistic philosophical panorama of knowledge. In this article; comparison of knowledge-nyaya, mimamsa and advaita: a philosophical study has been discussed.

Keywords: *Knowledge, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Advaita, Philosophy.*

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge has always been the central pursuit of Indian philosophy, guiding not only intellectual inquiry but also ethical and spiritual life. Among the diverse schools of thought, the Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, and Advaita Vedānta traditions provide distinctive approaches to understanding knowledge, its sources, and its ultimate purpose. While Nyāya emphasizes logical reasoning and epistemology, Mīmāṃsā focuses on the interpretation of Vedic injunctions and ritualistic knowledge, and Advaita seeks the realization of non-dual Brahman as the highest truth (Bhattacharya, S., 2016).

The Nyāya school, known primarily for its theory of knowledge (pramāṇa), investigates how perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony lead to valid knowledge (pramā). It lays down systematic methods to distinguish between true and false knowledge, thereby offering a rigorous analytical framework. In contrast, the Mīmāṃsā school prioritizes dharma and the authority of the Vedas, exploring knowledge in the context of duties and ritual actions. It asserts that knowledge is both prescriptive and practical, guiding human conduct through an epistemology rooted in Vedic injunctions. Meanwhile, Advaita Vedānta, as expounded by Ādi Śaṅkara, transcends

IJAMSR

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conventional epistemology by asserting that ultimate knowledge is the direct realization of the self's identity with Brahman, emphasizing intuition and spiritual experience (anubhava) over purely intellectual reasoning (Freschi, E., 2018).

This comparative study aims to explore the similarities and contrasts among these three schools regarding their conception of knowledge, the means through which it is acquired, and its role in human life. By examining their philosophical frameworks, this study not only illuminates the richness and diversity of Indian epistemology but also highlights enduring questions about truth, reality, and the path to liberation. The investigation seeks to bridge the analytical rigor of Nyāya, the ritualistic pragmatism of Mīmāṃsā, and the spiritual insight of Advaita, offering a comprehensive understanding of knowledge in classical Indian thought.

COMPARISON OF KNOWLEDGE-NYAYA, MIMAMSA AND ADVAITA (PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES)

Naiyāyikas and *Mīmāṃsakas,* the common-sense realists, raise specific objections to the Grammarian view on the grounds that it is not borne by experience. We have separate awareness's of words and universals. While we may not perceive something as a cow prior to acquiring the word 'cow,' we are surely aware of cowness before we acquire the linguistic expression, just as we are aware of and can discriminate shades of red even before we acquire the names of some of those shades. A non-conceptual awareness of the object is implied by the subsequent occurrence of a conceptual awareness with determinate content. *Kumārila* also points to other phenomena, which indicate that the awareness of the meaning of a word is independent and distinct from the word itself. Furthermore, awareness of the meaning and that of the word are usually different kinds of representations; there is no possibility of confusing or conflating these. *Kumārila* brings to attention linguistic phenomena that reinforce the point that words and meanings must be distinct representations, e.g., homonymy, synonymy, categorizing and recognizing grammatical parts of speech (Bilimoria, P., 2018).

The ability to distinguish and discriminate types is perhaps enhanced by knowledge of language and concepts, but is not completely dependent on it. Those who are not trained in music can certainly hear the difference between distinct notes, even though they are unable to identify them by name. *Vātsyāyana*also appeals to the ordinary experience of people who are conversant with words. Ordinarily, words are apprehended as names of objects. The knowledge of the word-object association comes after the perceptual knowledge derived through sense-object contact. Such contact results in a perceptual awareness, which, in turn, provides the occasion for recalling the appropriate word, if indeed the appropriate word exists in the experiencer's linguistic repertoire (Potter, K. H., 1977).

Perceptual knowledge is antecedent to verbal knowledge and cannot owe its existence to words. *VācaspatiMiśra* specifically objects to *Bhartṛhari's*claim that infants and adults who lack a language perceive objects by memory impressions of their names from previous births. Objects are vividly and

IJAMSR

International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering, Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
19th January, 2025, Noida, India.

clearly given to us in perception, but the memory-impressions of previous births are at best vague and indistinct. *VācaspatiMiśra* asks,

"How can such a vague and unclear thing be identified with a clear and distinct perception?"

(Nyāyavārttikatātparyaṭīkā, 127)

His other argument against *Bhartṛhari* is the obvious point that words do not necessarily refer to their objects, for example, words in quotation marks do not refer to objects, only to themselves. Moreover, if the word and its denotation were identical, a blind man would grasp red or redness when he grasps the word 'red' and a deaf person would grasp the word 'red' when he grasps a red thing (Potter, K. H., 2014).

The *Naiyāyikas* also have a general response to nominalistsBuddhists as well as Grammarians. They posit monadic universals that correspond to natural and metaphysical kinds and one dyadic universal, viz. inherence.The main nominalist objection is that once we accept real universals in our ontology we risk overpopulating the world with entities corresponding to every expression that designates a property. For example, if we accept horsehood and cowhood as universals, we also need to accept universal hood as another universal. The *Naiyāyikas* propose that not every expression, which designates a property, generates an objective universal (*jāti*); some property-expressions correspond to subjectively constructed categories (*upādhi*), which though useful for analysis, are not ontologically real.

Uddyotakara argues that to correspond to a real universal a general term must meet two conditions:

(i) A general term should be based on a ground, which accounts for the common awareness of a number of different objects, that makes the application of the term possible, and
(ii) The ground should be a simple (non-compound), unitary property or entity that analyzed or explained away otherwise.

(Commentary on Nyāya-sūtra, 2.2.65)

Universal hood is a bogus universal; it violates the second condition. There is no simple basis or ground for universal hood as opposed to universals such as cowhood and horsehood; the ground of being one-in-many can be analyzed in terms of inherence. The same applies to universals like 'barefooted', 'cook', 'reader' etc.; the basis for their application is presence of compound features such as bare feet, etc. However, this stratagem forces the *Naiyāyikas* to admit that many general terms designate bogus universals and, consequently, they start succumbing to the nominalist pressure (Deutsch, E., & Dalvi, M. M., 2004).

Matilal (1986, 420–421) notes that there is another way in which it happens to *Navya-Nyāya*: A real universal must partake of the nature of 'one-in-many'. The *Navya-Naiyāyika*, *Udayana* (c. 10th century CE), lists a third necessary condition for disqualifying a property from being considered as a real universal. Under this condition, an abstract property that belongs only to one individual is also a bogus universal even though it is simple and unanalyzable; skyness in the sky is bogus because it is

IJAMSR

International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering, Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
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only a nominal attribute. However, since both cowhood and skyness are simple properties, they are grasped as such in perception without further qualification. In this sense, *Naiyāyikas* maintain that some real universals are directly perceptible. This leads to the peculiar Nyāya view that real universals and basic properties are grasped in our awareness as '*epistemic firsts'* or ultimate (Nakamura, H., 2004).

Gaṅgeśa calls such perception, in which universals are grasped as such, non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception.The AdvaitaVedānta theory compromises on the realism of earlier classical Hindu philosophy. Their early view on perception is akin to the Buddhists, although arrived at from a different perspective. *MaṇḍanaMiśra* says:

Perception is first, without mental construction, and has for its object the bare thing. The constructive cognitions, which follow it, plunge into particulars.

(Brahma-Siddhi, 71.1-2)

He draws a distinction between perceptual cognition and constructive cognition, but is careful to use *vikalpa-buddhi*, rather than *savikalpakapratyakṣa*, for the latter cognition. For him perception is always non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception and it is of a universal, indeed of the highest universal, Being (sat). Bestowing to early *Vedāntins*, the real is bereft of all character since its nature is non-differentiated consciousness or Brahman. Therefore, perceptual cognition, which presents the real, must be non-conceptual or indeterminate for it is the knowledge of the existence of a thing without any qualifications or predications. *MaṇḍanaMiśra* also denies the thesis that non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception is non-verbal. This surprising claim is clearly owed to *Bhartṛhari's* influence, as is evidenced by the example employed by *MaṇḍanaMiśra* in the argument (Scharf, P.M., 2002).

Neo Advaita-Vedāntins, however, accept a distinction between non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception and conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perceptions from empirical or practical (*vyāvahārika*) standpoint; from ultimate (*paramārthika*) standpoint such distinction is untenable. A brief description of conceptual (*viṣayagata, Advaita-Vedānta term for savikalpaka*) perception will help put in perspective *Applebaum's*(1982) reconstruction of their notion of non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception later. Determinate perception is the result of the activity of mind (*manas*) or *antaḥkaraṇa*(literally translated as *'inner vehicle'*)—the terms are frequently used interchangeably. Advaitins maintain that the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) 'goes out' through the respective sense organ (the eye, say) and pervades the object of attention. Subsequently of this contact, the object presents itself as data to the receptive mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) which, in turn, transforms into a mental state (*vṛtti*). As soon as the data are presented to inner faculty, there is an identification of consciousness associated with the mental state (*antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*) with the consciousness associated with the object. To say that *vṛtti* and data are identified is to say that the form of the mental state, if all goes well, corresponds one-to-one with the form of the object; the mental state is a reflection of the object of perception, and as such is non-different from the object. Thus results a determinate judgment

IJAMSR

International Conference on Latest Trends in Science, Engineering, Management and Humanities (ICLTSEMH -2025)
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(*vṛttijñāna*) of the form "this is a jar". Furthermore, according to them, we do not perceive our mental states; we directly perceive the objects themselves. The *vṛtti* in the form of the object impresses itself as it were in the mode of the subject itself, and thereby comes to be apprehended, but as a predicate*Bilimora* explains,

In addition, not as the pure subject-content which is the 'I-notion' in the subject's apperception.

(Bilimoria, 1980, 41)

The initial mental state subsidies and the subject become directly aware of the object itself; the cognition is self-evident to the subject, just like the cognition of pleasure and pain. In this reflective stage, the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) integrates the mental contents corresponding to the object with familiar or recognized percepts. Determinate perception of the totality of the object occurs with the completion of the assimilative process.

David Applebaum (1982) notes that *Bilimoria's*discussion of the Advaitin's notion of perception focuses on the necessary conditions or criteria for valid or veridical perceptions. According to him, this approach while justified in the light of perception's inclusion among the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) is mistaken because it only focuses on sensation as a species of mental state (*vṛtti*). For the Advaitin, sensation is not a mode exhausted by the judgmental content of a mental state (*vṛtti*), it has epistemic value independently of its role in judgmental perception. Applebaum quotes from the *Upanisadic* texts to support this view:

Manas is for men a means of bondage or liberation of bondage if it clings to objects of perception (visayasangi), and of liberation if not directed towards these objects (nirviṣayam).

(Applebaum, 1982, 203)

Non-conceptual perception furnishes us with knowledge of pure existence (*sanmātra*) rather than with proto-data to construct imagined particulars. Therefore, it is not simply a prior stage of conceptual perception and so not necessarily, a mental state produced in cooperation with the object (Ganeri, J., 2010).

Applebaum (1982, 204) suggests that non-conceptual perception in this sense focuses attention on sensing, in which consciousness turns its attention inwards to the activity of the sense organs resulting in deepening and broadening their proprioceptive content. Proprioception, he claims, points the way to the soul or self (*ātman*); mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) returns to its presentational activity, its function of monitoring and unfolding the sensory manifold to create conditions for the emergence of self (*ātman*), which according to the Advaitin, is identical with the Ultimate reality (*Brahman*). In non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception, consciousness is returned to itself and opens up the possibility of manifesting or seeing the Seer (*ātman*) or knowing the Ultimate reality (*Brahman*).

IJAMSR

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19th January, 2025, Noida, India.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of knowledge in Nyaya, Mimamsa, and Advaita philosophies reveals both convergences and divergences in the Indian epistemological landscape. Nyaya emphasizes knowledge as the accurate cognition of reality through logical reasoning and perception, highlighting the importance of pramanas (means of valid knowledge) in discerning truth. Mimamsa, while also recognizing pramanas, focuses primarily on the role of ritual action and scriptural injunctions, viewing knowledge as intimately linked with dharma and the correct performance of duties. Advaita Vedanta, in contrast, transcends the empirical and ritualistic domains, defining ultimate knowledge as the realization of the non-dual Brahman and the illusory nature of the phenomenal world (Chakrabarti, K., 2005).

The study underscores that while Nyaya and Mimamsa offer structured, procedural approaches to knowledge grounded in logic, perception, and dharma, Advaita provides a transformative, experiential dimension where knowledge leads to liberation (moksha). Together, these philosophies demonstrate the richness and diversity of Indian thought: Nyaya represents analytical clarity, Mimamsa embodies practical orthopraxy, and Advaita captures metaphysical insight. Understanding their perspectives on knowledge not only deepens our appreciation of classical Indian philosophy but also provides timeless insights into the nature, purpose, and methods of human cognition.

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