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Sāṃkhya Theory of Verbal Testimony According to Yuktidīpikā

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Abstract
Theory of *pramāṇa* occupies a very important part in almost all the systems of Indian philosophy. The concept of *pramāṇa* as explained by the author of *Yuktidīpikā* is also different. In the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* itself, it has been stated that three kinds of *pramāṇa* are to be accepted. In fact, different systems admit different number of *pramāṇa*. So when it is generally accepted that *pramāṇa* is the only means for acquiring right knowledge, a question naturally arises as to how many *pramāṇas* are accepted by Sāṃkhya.The third *pramāṇa* which is admitted by Sāṃkhya is verbal testimony, generally denoted by the term *śabda*. In its most general sense, the word śabda means any kind of sound. But in present context it is to be taken in a narrow sense, in the sense of sound which is a combination of letters (varṇa) and which may be used as a symbol for expressing some meaning. Thus, śabda-pramāṇa means words or a group of words as a source of valid knowledge.

Keywords: Indian philosophy, pramāṇas, śabda, Sāṃkhya, Yuktidīpikā

Introduction
All the orthodox systems put special emphasis on this *pramāṇa*, because they all accept the validity of the Vedas and scriptures based upon them, which naturally come under the purview of this particular source of knowledge. While discussing the nature of *śabda*, Indian philosophers have raised many significant probans which are worthy of study for their own importance. They have discussed, for example, probans relating to the relation between a word and its meaning, the actual meaning signified by a word, the nature of sentential meaning and the process of arriving at it and also whether verbal testimony should be accepted as an independent source of knowledge at all. Of course, the theories have developed through the centuries and moreover, these theories are not always available in the earlier original texts of the systems.

Definition of śabda pramāṇa
In the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* this source of knowledge is referred to by the term *āpta-vacana* [1]. It is also pointed out that this source is to be considered important. The idea is that generally objects are known by perception. But there are also imperceptible objects and they are to be known by inference. There may be still objects which are not only beyond perception, but cannot even be known through inference. Such objects are established by verbal testimony. For example, the evolution of the world through a particular sequence, the existence of heaven, of *apūrva* and gods etc. are all established on the authority of scriptures or verbal testimony. The author of Yuktidīpikā offers a slightly different explanation. According to him, two kinds of objects come under the purview of this source of knowledge. First, objects through they may be known by some other *pramāṇa*, but are not so at present, because of some factor obstructing the operation of that source. Secondly, objects which are, totally beyond the access of any other source [2].The author of *Yuktidīpikā* also notes an objection against this position. If the authority of verbal testimony is accepted, then the authority of learned persons belonging to even the other systems has to be accepted.

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[1] SK, verse 4.
[2] YD, under SK verse 5.

But the authorities of the different systems subscribe to and argue logically for different conclusion and doubt. Finally, he will not be able to proceed on the path of salvation. In answer it is pointed out that the objector has missed the actual point. It is not accepted that the statement of any and every person is accepted as valid. Only such persons are considered trustworthy who have conquered all vices, who have attained knowledge beyond all doubts and who are capable of ascertaining the nature of objects which are ordinarily beyond the senses, i.e. persons like the great seers. If such persons are available in the other systems also, there is no harm in accepting their authority. Besides, it does not mean that the statement of a trustworthy person belonging to a particular system cannot be accepted as valid so far as his own system is concerned. In his own particular field of study he must be accepted as authoritative [3].

In the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, verbal testimony is not denoted by the general term *śabda*, instead a significant term has been used to denote it, namely, *āpta-vacana*. The definition also is given in almost similar terms, namely, *āpta-śruti*. The compound is taken to be *karmadhāraya* (*āpta-śrutiḥ*) [4]. The word *āpta* means that which is capable and capability is here synonymous with non-contradictedness. The term *śruti* means the knowledge of sentential meaning as produced through the sentence. When there is a valid ascertainment produced through a group of words, it is a case of *śabda-pramāṇa*. Such knowledge is intrinsically valid. By verbal testimony Vācaspati primarily takes knowledge acquired through the Veda. The followers of Sāṃkhya do not admit God and hence, the Veda cannot be taken to be statements coming from God. But the Vedic statements are valid by themselves, because they have no connection with any speaker and the possibility of there being any defect is automatically excluded. Of course, it may be asked how are we to establish the validity of Smṛti, Itihāsa and Puraṇa which are definitely connected with some speakers? The answer is that these texts are all based upon the Veda, they deal with truths which are already established by the Veda and as such, knowledge derived through them is also equally valid [5].

Refutation of others system

Even then, an objection may be raised. It may be true that Manu and others have properly studied the Veda and then, they have written the texts. So they contain truths which are already sanctioned by the Veda. But how can the same be true of the doctrines advocated by Kapila? Kapila is said to be ādividvan, the first and foremost of the learned, it cannot be said that he has written the text after studying the Veda. Admitting that he has also studied the Veda, it would have to be admitted further that he has done so under the guidance of a preceptor. In that case he cannot be the first and foremost among the learned. If, on the other hand, his wisdom is not due to the study of the Veda, how can the text composed by him be accepted as based upon the Veda and accordingly valid? To this, Vācaspati comments that Kapila may not have studied the Veda in this particular kalpa, but at the beginning of a new creation, he recollects the knowledge he has acquired earlier. It is like a person who studies something and then goes to sleep for the night, but next morning he remembers all the things just he awakens. The doctrines of Kapila are thus ultimately based upon the Veda [6]. Vācaspati

further points out that the term *āpta* has a special significance. There may be scriptures composed by the Buddhist, the Jaina and others, but they cannot be accepted as valid, because they are not *āpta*, fit to be followed and accepted. Why are they unfit? Vācaspati answers that they are universally denounced. They also do not have any authoritative root. They speak of doctrines which are contradicted by *pramāṇa*. They are followed only by people who are devoid of sense are no better than beasts.

The author of *Yuktidīpikā* however dissolves the compound in the word *āpta-śruti* in two ways. First his explanation is exactly similar to that of Vācaspati. He comments that this explanation is necessary for showing that the scriptures which have no connections with any speaker are to be accepted as valid. Alternatively, he dissolves the compound as *ṣaṣṭhi-tatpuruṣa*. In that case verbal testimony will stand for statements of trustworthy persons. Thus whenever some speakers like Manu and others are available, their texts also may be accepted as valid. It is further explained that the term *āpta-śruti* is to be repeated twice, but because of *ekaśeṣa* only one is retained [7].

This later form of explanation is accepted by the Yogasūtra also, and the statement is not so cryptic. According to it agama operates when an awareness is produced in the listener after a reliable person has made a verbal communication regarding objects known by him through perception or inference in order to communicate his own awareness to somebody else. It is also pointed out that if the speaker is not reliable or if the speaker has not acquired knowledge through perception or inference, a verbal communication will not attain the status of *pramāṇa* [8].

In short, here we have two positions. First, reliability belongs to the words themselves and secondly, it belongs to the speaker. This tradition is available in the Nyāya view also.

As against the Sāṃkhya view that the pramāṇas are three in numbers, the Nyāya holds that there are four *pramāṇas*. According to it, the third one is *upamāna*, and *śabda* is the fourth or the last. The definition in the *Nyāyasutra* is almost synonymous with the one offered by Sāṃkhya. According to Gautama, verbal testimony is a communication from a reliable person. The special characteristic of such a person is given by Vātsyāyana. It is the speaker who has direct knowledge of an object and is motivated by the desired of communicating it as directly known by him [9].

The first characteristic is that the speaker must have a direct knowledge of the object. However, direct knowledge does not simply mean knowledge through perception. There are things which are extraordinary in nature and cannot be known by perception. So, Vācaspati comments that directly known means ascertained duly through a sufficient capable source of knowledge. A person may have the direct knowledge of an object, but he may not have any desire to communicate it to somebody else, or due to malice, he may not communicate it correctly. Such a person will not be considered reliable. So, Vātsyāyana speaks of the second characteristic. The person must have the desire to communicate the object correctly in the same way as he has himself ascertain it. Even then, such a person may not actually make a communication because of idealness or some other cause. It is therefore explained that he must be a person actually making the effort to make the communication. In spite of all these, he may not be able to make a statement due to the disability of sense-organs. Hence,

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 TK, under SK verse 5.
6 Ibid.

7 See note 74 above.
8 YS, 1.7, bhāṣya
9 NS, 1.1.7 and bhāṣya thereon.

a person will become an *āpta* only when he makes a statement [10].

Vātsyāyana makes an interesting point here. He says that the definition of a reliable person applies equally to the seer, the noble and the barbarian. It is not that the status of a speaker has anything to do with his reliability. The most important thing is whether he has a direct experience of the matter he is speaking about. Different persons may have correct knowledge in different matters. A Brahmin may be considered reliable in sacrificial matters. A warrior may be experienced in the matter of weapons. A low-born hunter may be an expert in the behavior of animals in the forest. Each has his own specialized field. When they speak with reference to their own specific field they are to be considered reliable and their statements are to be accepted as sources of valid knowledge. This is the basis of general practice on the strength of which our day to day activities are properly carried on [11].

One of the problems that is often discussed in connection with verbal testimony is whether it can be included in inference or not. The Vaiśeṣikas, for example, do not accept it as a separate form of *pramāṇa*, but say that the function of verbal testimony can be performed by inference. In the Sāṃkhya texts also the question has been discussed. Vācaspati makes a brief comment [12]. He says that verbal testimony must be distinguished from inference. When we hear a sentence we understand a whole, connected meaning and not just the individual meanings expressed by the words. This meaning cannot be known by inference. Although the sentence-meaning cannot be understood in the absence of the group of words, still there is no scope for inference. The words cannot be taken as an inferential mark, because it is not present as a property in the sentence-meaning, which is the thing sought to be established. Of course, one may argue that there is definitely a relation between a word and its meaning. Not every meaning is understood from every word. Therefore, just as concomitance is established between smoke and fire, so also concomitance is established between a word and its meaning. On the strength of this invariable relation the one, the meaning, may be inferred from the other, word. In fact, unless one is aware of the relation between a word and its meaning, one cannot understand any meaning ever after listening to the word. As against this claim, Vācaspati points out that it is not possible to establish concomitance between a sentence and its meaning. Concomitance is established on the basis of repeated observation. But such observation is not possible in the case of a sentence and its meaning. A poet, for example, presents some compositions which are totally new, the sentences have not been ever heard of before and the meaning also has never been understood. There is no scope of repeated observation in such cases. So it is not possible to establish concomitance between a sentence and its meaning [13].

View point of Yuktidīpikā

The author of *Yuktidīpikā* has discussed the question in greater details. The opponent argues that verbal testimony should be regarded as inference, because in this case also there are positive and negative agreements. We infer smoke from fire. Where ever there is smoke, there is fire and if there is no fire there is no smoke. Similarly, whenever a particular word is uttered, there is the awareness of a particular meaning. If the particular word is not heard there is no awareness of the meaning. As against this, it is pointed out, in the first alternative, that verbal testimony is not admitted to be a *pramāṇa* with reference to objects like the tree etc. which are experienced in our day to day life. It is admitted to be so in respect of objects like heaven etc which are totally beyond perception. Thus, at least in some particular cases the independence of verbal testimony as a source of knowledge cannot be denied. But finally he argues that even taking verbal testimony in general it can be shown that it is definitely distinguished from inference [14].

Thus, it is pointed out that there is a basic difference between inference and verbal testimony. In the former, it has nothing to do with the nature of the person employing the reason. The validity of the knowledge derived has nothing to do with the nature of the person concerned. If there is established concomitance between the *hetu* and *sādhya*, a correct inference will follow irrespective of whether it is employed by a pious man or a dishonest person. But in the case of verbal testimony the reliability of the speaker is vital. If the words are to lead to valid knowledge, they are to be pronounced by a reliable person. If the speaker is not so, the words cannot lead to valid knowledge [15].

Moreover, no invariable relation can be established between a word and a meaning. The relation between the *hetu* and the *sādhya* is valid everywhere and always. The concomitance is not disproved with reference to a different place or a different time. But the case with a word and a meaning is not so. In a particular country a particular word stands for a particular meaning. But the same word may signify a totally different meaning in some other country. Similarly, the meaning of a word may not be fixed for all time to come. The same word may convey different meanings in different times. So a word cannot be said to be concomitant with a meaning and verbal testimony cannot be considered a form of inference.

Another point to be noted in this connection is that in the case of inference the relation between the *hetu* and *sādhya* is natural. It is not possible to relate, for example, smoke to something else like water or air drawing it away from fire. Smoke and fire are related to each other by nature. On the other hand, the relation between a word and its meaning is not naturally fixed, because it may vary according to the intention of the speaker. A word may be generally used in a particular sense. But someone may use it to signify some special meaning. The word *vṛddhi* commonly means prosperity, but, according to Panini, it stands for three particular vowels. Therefore a word cannot be an inferential mark for a meaning [16].

There is also an attempt on the part of some to deny validity to verbal testimony because of a different consideration. All words cannot be considered sources of valid knowledge. There are words in the case of which the objects referred to by them can be apprehended also by some other source of knowledge. For example, the information given by the statement that there are mango trees on the bank of the river can be verified by perception. Such words cannot be regarded as a source of valid knowledge. The objection however is rejected. The real point is whether the words are employed by a reliable person or not. If they are employed by a reliable person there is no scope of doubting their validity irrespective of whether the things referred to by them are ordinary or

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[10] Bhāṣya on NS 1.1.7.
[11] Ibid.
[12] TK, under SK verse 5.
[13] Ibid.

[14] YD, under SK verse 7.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

extraordinary. Why should a valid source of knowledge depend for its validity upon another source of knowledge? A *pramāṇa* is self-sufficient and valid by itself. If the validity of verbal testimony is accepted in one case there is no logical ground to deny it in the case of the other [17].

Validity of verbal testimony
That verbal testimony is a separate *pramāṇa* is supported by specially pointing out the difference in the cognitions produced by inference and verbal testimony. It is pointed out that an object known through verbal testimony is not necessarily known by inference. There are objects, such as, heaven, nymph, *Uttarakuru* etc., which are imperceptible and cannot be known by inference. In fact, in the case of verbal testimony it is not that the objects are known merely from listening to the words. It is not similar to the knowledge of fire from the perception of smoke. The objects are rightly known due to the fact that reliable persons speak of them. It has been observed that when words are not spoken by such a person they cannot lead to right knowledge. The case of inference is thus quite different. This also provides an answer to the objection that there is no difference in the nature of the cognitions acquired by inference and verbal testimony. The cognitions in the two cases are dependent upon different factors and the basis of their validity also is different. It is therefore not logical to consider then identical [18].

After stating that in the Sāṃkhya view there are three *pramāṇas* and giving the definitions of them one by one the SK shows that each particular kind of object. Roughly the implication of the verse is that, in general, objects are known by perception. There are so many things around us like a jar, a piece of cloth etc. and they are all known by perception. But there are also objects which cannot be known by perception, e.g. heaven, virtue and vice etc. such objects are known by inference. But, still, there are objects which cannot be known either by perception or inference. For the knowledge of such objects we depend upon verbal testimony. Thus, through the three kinds of *pramāṇa* we can have the knowledge of all the objects which are different in nature [19]. But an objection may be raised against the above position. It may be admitted that in the case of objects with which it is possible to establish a contact with the sense, the objects may be known by perception. In the case of objects with which there can be no relation of the sense may be known by inference provided that it is possible to establish a concomitance between a *hetu* and a *sādhya*. But there are objects which are totally incapable of cognition through perception or inference. How are we to know about such objects? If it is answered that they are known through scriptures (*āgama*), then the views of even opponents will have to be accepted as valid, because an opponent will claim that his view is supported by his own particular scriptures. In other words, the views of all the philosophers will be established as valid. But this is not desirable, because each system of philosophy supports a particular theory and rejects those advanced by other systems. So it is to be admitted that scripture has no validity and the totally imperceptible objects cannot be admitted. But it has been claimed that there are only three *pramāṇas* and all objects can be apprehended by them. To answer this objection, the author of the SK has mentioned the scope of the three sources of valid knowledge so that it is proved that all

the objects are known by the three *pramāṇas* admitted by *Sāṃkhya* [20].

The author of *Yuktidīpikā* says that the above objection would be possible if it is claimed that there is only one kind of inference. But the fact is that different kinds of inference have been admitted. There are cases in which an effect is inferred from an effect. These two kinds of inference are applicable in the case of ordinary objects, in which it is possible to establish a concomitance between a *hetu* and a *sādhya*. It is not claimed that all the objects are known through these two. There is also a third kind of inference where the concomitance is ascertained on the basis of general observation and certain objects are established or known through it. For example, after ascertaining the co-existence of production and non eternality in a pot, non eternality is inferred in the case of word (*śabda*) also. Similarly, it is cognized that fragrance is caused through sandalwood because the former is of the nature of the latter. Again, we find that all objects composite in nature, such as, the bed etc., serve the purpose of somebody else, so we infer the existence of *puruṣa*. In this way, all that is desired is established. Thus, there is no difficulty, because an inference based on satisfied. If it is claimed that imperceptible objects are known through an inference based on general observation, it will have to be admitted that even objects which are not known because of some special circumstances also can be known through such an inference. For example, some causes for the non-perception have been stated in the SK itself. An object which is too far away cannot be perceived, e.g. a bird flying high in the sky. An object too near also cannot be perceived, e.g. collyrium in the eyes. If a sense is defective there can be no perception through it. There are also other causes which make a perceptible object imperceptible. It may be argued that such objects also should be known through this third kind of inference. This objection is answered by saying that objects like heaven, gods etc. which are absolutely beyond the reach of the senses are established by the scripture [21].

Conclution
We have discussed above the significance of the sixth verse as it has been explained by the commentators. The point made by them is that the objects which are beyond the senses are known by the special variety of inference, the one based on general observation. However, it appears that the significance of the verse need not be made so complex, rather the verse admits of a simple explanation. According to Sāṃkhya, the *pramāṇas* are only three. Every *pramāṇa* has its scope for a particular kind of things only. In this verse it is stated clearly. There are objects around us which are ordinary and can be reached by the senses. So generally objects are known by perception. For example, the awareness of a jar on the ground is apprehended by the visual sense. Nobody tries to infer it or claims that it is known from the statement of a reliable person. But there are also things which cannot be apprehended by any sense, e.g. virtue and vice, the gods etc. The means for knowing such things is inference. From a mark which has invariable concomitance with another thing we infer the existence of such objects. Still, then, there are things which can be known neither by perception nor by inference. For example, it is said that a person can attain heaven by performing the Aśvamedha sacrifice. In other words, there is a cause-effect relation between the performance of the

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] SK, verse 6.

[20] On ibid.
[21] Ibid.

sacrifice and the attainment of heaven. All this cannot be known by perception or inference, because the senses are not so powerful and there is no invariably related mark. So the knowledge in such a case can be acquired only through the statement of the scripture or verbal testimony.

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