

A Study on the Theory of Error (Khyātivāda) in the Nyāya Perspective

Md Ali Ahamed

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Sarojini Naidu College for Women, Dum Dum, Kolkata

Abstract

The error constitutes an epistemological idea. Consequently, it is juxtaposed with the truth. When the truth-claim of a judgement remains unchallenged, it is acknowledged as accurate; conversely, when such a truth-claim is contested, it is deemed erroneous. Philosophers have examined the concept of error from logical, epistemological, and psychological perspectives. The issue of error in Indian philosophy is examined through many theories referred to as the Khyāti vādas. In the Nyāya School of Philosophy, error is referred to as anyathākhyātivāda. Here, 'anyathā' signifies something different from what it is, whereas 'Khyāti' indicates erroneous understanding. This perspective suggests that the object of illusion is a genuine entity mistakenly perceived as a different real object. The nacre and silver are authentic individually; nonetheless, their association as "nacre-silver" introduces an element of unreality at this case, the nacre is erroneously identified as silver, typically located at venues such as a jewellery store or a silversmith's anvil. The later Naiyāyika school demonstrates much competence in elucidating the perceptual nature of illusory experiences, which, despite being illusions, involve the misattribution of misleading characteristics to a perceived reality.

Keywords: Epistemology, Nyāya school, Khyātivādas, anyathākhyāti, Jñānalakṣaṇa Sannikarṣa.

I. Introduction:

Each school of Indian Philosophy formulated its distinct theory of error (termed Khyātivāda) according to its epistemological and metaphysical framework. The Concept of Error (Khyātivāda)¹ in Indian Philosophy examines illusory or false knowledge (Apramā) in contrast to True knowledge (Pramā). The notion of error holds significant importance for Indian philosophers as it pertains to the issue of knowledge. Khyātivāda encompasses the examination of diverse theories related to the issue of error throughout Indian philosophy. Khyātivāda might be interpreted as the theory of knowledge, given that Khyāti signifies knowledge. Nonetheless, the inquiry emerges regarding how the theory of knowledge is deduced to be the theory of error. In Indian philosophy differs from the Western tradition.

Knowledge encompasses both accurate and inaccurate perceptions, and discussions of Khyātivāda arise solely in relation to Bhrama or falsehood; thus, every theory constitutes an opinion regarding the erroneous character of cognitive content in knowledge.

“Indian philosophical systems endeavour to rationalise and elucidate the phenomenon of erroneous perception. In this context, numerous arguments pertaining to Khyāti have been presented by different parties, including Satkhyāti, Atmakhyāti, Akhyāti, Anyathākhyāti, Asatkhyāti, Anirvacaniyakhyāti, Viparita khyāti, Alaukikakhyāti, Yathārtha khyāti, and Sadasadkhāti.”

Indian philosophers are categorized into two groups: (1) Idealists and (2) Realists. Concerning reality, they possess distinct perspectives. These two organisations provide distinct interpretations of reality and the associated issues.

The principal theories of error are categorised under two headings:

1. Satkhyāti
2. Asatkhyāti

¹ Khyātivāda is the collective term in classical Indian philosophy for different theories explaining perceptual error or illusion (bhrama). Derived from khyāti (cognition or apprehension) and vāda (doctrine), these theories answer a core question: how and why does the mind perceive something as what it is not.

Satkhyāti: This theory posits that there exists an objective reality within error, serving as the fundamental datum of an illusory object. This fallacy pertains to the awareness of existence. Ramanuja, Prabhakara Mīmāṃsaka, the Nyāya school, the Sāṃkhya school, and the Kumarila school share this perspective. The Yogachara² school of Buddhism does not refute the concept of illusion as a mental construct; it merely dismisses its exterior aspect. Therefore, this group can also be regarded as adherents of Satkhyāti. Consequently, the Satkhyāti theories of error encompass the following: -

1. Anyathākhyātivāda of the Nyāya School.
2. Akhyātivāda of Prabhakara Mīmāṃsakas.
3. Kumarila Bhatta's Viparita Khyātivāda
4. Sadasad Khyātivāda of the Sāṃkhya school
5. Yathartha khyātivāda of Ramanuja

Asatkhyāti

The term 'asat' signifies non-existence. This suggests that the substance of illusory perception is entirely non-existent. Consequently, mistake is seen as the perception of a non-existent item. This perspective is similarly upheld in Nagarjuna's Sunyavāda.³

Therefore, to consider according to the aforementioned classification, the philosophical groupings of idealism comprise (1) Nagarjuna's Asatkhyātivāda, (2) Vijnanavāda's Ātmakhyātivāda, and (3) Advaita Vedānta's Anirvacaniyavāda, whereas the other theories are associated with realist schools of philosophy.

Nyāya School of Philosophy:

The Nyāya School of Philosophy presumably originated from its endeavour to establish principles of argumentation for use in debates, which were prevalent in the Indian philosophical landscape for an extended period. The Nyāya was initially systematised by Gautama, referred to as "Aksapāda," in his Nyāya Sūtras (250-450 CE), which are part of the post-Buddhistic era. Nyāya literally signifies 'engaging with a subject', referring to the analytical reasoning that guides the mind to a conclusion. The term 'Nyāya' commonly signifies 'right' or 'justice,' hence the Nyāya system is recognised as the science of accurate judgement or sound reasoning. The term 'Nyāya' technically refers to a syllogism, or a discourse with five components. It is a discipline of accurate information, Pramāṇa Shāstra.

Currently, Nyāya comprises two significant sects: prācīna (the old) and navīna/navya nyāya (the modern). The ancient Nyāya (prācīna) evolved from the Gautama Sūtras. The Neo-Nyāya, or Navya Nyāya, commences with Gaṅgeśa, the author of Tattvacintāmaṇi, with Raghunath Siromani being the most distinguished among its proponents. Starting with Gautama of the third century B.C., several philosophers have examined the Nyāya perspective on error. The term Anyathākhyāti is not explicitly referenced in Gautama's Nyāya sūtras. However, there are instances pertaining to erroneous judgements.

Gautama's Nyāya sūtras have been commented upon by Vatsyāṇa (300 A.D.). Uddyotakara (A.D. 635) defends the remarks of Vatsayana in his work Nyāya Vārttika. Both Vatsayana and Uddyotakara have examined and distinguished between incorrect and correct judgements. The term "Anyathākhyāti" first appears in Vācaspathi's "Nyāya-Vārttika – Tatparyatika," which seems to be an annotation on Uddyotakara's Vārttika. In his commentary titled "Tatparya parisuddhi," Udayanacarya, who lived in the tenth century A.D., offered comments on Tatparyatika of Vācaspathi.

The Neo Nyāya school was founded by Gaṅgeśa, who flourished around 1200 A.D. Gaṅgeśa deviates from the traditional explanation of error and knowledge in his work Tattvachintāmaṇi. The author of "Dīdhiti", Raghunath Tarka Siromani, is among Gaṅgeśa's many supporters and commenters.

The etymological meaning of 'Anyathākhyāti'

The Nyāya School of Philosophy claims that anyathākhyātivāda is the term for error. Here, "anyathā" means anything different from what it is, and "khyāti" means incorrect information. According to this perspective,

² A significant school of Mahāyāna Buddhism that was established in India during the fourth century CE by the brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Meditation and psychological analysis are the primary focuses of this approach, which teaches that actuality is experienced and formed solely through the use of consciousness (also known as citta-mātra or "mind-only").

³ According to the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Sūnyavāda, also known as the theory of emptiness or śūnyatā, serves as the fundamental philosophy within the school. According to Nagarjuna, who lived about the second century CE, it was his contention that everything does not possess an autonomous, unchanging core or self-nature (svabhāva), but rather everything exists through interdependent causes and conditions

the illusion's object is actually a real object that is mistakenly perceived as another real object. (Nyāya Sūtra iv.2.35; Vatsayana Bhasya)

Understanding an object that lacks an attribute as having that attribute is the definition of the error that results from such a view. This is an important aspect of the ancient Nyāya principle, which maintains that any decision is valid insofar as its subject is involved. However, in terms of its affirming component, it could deviate from reality. As a result, the mistake relates to something outside of an item because it is a perceptual perception of an object as different from what it is.

It is actually incorrect to use the phrases "elsewise" and "elsewhere" to indicate anyathā. While the described object exists somewhere else, one interprets it in a different way. It is also asserted that anything that is understood is not valid by nature; however, it becomes valid during both validity and invalidity due to unrelated situations (paratahprāmāya). According to this idea, it will be observed that a real object manifests as another real object. It is an error or illusion to perceive a thing in a different way. It is actually the misinterpretation of one item, such as a nacre, for another, such as silver. Viparitakhyātivāda⁴ is another name for this idea of incorrect cognition.

The Nyāya school offers a realistic theory of error that views error as a single, cohesive perception. It must be acknowledged, though, that every attribute in the illusory judgement taken multiple times is real; the sole identity that is shown between them is not. According to Vatsayana, the Nyāya-Sūtra's commentator, no incorrect interpretation could be considered completely unfounded. Therefore, in the context of anyathākhyāti, the mistake is not an experience of completely unrelated contents but rather an incorrect perception of two genuine entities, one of which is mistaken for the other.

Nyāya view of erroneous cognition

The Nyāya School defines an "illusion" as a fact that is applied incorrectly. Real and perceived facts that have been incorrectly connected are included in an illusory perception. The illusory impression in which the real perception is that of a nacre is one example. Both are regarded as actual facts, nevertheless. In this case, any inaccuracies arise because the seen nacre occupies the silver that was perceived at a different time and location.

The Naiyāyikas contend that it is unrealistic to expect the idea of errors to explain the perceptual error. However, it can only show how the issue manifests as an inaccurate description of an object. Naiyāyikas also cites instances of incorrect perception, such as the nacre and silver, as Vācaspati did in his explanation of error. However, the Naiyāyika explanation of error as confusing one thing for another (Sadantaram sadantarāt mana grhayate) is representative of what the theory logically suggests.

The Nyāya School holds that an illusion occurs when something is perceived as being different from what it actually is, such as when nacre is mistaken for silver. This kind of misidentification can occur for a number of reasons, including inadequate light, poor vision, and the like, whereby the individual in question is unable to identify the true nature of a nacre and perceives it as something as brilliant as silver. It is the result of an actual object seeming as a separate object.

The inaccuracy is not the result of the person's indeterminate perception, but rather of the determinate perception that was altered by some aspects of the object's presentation.

When someone sees the characteristics of silver in a nacre, they are experiencing an illusion, which is a single perceptual cognition. The combination of a nacre and a visual organ, exacerbated by a flaw and triggered by the memory of silver tender, makes silver itself appear.

The sense of perception must come into contact with what is in front of it. Even still, general characteristics like brightness, etc., are understood by the sense. which are existing in the object prior to it because of some unanticipated flaws, the unusual and distinguishing characteristics of the product are not apparent. It is impossible to identify the object's general characteristics.

'Jñānalakṣaṇa Sannikarṣa'

The general characteristics of the object being associated with anything else—in this case, silver—receive the memory images of its unique qualities, which are suggested by the perception of its interest brightness. Through Jñānalakṣaṇa Sannikarṣa, modern Nyāya explains this. Therefore, Naiyāyikas accept the

⁴ An illusion is defined as the positive misapprehension of one real thing as another, according to the Viparitakhyati theory of error, which is a traditional Indian philosophical theory of error (khyātivāda).

Jñānalakṣaṇa pratyakṣa⁵ in the case of illusion. Error arises when the silver perceived elsewhere is referred to as a predicate to this as its subject through the medium of the idea of silver recalled in memory and extraordinary intercourse related. This is the determinate knowledge inferred by silverness.

One may refer to another individual as the same man who assisted him with a problem the day before when discussing a recognition issue (pratyabhijñā). This illustrates how specific aspects of representation and presentation combine to create a single perception. This is an example of how a prior perception qualifies a certain type of perception. Here, an object is seen and remembered as having been seen on a previous occasion, giving one the understanding of how current objects is qualified by past occurrences.

In this manner, it is immediately apparent that what has been cognised is the same as what was previously cognised. Such an effect is the result of perception and memory working together. Any common valid perception usually makes clear how a particular sensum joins with related concepts to form a single perception.

The relationship between the seen "this" and "silver" in an illusory perception is not objectively genuine. It is contradicted and shown to be incorrect. As a result, it will be evident that there is a mistake not in the perception-related presentations but rather in the way that one presentation is influenced by another presented by association and memory.

‘Viparita khyāti’

Jayantha Bhatta, a member of the Nyāya school of philosophy, promoted the theory of error, or viparitakhyativada. According to this theory, an error or mistake is the result of misinterpreting something. Other Naiyāyikas believe that their anyathākhyāti and viparitakhyāti are the same.

In the context of Prabhakara's theory of akhyāti (knowledge), Jayantha Bhatta offers this theory. He defines an illusion as a single cognition that resembles positive erroneous knowledge. In essence, it is the mistaken impression of one thing instead of another. The distinction between two cognitions is not eliminated. It's simply a good misunderstanding, like when someone thinks a piece of silver is a nacre.

"This is silver" is how this understanding is expressed. Now, the question of how such delusion happens emerges. The ancient Naiyāyikas believe that the characteristics of nacre are shared by both nacre and silver, according to the nacre-silver illusion. The deficiency in the visual organ causes one to overlook the nacre's unique characteristics. After that, one is reminded of the unusual characteristics of silver by association with the shared attributes. The impression of silver created by the memory of silver brought on by a mental distortion.

Gangeśa presents a memory constant that supplies the qualification material and the prediction content in order to explain the perceptual illusion. According to Gangeśa, non-veridical sensory awareness is a cognitive issue whose prediction content does not qualify the object associated with the sense organ. According to the Navya Naiyāyikas, in the illusion of the conch shell is mistakenly viewed as a silver that is present elsewhere.

‘Neo- Naiyāyika’ point of view

Gangeśa, the founder of the Neo Naiyāyika School, also promotes the anyathākhyāti theory. Gangeśa explains how a real object that exists somewhere else can appear in one's consciousness as an illusion. He believes that there is a unique relationship between the visual organ and the illusion of a silver nacre. He claims that such an extraordinary relationship is proposed through some alliance (jñānalakṣaṇa sannikarṣa). The perception of an illusion as a misrepresentation of an object as a different entity cannot be explained in any other way. Nyāya explains this through the concept of jñānalakṣaṇa pratyasatti, which states that a type of sense-object is brought in by the resuscitation of one's prior experience of an item.

The later Naiyāyika⁶ school demonstrates great expertise in attempting to describe the perceptual nature of illusory experience, which is unquestionably an illusion and involves attributing false character to a perceived fact. However, the following queries have come up in this regard.

⁵ In Nyāya philosophy, there is a sort of remarkable (alaukika) non-sensual perception known as jñāna-lakṣhaṇa-pratyasatti. This type of perception occurs when an object is perceived through the use of prior knowledge or memory.

⁶ Naiyāyikas are educated individuals who adhere to the Nyāya school of thought, which is one of the six orthodox schools of thought in ancient Indian philosophy. They are most well-known for their work as logicians,

1. How does the false character come to be attributed?
2. In what ways does this fictitious persona manifest as something that is truly observed in illusion?

Nyāya defines an illusion as a single perception. It is not a complex of perception and memory where the separation is obscured, in contrast to Prabhakara's view.

II. Conclusion:

Therefore, it may be deduced from Anyathā that Khyāti mistake is not an experience of completely independent entities. It is merely an incorrect perception of two actual things, one of which is mistaken for the other. Subjective conditioning or a relationship with the perceiver is violated. Therefore, rather than rejecting the substance, the sublimation of attribute is a correction.

Nyāya only acknowledges error in the area of description; in this regard, Anyathākhyāti represents erroneous judgement in cases when the judgement fails to provide an accurate description of the referent. From every perspective, it is true to evaluate something as it is. Any deviation from this standard is unquestionably false. Therefore, it is evident that when it comes to error, Nyāya is more interested in the logical problem of classifying error into a well-defined formal category than in conflating the logic problem with either psychological or metaphysical categories.

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professionals who specialise in epistemology, systematic reasoning, and the rules that govern legitimate knowledge.