

PRATYAKSA PRAMA IN ADVAITA VEDANTA

The primary objective of my treatment of the problem of perception here is to examine the possibility of formulating a realistic criterion of perceptibility and of percept acceptable to the Advaitins. But this requires a detail examination of various definitions or amendments to the definitions of perception suggested by them in the literature on Advaita Vedānta. I have addressed myself to this secondary task first in this paper.

Customarily, perception is defined in terms of sense-functioning. Commonsense view interprets perception as stimulation of senses. The Advaita-Vedāntins make a departure from this common usage in their definition of perception. According to Advaitins, perception as a source of knowledge is the instrumental cause of perception as a form of veridical cognition. That is, the sense-organs constitute the instrumental cause of perceptual cognition. The resulting state of perception is said to be immediate and such an immediate knowledge is held to be the self itself. For, in the self there is pure immediacy of knowledge. The senses are the *kāraṇa* of perception, as immediate knowledge, in so far as the mental modification (*antaḥ-karāṇa vṛtti*), which reveals it (consciousness), is the result of the operation of senses. The *antaḥkarāṇa* or the *manas* is said to be going out through the senses which are in contact with the present perceptible object and is modified in such a way as to assume the shape of the object itself. Sine *manas* is material in nature, it is possible for it to move and attain the dimension of the object of perception. Perception is the immediate cognition in which the mental

modification is identical with the object and is lit up by the self's light.

At the outset, let me point out that the Advaitins refuse to admit that perception is a cognition resulting from sense-object-contact. For, this will entail a difficulty, according to them, in case of inferential cognition and memory. Both *anumiti* and *smṛti* are also said to result from (an inner) sense like *manas*, and hence would have to be considered to be the cases of perception. To avoid this difficulty, one may suggest that in mental perception *manas* is the limiting case of the 'fact of being sense', while in cases of inferential cognition and memory *manas* is the cause more on account of 'its being *monas*' (*manastvs*) rather than due to its being a sense. But although in this way *Ativyāpti* could be avoided, *Avyāpti*, nonetheless continues to demand one's attention. This difficulty flows from the fact that Vedāntins do not consider *manas* to be a sense. According to them, the so-called internal mental perceptions like happiness, sorrow etc. depend on *manas*, but not on any (external or internal) sense for their emergence. Secondly, if such so-called perceptions are to be taken as cases of *pratyakṣa sāmānya*, then there should be no objection to the enumeration of God's perception as well under it. This latter move, however, would attract the charge of *Avyāpti*, for, God has no sense-organ of any kind. Hence, it is improper to claim that perception is a cognition due to sense-object contact.

Now let us turn to formulate the definition of perception from another point of view.

Generally, it is understood that a knowledge owes its perceptual character both to object and to its cognition. The statement 'I have seen the jar' points to the fact that the jar is perceived. Again, we say 'I have perceptual cognition relating to the object

jar'. Hence, perceptuality may mean either perceptuality of object or of cognition.² So, if one desires to formulate a definition of perception, both the cases of perception must be covered by it. Generally, all the philosophers accept perceptuality of these two varieties. In Advaita-Vedānta, separate defining marks have been provided for both the types. But as any special defining mark depends on general definition, so the definition of perception in general will be our first concern. At the outset, we tried to show the difficulties involved in formulating the definition of perception in terms of sense-object contact.

Now we shall make an attempt to show the difficulties involved in formulating definition of *pratyakṣa* in terms of its object (*viśaya*).³ According to the Advaitins, though in case of cognition emerging through any other source (*pramāṇa*) its object (*viśaya*) is admitted to be its cause, the role of object in perceptual cognition is more dominant than that in any other cognition. That is, perceptual cognition does not emerge except through immediate contact of sense-organ with its object. But this does not happen in cases of mediate knowledge. For, in mediate knowledge there occurs no perceptual contact with knowable objects. Still it will not be solely relevant to say that a knowledge owes its perceptual character to its being caused by the object. For, in that case an inferential cognition, where *manas* is substantively involved, will be a case of perception. The argument in support of this contention is : *manas* is a sense-organ (*indriya*) since it is the instrument of perceptual cognition like the eye.⁴ But, unfortunately, this argument considers *manas* both as subject (*pakṣa*) of this inference and as object (*sādhya*). Now the *pakṣa* of an inference, could certainly be an object of inferential knowledge (the *manas* here) and hence be as much an object of inferential cognition as the *sādhya*. But they are not so to be held with reference to the same

inference. Forgetting this, if every occurrent cognition is somehow held to be caused by its object, whatever it may be, or, if inferential knowledge is held to be caused by its *pakṣa*, then such an inferential knowledge has *manas* as one of its causes. In that case inferential knowledge would become perceptual in the sense of a cognition caused by its *viśaya*. This shows that the proposed definition of perception as *viśaya - janya - jñāna* is too wide (*ativyāpta*). Further, if one suggests that perceptual character of knowledge consists in its being a cognition caused by an object then the definition would come to suffer from the defect of *avyāpti* as well, as it would omit the cases of happiness, sorrow etc. For, once cognition of happiness and the resultant mental modification in the form of happiness are accepted to be simultaneous^b the latter atleast cannot be said to be caused by the object of happiness. In addition, since happiness and the resultant mental modification arise simultaneously, one of them cannot also be the cause of the other.^c Therefore, the definition under consideration also remains ridden with the fallacy of *avyāpti*.

But what could be meant by saying that the object is the cause of perceptual knowledge? This is significant if it means that perceptuality of a knowledge depends on its having been determined by an object. In other words, to be significant it should mean that there is a mutual determination between resultant perceptual cognition (*pratyakṣa jñāna vṛtti kāryatā*) and its determinative *viśaya* (*viśayaniṣṭha kāryatā*). But there cannot be determination unless there is a determining property. Now the question is : what is that determining property, which determines the causative or determining character of the *viśaya* relative to the resultant *pratyakṣa jñāna*? If an object *qua* object is the cause or the determiner, then the property of being object (*viśayatva*) (itself) must be the determining property of it. Thus understood, we can define perception as a knowledge caused by

its *viṣaya* (object), provided the property of being an object resident in it, causatively determines the character of the object under consideration, relative to the resultant perceptual cognition.

This definition, however, is not free from its own difficulties. For the property of being an object is present even in those things that do not cause perceptual knowledge. Hence, the property of being an object cannot be held to be the determining property of the resultant perceptual cognition relative to it. Therefore, we cannot say that *viṣaya qua viṣaya* causes perception in any significant sense. Nor can we, therefore, define perception as knowledge produced by an object.

Those who believe that a knowledge owes its perceptual character to its being caused by an object (*viṣaya*) are under an obligation to tell us how this truth could be established or known? Certainly, this could be established or known by a knowledge. But, then, there are two alternative possibilities. A perception, besides disclosing its object, should also disclose that it is produced, by the object. This, however, cannot be said. For, like every other knowledge perception reveals its object only, and since, 'having been produced by *viṣaya*' is not its object, perception cannot reveal it. The other alternative is that some subsequent cognition reveals that the previous perceptual cognition was produced by an object. This alternative cannot be accepted either. So we see that the causal relationship between perception and its object cannot be determined in this way. A source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) can determine its object only and nothing else. Failure, in this way, to determine causal relationship between perception and its object would amount to be a disproof of the view that knowledge owes its perceptual character to its being caused by an object.

A knowledge may, nonetheless, be held to owe its perceptual character to its being caused by an object (*viṣaya*), since there

is an agreement in presence and difference between an object and its cognition.⁷ The rule of concomitance between two entities implies that one is the effect of the other. We know that the relation between fire and smoke conforms to this rule of agreement in presence and difference and so smoke is said to be the effect of fire. Likewise, the proponents of the above-mentioned view mean to say wherever there is the fact of being caused by an object (*arthajanyatva*),⁸ there is perception, and 'wherever there is the absence of it, there is the absence of perception'. They perhaps overlook some other factor involved in it. If they exclusively rely upon the principle of agreement in presence and difference, other difficulties will not leave us. For instance, illusory perception has the claim to be a perception where we do not see the real object. There, some other object instead is represented before us. Hence the principle of the opponent that there is agreement in presence and difference between 'the fact of being caused by an object' and 'perception' is ruled out for it suffers from the defect of *avyāpti*. The inference under consideration also suffers from the defect of *svarūpāsiddha*,⁹ meaning absence of *hetu* in the *pakṣa*, since the said *hetu* '*arthānya-vyatirekānuvidhāyitva*' is absent in the object of illusory perception. The defender may plead here, further, that only 'veredical perception' is under consideration here and so the charge of *svarūpāsiddhi* could very well be circumvented. Nonetheless, mere fulfilment of the condition of the principle of agreement in presence and difference is not enough. For, the genesis of veredical perception additionally requires some other factors, namely light, manifested colour, largeness of an object, conjunction with *manas* etc. apart from '*artha*'. So we can safely say that the 'presence of an object' does not automatically guarantee 'emergence of perception'. Thus, the thrust of the opponent's argument that perceptual character of knowledge is determined by its object (*viśaya*) appears to be unfounded.

We attempted to sketch above the definition of perception where its object is a predominant factor in perception. We also considered the definition of perception as caused by its object, but found it to be beset with different difficulties. So let us, now, try to examine how some philosophers tried to qualify this definition giving greater stress on cognition. The definition, they offered, runs thus... Perception is a cognition emerging not through the active agency of any other cognition.¹⁰ The instrument of inferential cognition (*anumāna*) is the knowledge of the rule of concomitance, the instrument of comparison (*upamāna*) is the knowledge of similarity, the instrument of verbal comprehension is the cognition induced through words, the instrument of *anupalabdhi* is the knowledge of counter-positive etc. etc. So we note that from the six ways of knowing admitted by Vedāntin perception does not result through the active agency of any other cognition. In other words, perception does not result through the instrumentality of any other cognition.¹¹ But this definition, too, appears to be unacceptable since it is too wide (*ativyāpta*) covering the case of memory which does not emerge from any cognition. The instrument of *smṛti* is memory disposition which is not knowledge.

Some persons hold that perception is '*jñānā janyajñānatvam sākṣātvam*'.¹² Its meaning is very clear. It means that perception does not need any antecedent cognition for its genesis. It arises only if sense-object contact occurs and in the absence of any hindrance for its emergence. But further analysis will reveal that this definition, too, is not proper since it attracts the charge of *avyāpti* in the case of the perceptual cognition of 'the man with a stick' (*Daṇḍi Puruṣah*). For it is a synthetic cognition where 'the stick' characterises 'the man'. In such a case, the adjectival property is held to be determiner of our perceptual cognition of the man. To avoid such determination to say that our perce-

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ptual cognition of a man should result in the absence of the cognition of a stick is sheer nonsense. Hence, to escape from this puzzling situation, the opponents may plead to replace the definition by *jñānākaraṇakam jñānam pratyakṣam*'. In that case the 'cognition of stick' required necessarily for the emergence of synthetic cognition under consideration will be a general cause and not the instrumental cause (*karaṇa*), since the contact of sense with object is said to be the instrumental cause of perception.¹³ But this definition, too, suffers from the defect of *ativyāpti* (for it covers the case of recognition). So we see the definition cannot be rescued satisfactorily since any attempt to qualify it runs into difficulty. In fact, it is a difficult task to formulate a completely satisfactory definition of perception. For this reason, Dharmarāja Dhvarīndra gave an independent definition. In the commentary *Sikhāmaṇi* it is echoed : *Tataśca pratyakṣa pramāṇam durnirūpamityaśamkyaḥ (pratyakṣa pramā cātra caitanyameva)*.¹⁵ Perceptual cognition is consciousness itself. According to the śruti Brahman is *sat*, *jñāna* and *ananta*. Brahman is *jñāna* i. e., the fact of being cognition as residing in cognition (*jñānaniṣṭha jñānatva*) can provide us with the criterion of perceptuality of cognition.

Although we attempted to present the definition of perception in terms of *jñāna* yet perceptual cognition never arises without revealing its object. Perceptuality of jar etc., would be consciousness limited by the mental mode of jar etc., which are novel and uncontradicted. The text that 'Brahman i. e., direct and immediate',¹⁶ is an evidence towards that effect. What it means is that : Brahman becomes immediate without any sense contact. It is not *aparokṣa*, being pervaded by mental mode (*vṛtti*) as it happens in the case of ordinary objects like jar, cloth etc.

One important thing which we cannot but lay much stress on is the fact that the words *prtyakṣa* and *aparokṣa* though are

normally taken synonymously, according to the Advaitins it is not reasonable to accept them in identical sense. For, the derivative meaning of the word *pratyakṣa* is a cognition resulting from sense-object contact. But *aparokṣa jñāna* (immediate cognition) does not emerge that way. The moment the veil of ne-science disappears, self-manifesting consciousness of Brahman as the substratum of all, appears as immediate cognition. So we note, immediate cognition is not born from sense-object contact. For this reason, in the Advaita system, the immediate cognition of *nirviśeṣa Brahman* is held not to be a case of perception.

Now we shall look at the problem from realist's point of view. We do not know that the Naiyāyikas ever made any distinction between perceptuality of cognition and of percept in the manner of the Advaitins. Still, the realists cannot but accept what is the fact of experience, namely, the distinction under reference. That we have an experience of the form 'knowledge of perception (*pratyakṣa jñānam*) and also of the form 'object is a percept' (*pratyakṣa ghataḥ*), we will try to show from our realist's insight of the problem and will accept our apprehension in these forms as preached by the Advaitins. According to the Naiyāyikas, a knowledge owes its perceptual character to sense-object which causes it and perceptuality of a thing consists in its being an object of cognition which has perceptuality in the above sense. No other criterion for the perceptuality of a thing was deemed necessary by the Naiyāyikas. However, the Naiyāyikas believe perceptual cognition as the *viśayī* (knowing consciousness) and the object like pitcher, cloth etc., are the objects of that cognition (*viśaya* – objects of knowing). The cognition resulting from sense-object contact emerges in the self by the relation of inherence and it emerges in the object-content in the relation of *viśayatā* (objectness). Hence we can try to formulate the perceptuality of a thing following the tenets of the Naiyāyikas in this way :

A thing has perceptuality provided a perceptual cognition is related to it by way of *viśayatā* which is said to be a relation which a knowledge bears to its object.

Further, according to the Advaitins, knowledge is eternal, meaning unborn and imperishable and self is of the nature of *jñāna*. But the Naiyāyikas differ fundamentally from them in this respect. In the Nyāya ontology *jñāna* is the property of self and not its essence and self is a substance. So *jñāna* has the status of a *guṇa*¹⁷ and every *guṇa* of a self, in accordance with the definition of *guṇa*, rests in a substance which is none other than the self. Further, *jñāna* is a product arising out of a collocation of causal conditions. And like all products, it is an occurrent i. e., arises in time. According to the Vedānta view, *jñāna* is a modification of a substance called *buddhi* or *antaḥ-karaṇa* which assumes the shape and the form of the object. Not so in the Nyāya, *jñāna* is without any parts and does not assume any form or shape (*ākāra*).

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NOTES

1. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* of Dharmarājā Dhvatīndra is an original and most elementary text. No clear conception about the Vedāntic conception of *pramā* can emerge without the text
2. Of course, the Advaitins believe that perceptuality can be applied to the source (*pramāṇa*), cognition (*jñāna*) and object (*viśaya*).

3. The object–content of knowledge is designated as ‘*viśaya*’. For terminological clarification, we can say the logico–epistemic character of being a *viśaya* is designated as *viśayatā*. Knowledge in relation to its object is called *viśaya* and so its logico–epistemic character of being a *viśaya* is called *viśayatā*.
4. *Manah indriyam pratyakṣa jñānakaraṇatvāt caksurādivat.*
5. *Ekadā sukhāditadākara vṛttyerabhyupagamāt pratyakṣa-lakṣanasya sukhādi pratyakṣa vṛttivābhāvena vyāpteśca. Maṇiprabhā, pp. 34.*
6. The Philosophers admitted the fact that in case of two things produced simultaneously one cannot be the cause of the other. The two horns of a cow or of a buffalo etc., are examples towards this effect.
7. *Pratyakṣamarthajanyamarthānyatirekānvidhāyitvāt.*
8. Of course, we have to understand *arthajanyatva* as *arthajanyajñānatva*. This is exactly like the Buddhist’s (Vasubandhu) theory of *artha sanvitpratrakṣatva*.
9. *Svarūpāsiddha Hetu* would be a *hetu* which does not exist in the *pakṣa*. Now the absence of a *hetu* in the *pakṣa* means the absence of *pakṣa-dharmatā* and in the absence of a knowledge of *pakṣadharmatā*, it is not possible to have *parāmarśa*. This type of faulty *hetu* serves to impede the emergence of a correct inferential cognition.
10. *Jñānākaraṇa janya jñānatvam sākṣāttvam : Sikhāmaṇi, pp. 34.*
11. Exception is found in case of *savikalpa pratyakṣa* which results from its prior cognition of *nirvikalpa pratyakṣa*.
12. *Sikhāmaṇi, pp.34.*
13. It is according to the Naiyāyikas but the Advaitins accepted mental modification as the instrument.

14. *śikhāmaṇi*, p. 35.
15. *Vedānta Paribhāṣa*, p. 35.
16. *Bṛ. Up.* 3.4.1.
17. *Guṇa* can be rendered into 'quality' only at the risk of a grave misunderstanding. In the Nyāya ontology, every *guṇa* of self, in accordance with the definition of a *guṇa* rests in a substance which is none other than the self.