THE INDIAN THEORIES OF ERROR

The book* under review is the doctoral thesis of Prof. Bijayanand Kar, which was written by him under the guidence of Prof. Ganeshwar Misra, who has written the introduction of the book. The book is devoted to the Indian philosophical explanations of error, which are traditionally known as khyativadas. As it is claimed on the jacket of the book, it is for the first time, that such a comprehensive study of the theories of error in classical Indian philosophy has been made by applying the techniques of linguistic and conceptual analysis. It is also true again, as it is stated on the jacket, that in this book the attempt has been made not only to interest the professionals who are already familiar with the questions with which it deals, but also to provide an introduction to the subject for the general reader. In the five chapter of his book Prof. Kar deals in detail with Visistadavita, Mimamsa, Nyaya, Buddhist and Advaita theories of error. In every chapter generally the author first gives the traditional account of the respective theory of error and then analyses it in hi own way. Ultimately the author comes to some important conclus sions. The conclusions at which the author arrives are novel and are elaborated by him though sometimes they give the feeling of iteration. In the following lines I wish to discuss some of the main issues raised by the author in the present work.

The author again and again emphasises that the problem of **khyati** is not the problem of preceptual error but it is the problem of error in general. Therefore he calls the theories of **khyati** as the theories of error, and not as the theories of illusion. (Again, while doing this one has to make a distinction between cognitive error and practical error. The theories of **khyati** are the theories of cognitive error, though. Ramanujaites and Prabhakaras claim that all errors are only practical and there are no cognitive errors

* **The Theories of Error in Indian Philosophy** by Bijayananda Kar, Ajanta Publications, Delhi (1978), Pages 146, Price Rs. 45, Introduction by Prof Ganeswar Misra.

as such.) The author's view is of course very important because although the model of **khyati**, is primarily applied to mere perceptual error, it can be applied to any cognitive error whatsoever. The model of perceptual error was in fact used for explaining the cognitive error in general. For instance, Vedantins used their model of **anirvacaniya khyati** (which was primarily a model of perceptual error) for explaining **adhyasa**, while **adhyasa** meant the cognitive error in general.

However, the author does not seem to have established his thesis quite satisfactorily. For example one has to deal with the question whether all the classical Indian philosophers while dealing with the problem of **khyati**, really meant ' a theory of error' by the term **khyatiwada**. If it were the case, the **hetvabhasa** and the other types of fallacy (for instance **chala, drstantabhasa)** would have been found discussed in terms of **khyativada**. Some Naiyayikas at least would have explained **hetvabhasa** as a type of **anyathakhyati**. But we nowhere find this. This attitude of the classical Indian philosophers suggests that those philosophers did not have such a general idea of **khyativada**, though some philosophers like Advaitins did use **khyativada** as a model for explaining the cognitive error in general.

While discussing every theory of error, the author comes to a conclusion that the real aim of the respective theory of error is to face the problem of error by analysing the nature of judgement from the logical point of view. I have a feeling that while making this kind of claim again and again, the author is trying to transplant the western idea of ' logical point of view ' on the Indian way of thinking. According to the author, the logical analysis of **khyativada** gives us the concept of error as mispredication. And mispredication being merely a logical issue, the problem of **khyati** is really the logical problem of error. But this important thesis of the author can be questioned. Though we may vaguely use the language of ' subject ' and ' predicate ' in the Indian epistemological discussions, the ideas of ' logical subject ' and 'logical predicate' are quite aline to the ancient Indian way of thinking. When, for instance, Naiyayikas talk of 'this is silver' as an example of cognitive error, this ' for them does not stand for the ' logical subject ' or the ' logical referent ', but it connotes the actual object present before the perceiver. And ' silver ' for

them is not just the 'logical predicate' but it is the 'silverness' which subsists there in the actual silver. The scholars trained in western logic and philosophy are accustomed to considering logic as divorced from ontology or psychology. But Indian philosophers in general would not go by this way. When an Indian philosopher is talking of theory of error, he is not only concerned with logic (in the sense that he is trying to give the meaning of the term 'error') but also with the espistemology, psychology and ontology of error. (The ontology of error would tackle the ontic status of the object of error.) Though Naiyayikas, while giving their theory of error are concerned with defining error and though to give a definition of the concept of error can be called a logical task, that does not imply that Naiyayikas were concerned with the concept of error which subsists as a logical entity. Error for Naiyayikas was existent ontologically. (Not just epistemologically; because Naiyayikas did not divorce epistemology from ontology. Cognition for them was an existent—'sat' quality of a soul in the same sense as the white colour is an existent quality of a piece of chalk.) To define error, for Naiyayikas, was to state the distinctive feature of the existent erroneous cognitions. Thus the author's plan of depicting Nyaya account of error as an account in purely logical/conceptual analysis becomes misleading.

Prof. Kar also tries to give a modern interpretation of the Nyaya view of **Nirvikalpaka pratyaksa**. He claims that according to Nyaya school, **nirvikalpaka pratyaksa** is only a postulate, it is only logically assumed (p. 60). By this the author seems to mean that according to Nyaya the concept of **nirvikalpaka pratyaksa** is only an empty notion; it is a term which has sense, but no correspondence with ontology. I doubt whether any Naiyayika would be prepared to accept this. In fact a Naiyayika, in his frame of thinking, cannot conceive of a logical postulate which has to be accepted for explanatory purpose, but which does not subsist as a part and parcel of the world. Thus the author's introduction of the concept of 'logical assumption' or 'postulate' in explaining the Nyaya theory of perception leads to a distortion of the Nyaya content.

The similar problem arises with the author's interpretation of **idam** (meaning 'this'). While explaining the status of **idam** in the erroneous perception of the form '**idam rajatam**', the author is again under the influence of the western philosophical

analysis of ' this '. ' This ' for the philosophers like Russell and so on is absolutely a non-description and following this western conviction, the author presupposes that the Indian philosophers are also convinced that **idam** is equally a non-description. But idam for Indian philosophers does not merely serve the function of a demonstrative pronoun but it has also a descriptive function. The function is spelled out by the frequently used term ' **purovarti** ' (meaning ' that which is in front of somebodoy '). Many times the descriptive functions of the pronouns **idam, tat, etat** and **adas** are distihguished from each other[1]. In such a case the question of use or misuse of **idam** in a perceptual judgement cannot be easily ruled out as the author seems to have supposed.

The author's main thesis which runs like a thread in whole of his book, that the Indian theories of error are primarily and basically the logical theories, is reflected in the new etymologies of the different **khyatis**, suggested by the author. He tries to show that the etymologies of different **khyatis** really suggest the different logical analyses of the erroneous judgement, and they do not say anything either about the ontological status of the object of error or about the psychology of error. Some of the etymologies given are as follows (p. 11)—

1) **satkhyatih** = **sati khyatih** (= true judgement)
2) **asatkhyatih** = **asati khyatih** (= false judgement)
3) **anirvacaniyakhyatih** = **anirvacaniya khyatih** (= indeterminate judgement)

The difficulty about the first two, which strikes me is that the terms **sat** and **asat** in the Indian philosophical literature do not mean true and false respectively. The author holds that **sat** also means true (p. 119, fn.). It would have been better if the author would have given an instance of this from classical philosos phical Sanskrit. To the best of my knowledge **sat** is not ambiguous as to mean both real and true. Etymologically also **sat** means that which is/exists. And **asat** means non-existent, unreal. In such a case **sati khyatih** would mean ' real judgement' which is not the traditionally intended meaning of the term **satkhyati**.

Similarly the term **anirvacaniya** in the language of Advaita Vedanta is always used as an adjective of 'object of knowledge ' and not as an adjective of ' knowledge ' itself. The object is

called **anirvacaniya** in the sense that we cannot decide it to be either real or unreal. Therefore it is referred to as **sad-asad-anirvacaniya**. Thus the etymologies of the three **khyatis**, given by the author do not suit to the usages of the respective technical terms in the classical philosophical sanskrit.

The author gives these interpretations of the different **khyatis** because of his presupposion that all theories of error must be basically concerned with the logical question namely ' what is meant by error ?'. But I suppose that we need not unnecessarily delimit the scope of the programme which the Indian theoreticians had undertaken. The author has rightly pointed out that to regard Indian philosophical theories of error as merely psychological or metaphysical is wrong. But at the same time one has to keep in mind that to regard Indian philosophical theories of error as **merely** logical is equally wrong. The questions with which Indian philosophers were concerned while exposing their theories of **khyati**, seem to be as follows.

(1) Do there occur any cognitive errors as such ?

(2) What is the so-called cognitive error ?

(3) What does exactly happen when somebody commits the so-called cognitive error ? In other words, how does the so-called cognitive error occur ?

The first question, that is the whether—question, is metaphysical one, while the second question, that is the what-question, is logical one and the third question, that is the how-question is the psychological one. Indian theoreticians of error are concerned with all these three. Prof. Kar has suceeded in distinguishing the three questions from each other, but while emphasising the logical question he has disregarded the other questions to be genunine questions.

The auther also claims that no theory of khyati can be regarded as a scientific theory. Though it is true that all the theories of **khyati** do not give scientific answers to the how-question, still the scientific element in some of the theories cannot be denied. At the early stages of philosophy the demarcation-lines betweeu metaphysics, philosophy and science were not clear. Thus the philosophers were also supposed to state the scientific truths. In particular we find that the theories of **khyati** stated by Mimam-

sakas and Naiyayikas were more empirically based. Prabhakaras tried to explain the process of erroneous cognition and the stages of that process stated by Prabhakaras were not totally denied by Naiyayikas but were only supplimented by saying that error is not only the non-discrimination between two distinct objects but it is also the false identification of the two objects. The last step namely false identification was omitted by the Prabhakaras because of their metaphysical bias. Thus it seems that though we need not regard Prabhakara's theory of error as purely scientific we may regard it as a crude scientific theory. Prof. Kar seems to have missed the point. The auther says, " **A khyativada** is clearly not factual in the sense of a scientific theory, as in that case it would have been either established or rejected in view of empirical observation and experiment ". (p. 44) The statement is confusing because a scientific hypothesis does not refrain from being a scientific hypothesis if it has not been either established or rejected in view of empirical observation and experiment. It is still a scientific hypothesis if it is capable of being established or rejected in view of empirical observation and experiment. I suppose that the largest part of Prabhakara's theory of error is capable of being established or rejected in view of empirical observation and experiment.

There are many other difficulties which I came acrross while going through the book. A few of them may be cited. The auther rightly points out that according of Vaibhasikas as well as Sautrantikas reality consists of the unique particulars. But again he says that according to those Buddhists all these are bare particulars in the sense of the bare referents for logically proper names. (p. 81) I doubt whether there are any logically proper names according to Buddhists. All names according to them are common names and particulars are really speaking unnameables.

The auther says, 'Sankara's programme is not of discovering any fact ..... His philosphy only aims at pointing the inadequacy of language '. (p. 112) Now, is not inadequacy of language a fact which Sankara tries to point at ? Sankara's statement that this kind of (inadequate) linguistic activity of the people is but natural (' **naisargiko'yam lokavyavaharah** ') points at the same factual thesis.

Till now we have seen how it is difficult to agree with the author's main theses. Some comparatively minor errors in the book may also be pointed out. The auther uses the word 'indeterminate' rather ambiguously both as the synonym for **nirvikalpaka** and for **anirvacaniya** (see pp. 12, 20 . I suppose that 'non-judgemental', would have been a better synonym for **nirvikalpaka.** Secondly Romanisation of Sanskrit terms and quotations is many times wrong because the necessary diacritical marks are not given at due places. The value of the book would have been increased if sufficient care would have been taken in this regard.

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NOTES

1. A popular verse runs,
idamastu sannikrstam samipataravarti caitado rupam
adasastu Viprakrstam taditi parokse vijaniyat
Meaning : 'Idam' connotes the sense of proximity; 'etat' connotes more proximity. 'Adas' connotes a far distance and **tat** is used when the object beyond one's vision is to be connoted.

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