

Reflection of Upamāna pramāṇa of the Nyāya philosophy in the Sanskrit and Bengali literature

Ranjit Shaw

Assistant professor in Philosophy

Sammilani Mahavidyalaya

E.M. Bypass, Baghajatin, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Researcher – Visva- Bharati University

Abstract: Knowledge is divided in two kinds – valid knowledge (*yathārtha jñāna* and *ayarthārtha jñāna*) and invalid knowledge in Indian philosophy. Valid knowledge is called *pramā*. *Pramāṇa* is the means or instrumental cause of valid knowledge or *pramā*. There are several kinds of *pramāṇa* in Indian philosophy. *Upamāna pramāṇa* is another kind of *pramāṇas* in Indian philosophy. According to the *nyāya* philosophy *upamāna* is an independent source of knowledge and we get *upamiti pramā* from *upamāna pramāṇa*. *Upamāna pramāṇa* is the instrumental cause or *karana* of *upamiti* and *upamiti* is the resultant knowledge of *upamāna pramāṇa*. *Upamiti* is the knowledge of *śakti* or relation of words to their meaning. *Upamāna* plays a great role in the knowledge theory and practical life. Here I have tried to explained how did use the *upamāna pramāṇa* in the Sanskrit and Bengali literature.

Keywords: *pramā*, *pramāṇa*, *upamāna*, *upamiti*, *agama*, *sambhaba*, *ceṣṭā*, *oītihya*, *yathārtha*.

Indian knowledge system developed an aid to metaphysics. Metaphysical investigation helps to understand the nature of ultimate knowledge in from of truth or reality. Though every school of Indian Philosophies have developed their own tools to understand epistemological and logical problems, but their efforts were done to provide methodological explanations. Metaphysical experiences were sought by the method of epistemology. In the background of philosophical investigations, knowledge may be roughly identified as principles regarding reality and the means of knowledge the methods of explaining them. These convictions in general may be brought under the broad heading of *jñāna* which denotes all kinds of knowledge, true or false. When, however, man comes across various convictions regarding the same thing, he feels to verify their validity through various methods which may be roughly termed as *pramāṇas*. Perhaps, with this intention Vātsyāyana stated that *Nyāya* means the examination of an object through the *pramāṇas*—*kah punarayam nyāya? Pramāṇairathaparikṣanam* (*Nyāyabhāṣya* -1.1)) The basic aim of the *pramāṇas* is to test the validity of various convictions. But, the convictions which stand the test of validity are the *pramā* which denotes true or valid knowledge. Thus, *pramāṇa* in Indian Philosophy has twofold purpose of testing the validity of conviction and to rose to new valid conviction. *Pramā* is the true or valid knowledge. Howev-

er, it begs the question regarding the test of the peculiar characteristic of validity itself. In other words, what is the factor which makes a conviction valid? This gives rise to the divergence of views regarding the mark or the true of valid knowledge and consequently, the definition of *pramā* itself. According to the Buddhas the true of knowledge consists in its practical value. They define *pramā* as the knowledge which reveals an object. According to the *Naiyāyikas*, the validity of knowledge consists in the objectivity or the faithfulness of the knowledge to the object. The *pramā* is generally defined by the *Naiyāyikas* as the knowledge which informs of the existence of something in a place where it actually exists. Or, in other words, *pramā* is the knowledge which predicates of something a property really possessed by it— *tadvati tatprakārakānubhavo yathārtah / saiva prametyucyate (Tarkasamgrah)*. The Prabhākara school of Pūrvamīmāṃsā—*pramāṇamanubhūtiḥ (Prakaraṇapañcikā)* and the Dvaita—*yathārtha pramāṇam (Pramāṇaprakaraṇa)*, the Dvaitādvaita—*yathārthajñānam pramā / tadvati tatprakaravām yathārthatvam (Śrutyantakalpavalli)* and the Śuddhādvaita schools of Uttaramīmāṃsā—*niścayo yathārthānubhavah / ayameva prameti vyavahriyate / yāthārthyam cārthānativartitvam (Prasthānaratnākara)* also accept conformity of knowledge to the object as a mark of valid knowledge. The Viśiṣṭādvaita school of Uttaramīmāṃsā holds that the validity of knowledge consists in both the faithfulness to the object and the prompting to the fruitful activity. The valid knowledge is defined there as that which apprehends an object as it really exists and which prompts fruitful activity—*yathāvasthitavyayavahārānuguṇam jñānam prameti (Nyāyapariśuddhi & Yatīndramataḍipīkā)*. According to the Advaita School of Uttaramīmāṃsā, the validity of knowledge consists in non-contradictoriness. The followers of this school define *pramā* as the contradicted knowledge of an object—*pramātvam-anadhigatābādhita-viṣaya-jñānatvam (Vedāntaparibhāṣā)*.

They do not accept novelty as an essential factor for valid knowledge. That is why Dharmarāja Adhvaryu offers two definitions of *pramā* with and without novelty as a mark of *pramā*—*tatra smṛti-vyāvṛttam pramātvam-anadhigatābādhita-viṣaya-jñānatvam / smṛti-sādhāraṇam tvabādhitaviṣaya-jñānatvam (Vedāntaparibhāṣā)*.

Every system of Indian philosophy is based on epistemology or theory of knowledge. However, all the schools of Indian philosophy do not show a homogenous approach towards the source of valid knowledge. Though some similarity among a few schools can be noticed, there are schools which show striking differences in their choice of *pramāṇas*. Overall, there are ten *pramāṇas* mentioned by different schools of philosophy. They include: Perception (*Pratyakṣa*), Inference (*Anumāna*), Verbal testimony (*śabda* or *āgama*), Comparison (*Upamāna*), Postulation (*Arthāpati*), Non-apprehension (*Anupalabdhi*), Probability (*Sambhava*), Tradition (*Aitihya*), Indication (*Ceṣṭa*), and Imagination or Intuition (*Pratibhā*).

Among the *pramāṇas* *Upamāna* is being considered as an independent

source of knowledge by the Indian Philosophical Schools of *Nyāya*, *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* and the *Advaita* tradition. *Nyāya* philosophy admits four *pramāṇas*, those are— 1.*Pratyakṣa*, 2.*Anumāna* 3.*Upamāna* and 4.*śabda*. *Upamāna* is a Sanskrit term, this is a combinable word *Upa* and *Māna*. *Upa* means near or similarity and *Māna* means knowledge so that signifies knowledge gained through similarity or comparision. According to the Maharshi Gautama's *Nyāsutra*, *Upamāna* can be stated as the source of knowledge of the relation between a name and the nameable object or between a word and its denotation – “*prasiddhasadharmanyat sadhyasadhanamupamanam*”. And in the commentary, Vātsyāna said – “*prajnatena samanyat prajnapaniyasya prajnapanamupmanamiti, yatha- gaurevaim gavayah*”.

After looking the similarity between a name and a thing so named or between a word and its denotation, we may achieve some knowledge. This is *upamīti*. *Upamīti* is described as the relation between a term and what it signified. For example, a man who does not know what a *gavaya* or wild cow is, may be told by a forester that it is an animal like a cow or *gavaya* is similar to cow. The word of the forester “*gavaya* is similar to cow” is called *Atideśa vākya*. If, subsequently, he happens to meet such an animal or perceives an animal which looks like a cow in the forest. After perceiving the similarity of cow in this unknown animal, he remembers the *atideśa vākya* “*gavaya* is like to cow” and knows or recognizes it as a *gavaya*, then his knowledge will be due to *upamāna* or comparision. This knowledge is possible due to the *upamāna* or comparison. Thus, *upamīti* is the knowledge of the relation between a name and the object it denotes by that name. Anambhatta in his *Tarkasangraha* said— “*Upamitikaranampumanam sanjnasanjisambandhajnamupamīti*.” *Upamitikaranampumanam* means *Upamāna* is the cause of *upamīti* and *sanjnasanjisambandhajnamupamīti* means *upamīti* is only the realisation of a connection of name (*saṃjña*) with object (*saṃjñī*) denoted by it. *Upamāna* produces the knowledge of the relation depending on similarity between the name and the named. It also means getting the knowledge of an unknown thing by comparing it with a known thing.

Analysing the process of reasoning in *upamāna pramāṇa*, we get the following steps. Firstly, we have an authoritative statement called *Atideśa vākya* (*gavaya* is like to cow) that a word denotes objects of a certain description. Secondly, when a man observes any such object, the man has the knowledge that it answers to the given description. Thirdly, there is a recollection of the descriptive statement received from the authority. Lastly, there is the resulting knowledge that this kind of object is denoted by the word in question (*upamīti*). Thus, the man who does not know what objects are denoted by the word *gavaya*, may have it from some authority that the word denotes animals resembling the cow. When next time he happens to find such animals, he perceives their striking similarity to the cow. Then he remembers the authoritative statement that animals resembling the cow are

gavaya. With this it can be concluded that the word *gavaya* denotes this class of animals. Vatsyana gives two more examples of *Upamana*. After the propositions conveying the comparison, the *mudgaparni* (kind of herb) is like the *mudga* leaf and *masaparni* (another kind of herb) is like the *masa* are employed, a person acquires the knowledge of the relation between the naming word and the object denoted and he collects the herbs for preparing medicines. Thus, many other things are to be known as the objects of *upamana* in everyday life.

Sanskrit Literature and Poetics on *Upamāna*:

The arena of Sanskrit literature abounds in similes and similarity-based description. The applications of *aupamya-mūlakaalamkāras* create the scope of cultivation of *upamāna* therein. Similes are used for introducing simplicity and clarity of expression. Authors of Sanskrit literary creations choose *upamāna* from their experience and their power of observation represent and describe poetical facts in a fanciful manner with the use of *upamāna*. And in poetical matters; the *alamkāras* (rhetorics) like – *upama*,⁴ *rūpaka*, *aprastutprāśamsā*, *arthāntaranyāsa*, *dīpaka*, *kāvyalīṅga*, *tulyayogita*, *atīsayokti*, *apahnuti*, *dṛṣṭānta*, *nidarśanā*, *parīṇāma*, *niścaya* etc. pave the path of application of *upamāna* in Sanskrit literature and literary criticism. The applications like – *megha-śyāma*, *kanyā-ratna*, *pādapadma*, *mukha-candra*, *padam padmam iva*, *caranya-kamalam*, *mukham candra iva*, *mukham candra eva*, *padam padmam eca*, *padma-mukhī*, *abja-sambhvām*, *enākṣī*, *Padma-locana*, *padmālaya*, *Padma-karā*, *padma-nābha*, *samudra iva gāmbhīrye dairyenā himavān iva*⁵, *niama-kalpa-taror-galitam phalam* *śuka-mukhāt amṛ tadrava- saṃyutam*⁶, *ātmānam rathinam viddhi śarīram rathameva tu*⁷, *saṃāśritā ye pada-pallava-pallavam mahatpadam* *puṇyayaśo murāreh*⁸, *atha vyavasthitān dṛṣṭva dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajah*⁹ etc.

4 *Upamā yatra sādṛ śya-lakṣmīḥ ullasatī dvayoh* (candrāloka – 5/3)

5 *Rāmāyaṇa* – 1/1/16

6 *Śrīmad Bhāgavat-purāṇa* – 1/1/3

7 *Kaṭhopaniṣad* – 3/3

8 *Śrīmad Bhāgavat-purāṇa* – 10/14/58

9 *Śrīmad Bhāgavatgītā* – 1/20

clearly denote the application of *upamāna* in the sphere of Sanskrit literary creations. Application of *upamāna* and similarity through poetic language, express a wider sense of easier understanding and knowledge through its language in which experiences, emotions and ideas have been mingled cordially expressed through evocation. The use of language of a poetry is characterized by the deviation from the purpose of literalness. On the contrary, the use of thoughtful scientific language aspires to an unambiguous and unequivocal use of terms by the expressive manner of *upamāna*.

The Place of *Upamāna* in Bengali Literature:

Upamāna, or comparison, is a fundamental *Pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) in Indian epistemology, primarily used to acquire knowledge through resemblance or analogy. While its significance is well-established in Indian philosophical discourse, its influence extends deeply into Bengali literature, where comparison serves as a powerful literary device for enhancing expression, meaning, and aesthetics. This essay explores the role and use of *Upamāna* in Bengali literary traditions, highlighting its impact on poetry, prose, and philosophical writings. In classical Indian philosophy, *Upamāna* is the process by which an unfamiliar object is understood through its similarity to a familiar one. In literature, this principle translates into simile (*upamā*) and metaphor (*rūpaka*)— essential tools of poetic and narrative construction. Bengali literature, with its rich heritage of poetry, songs, and prose, extensively employs *Upamāna* to create vivid imagery and emotional depth. From the devotional lyrics of the Bhakti movement 15 *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini – 2/1/56 to the revolutionary verses of modern Bengali poetry, comparisons serve to deepen expression and bridge the known with the unknown. The earliest extant Bengali literature, the *Caryāpada* (8th – 12th century), consists of mystical songs by Buddhist monks. These songs use *Upamāna* extensively to convey abstract spiritual ideas. For instance, nature-based similes liken human emotions and the transitory nature of life to flowing rivers, fleeting clouds, or withering flowers. During the medieval period; Vaishnava Padāvalī and Bhakti poetry poets like Caṇḍīdās(a), Vidyāpatī, and Govindadās(a) infused Bengali literature with Vaishnava devotional themes. *Upamāna* played a crucial role in expressing divine love: Radha's beauty is often compared to the full moon, blooming lotus, or lightning in the sky. Krishna's flute is likened to the call of a cuckoo, evoking longing in the hearts of devotees. Rabindranath Tagore's Use of *Upamāna* is also mentionable. Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest figure in Bengali literature, extensively used *Upamāna* in his poetry, prose, and songs. In works like *Gitanjali*, he compares human emotions to natural elements:

āmār(a) ei path(a) cāoyātei ānanda— “আমার এই পথ চাওয়াতেই আনন্দ” (My joy is in the waiting). Here, the act of waiting is likened to the slow unfolding of nature's rhythm. The human soul's longing is compared to a bird seeking the infinite sky. Tagore's masterful use of *Upamāna* creates layers of meaning, making his work deeply philosophical yet accessible.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the Rebel Poet of Bengal, employed *Upamāna* to create striking revolutionary imagery. In poems like *Bidrohī*; বিদ্রোহী (The Rebel): The rebel is likened to a storm, fire, and thunder, emphasizing unstoppable force and resistance. Love is compared to a raging sea, symbolizing intensity and passion. His use of *Upamāna* enhances the emotional impact, making his poetry both lyrical and powerful. In addition to

poetry, *Upamāna* finds extensive application in Bengali prose, novels, and short stories. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and his Nationalist Literatures are the pioneer of Bengali novels. He used *Upamāna* to evoke patriotism and heroism. In Ānandamāṭh(a) (আনন্দ মঠ), the motherland is likened to a goddess, inspiring reverence and devotion. His use of *Upamāna* enhances the mythical and emotional appeal of his nationalist themes. Śarat(a) Candra Caṭṭopādhyāy(a) and Emotional Realism novels, such as Dev(a)dāsa (দেবদাস) and Śrikānta (শ্রীকান্ত), employ *Upamāna* to depict human emotions with realistic intensity: A grieving character's sorrow is compared to a relentless monsoon. Love is depicted as an eternal river flowing through human hearts. His use of *Upamāna* gives his narratives a poetic quality, making them deeply touching. Bibhūtibhūṣan(a) Bandopādhyāy(a) and masterpiece on Nature Imagery, Pather(a) Pāncalī (পথের পাঁচলী) is filled with nature-based comparisons: The protagonist Apu's innocence is likened to a dew-covered lotus. The vast fields and rivers mirror the expanse of human dreams. His *Upamāna*-laden prose enhances the sense of nostalgia and connection with nature.

Even in contemporary Bengali Literature, *Upamāna* remains a vital stylistic device. Shankha Ghosh's poetry employs *Upamāna* to comment on social and existential issues. Sunil Gangopadhyay and Samaresh Majumdar use vivid comparisons in their novels to depict urban and rural contrasts. Jibanananda Das uses *Upamāna* in surrealistic ways, making his poetry uniquely evocative; āmi klānta prāṇ(a) ek(a) ("আমি ক্লান্ত প্রাণ এক") – likening exhaustion to fading light). Thus, *Upamāna* has played a profound role in shaping Bengali literature, from ancient mystical verses to modern experimental poetry. Whether in devotional songs, nationalist literature, emotional narratives, or philosophical reflections, *Upamāna* enhances meaning and deepens aesthetic appeal. By drawing analogies between the known and the unknown, it bridges emotion and intellect, reality and imagination, making Bengali literature one of the most expressive traditions in the world.

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