

Perception According to East and West

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ABSTRACT

Culture is not just race, nationality or any particular social category--culture is an experience."-Peng. This article describes the theory of perception focusing on how eastern and western people understand perception. Eastern culture commonly follows three pedagogies namely Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Whereas the western theory focuses on our sensory experience of the world around us and involves both the recognition of environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli. This Article aims at emphasizing the theoretical understanding of human perception. It provides the reader with the brief descriptions of perception according to Jainism which majorly includes Pratyaksh, Paroksh, Avgrah and Iha. It also describes how Hinduism explains perception (pratyaksha) as the primary means of knowledge (pramana) gained through five sense organs (indriya) and the awareness of perceptual being which is produced by virtue of a connection with the 'inner' sense faculty or mind (manas). Whereas, according to Buddhism, perception is a non-conceptualized or indeterminate awareness. Furthermore, Article discusses the western approach describing that we gain information about properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our survival. Also, a perception not only creates our experience of the world around us; it allows us to act within our environment of perception in psychology. By this way, this article aims to provide a comprehensive viewpoint of perception.

Key words: *Pratyaksh, Paroksh, Iha, Avgrah, Avaya, Indriya, Pramana, Manas.*

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Let us introspect and ask a few questions to ourselves. Are we happy? Are we satisfied with what we have? Are we without any complaints? Are we healthy? Over and above all; do we respect nature the way it is?

The answer to all the questions is a 'No'. To change the answer into a 'Yes' to all the questions; one just needs to change one's perception. According to the author, the term perception includes the main essence of all the philosophies, religions and therapies or mental treatments.

Different disciplines have given explanations and theories for perception. Perception is derived from the word to perceive broadly means to understand the world around us. According to West, the process of perception is done by using our five senses. Each one of us since birth starts interpreting the environment because of the need to adapt to the surroundings which include natural environment, social environment and the cultural or regional environment which has a definite style of living. In order to adapt to the natural environment or one can say the existence, like other species even we try to tune ourselves with the changing conditions occurring around us. As we see ourselves growing; we associate the same principle with other living organisms that grow too. Another principle of nature to which we adapt along with other species is movement i.e. we are capable of moving to migrate. Furthermore, the principle of interdependence across natural environment equally dominates i.e. no one can function completely alone without depending on nature directly or indirectly. These principles have instinctively created a need to adjust because without adjustment it is not possible to give or take something. Here arise all the problems and conflicts; what to choose what not to choose; how to choose; whether to choose or not etc. In order to learn this human starts putting in conscious efforts to understand the functioning of nature and him and tries to

identify and organize the patterns noticed in existence. Somewhere out of this sense, only humans could correctly understand the concept of camouflage. There are endless examples of such different types of learning. Psychologists and philosophers call it a process of perception. In simpler words, perception means the way we identify and interpret the world through our senses.

Similarly, let us discuss perception with reference to the social environment. Here by using the term social environment I refer to different social settings which we humans come across as and when we grow and these social settings certainly contribute to our growth. For e.g.; home, school, cinema hall, hospital, shopping mall etc. In such settings, an individual naturally behaves in a manner which is acceptable to the place. He is able to do this because he learns it gradually with maturity the appropriate style to behave and captures the demand and expectations of the respective social setting. Though this entire process seems very automatic and natural it also includes involvement of our cognitive processes out of which perception plays a key role. Our success to adapt with social environment majorly depends on how we perceive that environment and whether our responses are in accord with the setting or not. If we perceive shopping mall as a place to sit and relax then we might not be able to do that. Similarly, if we perceive a school to be a place where no rules, ethics and etiquettes are required then the setting might not encourage your behavior and you would not be allowed to be there. Thus, under social environment also we perceive the stimuli and learn appropriate behavioral patterns in order to adjust with it.

Moving from social environment to cultural or regional environment will further help us understand the process of perception with a different frame of reference. In a way, one can relate cultural or regional environment as one of the branches of

the social environment but yet it holds a significance importance separately and is vast in itself having so many different segments. By Cultural environment, I intend to focus on different groups of people which have been developing for centuries on the basis of classification of climate, language, the taste of food, living style etc. For e.g.; if we see in India itself there are so many different cultures adopting a different style of living. Like people staying in Rajasthan have a completely different style of living as compared to people living in Bengal. Similarly, South Indians are perceived completely different than North Indians. If you relook at the previous sentence I have used the phrase- are perceived differently, i.e. their differences in lifestyle, food, clothing etc. are understood and interpreted by identifying their unique patterns depending of course on the natural climatic and other conditions in an organized way. Probably because of this only a quote for India is framed: “Unity in diversity”. This was about India but it holds true even globally. Let us reflect a bit on Eastern culture and Western culture.

The Western Culture:

Percept: Complex mental representation integrating particular sensational aspects of a figure. Thus, Perception can be defined as-‘The set of processes by which we recognize, organize, and make sense of the sensations we receive from environmental stimuli.’

Perceptual experience involves four elements:

- Distal (far) stimulus i.e. an object in the external world which is an informational medium. For e.g.: Reflected light, sound waves, chemical molecules, or tactile information coming from the environment
- Proximal (near) stimulus which is a representation of the distal stimulus in the sensory receptors e.g. picture on the retina.
- Perceptual object which means a mental representation of the distal stimulus

- Perceptual Constancies:
 - *Size constancy*: The perception that an object maintains the same size despite changes in the size of the proximal stimulation. The same object at two different distances projects different-sized images on the retina. Size constancy can be used to elicit illusions (e.g. Ponzo illusion or Müller-Lyer Illusion)
 - *Shape constancy*: The perception that an object maintains the same shape despite changes in the size of the proximal stimulus. It involves the perceived distance of different parts of the object from the observer.
 - *Depth Perception*: When you drive, you use depth to assess the distance of an approaching automobile. When you decide to call out to a friend walking down the street, you determine how loudly to call, based on how far away you perceive your friend to be
 - *Monocular depth cues*: They are represented in just two dimensions and observed with just one eye. Closer object partially obscures another object; the further object is partially obscured by another object. Some of the examples of monocular cues are Linear perspective- apparently, parallel lines seem to converge as they approach the horizon, Aerial perspective the closer the object the crisper images seem, more clearly delineated, Motion parallax - objects approaching get larger and move quickly closer.
 - *Binocular depth cues*: The closer the object you are trying to see, the more your eyes must turn inward. Your muscles send messages to your brain regarding the degree to which your eyes are turning inward, and these messages are interpreted as cues indicating depth. The closer an object is to you, the greater the disparity between the views of it as sensed in each of your eyes. The apparent jumping of images between the two eyes, which indicates the amount of binocular disparity, will decrease with distance.

Gestalt principles

- ***Figure-ground:*** When perceiving a visual field, some objects (figures) seem prominent, and other aspects of field recede into the background (ground)
- ***Proximity:*** We tend to perceive objects that are close to each other as forming a group
- ***Similarity:*** We tend to perceive objects that are similar to each other as forming a group
- ***Continuity:*** We tend to perceive smoothly flowing or continuous forms rather than disrupted or discontinuous ones
- ***Closure:*** We tend to perceptually close up, or complete, objects that are not, in fact, complete

Theoretical Approaches to Perception

- ***Bottom-Up Approaches:*** Start from the bottom, considering physical stimuli being perceived and then work their way up to higher-order cognitive processes (organizing principles and concepts). Higher cognitive processes cannot directly influence processing at lower levels. Gibson's Theory of direct perception: The array of information in our sensory receptors, including sensory context, is all we need to perceive anything. We do not need higher cognitive processes or anything else to mediate between our sensory experiences and our perceptions. Existing beliefs or higher-level inferential thought processes are not necessary for perception.
- ***Top-Down Approaches:*** The perceiver builds (constructs) a cognitive understanding (perception) of a stimulus, using sensory information as the foundation for the structure but also using other sources of information to build the perception. During perception, we quickly form and test various hypotheses regarding percepts based on what we sense (sensory data), what we know (knowledge stored in memory), what we can infer (using thinking), what we expect.

Deficits in Perception

- ***Visual Agnosi:*** People with visual agnosia have normal sensations of what is in front of them, but they cannot recognize what they see.
- ***Prosopagnosia:*** Severely impaired ability to recognize human faces

The Eastern Culture:

Modern day logic is defined as the study of principles and method of argumentation. An argument in the system of logic is a set of statements. Jain logic is ancient. Its roots can be traced to Holy Scriptures in which it states, “Non-absolutism is the principal dogma of Jainism”. Furthermore “every statement is to be accepted as relative truth”. The soul is eternal as well as changing. How can these two conflicting statements be true? According to Jain logic, they are true statements in their own perspective. The soul is eternal from a substantial point of view (*Dravya*). The soul is ever changing from a modal point of view (*Paryäya*).

As six blind men touched an elephant, and came out with their own opinion that the elephant is like a pillar, python, drum, pipe, long rope, and a huge fan, depending on the parts of the body that they touched. They could be right from their own perspective, but the elephant is an elephant, and the person who sees knows an elephant as a total. He also knows that elephant could be like a pillar, python, drum, pipe, long rope and a huge fan, from the perspective of the legs, trunk, abdomen, tusk, tail, and ears. Therefore, if you do not have complete knowledge, do not believe in other possibilities or think that their partial point of view is the only truthful and others are wrong then the partial point of view is not right.

Thus, understanding of Jain logic helps a lot for tolerance. Nothing may be wrong and nothing may be right. All the statements are true in their own perspective. Because of our inability to know substance as a whole, we cannot have complete knowledge of a substance. Only omniscient lord has perfect knowledge, so He has a complete knowledge.

The spoken and written language has limitations of expressions. So one has to understand the broader meaning of Jain logic and then try to understand the reality in that perspective. We should know all the angles of the substance and then present the partial point of view, and then we are right. Presenting the partial point of view, and then considering it as a complete knowledge is wrong according to Jain logic. We should also keep in mind, that when a sentence is spoken, we should know from what angle it is spoken. If we understand it correctly, then our knowledge base increases. To know a substance, there are 4 different categories, which are described in scriptures.

Five Pramānas: As discussed earlier, Pramāna kind of knowledge comprises all the aspects of a substance. Pramāna means total, true, valid, pure and complete knowledge.

Pramāna is of two kinds i.e. *Pratyaksha* (direct) and *Paroksha* (indirect)

- *Pratyaksha Jnān* or direct knowledge is that which is obtained by the soul without the help of external means. The *Pratyaksha Jnān* is of 3 kinds-namely *Avadhi-jnān*, *Manah-Paryāya Jnān* and *Keval Jnān*.
- *Paroksha Jnān* means the knowledge that is obtained by the soul by means of such things as the five senses and mind. *Paroksha Jnān* is classified into (1) *Mati-jnān*, (2) *Shruta-Jnān*.

Thus, there are 5 kinds of *Pramāna*: (1) *Mati Jnān* (2) *Shruta Jnān* (3) *Avadhi Jnān* (4) *Manah-Paryāya Jnān* (5) *Keval Jnān*. Modes of *Pramāna* can also be classified as follows for detail understanding.

Direct knowledge (*Pratyaksha Pramāna*)

Soul's knowledge of substance is pure. Soul's involvement is direct in obtaining this type of knowledge. It can be of 2 types.

The knowledge obtained by the soul in sensory (*Mati*) knowledge and articulate (*Shrut*) knowledge, is called indirect knowledge, for two reasons: 1) There is a need for senses and mind's involvement and 2) The knowledge is called impure because the knowledge obtained from senses' and mind usually is for others and not for the soul. However, when the soul obtains right faith (*Samyag Darshan*) at that time, the sensory knowledge and articulate knowledge are used for the knowledge of the self. Therefore, this is called direct knowledge in a conventional sense. Here the knowledge is partially true (*Ekadesha Spasta*).

Five *Samavāya* (Five Causal Factors)

Who is responsible for the events that occur in the world? Hegel said it is history. Marx said it is "the system." Various views have been propounded to explain the occurrence of events. These theories put forward mutually conflicting answers to the question of who or what causes events in this universe to transpire. An event does not take place because of one reason. There are always more than one factor are involved. As per Jain philosophy, a situation develops or an event happens because of five reasons, called *Samavāy*.

- *Samvāya*

Samavāy is the name of the group of five causes which are associated with every situation or event. It gives to the connection between action and causes. Without a cause, no

action can take place. These five causes have a deep connection with everything that takes place in the universe. These all are responsible for all events (positive or negative) in the universe. Some people give focus only on one of these causes and ignore the others. The theory of *Anekāntavāda*, the Jain philosophy of multiplicity of viewpoints, rejects this way of viewing matters from a single angle. The Jain philosophy views and reveals the importance of each *Samavāy* from the *Anekāntavāda* and considers these five *Samavāys* as the causes of any action or reaction. Without these five, nothing can take place. The five *Samavāys* (a group of factors functioning simultaneously) are:

- *Kāl* (Time)

Time gives sequence to whatever happens in the universe. The *Karmas* that are bound to the soul due to activities may not immediately manifest their fruits as soon as they are bound. The fruits of *Karma* appear at a specific time depending on the nature of the *Karma* itself. *Karmas* have to depend on time to present their fruits. One cannot have fruits the very moment a tree is planted. The seed cannot neglect the temporal limitation set out by time for its transformation into a tree; even nature depends on time for its manifestation or actualization. Time is a controlling principle. Without it, the temporal order cannot be accounted for. If there were no time, a spout, a stem, a stalk, a flower and a fruit - all would emerge and exist simultaneously. We cannot but acknowledge the fact that time plays an important role in the events of one's life.

If human being understands that time is one of the important factors that produces an effect, he/she will learn to be patient during the period from the inception of the work to its completion or accomplishment. Otherwise, he/she will wrongly expect success or accomplishment the moment the

work has commenced or at least before its due time. He may then lose all hopes on account of not attaining success. This will make him/her slack in his/her efforts. As a result, he/she will certainly be deprived of success in the future.

- *Svabhāv* (Nature of a Substance)

Time is not everything. Even if the right time arrives, certain seeds do not sprout. Why are thorns sharp? Why do most flowers have beautiful colours? Why are some animals cruel? Why are some animals clever and capable of rapid movement? Why does a dog bark? A single answer to all these questions is, it is their nature (*Svabhāv*). For example, to bark is a dog's nature. You will not be able to grow mangoes on a lemon tree. In matters like these, individual nature is considered as the main cause. Nothing can generate an effect against its own inherent nature, even if all other causal conditions such as time, human effort, etc., are present there. An insentient or sentient thing produces an effect strictly in accordance with its own inherent nature. Undoubtedly, the place of inherent nature is very important in the production of effectors of the occurrence of an event.

- *Niyati* (Destiny)

Niyati means destiny or fate. In this world, there are certain things that are predetermined and unalterable. In these situations, whatever has been destined will take place. Whatever has to happen keeps happening. In this process, change cannot be made despite our best-laid plans. For example, even if we make all possible efforts, we cannot prevent the ageing process or may not be able to save someone's life. If someone were going to hit our car from behind, he/she would do so, despite our best efforts. In essence, although we are in control of most events that occur throughout our life, there are certain things that are beyond our control.

Destiny can be regarded as identical to a certain type of *karma*, an unalterable *karma*. In Jain terminology, it is called '*Nikāchit karma*'. The *Nikāchit karma* is that which is unalterable and which most certainly causes the experience of pleasure or pain to the concerned soul at the time of its fruition. The fruit or result of such type of *karma* being *Niyat* (fixed and unalterable), the *karma* is known by the name '*Niyati*'. However, it must be stressed that the concept of *Nikāchit* only applies to a select few *karmas* and cannot be used as a justification for apathy or evil.

- *Nimitta & Prārabdh* (External Circumstances and Karma)

Nimitta is an apparent cause of a result or a catalytic agent (helper) of a process, result or activity. There can be one or more *Nimitta* in any given event. *Nimitta* can be either external (person, objects) or internal (*Karma*). Guidance of a *Guru* and scripture or an event can be an external cause.

Happiness, misery and various conditions related to us depend on diverse *karmas*. Sometimes we notice that good deeds yield bitter fruits and evil deeds yield sweet ones. Behind this apparent anomaly, it is the force of *karma* that is at work. All strange things and all the sad things we witness; all the happy things we experience; these are all are due to *Karma*. A mother gives birth to two children together (twins). Still one turns out to be different from the other. This is because of one's own *Karma*. The rich become poor, poor become rich, rich become richer and poor become poorer. This is also because of one's own *Karma*. Everyone has to experience both the good and the evil consequences of *Karma*.

- *Purushārtha* (Self-effort)

Purushārtha or individual effort has a special place. A person cannot progress if he/she depends on Time or Nature or Destiny or *Karma* and if he/she does not put forth the effort. The human race has progressed because of its efforts

and initiatives. It is not possible to improve anything without efforts.

Which one is the most important of these five? Which is the most effectual? The controversy regarding these questions is not of today but has existed for centuries. Countless arguments and counter-arguments have been made for and against one or another proposition. One who supports one view disagrees with other causes. However, Jain philosophy does not consider these five from a single point of view; nor does it consider anyone of them as the only right one. The Jain philosophy considers their collective effect as valid and right. However, Jain philosophy does put more emphasis on individual effort (*Purushārtha*), because the individual effort is the only one in our control. Individual effort can change or eradicate one's *Karma*. *Purushārtha* of past is *Karma* of present and *Purushārtha* of the present is *Karma* of future. If we continue to put self-effort to shed our *Karma*, our destiny will improve, and that can happen sooner depending upon the eradication of *Karma*. However, we must understand that it takes all the five causes for any action to take place.

Perspectives on Perception

Most classical Indian philosophical schools accept perception as the primary means of knowledge but differ on the nature, kinds and objects of perceptual knowledge. Here we first survey Buddhist and orthodox Hindu schools' definitions of perception (excluding *Vaiśeṣika* and *Yoga* schools since they simply take on board *Nyāya* and *Sāṃkhya* ideas, respectively) and note the issues raised by these definitions. As mentioned above, the orthodox schools generally accept both non-conceptualized (indeterminate) and conceptualized (determinate) perceptual states in sharp contrast to the Buddhist view that perception is always non-conceptualized or indeterminate awareness.

Nyāya realism

The most comprehensive, and the most influential, the definition of perception in classical Indian philosophy is offered in Gautama's *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.4. Perception is a cognition which arises from the contact of the sense organ and object and is not impregnated by words, is unerring, and well-ascertained. The *Navya-Naiyāyika Gaṅgeśa* objects to the notion 'sensory connection' in the classical *Nyāya* definition of perception, arguing that this makes the definition too wide and too narrow at the same time: too wide because it implies that every awareness is perceptual being produced by virtue of a connection with the 'inner' sense faculty or mind (*manas*); too narrow because it fails to include divine perception, which involves no sensory connection. *Gaṅgeśa* offers a simpler definition of perception as an awareness which has no other awareness as its chief instrumental cause. Being concerned that his definition may be interpreted as ruling out conceptualized or determinate perception that may have non-conceptual or indeterminate perception as one of its causes, he argues that indeterminate perception can never be the chief instrumental cause of determinate perception, although it is a cause, since it supplies the qualifier or the concept for determinate perception.

Mīmāṃsā realism

The *Purva Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* (MS) were originally composed by *Jamini* around 200 BCE. The fourth MS 1.1.4 says: The arising of a cognition when there is a connection of the sense faculties of a person with an existing (*sat*) object—that (*tat*) is perception; it is not the basis of the knowledge of *Dharma* because it is the apprehension of that which is present. (Taber, 2005:44)

There is no consensus among *Mīmāṃsā* commentators on whether this is intended as a definition of perception, even while an initial reading of it suggests that it may be. *Kumārila*, the noted

Mīmāṃsā commentator argues that the first part of the *sūtra* is not intended as a definition because of the context in which it figures; the *sūtra*-s preceding it are concerned with an inquiry into righteousness (*Dharma*). Moreover, the *sūtra* construed as a definition of perception results in too wide, and not too accurate, a definition, because it only says that perception arises from a connection between the sense faculty and an existing object and does not exclude perceptual error or inferential cognition. *Taber* (2005, 16), on the other hand, suggests that it is possible to construe as a valid definition, and indeed such a construal was proposed by an earlier commentator, the so-called *Vṛttikāra* quoted at length by *Śābara* in his *Śābarabhāṣyam*. This, the most extensive commentary on the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra*, suggests that the words of the *sūtra* (*tat* = ‘that’ and *sat* = ‘existing’) be switched around for a different reading for the first part of the *sūtra*, which would then state that, “a cognition that results from connection of the sense faculties of a person with that (*tat*) [same object that appears in the cognition] is true (*sat*) perception”. This switch rules out perceptual error and inference; both these present objects other than those that are the cause of the perception.

Nirvikalpaka and *Savikalpaka Pratyakṣa*

The Sanskrit term *kalpanā* is variously translated as imagination or conceptual construction and is meant to be the source of ‘*vikalpa*’, roughly translated as concepts, but which may stand for anything that the mind adds to the ‘given’. The time-honored differentiation of perception into conception-free perception (*nirvikalpa pratyakṣa*) and conception-loaded perception (*sa-vikalpa pratyakṣa*) is made on the basis of concepts (*vikalpa*) (*Matilal*, 1986: 313).

Buddhist nominalism:

The oldest preserved definition of perception in the Buddhist tradition is the one by *Vasubandhu* (c. 4th century CE),

“Perception is a cognition [that arises] from that object [which is represented therein]” (*Frauwallner*, 1957). However, the more influential and much-discussed view is that of later Buddhist philosopher *Diñnāga* (c. 480–540 CE) for whom perception is simply a cognition “devoid of conceptual construction (*kalpanāpodham*)”. *Taber* (2005,) notes two important implications of this definition. First, perception is non-conceptual in nature; no seeing is seeing as, because that necessarily involves the intervention of conceptual constructs, which contaminate the pristine given. Perception is mere awareness of bare particulars without any identification or association with words for, according to *Diñnāga*, such association always results in the falsification of the object. Referents of the words are universals which, for the Buddhist, are not real features of the world. Second, *Diñnāga's* definition only indicates a phenomenological feature of perception; it says nothing about its origin and does not imply that it arises from the contact of a sense faculty with the object. Therefore, for the Buddhist idealist, the object that appears in perceptual cognition need not be an external physical object, but a form that arises within consciousness itself. Both these ideas led to vigorous debates in classical Indian philosophy between the Hindus and the Buddhists. The first of these ideas relates to the notion of non-conceptual perception, the second to idealism. *Diñnāga's* philosophy is idealist-nominalist in spirit and his epistemological position is in sync with the Buddhist metaphysical doctrines of no-self and evanescence of all that exists which, expectedly, evoke strong reaction from the realist *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* and *Mīmāṃsā* schools.

The development of Hindu realism:

The *Nyāya* view evolves in response to Buddhist account of perception. They regard perception as a cognitive episode triggered by causal interaction between a sense faculty and an object. This interaction first results in a sensory impression,

nothing more than mere physiological change. This preliminary awareness, non-conceptual perception, is a necessary first step in the process of perception and is invariably followed by a structured awareness leading to conceptual perception. A cognition that is independent of preliminary sensory awareness cannot result in a perceptual judgment. The first awareness does not destroy the perceptual character of the second; rather, it facilitates this subsequent awareness. Non-conceptual perception is an indispensable causal factor for generation of conceptual perception, although memory, concepts and collateral information may also be required. It is important to note that the *Nyāya* notion of *vikalpa* (in their distinction of *nir-vikalpa* and *sa-vikalpa*) is different from that of the Buddhists. Unlike the latter, the *Naiyāyikas* do not think of *vikalpa-s* as mental creations or imaginative constructions but as objectively real properties and features of objects. *Vikalpa* in this sense indicates the operation of judging and synthesizing rather than imagining or constructing. Thus conceptual perceptions truly represent the structure of reality. Of the five types of concepts (*vikalpa-s*) recognized by the Buddhists, viz. *nāma* (word), *jāti* (universal), *guṇa* (quality), *kriyā* (action) and *dravya* (substance), the *Naiyāyikas*, regard all but the first *vikalpa* as categories of reality (*Mondal, 1982*). Unlike the Grammarians, the *Nyāya* schools do not accept the objective reality of words; words are not inherent to the object presented in perception. Rather, the *Naiyāyikas* hold that the relation between word and object is created by convention in a linguistic community. Although a concept is associated with a word (*nāma-vikalpa*) by means of a convention, it is not merely a fabrication. For example, when someone brings garlic clove near my nose and teaches me by pointing to it that it is called garlic, then subsequently confronted with the garlicky odor and a similar clove, I can see it and smell it as garlic. Thus perceptual awareness includes knowledge of words but, insofar as it is

perceptual awareness, it is brought about by sensory contact with the object and, its properties which exist independently of words.

The Buddhists reject this argument on the basis that the conventional meaning of a word relates the word with the concept or the universal. Universal or concepts cannot be objects of our perception; they cannot be sensed. Universals, attributes and concepts are theoretical constructs for the Buddhists; what is sensed is the actual object, the exclusive particular, the ultimate existent. The Buddhists offer two arguments in favour of the claim that only particulars are real. First, knowledge by means of words or verbal testimony is very different from perceptual knowledge, for what we are aware of when we hear the words “garlic is pungent” is very different from what we are phenomenologically aware of when we smell garlic; words do not denote or stand-in for actual objects and can be uttered in the absence of any objects, but perception cannot arise in the absence of objects. Second, the particulars are real or existent because they have causal efficacy (*arthakriyāsāmarthyā*). Only particular real garlic can flavor one's food or ruin it, but the universal garlihood cannot do any of these; in this sense, only the particulars are real for they fulfill the purposes (*artha*) of humans.

The *Navya-Nyāya* notion of non-conceptual perception differs from that of the Buddhists in many respects, two of which are very important. First, according to *Navya-Naiyāyikas*, there is no apperceptive evidence for non-conceptual perception, unlike the Buddhists who contend that conception-free awareness is necessarily self-aware. The *Navya-Naiyāyikas*, as is obvious from the quote above, emphasize that the evidence for a non-conceptual sensory grasp of universals comes in the form of an inference. Second, according to *Navya-Nyāya*, the object of non-conceptual perception is a qualifier (concept), although not given as that in the first instance, but not a bare particular as the Buddhists

hypothesize. It is, as the above quote explains, posited by the force of an inference; the ‘bare object’ of non-conceptual perception becomes the qualifier in a resultant determinate perception. While this does not satisfactorily address *Chakrabarti's* concern that lack of apperceptive evidence implies that the subject cannot assign an intentional role to the object of non-conceptual perception, *Chadha* (2006) argues that the subject's not being in a position to assign an intentional role to the object of non-conceptual perception is no hindrance to the intentionality of non-conceptual perception itself. Non-conceptual perception is awareness of a “non-particular individual” (*Chakrabarti*, 1995) and can be assigned the intentional role of a qualifier in virtue of the recognitional abilities acquired by the subject on the basis of the perceptual episode. The subject sees a non-particular individual but, since there is no apperceptive or conscious awareness, the subject does not see it as an instance of a universal or a qualifier. *Chadha* explicates *Gaṅgeśa's* insight that a qualifier is given as a non-particular individual, neither divorced from nor joined to the qualificandum and, therefore it is wrong to suggest that lack of apperceptive evidence implies that non-conceptual perception is not an intentional perceptual state.

The Advaita Vedānta: A compromise on Hindu realism

The *Advaita Vedānta* theory compromises on the realism of earlier classical Hindu philosophy. Their early view on perception is akin to the Buddhists, although arrived at from a different perspective. *Maṇḍana Miśra* says:

Perception is first, without mental construction, and has for its object the bare thing. The constructive cognitions which follow it plunge into particulars. (*Brahma-Siddhi*, 71.1-2)

The *vṛtti* in the form of the object impresses itself as it were in the mode of the subject itself, and thereby comes to be apprehended, but as a predicate—and not as the pure subject-content which is the “I-notion”—in the subject's apperception”. (*Bilimoria*, 1980,

pp.41). The initial mental state subsides and the subject becomes directly aware of the object itself; the cognition is self-evident to the subject, just like the cognition of pleasure and pain. In this reflective stage, the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) integrates the mental contents corresponding to the object with familiar or recognized precepts. Determinate perception of the totality of the object occurs with the completion of the assimilative process.

David Applebaum (1982) notes that *Bilimoria's* discussion of the *Advaitin's* notion of perception focuses on the necessary conditions or criteria for valid or veridical perceptions. According to him, this approach while justified in the light of perception's inclusion among the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa-s*) is mistaken because it only focuses on sensation as a species of mental state (*vṛtti*). For the *Advaitin*, the sensation is not a mode exhausted by the judgmental content of a mental state (*vṛtti*), it has epistemic value independently of its role in judgmental perception. Applebaum quotes from the Upanisadic texts to support this view: *Manas* is for men a means of bondage or liberation ... of bondage if it clings to objects of perception (*visayasangi*), and of liberation if not directed towards these objects (*nirviśayam*). (*Applebaum, 1982, p.203*)

Non-conceptual perception furnishes us with knowledge of pure existence (*sanmātra*) rather than with proto data to construct imagined particulars. Therefore, it is not simply a prior stage of conceptual perception and so also not necessarily a mental state produced in cooperation with the object. *Applebaum* (1982, p.204) suggests that non-conceptual perception in this sense focuses attention on sensing, in which consciousness turns its attention inwards to the activity of the sense-organs resulting in deepening and broadening their pro-prioceptive content. Pro-prioception, he claims, points the way to the soul or self (*ātman*); mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) returns to its presentational activity, its function of

monitoring and unfolding the sensory manifold to create conditions for the emergence of self (*ātman*), which according to the Advaitin, is identical with the Ultimate reality (*Brahman*). In non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) perception, consciousness is returned to itself and opens up the possibility of manifesting or seeing the Seer (*ātman*) or knowing the Ultimate reality (*Brahman*).

Perceptual Illusion

The sceptics challenge strikes at the claim made by the *Naiyāyikas* that perception should be non-erroneous (*avyabhichāri*) and well-ascertained or free from doubt (*vyavasāyātmaka*). They ask: how do we distinguish between veridical perceptions and the non-veridical ones? In the case of a perceptual doubt, say, seeing something at a distance which looks like a pole or an old tree-trunk, we are uncertain which it is but are a priori sure it cannot be both. In the case of perceptual illusion, I see a snake but I misperceive as there is only a rope in front of me. Illusoriness of the experience (seeing a snake) is exposed with reference to another veridical experience (seeing a rope), but again, we are a priori sure that both cannot be true together. Then, the Buddhist sceptic, *Vasubandhu*, raises the ante with the question: could they not both be false simultaneously? The sceptical argument is premised on a denial of the realist thesis that experiences refer to a mind-independent reality. *Vasubandhu's* argument for idealism appears right at the beginning of *Vimśatikā* when he states:

This [the external world] is consciousness only, because there is the appearance of non-existent things, just as a person with cataracts sees non-existent hairs, moons et cetera. (*Feldman, 2005*). *Vasubandhu* offers many other examples of dreams, delusions, hallucinations, etc., where we are aware of non-existent objects that are products of our imagination and not objects

external to the mind. If it is possible for awareness to create its own object and then grasp it (as in a dream) then, *Vasubandhu* argues, everything that we seem to be aware of could be a making of awareness.

The standard reply to this view appeals to the intuition that illusory experience is parasitic on veridical experience. The *Naiyāyika*, *Vātsyāyana* explains that an erroneous cognition depends on a principal cognition as its basis. “This is a man” for a tree-trunk, which is not a man, has for its basis a principal cognition of a man. If a man has never been perceived in the past, an erroneous cognition of a man, in what is not a man, can never be produced (*Nyāya-Sūtra-Bhāṣya*, 4.2.35). A similar argument is put forth by the *Advaita-Vedanta* founder *Śankara*. He challenges *Vasubandhu's* view on the ground that it is incoherent; when the Buddhists say “that which is the content of an internal awareness appears as though external,” they are assuming the existence of an external thing even while they deny it ... For they use the phrase ‘as though’ ... because they become aware of a cognition appearing externally ... For nobody speaks thus: *Viṣnumitra* appears like the son of a barren woman. (*Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya*, 2.2.28)

I close this article on the note that *Sūtra-s* were primarily composed in the seven centuries from 5th BCE to 2nd CE and, thereafter, for the next millennium and more, the philosophical work was carried forward by *Sūtra* commentators (*tīkā-kār-s*) from respective schools. This latter period saw these epistemological debates rage among scholars from these schools. Note also that there is no consensus on the dates given here; most Western scholars accept these, while Indian schools place them further back in antiquity.

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