

The Epistemological Status of Upamāna: A Critical Study of Bhāsarvajña's Interpretation

Introduction

- Indian philosophy gives great importance to *pramāṇas* (means of valid knowledge). Different schools disagree on how many *pramāṇas* should be accepted. One of the major debates concerns *Upamāna* (comparison). While classical Nyāya accepts it as an independent *pramāṇa*, Bhāsarvajña argues that it is only a form of *Śavda* (verbal testimony).

Classical Nyāya Theory of Upamāna

- Four *pramāṇas*: Perception, Inference, Comparison, Testimony.
- *Upamāna* (comparison) produces knowledge of an unknown object through similarity.
- Example: A traveller learns that a *gavaya* resembles a cow. On seeing it later, he recognizes it as a *gavaya*.

Bhāsarvajña's Critique

- Bhāsarvajña argues that recognition of the *gavaya* is not produced by similarity itself. It arises through verbal testimony (mainly). Therefore, accepting a separate pramāṇa called *Upamāna* is unnecessary.

Main Arguments

- The relation between a word and its object is established by trustworthy testimony.
- Similarity only helps apply previously acquired knowledge.
- Speaker's intention (*tātparya*) and context determine meaning.
- Language is central to valid cognition.

***Nyāyasūtra* and Objections**

- Opponents argue that Gautama separately mentions *Upamāna*, proving its independence. Bhāsarvajña replies that separate treatment does not imply an independent category.

Philosophical Significance

- Bhāsarvajña simplifies epistemology by avoiding unnecessary multiplication of *pramāṇas*. His theory highlights language, convention, context, and intention, anticipating later developments in Indian philosophy of language.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- Unique explanation of *Upamāna*.
- Strong defence of *Śavda*.
- Sophisticated linguistic analysis.

Criticisms:

- Classical Naiyāyikas maintain similarity has an independent epistemic role.

Conclusion

- Bhāsarvajña reinterprets *Upamāna* as a special function of *Śavda* rather than an independent means of knowledge. His theory remains one of the most original contributions to Nyāya epistemology and continues to inspire modern research.

Thank you...