

## THE NUMBER OF PRAMĀṆAS ACCORDING TO BHARTRHARI\*

*By Ashok Aklujkar, Vancouver*

1.1 In an article entitled “*prāmāṇya* in the philosophy of the Grammarians”, expected to be published in the near future, I have tried to explain the distinctive nature of the view of *prāmāṇya* or ‘validity of the means of cognition’ which the Grammarians or Vaiyākaraṇas held. I have pointed out in that article that whereas most other traditions of Indian philosophy, knowingly or unknowingly, emphasized the separability of the means of cognition (*pratyakṣa* ‘perception’, *anumāna* ‘inference’, etc.), the Grammarian-philosophers like Bhartrhari (“B” in abbreviation) played down the separability of the means and looked upon them as functioning conjointly<sup>1</sup>. In particular, *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* work on the backdrop of *āgama*, and *āgama* changes, usually gradually, in the light of the knowledge received through *pratyakṣa* and

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that Indian philosophers of other persuasions are not aware of the mutual dependence or limitations of *pramāṇas*. They too would readily concede that an *anumāna* is not valid if it is vitiated by a perception, that the perception of a rope as a snake should be rejected if one can infer at a later moment the real nature of the object, and that one cannot assert that fire does not burn simply because a reliable text or person says so. What I have in mind here is not invalidation or delimitation that obtains after the operation of a *pramāṇa*. My remark has rather to do with what takes place while a *pramāṇa* is in operation. The Grammarian school is unlike the other schools of Indian philosophy in accepting at that point the penetration of (what is considered to be) the domain of one *pramāṇa* by (what is considered to be) the domain of another *pramāṇa*. While the Buddhist thinkers like Dignāga avoid such overlapping of *pramāṇas* by restricting the object of *pratyakṣa* (to *svalakṣaṇa*, i.e. by redefining *pratyakṣa*), the Grammarians accept the overlapping as an unavoidable fact of life and view the operations of (so-called separate) *pramāṇas* as basically complex.

*anumāna*. This is so because the Grammarian's idea of *āgama* was significantly different, which, in turn, was due mostly to his four-fold or multi-level concept of language and his awareness of the centrality of language in our experience of the world.

**1.2** Even if one grants the Grammarian's view that the *pramāṇas* function 'hand-in-hand', one can ask the following question: Which *pramāṇas* does the Grammarian have in mind when he puts forward his view? His *pramāṇas* may not be as separable as those of others and he may not be interested in so defining them as to make their domains mutually exclusive, but how many common sense definitions precede his view or are presupposed when he takes his stance? In other words, what is the number of the *pramāṇas* the Grammarian is willing to accept as a lower-level reality – as convenient fictions? There is some difference of opinion in this matter<sup>2</sup>, and hence I wish to examine it in the present paper. My remarks about it should, however, be understood as applicable only to B, although they may be true of other Grammarian-philosophers and although I shall occasionally speak of Grammarians in general.

**2.1** It is implicit in the preceding remarks that, as far as I know, B makes no explicit statement on the number of *pramāṇas* he is willing to entertain. Were there to be such a statement, the difference of opinion would not have arisen. Now, given the situation as it is, we first need to ask ourselves: How shall we be able to find out what *pramāṇas* B presupposes?<sup>3</sup> I think all we need to do is to note the key terminology of those sections of his *Trikāṇḍī* or *Vākyapadīya* and *Tripādī* or *Mahābhāṣyaṭīkā* in which he discusses the issue of *pramāṇya*. These sections, specifically TK 1.30–43, 148–53 with the *Vṛtti* thereto, 2.134–41, and TP pp. 8, 82–3, 98, 191–4, express their contents with *pratyakṣa*<sup>4</sup>, *anumāna*<sup>5</sup>, and *āgama*<sup>6</sup> (from among the terminology commonly asso-

<sup>2</sup> If those students of B's thought who, like me, conclude that the *pramāṇas* are not really separable in B's view were to be disinterested in determining the number of *pramāṇas* precisely and hence were to mention various numbers, that would be something expected. However, the difference of opinion is noticed even among those scholars who have not realized the tentativeness of the *pramāṇa* distinctions set up by the Grammarian and whom one expects to be more committed to giving an account of each acceptable *pramāṇa*.

<sup>3</sup> It will be noticed that the scholars whose views I modify below have not raised this crucial question about the method prior to their listing or delineation of the *pramāṇas* acceptable to B.

<sup>4</sup> Related expression: *pratyakṣapramāṇa*.

<sup>5</sup> Related expressions: *anumāṇi*, *anumita*, *anumāyamāna*, *ānumānika*/<sup>o</sup>*nikī*, *tarka*, *hetu*-, *tārkika*-.

<sup>6</sup> Related expressions: *āgamika dharma*, *āgamacakṣus*.

ciated with *pramāṇas* in Sanskrit) as perimeters. It follows, therefore, that the *pramāṇas* presupposed by B are *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama*. This conclusion is supported by the following additional considerations:

(a) B nowhere declares *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* to be unacceptable or always unreliable, and he clearly argues for the acceptance of *āgama* in TK 1.30–43.

(b) The author of the Yogasūtra (1.7), to whose thought B seems close<sup>7</sup>, acknowledges precisely the same three *pramāṇas*.

(c) B's guiding light in grammar, Patañjali, the author of the Mahābhāṣya, indicates awareness of only these three *pramāṇas*<sup>8</sup>.

**2.2** Having thus established that B's thinking on *pramāṇya* moves in the spheres of *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama* and that it makes historical sense to attribute initial or first-level acceptance of these three *pramāṇas* to him<sup>9</sup>, I would like to examine whether those interpretations are justified in which additional *pramāṇas* have been mentioned as acceptable to him.

**3.1** While introducing TK 1.35, B's commentator Vṛṣabha – who, on the whole, is a very perceptive scholar and the incomplete and faulty preservation of whose commentary saddens all serious students of B – remarks: *pratyakṣānumāne eva pramāṇe ity avagamād* [→ *ava ... [ā]gamād?*] *anyapramāṇapradarśanena vyabhicārayati*. And again, while introducing TK 1.36, Vṛṣabha says: *pratyakṣānumānāgamavyatirikṭāṃ pratipattim āha*. Although the text of the first remark is not beyond doubt, it is clear from Vṛṣabha's explanations of TK 1.35–6 and the V

<sup>7</sup> I have discussed the relationship between the Yogasūtra and Yoga-bhāṣya, on the one hand, and the TK, on the other, in a paper read at the 1970 annual meeting of the American Oriental Society. I hope to be able to prepare this paper for publication in the near future.

<sup>8</sup> (a) See the Mahābhāṣya passages in which *anumāna*, *anumānagamya*, *āgama*, *pratyakṣa*, etc. occur according to PATHAK – CHITRAO 1927. (b) The remark *śabdapramāṇakā vayam. yacchabda āha tad asmākaṃ pramāṇam* occurring in the Mahābhāṣya (Paspasā *vārttika* 9; 2.1.1 *vārttika* 5) should not be interpreted as meaning that the Grammarians accept only *śabda* or *āgama* as a *pramāṇa*. TK 3.7.38cd, Helārāja 3.1.11, etc. rightly take it as indicating that the Grammarian, in his role as a linguist, can accept as existing anything that words express – that, while writing a grammar, he does not have to determine what actually exists. (c) See note 18 below for refutation of the view that Patañjali recognized *arthāpatti* as an additional means of cognition.

<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that there could not have been talk of some other *pramāṇas* before or during the time of B. What we are attempting here is not a determination of the range of B's information, but a determination of what B was willing to view as (initially or commonsensically) acceptable *pramāṇas*.

thereto that he takes the two verses to mean that B accepted the possibility of knowledge through a means going beyond *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama* (cf. SUBRAMANIA IYER 1969: 89, lines 23–30).

I consider it rather revealing that Vṛṣabha does not have a name for this additional means<sup>10</sup>. He will probably be hard pressed to find one among the words employed by B. The purport he assigns to B's *kārikās* and V is not supported by the context or by the expressions constituting the passages in question. In fact, B's phrases *pratyakṣapramāṇaviśayam api* (V 1.35)<sup>11</sup> and *pratyakṣam anumānam ca* (TK 1.36; note the omission of *āgama*) indicate that B's intention is not to state that something exceeding *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama* must be acknowledged. The purpose of TK 1.35–7 seems to be to point out cases of extraordinary perception in order to make two further contextually relevant observations: (a) Inferences cannot refute what extraordinary perception establishes (b) Since the *dharmaśādhana* of *śādhū* expressions is/could be based on such extraordinary perception, one cannot reject it through inferential statements. TK 1.35–7 can thus be understood as implying that extraordinary perceptions resulting from *abhyāsa* 'constant practice', *karman/adrṣṭaśakti* 'a non-mundane or imperceptible force' possessed by spirits (*rakṣahpitṛpiśāca*)<sup>12</sup>, and enlightenment (state of the *āvirbhūtaprakāśa* individuals) be admitted and further that, to account for such perceptions, the possibility of heightening of the capacities of senses (through *abhyāsa*, *tapas*, etc.) be admitted. It

<sup>10</sup> TRIPĀTHĪ (1972: 319–20) initially follows Vṛṣabha's interpretation of TK 1.35 and 1.36 and takes the further step of specifying the so-called additional *pramāṇas* as *abhyāsa* and *adrṣṭa*, but then he turns around and, on the basis of a different reasoning, disposes of *abhyāsa* and *adrṣṭa* by including them in *pratyakṣa*. His procedure is unhistorical. It does not depend on indications in individual texts, but rather on what he and other authors consider logical. He does not even point out the weakness of his first reasoning that leads him to the hypothesis that B has additional *pramāṇas* (namely, *abhyāsa* and *adrṣṭa*) in mind.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SUBRAMANIA IYER (1969: 89): "What is specifically denied is that it is inferential knowledge".

<sup>12</sup> SUBRAMANIA IYER's (1969: 89–90) perceptive comparison of the information gleaned from the *Brahmakāṇḍavṛtti* and the *Vākyakāṇḍavṛtti* establishes that the nature of the cognitions arising out of *abhyāsa* and *adrṣṭa* can be characterized as *pratibhā* in B's terminology. However, such a characterization does not in itself imply that the means leading to the cognitions must be other than *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama*. It is clearly stated in TK 2.117 that *pratibhā* arises out of all kinds of linguistic expressions, which implies that it does not depend exclusively on means of any special kind. There are also several other indications in the TK to the effect that, in the philosophy of B, the domain of *pratibhā* is not concomitant with the domain of the extraordinary.

does not seem justifiable to understand the passage as implying that additional means of cognition need to be postulated<sup>13</sup>.

One should also note that the extraordinary perceptions mentioned above are due to extraordinary qualities acquired by the perceivers, that is, are due to *puruṣadharma*. In TK 1.30 B declares that all such special *puruṣadharmanas* are ultimately dependent on *āgama* (cf. SUBRAMANIA IYER 1969: 93). It would, therefore, be inconsistent with his statement to postulate a *pramāṇa* beyond *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama* to account for extraordinary perceptions<sup>14</sup>.

**3.2** Since *pratibhā* occupies an important place in B's thought and since *pratibhā* is discussed as a possible *pramāṇa* in some Sanskrit philosophical works, one may get the impression that *pratibhā* is an additional *pramāṇa* even in B's philosophy. This impression may be strengthened by discussions such as SUBRAMANIA IYER's (1969: 86–93) in which a prominent place is given to the explication of the concept of *pratibhā* in a chapter entitled "Bhartṛhari and the *pramāṇas*"<sup>15</sup>. However, it can be shown rather easily that, although *pratibhā* is *pramāṇabhūta* ('something people generally rely on') in B's philosophy, it is not a *pramāṇa* in it, at least not in the sense in which *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama* are *pramāṇas*. The reasons suggested in 2.1 and 3.1 above go against its acceptance as a *pramāṇa*. Furthermore, *pratibhā* is knowledge itself looked at from a specific point of view (TK 2.143–51). A remark like *pramāṇatvena tāṃ lokāḥ sarvaḥ samanupaśyati* (TK 2.147) simply means that the knowledge that *pratibhā* is, is viewed as reliable and becomes a basis or means for action, as the immediately preceding line (*itikartavyatāyāṃ tāṃ na kaścid ativartate*) and the immediately next

<sup>13</sup> See TRIPATHI 1972: 319–21 for another kind of reasoning leading to the same conclusion.

<sup>14</sup> (a) It is perhaps significant that a modern scholar, MURALIDHARA PĀNDEYA (1969: 150–2), while interpreting, without reference to Vṛṣabha, the section of verses with which we are concerned here, takes the section as establishing only that *śabda* or *āgama* must be acknowledged as a *pramāṇa* in addition to *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*. (b) One can possibly save Vṛṣabha's explanation by taking it to mean that the extraordinary perceptions mentioned by B transcend *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, and *āgama* as they ordinarily apply. Vṛṣabha's intention then is not to say that an additional means must be acknowledged, but that the ordinary operations of *pratyakṣa*, etc. do not cover all cases of knowledge. One should, however, note that Vṛṣabha's words, as available, are inadequate to convey this meaning. They do not indicate that he makes a distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary operations of the acceptable *pramāṇas*.

<sup>15</sup> It should, however, be noted that SUBRAMANIA IYER does not state in this discussion that *pratibhā* is a *pramāṇa* in the sense 'means of knowledge'. He discusses *pratibhā* as knowledge and probably does so in a chapter on *pramāṇas* because the concepts *pramāṇa* and *pramā* are related.

line (*samārambhāḥ pratāyante tiraścām api tadvaśāt*) indicate<sup>16</sup>. Finally, B specifies *āgama*, one of the *pramāṇas* undoubtedly acceptable to him, as the principal cause of *pratibhā*, making it impossible thereby that *pratibhā* could be a *pramāṇa* for him in the same sense<sup>17</sup>.

**3.3** TRIPĀTHĪ (1972: 10) attributes acceptance of four *pramāṇas* (*pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *arthāpatti*, and *śabda*) to those followers of Pāṇini who know the philosophy of the Grammarians (*vyākaraṇadarśanavid pāṇinīya*). Presumably, he includes B in this group. But I do not see any strong evidence to attribute acceptance of *arthāpatti* to B<sup>18</sup>. In fact, statements such as *pārārthyasyāviśiṣṭatvān na śabdāc chabdasamnidhiḥ / nārthāc chabdasya sāmṇidhyaṃ na śabdād arthasamnidhiḥ* // (TK 2.338) rule out the acceptance of *arthāpatti* by B, except maybe as a fiction of hermeneutics. I also think that *śabda*, in the sense of ‘testimony’, its usual meaning in the context of *pramāṇas*, would be a weak substitute for what B means by *āgama* (AKLUJKAR 1971: 169–70, 1988: § 2.2–9) and hence should not replace *āgama*.

**4.1** Finally, I would like to turn to the view of a scholar who ascribes to the Grammarians acceptance of fewer *pramāṇas* than I do. Mokṣākaragupta remarks in his *Tarkabhāṣā* (p. 5): *vaiyākaraṇo brūte pratyakṣam śābdam ceti pramāṇadvayam*.

In one sense Mokṣākaragupta is correct. As clarified in my “*prāmāṇya*” article, which is summarized in 1.1, B views man as moving through life on the basis of previously acquired knowledge and new experiences; the former shapes the latter, and is also shaped by the

<sup>16</sup> Even if *pratibhā* were viewed as a means of a further knowledge having the form ‘This is reliable’, it would be so as a part of the process of inference, not independently.

<sup>17</sup> TRIPĀTHĪ (1972: 321) too concludes that *pratibhā* is not an additional *pramāṇa* in the philosophy of the Grammarians (including B), but he does so by merging *pratibhā* with a kind of *pratyakṣa* (the *mānasa pratyakṣa*) on the basis of Nyāya reasoning acceptable to him, not on the basis of textual evidence from B.

<sup>18</sup> All the evidence that TRIPĀTHĪ (1972: 297–300) adduces in favor of his view comes from other authors in the field of grammar. What he considers to be adequate evidence for attributing acceptance of *arthāpatti* to B’s predecessors amounts to this: Pāṇini and Patañjali were aware of the phenomenon of implied meaning (hardly a surprising conclusion, since implication is so frequently noticed and required in linguistic communication). Whether they considered implication to be a means of knowledge in the same way as *pratyakṣa*, etc., whether they used the term *arthāpatti*, whether they attempted to define *arthāpatti* or something essentially similar to it, and whether they could not have included implication in some other means of cognition are the questions that TRIPĀTHĪ should have considered prior to reaching his conclusion.

latter if the new element contained in the latter does not agree with what it has and yet cannot be denied; in other words, while there is no pure sense experience, the primacy of sense experience as a generally reliable guide to what is 'out there' is not set aside in B's philosophy. When *pratyakṣa* produces enough evidence that is at variance with one's *āgama*, the composition of *āgama* changes to the necessary extent. Thus, man navigates through the stream of life with *pratyakṣa* and *āgama* (assuming this is what Mokṣākaragupta means by *śābda*) as his oars. Inference, as one cognition leading to another, may be deemed part of *śābda* in B's view, since B considers all cognitions to be infused with language.

While Mokṣākaragupta's statement can thus be defended, we should note that we do not know if this is the sense he had in mind. Secondly, the statement goes against the evidence collected in 2.1<sup>19</sup>. If one must attribute acceptance of only two *pramāṇas* to B, it may perhaps be more defensible to maintain that *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*, working in contact with *āgama*, are the *pramāṇas* that B accepts.

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<sup>19</sup> Note particularly that B does not speak of *śābda*. Even if his *āgama* is understood as an equivalent of *śābda*, it is clearly not an equivalent of *śābda* in the narrow sense 'testimony, what the reliable texts or persons convey' that is found in the writings of other thinkers making sharp distinctions between various *pramāṇas*.

- TK = Trikāṇḍī or Vākyapadīya. Ed. WILHELM RAU, Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīya. [AKM XLII,4]. Wiesbaden 1977 (My enumeration of *kārikās* is according to this edition and the text of the *kārikās* and the Vṛtti is according to the new edition I hope to be able to publish in the near future. The passages I have utilized in this article can be located also in K. A. SUBRAMANIA IYER's editions at approximately the same places as I have specified).
- TP = Tripādī. Eds. K. V. ABHYANKAR – V. P. LIMAYE, Mahābhāṣyadīpikā of Bhartṛhari. [Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Post-graduate and Research Department Series, no. 8]. Poona 1970.
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- V = Vṛtti (s. TK and Vṛṣabha).
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