

Original Article

The Pedagogical Relevance of The Theory of Knowledge (Pramana Siddhant) In Nyaya Philosophy

Dr. Badri Naryan Mishra

Assistant Professor, Department of Education CSJM University, Kanpur (UP)

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Abstract

This paper examines the pedagogical relevance of the Theory of Knowledge (Pramāṇa Siddhānta) in Nyāya philosophy, with special reference to the concepts of pramāṇa (means of valid knowledge), pramā (true or valid knowledge), and the role of Pratyakṣa (perception) in experiential learning. Nyāya philosophy offers a systematic, rational, and analytical framework for understanding knowledge by emphasizing the verification of cognition and the elimination of error (apramā). Knowledge, according to Nyāya, is not merely the accumulation of information but the attainment of truth through reliable cognitive processes. Among the various means of knowledge recognized by Nyāya, perception occupies a foundational position, highlighting the importance of direct experience, sensory engagement, and attentive observation in the learning process. The distinction between nirvikalpaka (indeterminate) and savikalpaka (determinate) perception explains how learners progress from raw, unstructured sensory data to meaningful conceptual understanding. This epistemological progression closely aligns with modern constructivist and experiential learning theories, which stress active participation and reflective cognition. The study further demonstrates that Nyāya epistemology promotes critical thinking, logical reasoning, and reflective inquiry by encouraging learners to examine the validity of knowledge claims and avoid cognitive errors. Its emphasis on inquiry (parīkṣā), debate, and reasoning supports activity-based and learner-centered pedagogical approaches. By integrating perception, inference, and reflection, Nyāya provides a holistic model of learning that balances experience with rational analysis. Overall, the paper argues that the Pramāṇa Siddhānta of Nyāya philosophy offers valuable insights for developing effective, rational, and meaningful pedagogical practices, making it highly relevant to contemporary educational theory and practice.

Keyword: Nyaya, Knowledge, Pedagogical, Siddhanta, Education.

Introduction

At its deepest level, education is concerned with the nature, sources, validity, and purpose of knowledge. Every educational system, whether ancient or modern, implicitly or explicitly rests on certain epistemological assumptions regarding how knowledge is acquired and how truth is distinguished from error. In Indian philosophical tradition, epistemology occupies a central place, and among the various schools of thought, Nyāya philosophy stands out for its systematic, logical, and analytical approach to the problem of knowledge. Nyāya, traditionally attributed to Gautama (Akṣapāda), is primarily known as the school of logic and reasoning, yet its ultimate aim is not merely intellectual clarity but the attainment of true knowledge that leads to the removal of ignorance and, ultimately, liberation (mokṣa). The Nyāya system recognizes that ignorance is the root cause of human suffering and that the right knowledge, acquired through valid means, is essential for both practical life and spiritual progress. In this context, the theory of knowledge known as Pramāṇa Siddhānta assumes fundamental importance as it provides a structured and reliable framework for understanding how human beings come to know reality.

Pramāṇa Siddhānta, the epistemological foundation of Nyāya philosophy, is concerned with valid cognition and the conditions under which knowledge becomes true and reliable. The term pramāṇa refers to the instruments or sources of knowledge,

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Address for correspondence:

Dr. Badri Naryan Mishra, Assistant Professor, Department of Education CSJM University, Kanpur (UP)

Email: mishra.bnarayan@gmail.com

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while *pramā* denotes a valid cognition that corresponds to reality and leads to a successful activity. Nyāya philosophers carefully distinguish *pramā* from invalid knowledge, such as doubt, illusion, or error, emphasizing the need for critical examination and verification of cognitive claims. This rigorous concern for validity makes Nyāya epistemology particularly relevant to pedagogy, as education is not merely the transmission of information, but the cultivation of true

understanding and rational judgment. In an educational context, the question is not only what students learn, but also how they learn, how they justify their beliefs, and how they discriminate between knowledge and misinformation. Nyāya's *Pramāṇa Siddhānta* directly addresses these concerns by offering a systematic classification of sources of knowledge and outlining methods for evaluating their reliability.

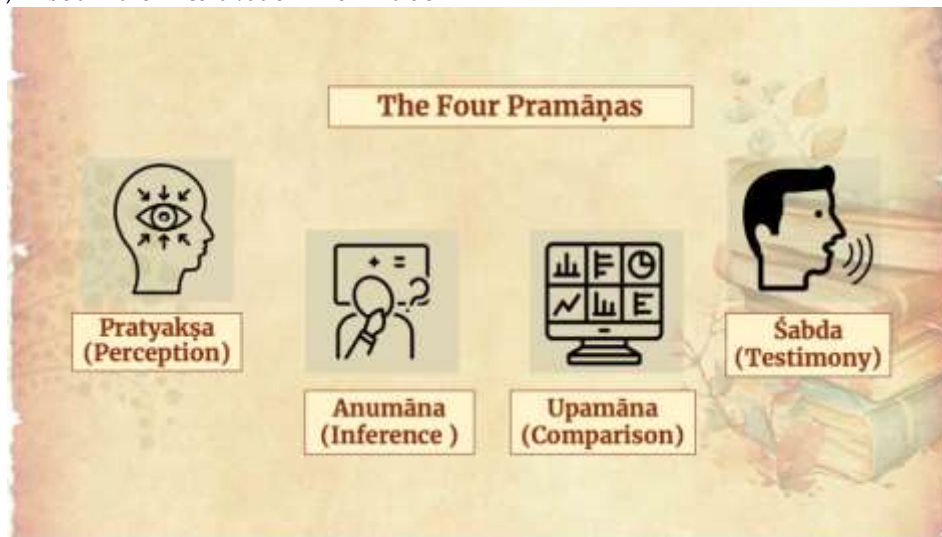


Figure1: The Four Pramanas

Nyāya philosophy recognizes four independent *pramāṇas*: perception (*Pratyakṣa*), inference (*Anumāna*), comparison (*Upamāna*), and verbal testimony (*Śabda*). This pluralistic epistemological framework provides deep insights into the complexity of human cognition and learning. From a pedagogical perspective, this suggests that knowledge is not derived from a single source but emerges through the interaction of sensory experience, reasoning, analogy, and communication. Modern educational theory acknowledges that learners construct knowledge through multiple pathways, including observation, logical reasoning, prior knowledge, and social interaction. Thus, the Nyāya framework anticipates many contemporary pedagogical insights and provides a philosophical justification for diverse teaching-learning methods. By recognizing perception as a fundamental source of knowledge, Nyāya emphasizes the importance of direct experience and observation in education. By giving a central place to inference, it underscores the roles of reasoning and critical thinking. *Upamāna* highlights the cognitive value of analogy and comparison in terms of concept formation. *Śabda* acknowledges the indispensable role of language, teachers, and authoritative texts in the transmission of knowledge while simultaneously insisting on the reliability of the source.

The pedagogical relevance of *Pramāṇa Siddhānta* has become especially significant in the contemporary educational landscape, which is marked by rapid technological change, an overwhelming flow of information, and increasing challenges related to misinformation and uncritical learning. In this context, the ability to evaluate knowledge claims, reason logically, and distinguish between valid and invalid sources of information is more important than ever. Nyāya philosophy offers valuable tools for addressing these challenges by cultivating the habits of critical inquiry, doubt, and rational examination. The Nyāya's emphasis on *saṃśaya* (doubt) and *vicāra* (inquiry) encourages learners to question assumptions rather than accept them uncritically. Simultaneously, its theory of debate (*vāda*) promotes reasoned dialogue and respectful intellectual engagement, which are essential components of a healthy academic environment. These elements of Nyāya epistemology align closely with modern ideals of learner-centered education, critical pedagogy, and democratic discourse in the classroom.

Furthermore, *Pramāṇa Siddhānta* has important implications for the role of teachers and the ethical dimensions of education. In recognizing *Śabda* as a valid means of knowledge, Nyāya affirms the importance of trustworthy teachers and reliable texts in the learning process. However, it

also places moral responsibility on the teacher to be competent, truthful, and free from bias. This conception of the teacher as an āpta, or reliable authority, resonates strongly with contemporary discussions of professional ethics in education. At the same time, Nyāya does not advocate blind obedience to authority; instead, it maintains that verbal testimony must be critically assessed in the light of reason and experience. This balanced approach fosters respect for both tradition and intellectual autonomy, which are the essential goals of education.

In addition to its cognitive and ethical dimensions, the pedagogical relevance of Nyāya's theory of knowledge extends to learners' holistic development. Nyāya philosophy does not treat knowledge as an end in itself but as a means to remove ignorance, suffering, and error. From this perspective, education is not merely about acquiring skills or information for economic success but about cultivating wisdom, clarity of thought, and a right understanding of reality. This vision of education integrates intellectual development with moral and spiritual growth, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the aims of pedagogy. In an era when education is often reduced to measurable outcomes and technical competencies, Nyāya's emphasis on true knowledge and liberation provides valuable corrective and invites educators to reconsider the deeper purposes of teaching and learning.

Thus, the study of the pedagogical relevance of Pramāṇa-Siddhānta in Nyāya philosophy is both timely and significant. By examining Nyāya's theory of knowledge through an educational lens, one can uncover rich insights into the nature of learning, methods of acquiring valid knowledge, and ethical responsibilities of teachers and learners. This study seeks to explore these dimensions in detail, demonstrating that Nyāya epistemology is not merely of historical or philosophical interest but remains a living and relevant resource for contemporary educational thought and practice.

Concept Of Pramāṇa and Pramā in Nyāya Philosophy

Indian Philosophy has accepted Pramāṇas or the instrument of valid knowledge and the fact that they help reach certain conclusions and doctrines. The Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophies are among them. Gautama was the founder of the Nyāyaśāstra. The subject matter of Nyāyadarśana is the search for the means and methods of fundamental truth. It deals with 16 categories, such

as Pramāṇa, Prameya, Samśaya, Prayojana, Driṣṭānta, Siddhānta, Avayava, Tarka, Nirṇaya, Vāda, Jalpa, Vitaṇḍa, Hetvābhāsa, Chala, Jāti, and Nigrahasthāna, and how their true knowledge enables one to attain Mokṣha or Liberation.

In the definition of Nyāya, Vātsyāyana says that 'Nyāya is the examination of an object with the help of the instrument of Valid knowledge or Pramāṇa 'प्रमाणैरर्थपरीक्षणं न्यायः'. The most essential function of means of valid knowledge is to produce valid knowledge of objects or Pramā, and closely associated with the same knowledge to be produced is the object known as Prameya. To realize Pramā, four factors are required. These are Pramāta, Prameya, Pramiti, and Pramāṇa. Pramāta is the person who knows and the object of the knowledge is 'Prameya.' Pramāta helps the seeker with the object of the activity. An object that is known thoroughly is called Prameya, and the correct knowledge of the object is called Pramiti. Again, the acquisition of knowledge is 'Pramiti' and the cause that lead to the acquisition is 'Pramāṇa.' Pramāṇa is also considered a criterion for ensuring that the knowledge gained is true or false. Keśavamīśra terms it 'प्रमाकरणप्रमाणम्'.

Pramāṇa or the means of the right knowledge are divided into four categories: Pratyakṣa, Anumāna, Upasana, and śabda. According to Vātsyāyana, pramāṇa means of cognizing things, which is evident from the etymology of the word itself. The pramāṇa ,as must be regarded as rightly effective, because it is only when a thing is known by means of a pramāṇa that it has the power to arouse fruitful and effective activity 'प्रमाणतोऽर्थप्रतपत्तौ प्रवृत्तसामर्थ्यादर्थवत्प्रमाणम्' Footing on this Vātsyāyana calls Ānvīkṣiki as Nyāyaśāstra. The search of Ānvīkṣiki starts from the four divisions of Pramāṇa-Pratyakṣa, Anumāna, Upamāna and śabda.

The state of liberation is one in which one knows no suffering or pain. A man born will suffer as a twin. The twin of a man, that is suffering, will never take birth if a man does not take birth. A person is born because of his actions, both good and bad. If he overcomes his doings, which are good and bad, then there will be no birth. Likewise, a man is a slave to his desires. This is because men do not have the knowledge that is right or wrong. Knowledge that is wrong should be erased by acquiring the right knowledge with the help of pramāṇas. The acquisition of correct knowledge helps eliminate incorrect knowledge.

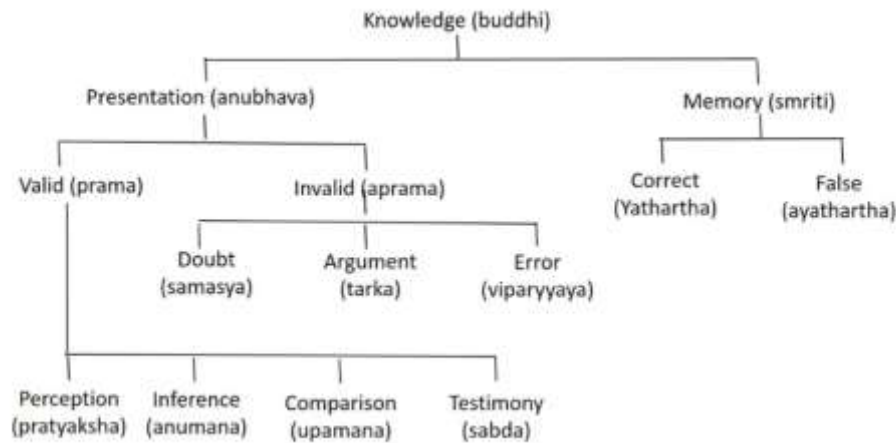


Figure 2: Truth in Indian Philosophy-II: Nyāya Philosophy

Pramāṇa is considered to be valid knowledge. The Nyāya defines Pramāṇa as a knowledge which is the true presentational knowledge. In addition, the Pramāṇa is a distinct and certain cognition of an object. This quality of Pramāṇa is to avoid all invalid knowledge, such as memory, doubt, and error; a hypothetical argument is the reason for rejecting memory. Undoubts and other aforementioned elements are excluded because they are not dependable, and their cognition is not certain.

Pramāṇa has three main characteristics, namely assuredness, truth, and presentativity. The knowledge imparted by Pramāṇa is true. The Nyāya states that true knowledge has the ability to correspond to facts. According to some Naiyayikas, anubhava is knowledge that is different from that of memory and others because the latter begins the question. Thus, by stating this, the Naiyāyikas reached the definition mentioned above. In this presentational cognition, the reality of the object and its ascertainment are true to the core.

In Indian Philosophy, valid knowledge is called prama and the source of valid knowledge is called pramāṇa. The way we can achieve valid knowledge is called pramāṇa. There is a detailed discussion on Pramāṇas in Nyāya Philosophy. Therefore, this system is called the Pramāṇa śāstra. Naiyayikas accepts four types of valid knowledge: Perception or Pratyaksha, Inference or Anumāna, Comparison or Upamāna, and Verbal testimony or Sabda. Vātsyāyana puts his ideas about Pramāṇa, which clearly indicates that he takes pramāṇa as an instrument of knowledge.

Pratyakṣa (Perception) And Experiential Learning

Pratyakṣa, or perception, occupies a foundational position in Nyāya epistemology and is regarded as the most immediate and primary means of valid knowledge, as it arises from direct

contact between the sense organs and their corresponding objects. According to Nyāya philosophy, perception is defined as non-erroneous cognition produced by the conjunction of senses with an object, mediated by the mind, and characterized by immediacy and directness. This emphasis on direct experience makes Pratyakṣa particularly significant from a pedagogical perspective as it highlights the central role of experiential learning in the process of knowledge acquisition. Nyāya thinkers carefully analyze perception not as a simple or passive reception of sensory data, but as a complex cognitive process involving multiple stages. They distinguish between nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa, the indeterminate and pre-conceptual stages of perception in which an object is apprehended without name, class, or relational attributes, and savikalpaka pratyakṣa, the determinate stage in which the object is cognitively structured, classified, and understood in terms of concepts and language. This distinction has profound implications for education as it mirrors the learner's journey from raw sensory experience to organized understanding and conceptual clarity. In experiential learning, students first encounter phenomena through observation or activity and only later interpret, analyze, and articulate their experiences in conceptual terms. Nyāya's theory of perception thus anticipates modern educational psychology, which recognizes that meaningful learning begins with concrete experiences and progresses toward abstract thought.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Pratyakṣa underscores the importance of sensory engagement and direct interaction with the learning environment. Nyāya philosophers maintain that all higher forms of knowledge ultimately depend upon perception, since inference, comparison, and verbal testimony presuppose perceptual awareness at some stage. In the educational process, this implies

that learning should be grounded in observation, experimentation, and firsthand experience rather than rote memorization or the passive reception of information. Activity-based learning, laboratory experiments, field studies, demonstrations, and project work exemplify pedagogical practices that resonate with the Nyāya emphasis on perception. Such methods enhance attention, retention, and understanding by simultaneously engaging the senses and the mind. Nyāya's insistence that perception must be free from defects such as sensory impairment, distance, or illusion further reinforces the need for clarity, accuracy, and appropriate learning conditions in education. From this perspective, teachers must ensure that learning environments are conducive to clear perceptions by providing suitable materials, proper guidance, and opportunities for focused observation.

Nyāya analysis of perceptual errors is also pedagogically significant. Nyāya philosophers carefully examine cases of illusion, hallucination, and misperception to distinguish valid perceptions from invalid cognition. This critical approach to perception teaches learners that not all experiences automatically yield true knowledge, and that careful examination and verification are necessary. In experiential learning, reflection plays a crucial role in transforming experience into knowledge. Nyāya's epistemology supports this reflective dimension by emphasizing the conditions under which perception becomes valid. The recognition that perception can be erroneous encourages students to question their immediate impressions, test their observations, and seek confirmation through repeated experiences or reasoning. Such an attitude is essential for the development of scientific tempers and critical thinking, which are key objectives of modern education.

Furthermore, the role of mind (*manas*) in Nyāya's theory of perception has important educational implications. Nyāya holds that perception requires not only the contact of the sense organs with objects, but also the attentive involvement of the mind. Without mental attention, sensory contact does not result in cognition. This insight aligns closely with contemporary educational research that emphasizes the importance of attention, motivation, and mental engagement in learning. In the classroom, mere exposure to information or sensory stimuli is insufficient for learning, and students must be mentally present and actively engaged. Nyāya's emphasis on the role of mind highlights the importance of cultivating concentration, mindfulness, and interest in the learning process. Experiential learning activities that actively involve learners are more likely to engage in the mind and

produce lasting understanding in accordance with Nyāya principles.

The transition from the *nirvikalpaka* to the *savikalpaka* perception can also be seen as a model for curriculum design and instructional sequencing. In the early stages of learning, students often encounter new material in an unstructured or intuitive manner, similar to indeterminate perceptions. Through guidance, discussion, and reflection, these initial experiences are gradually organized into determinate knowledge characterized by concepts, classifications, and relationships. Nyāya's analysis suggests that teachers should respect this cognitive progression and avoid prematurely imposing abstract definitions or rigid frameworks before learners have sufficient experiential exposure. Educators can facilitate a more natural and meaningful transition to conceptual understanding by allowing students to explore, observe, and interact with learning materials.

In addition, the *Pratyakṣa* has implications for inclusive and holistic education. Since perception involves multiple senses, Nyāya implicitly acknowledges the diversity of the sensory pathways through which learners engage with the world. This insight supports the use of multisensory teaching strategies that cater to various learning styles and abilities. Visual aids, hands-on activities, auditory explanations, and tactile experiences can all be understood as pedagogical applications of Nyāya emphasis on perception. Such approaches not only enhance comprehension, but also promote equity and inclusiveness by accommodating diverse learners.

In a broader educational context, Nyāya's emphasis on perception contributes to the development of epistemic humility and intellectual discipline. By recognizing both the power and limitations of perception, learners are encouraged to value their experience while remaining open to correction and refinement. This balanced attitude is essential in an age when visual and sensory information is often taken at face value without critical scrutiny. Experiential learning informed by Nyāya epistemology thus combines direct engagement with reflective evaluation, leading to deeper and more reliable understanding.

Conclusion

Nyāya's philosophy shows that education is not just about memorizing information, but about gaining true and reliable knowledge. Its theory of knowledge, called *Pramāṇa Siddhānta*, explains how we come to know things correctly and avoid errors. The ideas of *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) and *pramā* (true knowledge) remind us that

learning should be based on a proper understanding and verification. Among the various means of knowledge, Pratyakṣa and perception highlight the importance of direct experience and observation in learning. When students learn by seeing, doing, and experiencing things, their understanding becomes clearer and more meaningful. Overall, Nyāya philosophy supports an education system that encourages observation, thinking, questioning, and careful judgment, thus making learning more effective and practical.

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Conflicts of interest

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