

Theory of Error in the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana

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Abstract

The schools of Indian Philosophy primarily aim to examine the nature and means of valid knowledge (pramā). An invariable part of this examination is determining the distinction between erroneous knowledge and valid knowledge. Accordingly, with its theory of knowledge, each school also specifies its theory of error (khyātivāda). While some describe it as non-apprehension, others as misapprehension, still others claim it to be indefinable. The Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana endorses a theory of error called Cidacitkhyāti. The term 'Cidacitkhyāti' can be explained as a two-fold theory of error as it encompasses two aspects of error—one associated with 'cit' (sentiency) and the other with 'acit' (non-sentiency). This dual nature of error is based on the nature of the five ontological entities endorsed by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, namely, jīva, īśvara, māyā, Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. Cidacitkhyāti is further elucidated to entail the process of quintuplication (pañcikaṛaṇa) and memory along with the cognition of either the sentient or non-sentient entities.

This theory has certain aspects analogous with two other theories of error, namely, Anyathākhyāti of the Naiyāyikas and Satkhyāti of the Viśiṣṭādvaitins. The former provides a logical description of error as a wrong apprehension, while the latter offers a more metaphysical explanation of error as a non-apprehension. Thus, Cidacitkhyāti can be described as an incorporation of Satkhyāti and Anyathākhyāti only to the extent that they are consistent with the metaphysics of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.

This paper attempts to analyse the nature of Cidacitkhyāti and how it mediates between these two distinct modes of error. The analysis is based mainly on the exposition of the epistemology of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana as presented in Sadhu Bhadrashdas' vādagraṇtha, Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā.

Keywords: Akṣara-Puruṣottama, error, knowledge, Cidacitkhyāti, Anyathākhyāti, Satkhyāti Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā

The schools of Indian Philosophy primarily aim to examine the nature and means of valid knowledge (pramā). Valid knowledge is generally defined as a correct understanding or comprehension of any object or entity as it is (Sharma, 1978, pp. 192). It is attained only through certain valid means of knowledge. If not, one attains invalid knowledge (apramā). For instance, perception is accepted as a valid means by almost all schools of Indian Philosophy. However, one may perceive erroneously as in the cases of illusion or hallucinations. Such cases are identified as leading to invalid knowledge. Thus, an invariable part of such an examination is determining the distinction between erroneous knowledge from valid knowledge. Srinivas Rao (1998), while noting the importance of error in Indian Philosophy, remarks:

[m]isperception is as much a case of *cognizing* as any other case of correct perception and is therefore as much in need of an explanation as perception (pp.2).

Each school of Indian Philosophy admits the occurrence of error but explains it in accordance to its own analysis of epistemology and, in many cases, ontology. While some describe it as non-apprehension, others as misapprehension, still others claim it to be indefinable. While some are logical in their explanation, others are more metaphysical. The Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana endorses a two-fold theory of error called Cidacitkhyāti. This theory has certain aspects analogous with two other theories of error, namely, Anyathākhyāti of the Naiyāyikas and Satkhyāti of the Viśiṣṭādvaitins. The former provides a

logical description of error as a wrong apprehension, while the latter offers a more metaphysical explanation of error as a non-apprehension. This paper attempts to analyse the nature of *Cidacitkhyāti* and how it mediates between these two distinct modes of error. The analysis is based mainly on the exposition of the epistemology of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana as presented in Sadhu Bhadrashdas' *vādagraṇtha*, *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* (henceforth *Sudhā*).

Definition of Error

Sadhu Bhadrashdas, in his exposition of fundamentals of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, defines *Cidacitkhyāti* as “bhrānti” and as “viparita or ayathārtha jñāna” (inverse or invalid knowledge) (*Sudhā*, pp.191). The question that may immediately arise—illusive or inverse of what? Anticipating such a query, Sadhu Bhadrashdas clarifies that this definition is grounded in the philosophical principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana (*siddhāntā'nusāreṇa*). The philosophical principles of the Darśana are centred around the five real ontological entities, *jīva* (individual *ātman*), *īśvara* (deities), *māyā*, *Akṣarabrahman* (entity superior to all beings) and *Parabrahman* (entity superior to all beings, including *Akṣarabrahman*). *Akṣarabrahman* and *Parabrahman* are eternally pure and divine. They are the cause and controller of *māyā*, the material cause of creation, and of the various *jīvas* and *īśvaras* that inhabit this creation. However, *Parabrahman* reigns supreme and everything, including *Akṣarabrahman*, prevail as per his will.

Consequently, perceiving any of the five entities, particularly *Parabrahman* and *Akṣarabrahman*, against its true nature and form is identified as inverse or invalid knowledge. Thus, the nature of error is shown to be embedded in the Darśana's metaphysical framework. This is true of other Vedāntic schools, for instance Śankarācārya's *Anirvacaniyakhyāti* and Rāmānuja's *Satkhyāti* are also grounded in the nature of the ultimate Reality and its relation to the material world. The definition of *Cidacitkhyāti* is based on the teachings of Svāminārāyaṇa. Though he does not use the word 'Cidacitkhyāti,' Svāminārāyaṇa, in his teachings compiled in the work *Vacanāmṛta*, emphasizes on the various kinds of erroneous understandings that can arise, such as:

Brahman itself assumes that form of Prakṛti-Purush. Then that Brahman itself assumes the forms of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva...Subsequently, Brahman also becomes the *jīvas* residing in those mobile and immobile forms of creation. By misunderstanding 'brahma-jñāna' in such a manner, that individual then believes his own *jīva* to be God, thus causing a breach in *upāsanā* (*Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhadā* II.3).

In this way, perceiving oneself as or equal to *Parabrahman* is recognized as a misunderstanding of the true form and nature of *Parabrahman* and oneself (*jīva*). Similarly identifying *Parabrahman* with any other metaphysical entity is deemed as an erroneous understanding.

Cause of Error

Such an erroneous understanding is asserted to be caused by one's bodily passions and desires. Further, perceptual error may be caused by improper functioning of the senses. The senses may be deluded due to the temporal and spatial ambiguities, inappropriate lighting etc. (*Sudhā*, pp.191-92). Such conditions that may hinder one's attainment of valid knowledge are also affirmed by other schools of Indian Philosophy (Pellegrini, 2013, pp.222). However, Sadhu Bhadrashdas offers the primary cause of error to be the absence of *brahma-bhāva* (*brahmabhāvādāridyamiti tu sarvakāraṇapradhānamiti*). *Brahma-bhāva* is recognized as the fundamental soteriological endeavour that encompasses profound association with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, who eternally remains in the service of the Supreme Being Parabrahman. Such association leads one to develop the auspicious virtues like that of the Akṣarabrahman Guru, which is referred to as developing a qualitative oneness with the Akṣarabrahman

Guru. In this vein, only on realizing one's true nature as being one with *Akṣarabrahman* and remaining ever subordinate to *Parabrahman* can one uproot the cause of all misunderstandings and errors.

Cit and Acit: Two-fold theory of error

The term 'Cidacitkhyāti' can be explained as a two-fold theory of error as it encompasses two aspects of error—one associated with 'cit' (sentient) and the other with 'acit' (non-sentient). This dual nature of error is based on the nature of the five ontological entities endorsed by the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The entities *Parabrahman*, *Akṣarabrahman*, *jīva* and *īśvara* are eternally sentient in nature, while being categorically distinct from one another. The entity *māyā*, on the other hand, is eternally non-sentient in nature. Consequently, the error of identifying a sentient entity with any another sentient entity is called *Citkhyāti*, and the error of identifying a formation of the non-sentient *prakṛti* with any of its other formations is called *Acitkhyāti*.

Further, Sadhu Bhadrashdas specifies that those instances of error that cannot be categorized exclusively as *Acitkhyāti* should be characterized as *Citkhyāti* (*Sudhā*, pp.193). Accordingly, instances of identifying any sentient entity with the formations of the non-sentient *prakṛti* or vice-verse are cases of *Citkhyāti*. *Cidacitkhyāti* is elucidated to entail the process of quintuplication (*pañcīkaraṇa*) and memory along with the cognition of either the sentient or non-sentient entities (*Sudhā*, pp.192). Though Sadhu Bhadrashdas rejects all other theories of error, he admits certain aspects of Rāmānuja's *Satkhyāti* and the Nyāya theory of *Anyathākhyāti*. But at the same time, he warns against accepting either one of these entirely. Thus, *Cidacitkhyāti* can be described as an incorporation of *Satkhyāti* and *Anyathākhyāti* only to the extent that they are consistent with the metaphysics of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana.

Acitkhyāti

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, like certain Vedānta schools, is realist. It upholds that all worldly creation is real, not a mere illusion. Moreover, this creation, with the will of Supreme Being, transforms from the causal state of *māyā* or *prakṛti*. The three *guṇas* of *māyā*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, interpenetrate in various degrees to form the phenomenal world. This cosmic unfolding entails the process of quintuplication (*pañcīkaraṇa*). According to this process, the five gross elements (*pañca bhūta*) namely, earth (*pṛthvi*), water (*jala*), fire (*teja*), air (*vāyu*) and ether (*ākāśa*) quintuplicate to create various gross objects. Half of each gross object is comprised of the predominant element and the remaining half is the 1/8th part of the remaining four elements.

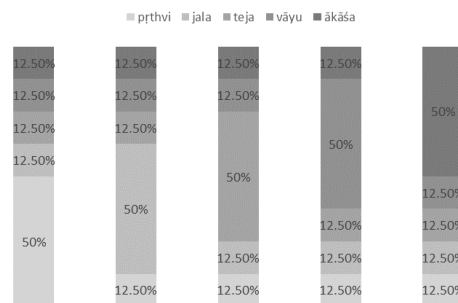


Figure 1 process of quintuplication (*pañcīkaraṇa*)

The *Satkhyāti* of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school is grounded primarily on this process of *pañcīkaraṇa*. According to this theory, when one commits an error of cognizing say silver instead of a shell, one does not essentially commit an error since there some aspect of silver present, due to the common compositing elements. Such presence is explained as:

When it is said that some aspect of silver is present in the shell, what is intended is not the very silver itself but the glitter or brightness of silver. There is similarity between shell and silver in respect to lustre (Chari, 2004, pp.177).

In this way, all gross objects of the phenomenal world are considered as related to each other. So, when one cognizes silver instead of shell, it is not an instance of non-apprehension of any attribute:

What is asserted in any judgement has definitely an objective basis. In this sense, there cannot be any misdescription or mispredication. All attributions are thought to be objectively real (Kar, 1938, pp.24).

Sadhu Bhadrashdas, in the *Sudhā*, accepts this understanding of error with reference to all gross objects that proceed from the non-sentient (*acit*) *prakṛti*. He specifies that all such objects are the effect of the transformation of *prakṛti* with the power and will of Parabrahman and his eternal servant *Akṣarabrahman*. Thus, though the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana upholds *satkāryavāda* like the Sāṅkhya school, it specifies that the course of causation takes place under the regulation of *Akṣarabrahman* and *Parabrahman*. Further, the formation of the gross material objects is stated to be ultimately realized through the process of *pañcikaṛaṇa*. Thus, error associated with gross objects entails *satkāryavāda* and *pañcikaṛaṇa*:

Pañcīkaro bhaved yatra satkāryatopapadyate |

Acitkhyātīrmatā tatra śuktyādau rajatādike || (Sudhā, pp.195)

[Error in the form of *Acitkhyāti* takes place amongst objects that are products of *pañcikaṛaṇa* and *satkāryatā*. As occurring when silver is perceived in a shell.]

By specifying the processes involved in the cases of error rules out all those entities that are beyond causation and *pañcikaṛaṇa*, that is, the sentient metaphysical entities *jīva*, *īśvara*, *Akṣarabrahman* and *Parabrahman*. Sadhu Bhadrashdas illustrates *acitkhyāti* through various examples, such as the error of perceiving silver in the shell, water instead of land, or a snake in a rope.

But, as discussed above, since all that is perceived constitutes the combination of all the *pañca bhūtas*, how can an instance of error be identified? To this, both the theories of *Satkyāti* and *Acitkhyāti* admit that the error here lies not in misapprehension, but non-apprehension of the inter-relation of all gross objects. Moreover, the silver that is perceived in the shell, or the rope in the snake is no doubt present due to common constituting elements but is different from the silver seen in the market or the snake in the zoo. The difference lies in the practical use of the same. The silver or the snake when perceived in the shell or rope cannot not be ‘used’ to fulfil their respective purpose. As Kar (1938) puts it:

[t]he ordinary distinction between truth (*pramā*) and error (*apramā*) is explained in terms of pragmatic consideration (*vyavahāra guṇa*). While a true judgement both reveals the object as well as possesses practical value, a false judgment only reveals the object but does not possess practical value (pp.25).

Thus, though all gross objects are real and inter-related, their distinguishing nature lies in their functionality.

Despite such equivalence with *Satkyāti*, the nature of error in the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana goes even further. For, unlike Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana, it endorses *māyā* or *prakṛti* as a separate ontological entity and not merely as an attribute of the Supreme reality. The difference in the underlying metaphysical framework of the two paves way for the differences their respective theories of error. The instances of error associated with the eternally distinct sentient ontological entities of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana are categorized as *Citkhyāti*.

Citkhyāti

Jīva (the individual *ātman*), *īśvara* (deities), *Akṣarabrahman* (the eternal servant of *Parabrahman*) and *Parabrahman* (the Supreme reality) are classified as the sentient ontological entities. Each of these

sentient entities are maintained to be mutually distinct. Unlike the constituents of the gross objects, there does not prevail a unity amongst the sentient ontological entities. Despite being sentient, they are essentially distinct. Nor do they arise from any substance. They are not effects (*kārya*) of any particular cause (*kāraṇa*) but are irreducible in nature and form. Swami Paramatattvadas (2017) affirms the same:

That one entity can never become any other entity, and that none is ever destroyed (because it is endless) (pp.71).

Parabrahman and *Akṣarabrahman* eternally transcend *māyā*, while *jīva* and *īśvara* are ever bound by the shackles of *māyā*. Release from these shackles is possible only by maintaining a deep attachment with *Akṣarabrahman* and offering selfless devotion to *Parabrahman*. Thus, identifying any of them with each other is considered as an instance of *Citkhyāti*. Further, identifying the non-sentient *prakṛti* with any of these sentient entities is also an instance of *Citkhyāti*. This is expressed lyrically:

Tato bhinne tu citkhyātirvaiparītyaṃ yadā bhavet |

Yathā"tmasu jaḍatvādi cetanatvaṃ jaḍeṣu ca || (Sudhā, pp.195)

[Instances of error different from the ones explained should be known as *Citkhyāti*. That is when non-sentiency is attributed to the sentient *ātman* and when sentiency is attributed the non-sentient objects.] Accordingly, perceiving material traits in the divine *Parabrahman* or equating *Parabrahman* with an ordinary individual *ātman* are cases of *Citkhyāti*. Here, though the characteristics of the individual *ātman* (*jīva*) exist, but they exist else where and not in *Parabrahman*. This aspect is analogous to the Nyāya theory of *Anyathākhyāti*. According to this theory:

[e]rror consists in attributing such characters to an object as are not to be really found in it (*tadabhāvavati tatprakāra*). In it one universal is referred not to its own locus but to that of a different universal (Chatterjee, 1939, pp.35).

The error at hand is of mis-predication or mis-apprehension of the true nature and attributes of the object perceived. Such mis-predication is caused due to the memory of a pervious perception. The memory of perceiving the object elsewhere leads to mis-predicating its attributes on another object. However, while the Naiyāyikas illustrate the same with the classical example of shell and silver, this belongs to different category of error for the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. For all errors associated with only material objects are cases of *Acitkhyāti*.

Thus, though the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana admits the logic of mis-predication, it fits this realist theory or error within its own metaphysical framework. This is possible as the metaphysical entities endorsed by the Darśana are asserted to be real and true. The entity recalled and imposed on the referent entity, both, are real and eternal.

Sadhu Bhadrashdas offers various examples of *Citkhyāti* or instances of error involving each of the four sentient entities. When one identifies the Supreme entity, *Parabrahman*, as the ordinary *ātman* and consequently not as the all-doer, as possessing divine auspicious qualities, as the bestower of fruits of one's actions, one commits an error of mis-predication (*Sudhā*, pp.194). This error occurs as one recalls the qualities perceived in the ordinary *ātman* and imposes them on the referent, *Parabrahman*. Furthermore, equating *Parabrahman* with any deity or believing *Parabrahman* as being formless are also instances of *Citkhyāti*.

Such cases of error suggest that the concept of error in the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, unlike the Nyāya Darśana, upholds a soteriological importance. Svāminārāyaṇa cautions on the implications of such errors:

[o]ne who has doubts in realizing God in this way, even if he is a staunch, *urdhvareta brahmacāri* and a great renunciant, attaining liberation would still be extremely difficult for him (*Vacanāmṛta Pancāla* 7).

Since *Akṣarabrahman*, that eternally upholds *Parabrahman*, is also believed to be the bestower of liberation (*Svāminārāyaṇa*, *Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhadā* I.54), such implications hold true for predicating the qualities of *jīva* or *īśvara* to the *Akṣarabrahman* Guru.

Additionally, the sentient *jīva* is affirmed to be essentially distinct from the bodily senses, mind and intellect. Moreover, the *jīva* never becomes one with *Parabrahman* even after attaining liberation. In this way, Sadhu Bhadresdas recognizes Cāravāka's description of the *ātman* as the body and Śankarācārya's claim of the *Jīva* as being one with Brahman as instances of *Citkhyāti*. Likewise, the entity *īśvara* is influenced by *prakṛti* and remains essentially distinct from *Parabrahman*. The powers of *īśvara* are stated to be bestowed by the will of *Parabrahman* (*Sudhā*, pp.120). Other Vedānta schools, like that of Rāmānuja, do not accept such an ontological distinction between *īśvara* and *Parabrahman*. But the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana categorizes an overlooking of this distinction as a mis-predication, and consequently is an instance of *Citkhyāti*.

Thus, though Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana accepts certain aspects of *Satkhyāti*, it goes further to classify the mis-predication of entities, which are beyond causation and *pañcikaraṇa*, also as an instance of error.

Dispelling Error

As discussed, *Acitkhyāti* is associated exclusively with the errors of the material objects, such as perceiving silver in a shell. Such errors do not possess any particular soteriological implications. They are caused primarily due to the inaccurate functioning of the senses. Thus, *Acitkhyāti* deals mainly with perceptual errors and can be dispelled almost instantly with perceptual accuracy.

Citkhyāti, on the other hand, deals not only with perceptual errors but primarily with conceptual errors. Moreover, due to its soteriological implications, *Citkhyāti* can be considered more critical than *Acitkhyāti*. Dispelling the former requires proper guidance from the wise and realized. For this, the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana turns to the Akṣarabrahman Guru. Only such a Guru can manoeuvre one away from conceptual misunderstandings and inculcate *brahma-bhāva* (*Sudhā*, pp.81). Elimination of *Citkhyāti* is, thus, necessary to gain spiritual purity and attain its ultimate goal, liberation.

Conclusion

The epistemology of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, like other schools of Indian Philosophy, entails the distinction between valid and invalid knowledge. Valid knowledge is primarily understanding the true nature and form of the five distinct metaphysical entities, and thereby invalid knowledge is misunderstanding their true nature and form. Subsequently, the error theory of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, namely *Cidacitkhyāti*, is driven by this metaphysical framework. The referent in all cases of error, being either of the five entities, is always real. Thus, *Cidacitkhyāti* can be categorized under the realist theories of error.

This theory of error endorses certain aspects from two other realistic theories of error- *Satkhyāti* and *Anyathākhyāti*. It mediates between these two different modes of error by its admitting only those elements that complement its metaphysics. The concept of *pañcikaraṇa* is analogous to *Satkhyāti*, while that of memory and mis-predication is to *Anyathākhyāti*. Despite such analogousness, *Cidacitkhyāti* seems to offer a novel contribution to Indian epistemology through its underlying metaphysical and soteriological content.

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