



## Establishing the Existence of God: Insights from Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika Thought

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### KEY WORDS –

Valid cognition, means of cognition, Inference, jīvātmā, paramātmā, substance, prevader, prevaded, relation between prevader and prevaded, means of inferential cognition, effect, effectness, cause, causality, agent, cognition of material cause, quality or property, qualitiness these are the key words you will come across in this paper.

### SUMMARY –

The pursuit of **liberation (mokṣa)** and the means to achieve it are the prominent objectives of both the Orthodox (Āstika) and Non-Orthodox (Nāstika) schools of Indian philosophy. These both school's fundamental area of exploration is **cognition (jñāna)** and the **means of valid knowledge (pramāṇa)**, about which they have their own differences. Among the six Orthodox (Āstika) schools of Indian Philosophies, the popular Nyāya philosophy founded by Gautama & Vaiśeṣika philosophy founded by kāṇāda acknowledge only four types of valid means - perception, inference, analogy and verbal testimony. Īśvara cannot be perceived, nor known through analogy, or Verbal testimony. There are factors why īśvara not being cognized by the above said means except inference. So the existence of god is

established by the means of inferential cognition by *naiyāyika* and *vaiśeṣika*. We will discuss about the factors why *īśvara* cannot be cognized by the above said means except inference, the definition of inferential cognition, the means of inference, the five components of a syllogism referred as *anumāna vākya* and the Syllogism used here for the establishment of the god elaborately in this paper with few other arguments for establishing the *īśvara tatvam*.

### **Philosophy & its various traditions -**

Philosophy is a vast and enormous faculty that involves a systematic study done about fundamental questions about the existence of universe, nature of the reality, knowledge, reason, value, mind, and language and their relationships to each other. In a broad sense, philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom - an activity people undertake when they seek to understand fundamental truths about all the above said. Here the philosopher critically examines these questions, often through logical arguments and analysis of concepts.

While exploring the traditions of philosophies available in this world, we come across several significant philosophies including Western, Arabic–Persian, Indian, and Chinese philosophies. Other philosophical traditions include Japanese, Latin, American and African philosophies. Indian philosophical systems hold a unique and remarkable place among great philosophical traditions of the world. India known as *Bhārata* which means engaged towards light, which represents the commitment towards the true knowledge. So, the word **Bhārata** can be interpreted as: "**The land where people are devoted to light (knowledge, wisdom).**" As we are *bharatiyas* we are keenly and firmly linked to the one of the many philosophical systems which emerged from this holy land and we follow the principles of one of the schools in our daily life - consciously or unconsciously.

### **Classifications of Indian philosophy -**

When we particularly talk about Indian philosophy it is broadly classified into two categories: Orthodox (*Āstika*) and Heterodox (*Nāstika*) schools.<sup>1</sup> The agreeing and disagreeing to the concepts of the Vedas is the prime factor for this classification of *Āstika* and *Nāstika* schools respectively. The primary objective of both Orthodox

schools and Non-Orthodox (Nāstika) schools is the pursuit of **liberation (mokṣa)** and the means to achieve it. A fundamental area of exploration in all Indian philosophical systems is **cognition (jñāna)** and the **means of valid knowledge (pramāṇa)**. Because without pramāṇa you cannot establish the existence of the padārtha which means the content of the valid knowledge (Pramāṇad hi vastusiddhiḥ). So all Indian philosophical systems have their own opinion about **valid cognitions (jñāna)** and its **means of valid knowledge (pramāṇa)**. The names of **valid cognitions (jñāna)** and its **means** are given in the appendix in table 1. The names of schools of Indian philosophies, how much **valid cognition (jñāna)** and its **means (pramāṇa)** they acknowledge are given in the appendix in table 2 & 3. Among the six Orthodox (Āstika) schools of Indian Philosophies, Nyāya philosophy founded by Gautama & Vaiśeṣika philosophy founded by kāṇāda are popular among intellectuals.

Through this paper I take the opportunity to discuss about the concept & existence of god which means īśvara siddhi (proof of god) and bhagavat tatvam, (nature of divine) which have been established by the philosophy of Nyaya and Vaisheshika particularly for opposing the cārvāka school of philosophy.

The **need to establish the existence of Īśvara** arises from a recurring feature in **Indian scriptures and philosophical treatises**, which traditionally begin with a *maṅgalācaraṇa*<sup>2</sup> - an auspicious invocation wherein the author offers praise to Īśvara. In response to this, **the Cārvāka School** - which denies the existence of anything beyond direct perception<sup>3</sup> - raises a critical question: **How can one praise an entity whose existence has not yet been established by any valid means of knowledge (pramāṇa)?** In other words, **praising Īśvara presupposes his existence**, which, according to them, lacks epistemological foundation.

To address this challenge, it becomes necessary to **establish the existence of Īśvara through valid cognition**. As the philosophical dictum declares: “*pramāṇād hi vastu-siddhiḥ*”<sup>4</sup> - “It is only through valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) that the existence of an object ( *vastu*) can be established.” Therefore, **to counter the objection raised by the Cārvākas**, one must present a *pramāṇa*-based argument to justify the existence of Īśvara.

This naturally leads to the question: **Which pramāṇa is capable of cognizing Īśvara?** The Nyāya school accepts **four primary pramāṇas** (perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony), while the Vaiśeṣika school acknowledges **two** (perception and inference). A comparative overview of the pramāṇas accepted by both Āstika (orthodox) and Nāstika (heterodox) schools of Indian philosophy is provided in **Tables 4 and 5 in the appendix**, along with the corresponding means of valid cognition.

Importantly, **both the Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas accept *pratyakṣa* (perception) and *anumāna* (inference)** as authoritative pramāṇas. However, since Īśvara cannot be established through perception, inference becomes the primary tool for validating his existence within these systems.

#### **Argument for Īśvara siddhi (Proof of God's Existence) -**

There are four types of valid cognition (yathārtha jñāna) accepted by Nyaya school of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> They are

1. Perceptual cognition (*pratyakṣa jñāna*)
2. Inferential cognition (*anumiti jñāna*)
3. Analogical cognition (*upamiti jñāna*)
4. Verbal testimony (*śābda jñāna*)

The two types of valid cognition (yathārtha jñāna) accepted by Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy. They are

1. Perceptual cognition (*pratyakṣa jñāna*)
2. Inferential cognition (*anumiti jñāna*)

Since **Īśvara (God)** cannot be directly perceived by any of the sense organs, nor known through analogy (*upamāna*) or verbal testimony (*śabda*), **the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika schools establish the existence of God through inferential cognition (*anumāna-pramāṇa*)**.

A natural question arises at this point: **Why is Īśvara not accessible to *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* (perceptual cognition)?** According to Nyāya epistemology, perceptual cognition arises when a sense organ (*jñānendriya*)—which serves as the instrumental and most exceptional cause (*asādhāraṇa-kāraṇa*)—contacts an object possessing qualities conducive to perception.

There are six types of perceptual cognition<sup>1</sup>, each corresponding to a specific sense organ:

- *Cākṣuṣa* (visual perception through the eyes),
- *Ghrāṇa* (olfactory perception through the nose),
- *Rāsana* (gustatory perception through the tongue),
- *Śrāvāṇa* (auditory perception through the ears),
- *Tvāca* (tactile perception through the skin),
- *Mānasa* (mental perception through the mind).

Of these, the **five sense organs (eyes, nose, tongue, ears, and skin)** are external, while the **mind (*manaḥ*)** is considered the internal sense organ. Among the external senses, **only the eyes have the potential to perceive a substance (*dravya*)** in its entirety. For a substance to be visually perceived, it must possess certain necessary attributes:

- **Color (*rūpa*)**,
- **Sufficient size (Mahatvam) (bigness)**,
- **Presence in light (*Āloka*)**.

If a substance lacks even one of these characteristics, it becomes imperceptible to the eyes. In the case of **Īśvara**, who is identified with **paramātmā (the supreme self)**, these attributes are absent. Since **ātman (self)** is devoid of color (*arūpa*), **Īśvara cannot be visually perceived**, and hence fails the conditions of *cākṣuṣa-pratyakṣa*.

As for the internal sense organ, **the mind (*manaḥ*)**, it can only perceive **internal states such as pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duḥkha*)**, etc., and only **within the specific individual self (jīvātmā)**. It has no capacity to cognize the existence of a distinct, transcendental being such as **Īśvara**.

Therefore, **neither external nor internal sense organs can apprehend Īśvara**, which is why his existence cannot be established through *pratyakṣa pramāṇa*. It is only through **logical inference (anumāna)** that Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika successfully demonstrate the **existence of Īśvara**.

**Īśvara cannot be known through analogical cognition (*upamāna-pramāṇa*)** either. To understand why, we must first explore what **upamāna** entails.

According to the Nyāya School,

“संज्ञासंज्ञिसंबन्धज्ञानं उपमानम्”<sup>6</sup> *“Upamāna is the cognition that arises from the recognition of similarity between a known and an unknown object”*. In simpler terms, **analogical cognition** is a means of acquiring knowledge about something **unknown** by **comparing it with something already known**, based on **resemblance or similarity**.

#### **Illustrative Example:**

Suppose a person X, unfamiliar with the animal called **gavaya** (गवयः – wild ox), hears from person Y that *“a gavaya is similar to a cow.”*<sup>7</sup> Later, while in a forest, person X sees a wild animal resembling a cow. Recalling the earlier statement of similarity made by Y, person X identifies the animal as a **gavaya**. This form of knowledge, gained through comparison and resemblance, is **analogical cognition**. Importantly, **such cognition depends on a prior similarity statement** (*sādṛśya-vacana*) made by someone who has already encountered both entities—the known and the unknown.

However, **in the case of Īśvara**, no such **similarity statement** can be provided. Since **no one has ever directly perceived Īśvara**, no person is in a position to make a valid comparative statement linking Īśvara to any known entity. As a result, **analogical cognition fails as a valid means** to establish or recognize the existence of Īśvara.

Thus, **upamāna-pramāṇa is inapplicable** in the context of Īśvara, further affirming the need for **inferential cognition** (*anumāna*) as the only viable pramāṇa in the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems to demonstrate his existence.

Īśvara also cannot be cognized through *śabda pramāṇa* (verbal testimony).<sup>8</sup> According to Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophy, the Vedas are considered to be **composed or revealed by Īśvara himself**. Therefore, any **Vedic statement that attempts to establish the existence of Īśvara** would be **logically circular**—relying on the very being whose existence is under inquiry. In other words, one cannot validate the existence of Īśvara using texts that presuppose his authorship; as such a method lacks epistemological independence. Consequently, **verbal testimony is not accepted as a valid and independent means to establish the existence of Īśvara** within this philosophical framework.

So the above said logics make clear that through these three means īśvara cannot be cognized. So **Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophy** tend to establish the existence of īśvara through inference. **Inference (*Anumāna*)** is the process of arriving at a truth or conclusion based on a previously accepted or assumed proposition. In simpler terms, it is **knowledge derived from another piece of knowledge**.

Let us illustrate this with a classic example:

“The mountain has fire, because it has smoke.”<sup>9</sup>

Here, the conclusion that **the mountain has fire** is based on a prior, well-established generalization - “Wherever there is smoke, there is fire.”<sup>10</sup>

This underlying universal relation between **smoke (*hetu*)** and **fire (*sādhya*)**, consistently observed in various instances (e.g., a kitchen), forms the basis of inference. This knowledge of invariable concomitance is referred to as **vyāpti-jñāna** (knowledge of universal relation), and the inference drawn from it is termed **anumāna**.

By repeatedly witnessing the **coexistence of fire and smoke** across different contexts and locations, a person recognizes a fixed connection (*vyāpti*)<sup>11</sup> between them. *Vyāpti* is the relation between *vyāpaka* (prevader) & *vyāpya* (prevaded). In the context of fire and smoke fire is *vyāpaka* and smoke is *vyāpya*. Always *vyāpaka* exist in more locations than *vyāpya*. Therefore, upon seeing smoke on a distant mountain, one confidently infers the presence of fire—**without directly perceiving it**.

In formal logic, this inferential reasoning is expressed through a **sylogistic statement**, known in Indian philosophy as **anumāna-vākya**. Such a syllogism typically consists of **five components (*pañcāvayava-vākya*)**:

1. **Pakṣa** – The subject under discussion (e.g., *parvataḥ* – the mountain)<sup>12</sup>
2. **Sādhya** – The attribute to be established (e.g., *vahnimān* – having fire)
3. **Hetu (Linga)** – The reason or indicator (e.g., *dhūmāt* – because of smoke)
4. **Udāharaṇa (Dṛṣṭānta)** – The example illustrating the invariable relation (e.g., *mahānasa-vat* – like in a kitchen)
5. **Nigamana** – The conclusion (e.g., *tathā ca ayam* – therefore, this mountain has fire)

Thus, the complete inference is expressed as: “**Parvataḥ, vahnimān dhūmāt, mahānasavat, tathā ca ayam.**” (*The mountain has fire because it has smoke, like in a kitchen; therefore, this mountain too has fire.*)

In Indian logic, **inference is of two kinds:**

- **Svārthānumāna** – Inference used for one’s **own cognition**.<sup>13</sup>
- **Parārthānumāna** – Inference used to **convince or communicate** the cognition to others.<sup>14</sup>

This structured system of reasoning forms a foundational part of **Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika logic**, offering a highly refined framework for validating unseen truths through observed relationships.

So by anumāna pramāṇa **Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika establish the existence of īśvara** particularly for condemning the Cārvāka School of philosophy. In this case **Parārthānumāna** is used to **convince or communicate** the cognition of īśvara to cārvāka.

The Syllogism called as anumāna vākya said here is “**The Entire Creation - such as the Earth, trees, seed and so on - must have a Creator, - because it possess the characteristics of the Creation – similar to a pot which is created by a potter**”. क्षित्यङ्कुरादिकं कर्तृजन्यं कार्यत्वात् घटवत् तथा च अयम् इति<sup>15</sup> Just as a pot cannot come into existence without a potter, the universe, too, cannot exist without a **Creator**. Without an intelligent agent, creation is impossible. Therefore a creator’s existence is a must for acceptance. Furthermore by **the method of elimination - known as pariśeṣa nyāya**, that status of being a performer or creator can’t be a locus in ordinary humans. So there must be a creator for all these creations other than humans, who endows the cognition of material cause of the creation and has the skill and will to bring the **universe into existence**. So therefore a creator or a doer or a performer is there for all of these creations. And he is supposed to be referred as īśvara. And few more arguments do establish the existence of īśvara.

## CONCLUSION :

Modern scientists accept the existence of gravitational force based on the principle of cause and effect, even though it cannot be directly perceived by any of the sense organs or other means of direct cognition. It is only through inference (anumāna) that the presence of gravity is recognized - by observing its effects, such as the falling of objects or the orbital motion of celestial bodies.

In a similar manner, Sanskrit scriptures, especially those rooted in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophical traditions, also present explicit, structured, and logical arguments to establish the existence of Īśvara (God). These arguments are not based on blind belief or emotional appeal, but on systematic reasoning and valid pramāṇas (means of knowledge).

Just as gravitational force is universally accepted despite its imperceptibility - because its effects are observable and its existence is logically inferred - so too, the existence of Īśvara is argued and established through inference and philosophical reasoning. The logical explanations found in Sanskrit philosophical texts are profound and well-founded, and cannot be dismissed casually or on the basis of mere skepticism.

## Appendix -

Table 1 –

|    | <i>Types of Valid cognitions</i> | <i>Types of means</i> |
|----|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | <i>Pratyakṣam</i>                | <i>Pratyakṣam</i>     |
| 2. | <i>Anumitiḥ</i>                  | <i>Anumānam</i>       |
| 3. | <i>Upamitiḥ</i>                  | <i>Upamānam</i>       |
| 4. | <i>Śabdabodha</i>                | <i>Śabdaḥ</i>         |
| 5. | <i>Arthāpattiḥ</i>               |                       |
| 6. | <i>Anupalabdhiḥ</i>              |                       |

Table 2 -

|    | <i>Āstika Schools</i> | <i>Objective</i> | <i>Types of Valid cognitions(in nos.)</i> | <i>Types of means (in nos.)</i> |
|----|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | <b>Pūrvamīmāṃsā</b>   | Liberation       | 6                                         | 6                               |
| 2. | <b>Uttaramīmāṃsā</b>  | Liberation       | 6                                         | 6                               |

|    |           |            |   |   |
|----|-----------|------------|---|---|
| 3. | Nyāya     | Liberation | 4 | 4 |
| 4. | Vaiśeṣika | Liberation | 2 | 2 |
| 5. | Sāṅkhya   | Liberation | 3 | 3 |
| 6. | Yoga      | Liberation | 3 | 3 |

Table 3 –

|    | <i>Nāstika Schools</i> | <i>Objective</i> | <i>Types of Valid cognitions (in nos.)</i> | <i>Types of means (in nos.)</i> |
|----|------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Jaina                  | Liberation       | 2                                          | 2                               |
| 2. | Bauddha                | Liberation       | 2                                          | 2                               |
| 3. | Cārvāka                | Liberation       | 1                                          | 1                               |

Table 4 -

| <i>Āstika Schools</i> | <i>Pratyakṣam</i> | <i>Anumitiḥ</i> | <i>Upamitiḥ</i> | <i>Śabdabodha</i> | <i>Arthāpattiḥ</i> | <i>Anupalabdhiḥ</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Pūrvamīmāṃsā          | Y                 | Y               | Y               | Y                 | Y                  | Y                   |
| Uttaramīmāṃsā         | Y                 | Y               | Y               | Y                 | Y                  | Y                   |
| Nyāya                 | Y                 | Y               | Y               | Y                 | N                  | N                   |
| Vaiśeṣika             | Y                 | Y               | N               | N                 | N                  | N                   |
| Sāṅkhya               | Y                 | Y               | N               | Y                 | N                  | N                   |
| Yoga                  | Y                 | Y               | N               | Y                 | N                  | N                   |

Table 5 -

| <i>Nāstika Schools</i> | <i>Pratyakṣam</i> | <i>Anumitiḥ</i> | <i>Upamitiḥ</i> | <i>Śabdabodha</i> | <i>Arthāpattiḥ</i> | <i>Anupalabdhiḥ</i> |
|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Jaina                  | Y                 | Y               | N               | N                 | N                  | N                   |
| Bauddha                | Y                 | Y               | N               | N                 | N                  | N                   |
| Cārvāka                | Y                 | N               | N               | N                 | N                  | N                   |

Glossary -

| No. | Diacritic English | संस्कृतम् | English                                        |
|-----|-------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | lakṣaṇam          | लक्षणम्   | definition                                     |
| 2   | lakṣya            | लक्ष्यम्  | definitium                                     |
| 3   | padārtha          | पदार्थः   | Content of a valid Knowledge / namable by word |
| 4   | dravya            | द्रव्यम्  | Substance                                      |

|    |                   |                   |                                                                                        |
|----|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5  | guṇaḥ             | गुणः              | quality/property                                                                       |
| 6  | guṇatva           | गुणत्वम्          | qualitiness                                                                            |
| 7  | Yathārthajñāna    | यथार्थज्ञानम्     | Valid Knowledge / Cognition                                                            |
| 8  | laukikapratyakṣa  | लौकिकप्रत्यक्षम्  | Perception generated by the contact of ordinary Souse & object                         |
| 9  | alaukikapratyakṣa | अलौकिकप्रत्यक्षम् | Super normal Perception generated by the contact of ordinary sense & object            |
| 10 | pratyakṣa         | प्रत्यक्षज्ञानम्  | Perceptual Cognition                                                                   |
| 11 | Anumitiḥ          | अनुमितिः          | Inferential cognition                                                                  |
| 12 | Upamitiḥ          | उपमितिः           | analogical cognition                                                                   |
| 13 | Śābdabodhaḥ       | शाब्दबोधः         | Verbal cognition                                                                       |
| 14 | pratyakṣapramāṇam | प्रत्यक्षप्रमाणम् | means of Perceptual cognition                                                          |
| 15 | Anumānapramāṇam   | अनुमानप्रमाणम्    | means of Inferential cognition                                                         |
| 16 | vyāpaka           | व्यापकः           | Prevader                                                                               |
| 17 | vyāpya            | व्याप्यः          | Prevaded                                                                               |
| 18 | vyāpti            | व्याप्तिः         | Relation between prevader & prevaded                                                   |
| 19 | pakṣa             | पक्षः             | Where the existence of the probandum is in doubt part of the syllogism                 |
| 20 | sādhya            | साध्यः            | The probandum of which existence is yet to established or proved part of the syllogism |
| 21 | liṅgam            | लिङ्गम्           | The reason to establish the probandum Part of the syllogism                            |
| 22 | sapakṣa           | सपक्षः            | Where the existence of probandum is known                                              |
| 23 | vipakṣa           | विपक्षः           | Where the Non existence of the probandum is well known                                 |
| 24 | kārya             | कार्यम्           | effect                                                                                 |
| 25 | kāryatva          | कार्यत्वम्        | effectness                                                                             |
| 26 | kāryakāraṇabhāva  | कार्यकारणभावः     | relation of cause and effect                                                           |
| 27 | kāraṇa            | कारणम्            | cause factor                                                                           |
| 28 | kāraṇatva         | कारणत्वम्         | Causality                                                                              |
| 29 | kartā             | कर्ता             | an agent a doer                                                                        |
| 30 | kṛti              | कृतिः             | effort                                                                                 |
| 31 | kṛtimān           | कृतिमान्          | Possesor of Volition                                                                   |

|    |               |                |                             |
|----|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 32 | upādānagocara | उपादानगोचरः    | cognition of material cause |
| 33 | aparokṣajñāna | अपरोक्षज्ञानम् | a Non perceptual cognition  |
| 34 | pariśeṣanyāya | परिशेषन्यायः   | Elimination rule            |

## END NOTES –

1. Introduction to Indian Philosophy, Chapter -1, 3. Schools Of Indian Philosophy.
2. तर्कसंग्रहात् मङ्गलाचरणस्य उदाहरणं –  
निधाय हृदि विश्वेशं विधाय गुरुवन्दनम् ।  
बालानां सुखबोधाय क्रियते तर्कसंग्रहः । इति ।
3. “तत् चैतन्यविशिष्टदेह एव आत्मा, देहातिरिक्तात्मनि प्राणाभावात्, प्रत्यक्षैकप्रमामवादितया अनुमानादेरनङ्गीकारेण प्रामाण्याभावात्”
4. “अर्थपरिच्छित्तिसाधनानि प्रत्यक्षादीनि प्रमाणानि” ।
5. प्रत्यक्षानुमित्युपमितिशाब्दभेदात् ।
6. तर्कसंग्रहोपमानलक्षणस्थं वाक्यम् ।
7. गोसदृशो गवयः ।
8. लेखनीयम् ।
9. पर्वतो बहिमान् धूमात् ।
10. यत्र यत्र धूमः तत्र तत्र वह्निः ।
11. साहचर्यनियमो व्याप्तिः ।
12. सन्दिग्धसाध्यवान् पक्षः ।
13. स्वार्थं स्वानुमितिहेतुः ।
14. स्वयं धूमादग्निमनुमाय परप्रतिपत्त्यर्थं पञ्चावयववाक्यं प्रयुज्यते तत् परार्थानुमानम् ।
15. दीपिका, तर्कसंग्रहटीका, कृष्णवल्लभाचार्यविरचिता, तर्कसंग्रहः न्यायबोधिनीपदकृत्यदीपिकाकिरणावलीव्याख्योपेतः ।

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