

Śrīharṣa Mīśra's critique of Trustworthiness

Sudipta Munsī

This paper aims at discussing the critique of the classical (*prācīna*) Nyāya theory of trustworthiness (*āptatva*) as found in the *Śabdalaṅkāra* section of the first chapter from the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā* of the great 12th century Advaita Vedāntin, Śrīharṣa Mīśra. Śrīharṣa submitted the Nyāya definition to a full-fledged critique ranging from smaller details to main issues, thus showing that 1. *āptatva* cannot be a reliable criterion for deciding the validity of a cognition, 2. even if it were so, no such speaker could ever be found. The author further extends Śrīharṣa's criticism by noting also that 3. even if such a speaker could be found, the information she delivered could consciously or inadvertently be distorted by the listener. He then concludes by noting further possible applications of Śrīharṣa's skeptical attacks to testimony as an instrument of knowledge.

This paper aims at discussing the critique of the classical (*prācīna*) Nyāya (henceforth only Nyāya) theory of trustworthiness (*āptatva*) as found in the *Śabdalaṅkāra* section of the first chapter from the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā* (henceforth only *KKh*) of the great 12th century Advaita Vedāntin, Śrīharṣa Mīśra (henceforth only Śrīharṣa).

1. Background

As a background, a general discussion of the Advaita Vedānta (henceforth only AV) philosophy and the Nyāya theory of trustworthiness is required.

To begin with, AV authors generally accept a basic classification of existence into absolute or *pāramārthika*, functional or *vyavahārika* and momentary or *prātibhāsika*. According to Advaita Vedānta philosophers, no trace of duality is imaginable with regard to the absolute realm. This absolute reality is also said to transcend time¹, whereas the second variety, viz. the functional, accounts for all multiplicity pertaining to the phenomena. However, all this multiplicity is only illusory and due to a beginningless and inexplicable nescience called *avidyā*, leading to a superimposition of the unreal (i.e. the multiform world) on the real (the single Brahman). This superimposition is sublated when the

¹ *kālatraye 'pi yat tiṣṭhati tat sat* (Tattvabodha ad 28). See Hall (1852: 5). The authorship of the Tattvabodha is controversial. Karl Potter's Bibliography attributes it to Mukunda Muni (floruit 1640). The idea was any way current in AV even before the 17th century.

knowledge of the one absolute truth, Brahman, dawns. The last variety, viz. momentary or *prātibhāsika* deals with dream-objects and erroneous perceptions such as the perception of silver in a mother of pearl, a snake in a piece of rope, etc. which exist only as long as they are perceived² (*pratītikālamātra sattā*). The difference between the *vyavahārika* and *prātibhāsika* levels consists in the fact that the knowledge of the former invalidates the latter, like the correct knowledge of a rope invalidates the former illusion of a snake. By contrast, the *vyavahārika* level ceases to exist only after the dawning of the knowledge of one's essential identity with Brahman and the liberation (*mokṣa*) of the individual soul or *jīva* consequent upon it.

For Advaita Vedānta philosophers, the various means of knowledge play their proper role only within the framework of the functional world, pervaded by multiplicity, but they cannot reach out to the Brahman, which transcends all traces of duality. Thus, these various means of knowledge or *pramāṇas* have relevance for the individual soul or *jīva*, which tries to discover its identity with the Brahman, hidden and misrepresented due to the effect of the twin powers of covering (*āvaraṇa śakti*) and distortion (*vikṣepa śakti*) of this beginningless nescience or *avidyā*, but these cease to function for such an individual soul when the latter realises its identity with the Brahman or the Absolute.³ Now, how can one know about the Brahman? It is ultimately through one's own experience of the Brahman that one knows it, but until then through the Upaniṣadic statements describing it. Nevertheless, this instance of reliance on linguistic testimony in the form of Upaniṣadic statements is only provisional. It is in this sense that even linguistic testimony in the form of the Vedic and

² *pratītikāla evaite sthitatvāt prātibhāsike/*

na hi svapnaprabuddhasya punas-svapne sthityayoh// “These two objects (namely, the perceiving self and the perceived world) are illusory on account of their having existed only during the period of (dream) experience. It is because no one after waking up from dream sees those objects when one dreams again.” – *Ḍṛgḍṛśyaviveka*; see Nikhilananda 1931, 55. About the authorship of *Ḍṛgḍṛśyaviveka*, Nikhilananda (1931: xiv) says: “Three names are generally associated with the authorship of the book. Brahmānanda Bhārati, one of the commenatators, acknowledges Bhārati Tirtha as its author. In some manuscripts it is found that Ānanda Jnāna, another commentator, salutes in the colophon Sankarāchārya as its author. Nischaladāsa, in his *Vṛtti Prabhākara*, ascribes the book to Vidyāranya, the celebrated author of *Panchadaśī*.”

³ *sarvavyavahāranam eva prāg brahmātmāvijñānāt satyatvopapatteḥ svapnavyavahārasyeva prāk prabodhāt. yāvad hi na satyātmaikatvapratīpattiḥ tāvat pramāṇaprameyaphalalakṣaṇeṣu vikāreṣu anṛtatvabuddhiḥ na kasyacid upapadyate* [Brahmasūtrabhāṣya (henceforth BSB only) ad Brahmasūtra (henceforth BS only) BS 2.1.14 (Shastri 1988: 377)] – “earlier than the realization of the Self with the Brahman, all activities can justly be true like the activities in dream before waking up. So long as the oneness of the true Self is not realized, nobody entertains the idea of unreality when dealing with the means of knowledge, objects of knowledge, and the results;” Gambhirananda (2009: 330).

Upaniṣadic statements cease to be valid for one who realises his identity with Brahman.⁴ Says Śaṅkarācārya in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*:

Since a man without self-identification with the body, mind, sense, etc., cannot become a cognizer, and as such, the means of knowledge cannot function for him; since perception and other activities (of a man) are not possible without accepting the senses etc. (as his own); since the senses cannot function without (the body as) a basis; since nobody engages in an activity with a body that has not the idea of the Self superimposed on it; since the unrelated Self cannot become a cognizer unless there are all these (mutual superimposition); and since the means of knowledge cannot function unless there is a cognizership; therefore it follows that the means of knowledge, such as direct perception as well as the scriptures, must have a man as their locus who is subject to nescience.⁵

Coming to Nyāya, its idea of linguistic testimony (*śabdapramāṇa*) is encapsulated in the following aphorism⁶ of Gautama from the *Nyāyasūtras*: *aptopadeśaḥ śabdaḥ*. Prabal Kumar Sen⁷ explains the aphorism according to the *bhāṣya* of Vātsyāyana⁸ as follows:

According to Vātsyāyana, a person can be regarded as a reliable speaker if he satisfies the following conditions:

- he must have first-hand knowledge of the thing(s) that he is speaking about,
- he must have the desire to communicate this knowledge to others without any distortion,
- such a desire on his part must result in an effort that makes him utter the required sentence(s),
- he must be capable of speaking properly.⁹

Sen further explains the above four conditions in the light of Vācaspati Miśra's *Nyāyavārtikatātparyāṭikā*¹⁰ (henceforth NVTT) as follows:

⁴ Thus reads the following verse (no. 24) of the *Vedāntaṭīṇḍima*, a Vedānta manual by Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī (see Thankaswami (1980: 136 and 360-361): *alaṁ vedair alaṁ śāstrair alaṁ smṛtipurāṇakaiḥ/ paramātmāni vijñāta itī vedāntaṭīṇḍimāḥ//* – “After knowing the Supreme Self, there is no use of the Vedas, scriptures, *Smṛtis*, *Purāṇas* (etc.) – such is the proclamation of Vedānta.” (My translation.) See Sarasvatī (1991: 25-26).

⁵ Gambhirananda 2009, 4. The original Sanskrit reads as follows: *dehendriyādiṣu ahaṁmamābhīmānarahitasya pramāṭṛtvānupapattau pramāṇapravṛtṭyanupapatteḥ. na hīndriyāṇi anupādāya pratyakṣādivyavahāraḥ sambhavati. na cādhiṣṭhānam antareṇa indriyāṇām vyavahāraḥ sambhavati. na cānadyastātmabhāvena dehena kaścid vyāpriyate. na ca etasmin sarvasmin asati asaṅgasya ātmanaḥ pramāṭṛtvam upapadyate. na ca pramāṭṛtvam antareṇa pramāṇapravṛtṭir asti. tasmād avidyāvadvaiṣayānyeva pratyakṣādīni pramāṇāni śāstrāṇi ca.* [BSB ad BS 1.1.1 (Shastri 1988: 20-21)].

⁶ *Nyāyasūtra* (henceforth NS) 1.1.7. See Thakur (1997: 14).

⁷ Sen (2006: 56).

⁸ Ad NS 1.1.7. *āptaḥ khalu sāksātkṛtadharmā yathādr̥ṣṭasya arthasya cikhyāpayiṣayā prayukta upadeṣṭā.* See Thakur (1997: 14).

⁹ The last point is not explicitly present in Vātsyāyana's *bhāṣya*, rather based on Vācaspati Miśra's elucidation of the *bhāṣya* text as quoted in the following footnote.

If a person has to satisfy all these conditions, then he should also be free from some defects. First, he must be free from ignorance (*ajñātā*) and wrong notions (*bhrama*) regarding the thing(s) that he is speaking about. This would satisfy the first condition mentioned above. He should also be free from lack of compassion (*akṛpā*), utter selfishness (*svārthakāmatva*) and desire for misleading others (*vipralipsā*). This would satisfy the second condition. He should likewise be free from laziness or idleness (*ālasya*) that prevents one from communicating something. This would satisfy the third condition. Finally, he should be free from carelessness (*pramāda*) and any defect of speech-organ (*vāgindriyavaikalya*). This would satisfy the fourth condition.¹¹

2. Śrīharṣa's Criticism of Trustworthiness

Continuing the Advaita Vedānta tradition, Śrīharṣa also maintained that it is the self-luminous Brahman that is the only reality. In the same vein, he attempted “to refute all definitions of the Nyāya system intended to justify the reality of the categories of experience and tries to show that the world and all world-experiences are purely phenomenal and have no reality behind them.”¹² Further, Śrīharṣa

undertakes to show that all definitions of things or categories put forward by the Nyāya writers are absolutely hollow and faulty even according to the canons of logical discussion and definitions accepted by the Naiyāyika; and, if no definition can stand or be supported, it necessarily follows that there can be no definitions, or, in other words, that no definitions of the phenomenal world are possible and that the world of phenomena and all our so-called experiences of it are indefinable.¹³

Thus, “Śrīharṣa's main point is to prove that all that is known is indefinable and unreal, being only of a phenomenal nature and having only a relative existence based on practical modes of acceptance, customs and conventions.”¹⁴ Moreover, it should not be lost sight of, that

¹⁰ *tattvaṃ vidvān akāruṇikatayā vā alasatayā vā anupadiśan, matsaritayā vā viparītam upadiśan nāptaḥ syād iti ata āha yathādr̥ṣṭasyārthasya cikhyāpayiṣayā prayuktaḥ. yathādr̥ṣṭasyeti matsaritayā viparītopadeśo nivāritaḥ. cikhyāpayiṣayeti akṛpāsvārthakāmatve nirākṛte. prayuktaḥ utpāditaprayatna iti alasatvam. tathāpi sthānakaraṇapāṭavābhāvena varṇaniṣpādanāsāmarthyenāptaḥ prasajyeta, iti ata āha - upadeṣṭā sthānakaraṇapāṭavavān iti. (NVTT). See Thakur (1996: 166-167).*

¹¹ Sen (2006: 56).

¹² Dasgupta (1922: 126).

¹³ Dasgupta (1922: 127-128).

¹⁴ Dasgupta (1922: 127).

those who criticize with the object of establishing positive definitions would object only to certain definitions or views of other schools; but both Śrīharṣa and the nihilists [Nāgārjuna's school, SM] are interested in the refutation of all definitions as such, and therefore his dialectic would be valid against all views and definitions of other systems.¹⁵

This gives him the background to refute the definitions of the various means of veridical knowledge like perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), linguistic testimony (*śabda*), etc. and through it trustworthiness (*āptatva*), which forms the core part of the Nyāya view of linguistic testimony as the sentence uttered by a trustworthy person (*āpta*). Against the time-honoured custom of accepting the validity of something with the help of definition (*lakṣaṇa*) and means of veridical knowledge (*pramāṇa*) at least since the time of Vātsyāyana, the commentator on the NS,¹⁶ Śrīharṣa argues to show that validity of linguistic testimony cannot be established. To begin with, he asks, what is this linguistic testimony?¹⁷ In answer, the Naiyāyika opponent presents the following three alternatives with their respective corollaries:

- Linguistic testimony is the sentence uttered by an *āpta*;¹⁸
- Linguistic testimony is the sentence of someone, who is free from defect(s);¹⁹
- Linguistic testimony is valid²⁰ sentence.²¹

Of the above three alternatives and their respective corollaries, we are concerned here with the first two, as the last calls for separate and much detailed treatment.

- Linguistic Testimony is the sentence uttered by an *āpta*.

¹⁵ Dasgupta (1922: 127). Dasgupta, in a footnote to this passage quotes the following lines from Śrīharṣa to show that “Śrīharṣa himself admits the similarity of his criticism to those of Nāgārjuna”: *tathā hi yadi darśaneṣu śūnyavādānirvacanīyapakṣayor āśrayāṇāṃ tadā tāvad amūṣāṃ nirbādhaiva sārvaṣāṅgānāṃ*. [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana – (Yogīndrānanda 2010, 122)] “If the (various) philosophical systems take refuge in (the arguments of) *śūnyavāda* and *anirvacanīyavāda*, then these arguments attain unhindered universal applicability.” (My translation.)

¹⁶ NSBh ad 1.1.3.

¹⁷ *śabdo 'pi ka ucyate?* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

¹⁸ *āptavākyaṃ hi śabdaḥ pramāṇam* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

¹⁹ *atha nirdoṣasya vākyaṃ hi tathā* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

²⁰ *yathārtha*, which literally means “like the object” or “corresponding to the object” and which I here translate as “valid” is a complex and virtually untranslatable term in the context of the KKh. Like all other definitions of Nyāya, Śrīharṣa shows that any precise definition or meaning of the term is ultimately impossible. Accordingly my translation of it is deliberately weak. For a brilliant summary of Śrīharṣa's critique of the Nyāya concept of the term *yathārtha* see Dasgupta (1922: 133-134).

²¹ *yathārthavākyaṃ śabdapramāṇam* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 439)].

Śrīharṣa says that such a definition of linguistic testimony (*śabdapramāṇa*) as the sentence uttered by an *āpta* is not right, since the alternatives as to who is an *āpta* do not stand the test of reason.²² In fact, in answer to the question as to who is an *āpta*,²³ the following alternatives and their rebuttals by Śrīharṣa are presented:

a. An *āpta* is someone who speaks of things as he has seen them²⁴

Śrīharṣa says that such a statement overextends to such cases where a sentence is uttered by a speaker, who is endowed with an erroneous knowledge of the object he speaks of.²⁵ The case of a mother of pearl being mistaken for silver and the statement, “This is silver”, made to that effect is an example in point. For, in such cases the speaker only refers to things as he or she has seen them but due to a mistaken perception his/her statement does not convey knowledge.

In view of this, the opponent revises his definition and says:

b. An *āpta* is someone who speaks of things seen through means of veridical knowledge²⁶

To this it is replied that even such a definition would overextend to cases where the speaker, though he has the real knowledge of the thing he speaks of, presents the thing differently.²⁷ Thus, if A despite knowing a shell as it is through means of veridical knowledge somehow (may be due to a mere slip of the tongue or with wrong intention) describes it as silver to B, the current definition would overextend to it.

This leads the opponent to revise his definition further and say:

c. An *āpta* is someone who speaks of things exactly as he has seen them through means of veridical knowledge²⁸

Śrīharṣa rejects this definition since it would apply even to such cases where one part of the sentence uttered by the speaker speaks of the thing exactly as it is perceived through means of

²² *āptavākyam hi śabdaḥ pramāṇam iti na yuktam, vikalpānupapatteḥ* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

²³ *tathā hi - ko 'yam āpto nāma* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

²⁴ *yathādr̥ṣṭavādīti cet* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

²⁵ *na, bhrāntipratipannavādivākye 'pi prasaṅgāt* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)]. The Sanskrit text of the objection to which this text passage is a reply can be read in the immediately preceding footnote.

²⁶ *pramāṇadr̥ṣṭeti viśeṣaṇe ca* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

²⁷ *tathābhūtasānyathāvādavyāpanāt* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

²⁸ *yathā pramāṇeti* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraśāstra (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437)].

veridical knowledge, while another part speaks of it in an incorrect manner.²⁹ To explain: in the sentence, ‘the lake is full of water and (full of) fire’,³⁰ uttered by someone who has known through means of veridical knowledge the lake to be full of water, the first part as describing the lake full of water is veridical, while the other part describing it as full of fire is non-veridical. Thus the current definition, though successfully applying to the first part of the sentence (i.e. the lake is full of water), overextends to the second part (i.e. the lake is full of fire), and is thus faulty.

The Naiyāyika opponent again revises the definition and says:

d. An *āpta* is someone who speaks exactly of as many things as he has seen through means of veridical knowledge³¹

To this Śrīharṣa says, the current definition suffers from under-extension as it is often seen that the number of objects defined (*lakṣya*) by one’s sentence are not exactly the same as are cognised.³² Thus, there may be many things on the ground like a jar, a piece of cloth, a building, etc. but it is only one or the other of them, that is spoken of while describing the ground in the form of ‘the ground possesses a jar’, ‘the ground possesses a piece of cloth’, etc.³³ Śrīharṣa condenses his reply into a very succinct statement: the whole range of things cognised through the means of veridical knowledge, is not reproduced in entirety.³⁴

The opponent goes on to formulate this new definition:

e. The statement of a speaker who speaks of only such things as are perceived through means of veridical knowledge is linguistic testimony³⁵

²⁹ *karāṇe cāmsē tathābhūtavādivākyasyāyathārthasyāpi vyāpanāt* [KKh, śabdalaṣṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 437-438)].

³⁰ This example is taken over from Śāstrī (2010: 196-197).

³¹ *yāvad yathāpramāṇadr̥ṣṭāniruktau ca* [KKh, śabdalaṣṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

³² *prāyeṇātathābhūtatvād eva lakṣyāṇām tadavyāpteḥ* [KKh, śabdalaṣṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

³³ This elucidation is based on the following Hindi explanation of Śāstrī (2010: 197-198): “*arthāt jin-jin rūpoṃ se jo-jo padārth pramāṇ dr̥ṣṭ hote haiṃ un-un rūpoṃ se sabhī padārth kathan ke viṣay nahīṃ ho pāte haiṃ prāyaḥ aisā dekhā jātā hai. Jaise bhūtal par ghaṭpaṭmaṭhādi anek padārtha pratyakṣpramāṇ se dr̥ṣṭ hote haiṃ kintu bhūtalāḥ ghaṭavat is vākya ke dvārā keval ghaṭmātra kā bodh hotā hai tathā ca ghaṭavatbhūtalam etāvanmātra vākya prayoktā āpta na hogā, aur na vah (bhūtalāḥ ghaṭavat) pramāṇ śabd hogā, arthāt us vākya meṃ śabd pramāṇ lakṣaṇ kī avyāpti ho jāyegī. kāraṇ ki yah āvaśyak nahīṃ hai ki jitney padārth pramit (pramāṇoṃ se dr̥ṣṭa) ho utne sabhī padārth sarvatra vākya ke dvārā abhihit ho.*”

³⁴ *na hi yāvat pramitam tāvad abhidhīyate* [KKh, śabdalaṣṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

³⁵ *yathāpramitasyaiva ca vaktur vākyaṃ iti vyākāre ca* [KKh, śabdalaṣṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

In other words, it may be said that a trustworthy person or *āpta* never speaks of such things as are not sanctioned by means of veridical knowledge. Śrīharṣa rejects this definition on the ground that it suffers from under-extension since even the statement³⁶ of Yudhiṣṭhira contained elements that were not attested by means of veridical knowledge.³⁷ To explain: Yudhiṣṭhira, who was considered as the yardstick of veridicality, sometime spoke untruth in the form of “Aśvatthāmā – the man or the elephant – has been killed”, when he knew it very well that it was Aśvatthāmā, the elephant that was killed, and that he ought to have said, “Aśvatthāmā, the elephant, has been killed.” Underlying such a critique is the suggestion that there exists no speaker who speaks only of such things as are perceived through means of veridical knowledge, and thus the current definition fails to reach its desired target and suffers from under-extension.³⁸ If even Yudhiṣṭhira, due to a single untruth, no longer qualifies as *āpta*, what to say of normal speakers?

Thus criticised, the opponent now says:

f. A person describing a thing just as it is perceived through means of veridical knowledge is trustworthy or *āpta* in that matter.³⁹

In reply, Śrīharṣa says, this statement is under-extensive on the ground that it would lead to the extraordinariness⁴⁰ of the subject-matter concerned.⁴¹ To explain: this extraordinariness will be tantamount to too much restriction of the current definition of *āpta* to the subject-matter concerned. Under such circumstances, only the person describing the particular subject-matter taken up for consideration, will be the trustworthy person (*āpta*) and no one else; and the particular sentence that he uses in that connection will be treated as linguistic testimony, and no other sentence uttered by him. Thus there will be no general rule, and there will be under-extension with regard to the

³⁶ In the form of: *aśvatthāmā hato naro vā kuñjaro vā*.

³⁷ *yudhiṣṭhiravākyaśyāpyanevambhūtatvenāvyaṅgyāpatteḥ* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraṅgana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

³⁸ This elucidation is based on the following Hindi explanation of Śāstrī (2010, 198): *tātparya yah hai ki āptatayā prasiddh yudhiṣṭhir ne bhi yathā pramit kā hī kathan nahīn kiyā, apitu kadācit “aśvatthāmā hato naro vā kuñjaro” ityādi rūp se mṛṣābhūt kā bhī kathan kiyā thā. ataḥ yudhiṣṭhir meṁ āpta kā lakṣaṇ tathā yudhiṣṭhir ke vākya meṁ śabd pramāṇ kā lakṣaṇ avyāpt hai*.

³⁹ *tatra viśaya iti viśeṣaṇe ca* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraṅgana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

⁴⁰ Grimes (1996: 57), translating *asādhāraṇa* variously as “special; uncommon; strange; extraordinary; too restricted”, explains it as “A type of fallacious reasoning in which the reason is fallacious due to its being present only in the subject and not present in any example; e.g., ‘Sound is eternal because it is sound.’”

⁴¹ *viśeṣarūpasya viśayasyāsādhāraṇyenāvyaṅgyāpakatvāpātāt* [KKh, śabdalaṅkāraṅgana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438)].

sentences spoken, as stressed by Sudhāmśúsekharā Śāstrī in his Hindī elucidation of *KKh*.⁴² Moreover, one might add that the same problem applies to the speaker, insofar as only the *speaker* of a given sentence, treating a particular subject-matter, could be said to be an *āpta* and not any other person listening to him or her and sharing the same expertise.⁴³

- Now Śrīharṣa turns his attention to the Sāmkhya-Nyāya⁴⁴ definition of linguistic testimony as the sentence of someone who is free from defects, and criticises it on the ground that

a. It fails to extend to such cases where one, endowed with defects⁴⁵ and desirous of saying, “there is no jar”, accidentally makes the actual statement: “there is a jar”.⁴⁶ It cannot be said that the sentence is not valid,⁴⁷ because it has already been said⁴⁸ that though this statement is made by someone, endowed with defect(s), yet since the cognition ensuing thence displays the same attributes as its object actually possesses and is not contradicted by any other means of valid knowledge, the sentence which acts as an instrument in the generation of the said cognition, is also valid.⁴⁹ Moreover, its validity is ascertained on account of its generating successful undertaking of activities,

⁴² *aisī sthiti meṁ lakṣaṅghaṭak viśayśabd se jis vyakti kā grahaṅ kareṅge us viśayviśeṣ vyakti kā kathankartā āpt hogā, anya nahīn, evaṁ usī viśayviśeṣ vyakti kā vācak śabd pramāṅ śabd hogā anya vākya nahīn, is prakār ananugam hogā aur paraspar vākya meṁ avyāpti bhī hogī* (Śāstrī 2010: 199).

⁴³ In this regard, see also Section 3.iii of this paper.

⁴⁴ Yogīndrānanda (2010: 438-439) traces this view to the following two verses quoted in the *Māṭharavṛtti* on *Sāmkhya-kārikā* 5, and their reuse in *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*, *Nyāyamañjarī* and *Nyāyavārtikatātparyāṭikā*:

*āgamo hi āptavacanam āptaṁ doṣakṣayād viduḥ/
kṣīṇadoṣo 'nṛtavākyaṁ na brūyād hetvasambhavāt//
svakarmani abhiyukto yo rāgadveṣavivarjitah/
pūjitatadvidhair nityam āpto jñeyah sa tādrśah//*

⁴⁵ The *Śāradā* commentary (see Śāstrī 2010: 200) mentions the following four defects: error (*bhrama*), carelessness (*pramāda*), intention of deceiving (*vipralipsā*) and defect of sense organs (*karaṅāpāṭava*). The Sanskrit text of the *Śāradā* reads *karaṅāpāṭatva* or ‘ability of the sense organs’, but that this is an obvious misprint is confirmed by the Hindi translation of the editor, which reads *karaṅāpāṭava* or ‘defect of sense organs’. Accordingly I have emended it as *karaṅāpāṭava*.

⁴⁶ *atha nirdoṣasya vākyaṁ tatheti cen, na, sadoṣasya 'nāsti ghaṭah' ityabhidhatsataḥ 'asti ghaṭah' iti daivān nirgatayathārthavākyaṁvyāpteḥ* [*KKh*, śabdakṣaṅghaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 438-439)].

⁴⁷ *tat pramāṅaṁ na bhavati eveti cen, na* [*KKh*, śabdakṣaṅghaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 439)].

⁴⁸ *pūrvam uktottaratvāt* [*KKh*, śabdakṣaṅghaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 439)].

⁴⁹ The elucidation of Śrīharṣa’s rebuttal is based on the following Hindi explanation of Śāstrī (2010: 200): “*ukta vākya ke doṣ prayojya hone par bhī tajjanya jñān tadvati tatprakārak hone mātra se evaṁ abādhit hone se pramātmak hai ataḥ us pramā kā karaṅ yah vākya bhī pramāṅ hī hai.*”

and despite initial doubt as to whether the knowledge, “there is a jar”, is to be treated as valid or invalid, its actual validity cannot be refuted.⁵⁰⁵¹

b. Moreover, the state of being free from errors in general is impossible even with regard to Yudhiṣṭhira,⁵² since despite his widespread fame as a speaker of truth, he at some point of time spoke untruth purportedly in the form of “Aśvatthāmā – the man or the elephant – has been killed.”

c. Lastly, it cannot be said that it is the absence of any particular defect (like intention of deceiving) that is the intended meaning of the expression, ‘absence of error’ (*nirdoṣatva*), as it would lead to extraordinariness.⁵³ To explain: If it is so accepted, then it would fail to account for other defects such as error, carelessness, etc. and thus the definition would be under-extensive. That is, if, for example, the current definition aims at covering the defect of the intention of deceiving, then it will apply only to the sentence spoken by such a person, who has an absence of the defect of intention of deceiving, but it will fail to apply to the sentences, spoken by such a person, who has absence of other defects like error, carelessness, etc.

3. Observations and further directions for research

In course of exploring the underlying suggestions of Śrīharṣa's critique of trustworthiness further, it may be objected that the claim that testimony does not help us arrive at absolute and incontrovertible truth, does not negate the fact that it is still the only option left for such cases where we have no other source of verifying the claim made. This objection becomes especially pertinent in such cases where one is trying to communicate his/her own feelings as also in case of religious [mystic?] experiences.

However the above objection does not take the following points into account:

⁵⁰ *pravṛttisāmarthyena prāmāṇyāvadhāraṇasambhavād āpātataḥ sandehe 'pi adoṣāt* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 439)] The *Śāradā* explains “*pravṛttisāmarthyena*” as *saphalapravṛttijanakatvena*, “*āpātataḥ*” as *saṁvādāt purā tādrśavākyam pramāṇam na veti sandehe 'pi*, and “*adoṣāt*” as *vāstavikapramāṇyanirāsāsambhavāt, sati api vastuni viśeṣadarśanam vinā tatsandehasya tadanapaghātakatvāt*. See Śāstrī (2010: 201).

⁵¹ Point (a) is especially interesting, since it suggests that Śrīharṣa would not subscribe to the standard Western definition of knowledge as “justified true belief” and would rather admit also true beliefs within the precincts of knowledge. That this is a widespread position in Indian philosophy is discussed by Sibajiban Bhattacharyya (in Matilal and Shaw 1985). [Note by Elisa Freschi].

⁵² *sāmānyato nirdoṣatvasya bhīmāgraje 'pi asambhavāt* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 439)].

⁵³ *viśeṣatas tathātvasya asādhāraṇyaparyavasāyitvāt* [KKh, śabdakṣaṇakhaṇḍana (Yogīndrānanda 2010: 439)].

- Testimony is not the only source of information about one's inner state: as for one, who is trying to communicate his pangs to his companion, the latter becomes aware of it through such marks as pale face, tearful eyes, etc. apart from the statement of the narrator. Thus, one might argue that there are indeed objective indicators and that one could rely on them instead of on testimony, even in the case of one's inner state.
- Provided that we have no other way to test the validity of what the narrator says it becomes difficult to differentiate the real case from the fraudulent one. After all, actors also have the ability to portray such feelings, often in a more convincing manner.
- Even a trustworthy person (*āpta*) is hardly able to lead us to an epistemologically better situation, since the success of an act of testimony also depends on the trustworthiness of the recipient. For example, hearing the statement, 'the sun has gone down',⁵⁴ made by someone in the village, a courtesan thinks, it is time for her to return to her business, while a thief deems it as an indication for the time for his going out for theft, and a staunch follower of the Vedas thinks it to be a signal for his becoming attentive to his daily religious duties. Thus it is one's personal disposition that plays a crucial role here in determining the meaning and validity of the contents of a testimonial. Thus not only the need for a competent speaker, but also a competent listener is here called for.
- Though the question of trustworthiness (*āptatva*) is a very crucial one, yet it may be argued that trustworthiness (*āptatva*) itself does not enjoy immunity from suspicion – this is because the Nyāya criteria of honesty and willingness⁵⁵ to tell truth are arbitrary as they do not hold good for a thief, who nothing but honestly and willingly bears witness to a theft committed by a second thief.
- As for the criterion of *sākṣātkṛtadharmatva*,⁵⁶ i.e. one's having first-hand knowledge of the thing he is speaking about, it may be said that only one *sākṣātkṛtadharmā* or the person who has such first-hand knowledge of the thing he is speaking about can verify the *sākṣātkṛtadharmatva* of another. But even this can be doubted. To explain: Suppose A knows only 300 German words, while B knows 3000 German words. Now coincidentally B asks A about a few German words (which come within the range of the 300 words which A knows) to test the latter's knowledge of the German language.

⁵⁴ This example is borrowed from the chapter on Buddhist philosophy, from the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, a 14th century compendium of Indian philosophical schools, authored by Sāyaṇa-Mādhava. See Śāstrī (1924: 19).

⁵⁵ See Thakur (1997: 14).

⁵⁶ See Thakur (1997: 14).

A passes the test successfully and on that score if A is thought by B as well-versed in German, a sheer mistake is committed.

These points, if further explored, might open up new vistas of research, and go a long way in underlining the utility of Advaita Vedānta philosophy in general and that of Śrīharṣa in particular in critically dealing with problems concerning trustworthiness, etc.

4. Conclusions

The foregoing discussion shows that so far as even our work-a-daily life is concerned, trustworthiness is not an altogether indubitable option to resort to, not to speak of its decisive role in ascertaining absolute truth. This is because, as Śrīharṣa shows, any definition of trustworthiness and a trustworthy speaker is ultimately impossible. Thus, as on one hand, it suffers from various overextensions such as in case of erroneous knowledge, partially veridical and partially non-veridical knowledge, etc., on the other hand, it is under extensive in the sense that it fails to reach such ideal targets where no trace of non-veridicality is imaginable. Moreover, in connection with the ascertainment of a trustworthy speaker, Śrīharṣa and his commentators suggest the virtual unavailability of one such, who is free from all defects, always speaks of nothing but truth arrived at through means of veridical knowledge, and never resorts to untruth. No special definition of 'trustworthiness' or 'absence of error' is admissible on the ground that it would be case-specific, and fail to account for other similar cases. Lastly, by saying that "the whole range of things cognised through the means of veridical knowledge, is not reproduced in entirety", Śrīharṣa suggests that the content of such a cognition undergoes a process of edition in the cogniser in accordance with his / her preferences, thus discounting the possibility of a frame-to-frame reproduction of the things cognised.

References

- Dasgupta, Surendranath. 1922. *A History of Indian Philosophy. Vol. 2.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gambhirananda, Swami, trans. 2009. *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya.* Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
- Gambhirananda, Swami, trans. 2004. *Eight Upaniṣads with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya. Volume 1.* Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
- Grimes, John. 1996. *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Hall, Fitzedward, ed. 1852. *The Ātma-bodha, with Its Commentary; also the Tattwa-bodha: Being two treatises of Indian pantheism*. Mirzapore: Orphan School Press.
- Matilal, Bimal Krishna and Jaysankar Lal Shaw, eds. 1985. *Analytical Philosophy in Comparative Perspective. Exploratory Essays in Current Theories and Classical Indian Theories of Meaning and Reference*. Synthese Library. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Nikhilananda, Swami, trans. 1931. *Drg-Drsya Viveka*. Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Asrama.
- Saraswatī, Swāmī Prajñānānanda, ed. and transl. in Bengali. 1991. *Vedāntaḍiṇḍima of Śaṅkarācārya*. Varanasi: Śrī Śrī Nigamānanda Vidyāniketana.
- Śāstrī, Sudhāmśuśekhara, ed. ed. and transl. in Hindī. 2010. *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā of Śrīharṣa with the Sanskrit commentaries, Śāradā and Rājahaṁsa, of Swāmī Śaṅkaracaitanya Bhāratī. Vol. 2*. Varanasi.
- Śāstrī, Vāsudeva Abhyaṅkara Mahāmahopādhyāya, ed. 1924. *Sarvadarśanasamgraha of Sāyaṇa-Mādhavācārya with an original Sanskrit commentary*. Poona: Prācyā Vidyā Saṁśodhana Mandira.
- Sen, Prabal Kumar. 2006. "Some Alternative Definitions of Śabdapramāṇa." In *Śabdapramāṇa in Indian Philosophy*, edited by Manjulika Ghosh and Bhaswati Bhattacharya Chakraborti, 53-79. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre.
- Shastri, J. L., ed. 1988. *Brahmasūtra-Śāṅkarabhāṣyam with the commentaries Bhāṣyaratnaprabhā of Govindānanda, Bhāmatī of Vācaspatimīśra, Nyāyanirṇaya of Ānandagiri*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1st edition 1980.
- Thakur, Anantalal, ed. 1996. *Nyāyavārtikatātparyaṭikā of Vācaspati Mīśra*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.
- Thakur, Anantalal, ed. 1997. *Gautamīyanyāyadarśana with Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.
- Thankswami, R. 1980. *Advaita Vedanta Literature. A Bibliographical Survey*, Madras: University of Madras.
- Yogīndrānanda, Swāmī, ed. & [Hindī] trans. 2010. *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā of Śrīharṣa with the Khaṇḍanaphakkikāvibhajana of Ānandapūrṇamunīndra Vidyāsāgara*. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Vidya Bhawan.

Sudipta Munsī, M.A. (History), Dip. in Sanskrit, is an independent scholar of History, Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy, based in Calcutta, with abiding interests in ancient Indian philosophies of language, testimony, history, psychology, etc. The topics of his publications are as varied as Cārvāka philosophy, Advaita Vedānta, education in Ancient India, etc.