

**STUDIES IN**

# **INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

**A MEMORIAL VOLUME IN HONOUR OF  
PANDIT SUKHLALJI SANGHVI**

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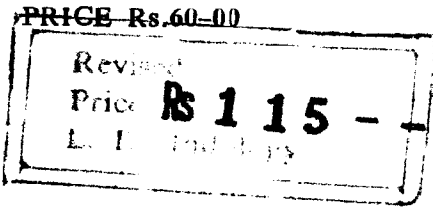
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## MEMORY

**Bimal Krishna Matilal**

Sukhlalji Sanghavi was called by members of his circle "Panditji". Dr. K. K. Dixit in his "Translator's Introduction to the Philosophical Notes" (*Advanced studies in Indian Logic and Metaphysics* ; S. Sanghavi) refers to him invariably as Panditji. But what is rather surprising is that being an erudite Pandit in the śāstras, Sukhlalji was perhaps the first one I know, who had realized more than any of his compatriots the limitation and barrenness of the old Pandit way of studying the Sanskrit philosophical texts. In his *Preface* to the above-mentioned book, he discusses the problem and very convincingly argues for a revision of our outlook in the study and research of the śāstras. He recommends explicitly "a non-partisan, historical, comparative study " of any Sanskrit philosophical text. He says :

"I became firmly convinced that the study of any philosophical system inevitably demands certain prerequisites and that these prerequisites include a fairly accurate understanding of the historical inter-relationship obtaining between the various philosophical systems of India."

I think Panditji's *Preface* should be read by all young scholars of our country who wish to work on any system of Indian philosophy. As I myself was deeply influenced by Panditji's comments, when I started my research work in Indian philosophy, I wish to pay my tribute to his memory by choosing a topic from his above-mentioned work.

One of the main disagreements of the Jaina epistemologist (*pramāṇa*-theorist) from all the non-Jaina philosophers was in the theory of knowledge. Memory-experience was

never regarded by any non-Jaina philosopher (a Naiyāyika or a Buddhist) to constitute a piece of knowledge, a *pramā*, a cognitive awareness which amounts to truth. Or, to put it in another way, while perception and inference were regarded as valid means or ways of knowing, memory was never considered such a means. The Jaina philosopher, on the other hand, contested this position and regarded memory as another source of non-perceptual knowledge by refuting the arguments of the Naiyāyikas and the Buddhists. Pandit Sukhlalji argued, in his above-mentioned book, that this dispute was primarily due to the reluctance of the non-Jaina philosophers to extend the use of the term '*pramā*' to memory-experience. All philosophers agree with the Jainas on the point that if a memory-experience happens to be a revival of a veridical past experience, perceptual or non-perceptual, then it is also veridical. But they apparently want to use the term *pramā* in a restricted sense such that a veridical experience would be called a *pramā* only if it is not the repeat or revival of a past experience. To quote Sukhlalji :

“ That mnemonic cognition is true of facts is acceptable to all (Indian logicians), and so there is no material difference of opinion on this issue; the difference only arises when some agree and others refuse to call memory a *pramāṇa*.” (p. 46)

Panditji, however, tried to give a historical explanation of this reluctance on the part of the Hindus, and a doctrinal explanation of the same on the part of the Buddhist. In the Hindu tradition, *smṛti*, the term for memory-experience, was also used to denote the *dharmaśāstras* as opposed to *śruti*, the Vedas. Now, since it is the cardinal doctrine of the Hindus that the *dharmaśāstras* are dependent upon the Vedas for their authoritativeness on *dharma* and are not independent sources of knowledge about *dharma*, *smṛti* cannot be called a *pramāṇa*. To wit : There is a systematic ambiguity in the word (= *pramā*) *pramāṇa*, for it can mean either a means of knowing or an authority, or a source for knowledge. There-

fore, if *smṛti* which meant *Dharmaśāstras* was not an independent *pramāṇa*, then by extension *smṛti* which also meant memory-experience, could not also be a *pramāṇa*.

The Buddhists, however, had a different reason, according to Sukhlalji. In Buddhist theory, any cognitive experience that involves thought or construction (*vikalpa*) would be excluded from being a *pramā* or *pramāṇa*. Thus, since memory involves thought, it cannot be a *pramā*.

While Sukhlalji's explanation is ingenious, it does not certainly seem to be the whole story. If from above one surmises that the dispute between the Jaina and non-Jaina philosophers on the status of memory was mainly terminological, it would be wrong. I believe that was not certainly the intention of Sukhlalji. I shall try to focus upon the deeper reasons for the dispute over memory-experience, and the consequent difference in theories of knowledge between the opposing parties.

There is something odd in calling a memory-experience an event of knowing, for the description of this experience is usually prefixed with "I remember". What I remember is another experience, another (past) cognitive event. If the past event amounted to knowing and if my memory is not "playing tricks" on me, I can remember now correctly what I had experienced. My present experience is also aware of the fact that what is coming to my mind along with my awareness of it is a past event. But an event of knowing is different from an event of remembering the first event of knowing. If the first event amount to knowing, it does not follow the second would be veridical, for I may remember incorrectly. The converse is also not true. If I remember correctly, i.e., my memory is "fully" revived, it does not follow that the first event was an event of knowing. If veracity is allowed to function as a qualifying property of a cognitive event when and only when it amounts to an event of knowing (a *pramā*), it cannot be regarded as automatically transmissible from the first type of events (events of cognition) to

the second type of events, events of remembering a past cognitive event. This is, at least one of the good reasons for the reluctance of the non-Jaina philosophers to regard a memory-experience as a *pramā*, an event of knowing.

I wish to connect the above argument with the traditional arguments found in the *śāstras*. The tradition of the non-Jaina philosophers (in this, the Mīmāṃsakas, some Naiyāyikas and the Buddhists agree, see Sukhlalji, p. 45) argues that a cognitive event becomes an act of knowing if it grasps or reveals a fact that has not been revealed or grasped before (cf. *a-grhītagrāhitva*). In other words, a fact not known before is supposed to be grasped by an act of knowing. An act of remembering therefore can hardly qualify to be an act of knowing unless, of course, the very fact of my knowing the original fact was not known to me before. If the veracity of a cognitive act is made dependent upon its grasping a novel fact, then another act, which *repeats* the first in the sense that the fact grasped in the first is the same as that in the second, cannot claim the property 'veracity'. For we cannot kill a bird more than once. An act of correct remembering is thought generally to be a *repeat* performance in the above sense. But the property 'veracity', as we have already seen, is not transmissible from the first act to the second. The second act may copy or repeat the first as far as the grasping of the same fact is concerned, but it cannot copy the other property, viz., that of grasping a hitherto ungrasped fact. For then it would not be a copy or repeat performance, and not an act of what we call 'remembering'.

Take the case of an original painting by one of the masters. There may be bad copies or even a set of 'perfect' copies of the painting. But the 'perfect' copy can copy everything of the original but not its originality, for then it could not be a copy by definition. Remembering in this way can never have the 'novelty' that is expected of an act of knowing. But there is something more to this point. Suppose, in our example, a doubt arises whether the first painting, which

has been copied by several copiests, good or perfect ones and bad ones, is a fake one, i.e., not by one of the masters. Now, nothing will be gained by looking at the second set of the copies, to investigate whether it is a true replica or not. To resolve the doubt one way or other one has to investigate the first painting. Thus, by making sure that a memory-experience is a correct and “full” revival of a previous act, we do not gain any insight into the problem of deciding whether the original act was a knowing act or not. The problem of an exact remembrance, like the problem of an exact reproduction, is quite separate from the problem of ensuring the first act to be an act of knowing. This analysis, therefore, shows that there is a good reason, not just a terminological dispute, for resisting the inclination to call a memory-experience a knowing act.

What I have argued here can be well supported by quoting a passage from Udayana’s *Nyāya-vārttika-tātparya-pariśuddhi* (p. 110). This passage was Udayana’s comment on Vācaspati’s rather enigmatic statement in reply to the question why memory-experience is not regarded as a *pramā*. (*Tātparyaṭikā*, p. 35);

“The relation between word and object is determined by people’s convention (*loka*). And people call such cognitive event *pramā* as is non-promiscuous with the object or fact (*artha*) and different from such memory-experience as is produced only from mnemonic impression (*saṃskāra*).”

This might have given the impression that it is a matter of arbitrary choice of the language-users that memory is not to be called a *pramā*. But Udayana sets the matter straight as far, at least, as the Nyāya view is concerned. A *pramā* is a cognitive awareness that is in accord with the object or fact, but memory can hardly be said to have such an accord, and hence it is not a *pramā*. I quote:

“Moreover, how can memory-experience be in accord with the object/facts? For it is not true that when a object

is remembered in a particular way, it is in that same state at that time. For the previous state has now ceased. If it did not, it would not be called 'previous'. It is also not true that memory "hangs on" to that object as one whose previous state has ceased. For we do not have the awareness of the cessation of the previous state. If we do not have (prior) awareness of something, we cannot have a memory of it. If we did 'remember' such a thing, it would not be a memory. Besides, we need to search for another unique (causal) condition [for memory, viz., first impression=*samskāra*]. But we are not aware of it ( i.e. such a condition ), for there is no past impression of it.

[Opponent:] How is it that although both a (prior) cognitive awareness and a memory-experience have the same object (revealed in both alike), we say the prior cognitive awareness may be in accord with the object but not the (later) remembering of it?

[Answer:] At the time of (prior) awareness, the object was in that state in which it was, but at the time of (later) remembering of it, it was not in the same state.

[Opponent:] Our later cognition (i.e., remembering) may be said to be in accord with the object if it cognizes that the object *was* in that state before as it was.

[Answer:] No. Then our (present) awareness of dark-colour with regard to an earthen pot that [was dark before but now] is red due to its being baked (with fire), would be said, by this argument, to be in accord with the object. [Read "yathārtha..." for "yathārta..."]

[Opponent:] But a cognition that dark-colour has ceased is certainly in accord with the object.

[Answer:] This is true. For that object is in that state at that time. But the remembered object is not in the same state at that time. Therefore memory-experience is certainly not in accord with the object. But a cognitive (non-



mnemonic) experience may be in accord with the object. [Read ‘yathārthānubhava’ for ‘yathānubhava’]. If, however, a cognition is in accord with the object and we have a memory–experience of the same object, then such memory–experience is said to be in accord with the object. Similarly, if the (prior) cognition is not in accord with the object, the exact (undistorted) remembering of it is also not so. For example, when a man has fled after cognizing a rope as a snake, he remembers it as a snake. Therefore the memory–experience has ‘veracity’ (the property of being in accord with the object) only to the extent of its being *borrowed* from a prior veracious cognitive experience; it is not natural (= *ājānika*) to memory. This (unnaturalness of veracity with regard to memory) is what is expressed as (memory’s) ‘dependence upon another’, and this has been confused by some philosophers who were lazy to make the point explicit (I think this is an oblique reference to Vācaspati by Udayana).’’

Udayana, in fact, has given two arguments in the above. First, he has argued that memory–experience cannot be said to be in accord with the object in the strictest sense in the way an ordinary (non-mnemonic) cognitive awareness can be. Next, he has shown, in recognition of the point that we may use such expressions as ‘true memory’, that the memory–experience can have accord with the object in a less strict sense, but such a property is only a transferred epithet from the original non-mnemonic past awareness in which the present memory is grounded.

What then is the sense in which the Jaina philosophers have argued that memory–experience is to be called a *pramā*, a true cognitive event? Does it simply mean that the Jaina philosophers use the term “*pramā*” in a less strict sense? It is tempting to say so, but I will suggest another way to understand the problem. If I had seen the pot to be dark when it was unbaked and now, when it is red after being baked, I remember truly that it was dark, the claim of the Jainas

is that it is a 'true' memory and hence a *pramā*. But Udayana has argued that this claim hides a confusion. For, if 'true memory' means, as it should, an exact reproduction or full revival of the past experience, then the verbal report expressed as "it was dark" cannot be a report of what we call a memory-experience. For, the portion of the experience expressed by "was", i.e., the pastness of the fact, cannot be any part of the past experience (the verbal report of the past experience was "it is dark"). And if it cannot be a part of the past experience, it cannot be part of present memory. Therefore, the verbal report "it was dark" is not that of memory, but a present experience aided by memory. I think the dispute here lies mainly in deciding what experience we should call memory, my remembering a past fact (that the pot was blue) or a present experience that the pot was blue based upon such remembering? We can also ask: whether these two are at all distinguishable experiences in the sense of being two cognitive events? I will skip an answer to this question and instead point out that the ordinary use of 'remember' is ambiguous enough to cover both.

There is a further point which takes us into the heart of this dispute. The problem of determining the truth of a non-mnemonic cognitive experience is quite different from the problem of determining the truth of a memory. Truth may be seen as a property of a cognitive experience, a property that is generated by factor or factors that are either concomitant with (if we accept *paratah*), or included in, if we accept *svatah*, the set of factors that generates the experience in question. But the correctness or accuracy or "truth" of a memory is generated, not by a similar set of factors, but by different ones, such as the intensity of the previous experience such that passage of time would not render it vague and inaccurate. If, however, it is argued that a memory in copying exactly a past true experience can also copy its truth, then we have to say that it is only a *copy* of the property truth or *pramāṭva*, and not *the* property truth.

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