TY-2026 · 15 — Tantrayukti Studies

संशयः

Reasons on Both Sides: Doubt as the Research Question

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Abstract

Saṃśaya, "doubt", is the tantrayukti by which a text sets a question before answering it. Kauṭilya defines it as "a matter with reasons on both sides", with a strategic dilemma: should the king march against an enemy whose subjects are impoverished and greedy, or one whose subjects have been wronged? Suśruta defines it as "seeing reasons on both sides", with a clinical puzzle: a blow to the vital point in the palm (*talahṛdaya*) kills, yet the cutting off of a whole hand or foot does not. Cakrapāṇi defines it as "knowledge of two undetermined alternatives, accompanied by the desire for a distinguishing feature", with Caraka's survey of conflicting opinions on the cause of birth. The three examples correspond to three sources of doubt that the Nyāyasūtra distinguishes — a choice between courses of action, conflicting evidence, and conflicting views — and each author resolves his doubt elsewhere in his work, Suśruta most strikingly by a physiological explanation in his chapter on vital points. This article argues that saṃśaya is the research question of a śāstra, examines three objections (that doubt is a defect in a teacher, that it is merely the absence of knowledge, and that every statement can be doubted), and concludes that the device lies in the formulation of a doubt with reasons on both sides and a stated criterion for deciding between them.

Keywords: saṃśaya; tantrayukti; doubt; research question; problem statement; dilemma; conflicting evidence; vipratipatti; vimarśa; Nyāyasūtra; Arthaśāstra; Suśruta; marma; Caraka

1. प्रवेशः · Place in the lists

Saṃśaya is fourteenth in Kauṭilya's list, twenty-fourth in Suśruta's and twenty-fourth in Caraka's. In Kauṭilya it follows arthāpatti (TY-14) — what the text implies — and in the medical lists it comes late, among the devices of debate. Wherever it stands, its function is the same: to open a question. The word is from *sam-* + √*śī*, "to lie together": two possibilities lying side by side, neither yet set aside.

The Nyāya school places doubt at the very start of reasoning. Vātsyāyana, commenting on the first sūtra, says that reasoning (*nyāya*) does not operate on what is unknown, nor on what is already settled, but on what is doubted. A śāstra that never states a doubt never reasons; it only asserts.

2. लक्षणानि · The definitions

> उभयतोहेतुमानर्थः संशयः
>
> क्षीणलुब्धप्रकृतिमपचरितप्रकृतिं वेति

> "A matter with reasons on both sides is saṃśaya." — Example: "(Should he march against) one whose subjects are impoverished and greedy, or one whose subjects have been wronged?"
>
> Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra* 15.1.32–33

> उभयहेतुदर्शनं संशयः। यथा तलहृदयाभिघातः प्राणहरः, पाणिपादच्छेदनमप्राणहरमिति ॥
>
> "Seeing reasons on both sides is saṃśaya. For example: a blow to the talahṛdaya takes life; the cutting off of a hand or foot does not take life."
>
> Suśruta, *Uttaratantra* 65.32

> संशयो नाम विशेषाकाङ्क्षानिर्धारितोभयविषयज्ञानं, यथा- "मातरं पितरं चैके मन्यन्ते जन्मकारणम्। स्वभावं परनिर्माणं यदृच्छां चापरे जनाः॥" (सू.अ.११) इत्यादिनोक्तः संशयः।
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> "Saṃśaya is knowledge whose two alternatives are undetermined, accompanied by the desire for a distinguishing feature. For example, the doubt stated in the passage beginning: 'Some consider mother and father the cause of birth; others nature, creation by another, or chance' (Sūtrasthāna 11), and so on."
>
> Cakrapāṇidatta, *Āyurvedadīpikā* on Caraka, *Siddhisthāna* 12.41–44

3. लक्षणपरीक्षा · Testing the definitions

3.1 Three sources of doubt

The Nyāyasūtra gives the classic definition and lists the sources of doubt:

> समानानेकधर्मोपपत्तेर्विप्रतिपत्तेरुपलब्ध्यनुपलब्ध्यव्यवस्थातश्च विशेषापेक्षो विमर्शः संशयः
>
> "Doubt is a deliberation (*vimarśa*) that requires a distinguishing feature, arising from the presence of a common property or of a unique property, from conflicting views, and from the irregularity of perception and of non-perception."
>
> *Nyāyasūtra of Gautama* 1.1.23

Authority	Example	Source of doubt	Kind of question
Kauṭilya	Which enemy to attack?	Two courses, each with reasons for and against	**Practical**: what should be done?
Suśruta	Palm injury kills; hand amputation does not	Two observations that seem to conflict	**Explanatory**: why is it so?
Caraka	Parents, nature, another's making, chance?	Conflicting views of authorities (*vipratipatti*)	**Theoretical**: which view is true?

Vātsyāyana's explanation of doubt from conflicting views fits Caraka's example exactly:

> व्याहतमेकार्थदर्शनं विप्रतिपत्तिः, व्याघातः — विरोधो ऽसहभाव इति। अस्त्यात्मेत्येकं दर्शनम्, नास्त्यात्मेत्यपरम्, न च सद्भावासद्भावौ सहैकत्र सम्भवतः, न चान्यतरसाधको हेतुरुपलभ्यते, तत्र तत्त्वानवधारणं संशय इति।
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> "Conflict (*vipratipatti*) is the seeing of contradictory views about one matter; contradiction is incompatibility. 'The self exists' is one view, 'the self does not exist' another; existence and non-existence cannot both hold of one thing, and no reason establishing either is found; the non-determination of the truth there is doubt."
>
> *Nyāyasūtra of Gautama* 1.1.23 (vatsyayana)

3.2 Cakrapāṇi's "desire for a distinguishing feature"

Cakrapāṇi's definition takes over the Nyāya element *viśeṣāpekṣā* — the requirement of a distinguishing feature — and makes it a desire (*viśeṣākāṅkṣā*). This is the most important part of the definition for a tantrayukti. A doubt in a śāstra is not confusion; it is a question that knows what kind of answer it needs. Vātsyāyana's classic illustration makes the point: seeing in the dusk something tall and broad, one asks "post or man?" and looks for the feature — movement, a head — that will decide.

3.3 Suśruta's doubt and its resolution

Suśruta's example is a genuine anatomical puzzle. A wound to a small spot in the centre of the palm is fatal; yet a hand or foot can be cut off entirely and the person survives. The reasons on both sides are observations, and they seem to contradict the principle that a greater injury is more dangerous than a smaller one. Suśruta resolves the doubt in his chapter on vital points:

> च्छिन्नेषु पाणिचरणेषु सिरा नराणां सङ्कोचमीयुरसृगल्पमतो निरेति ॥ प्राप्यामितव्यसनमुग्रमतो मनुष्याः संच्छिन्नशाखतरुवन्निधनं न यान्ति ॥
>
> "… when hands and feet are cut off, the vessels of men contract, and so little blood flows out. Hence, though they meet with great and severe calamity, men do not die — like trees whose branches are cut."
>
> Suśruta, *Śārīrasthāna* 6.31

> क्षिप्रेषु तत्र सतलेषु हतेषु रक्तं गच्छत्यतीव पवनश्च रुजं करोति ॥ एवं विनाशमुपयान्ति हि तत्र विद्धा वृक्षा इवायुधविघातनिकृत्तमूलाः ॥
>
> "But when the *kṣipra* and *talahṛdaya* points are struck, blood flows out in excess and vāta produces pain. Thus those who are wounded there perish, like trees whose roots are severed by a weapon."
>
> Suśruta, *Śārīrasthāna* 6.32

The first verse begins mid-word in the e-text (*cchinneṣu*), the preceding syllable having been joined to the previous verse.

The resolution has exactly the form Cakrapāṇi's definition anticipates: a distinguishing feature (contraction of the vessels versus profuse bleeding with pain) decides between the two alternatives. And it is reached by a mechanism, illustrated by the double image of a tree that loses a branch and a tree that loses its root.

3.4 Kauṭilya's doubt and its two resolutions

Kauṭilya's example is the opening of a debate in his seventh book. The teachers state the doubt and resolve it one way; Kauṭilya resolves it the other way:

> क्षीणलुब्धप्रकृतिमपचरितप्रकृतिं वेति क्षीणलुब्धप्रकृतिं यायात्, क्षीणलुब्धा हि प्रकृतयः सुखेनोपजापं पीडां वोपगच्छन्ति, नापचरिताः प्रधानावग्रहसाध्याः" इत्याचार्याः ॥
>
> नेति कौटिल्यः ॥
>
> क्षीणलुब्धा हि प्रकृतयो भर्तरि स्निग्धा भर्तृहिते तिष्ठन्ति, उपजापं वा विसंवादयन्ति, अनुरागे सार्वगुण्यमिति ॥
>
> "'(Of an enemy) whose subjects are impoverished and greedy, and one whose subjects have been wronged — one should march against the one whose subjects are impoverished and greedy; for impoverished and greedy subjects readily yield to instigation or harassment, whereas the wronged are to be won only by suppressing their leaders,' say the teachers. 'No,' says Kauṭilya. 'For impoverished and greedy subjects, being attached to their master, stand by their master's good, or frustrate instigation; in loyalty lies every excellence.'"
>
> Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra* 7.5.12–14

Both resolutions accept the doubt as genuine — reasons on both sides — and both seek the distinguishing feature. The teachers find it in the susceptibility of greedy subjects to bribery; Kauṭilya in the loyalty of subjects who, however poor, have not been wronged. A saṃśaya well stated allows the dispute to be about the right thing.

3.5 Caraka's doubt and its resolution

Caraka's example comes from his chapter on the three desires (Sūtrasthāna 11), where the question is whether there is rebirth. He states the doubt and its sources plainly — some rely on perception alone and deny what they cannot see; others accept rebirth on the authority of tradition; and the authorities differ on the cause of birth — and then resolves it by the fourfold examination: testimony, perception, inference and *yukti*. In his rules of debate he gives a second definition and a medical example:

> अथ संशयः---संशयो नाम *सन्देहलक्षणानुसन्दिग्धेष्वर्थेष्वनिश्चयः; यथा---दृष्टा ह्यायुष्मल्लक्षणैरुपेताश्चानुपेताश्च तथा सक्रियाश्चाक्रियाश्च पुरुषाः शीघ्रभङ्गाश्चिरजीविनश्च, एतदुभयदृष्टत्वात् संशयः---किमस्ति खल्वकालमृत्युरुत नास्तीति ॥
>
> "Now doubt. Doubt is non-determination regarding matters made doubtful by the marks of doubt. For example: persons are seen with and without the marks of long life, with and without proper care; some perish quickly, others live long. Because both are seen, there is doubt: is there untimely death, or not?"
>
> Caraka, *Vimānasthāna* 8.43

4. पूर्वपक्षः खण्डनं मण्डनं च · Objections and replies

4.1 Is doubt not a defect in a teacher?

> ननु आचार्यः निश्चितज्ञः भवति। तस्य ग्रन्थे संशयवचनं तस्य एव अज्ञानं सूचयति, शिष्यं च भ्रमयति। अतः संशयः तन्त्रदोषः, न युक्तिः इति चेत्, न। आचार्यस्य संशयः न स्वकीयः, किन्तु विषयस्य — "उभयतोहेतुमान् अर्थः" इति अर्थे संशयहेतुः, न वक्तरि। आचार्यः तं प्रकाशयति, ततः निर्णयं ददाति। यदि संशयं विना निर्णयः एव उच्येत, तर्हि शिष्यः "किमर्थम् अयं निर्णयः, किं विरुद्धम्" इति न जानीयात्, विपरीतदर्शने च मुह्येत्। सुश्रुतः "पाणिच्छेदने न मरणम्" इति विरोधिदर्शनं पूर्वम् एव उपन्यस्य समाधत्ते, येन शिष्यः तत् दृष्ट्वा न सन्दिह्यति। अतः संशयवचनं शिष्यस्य रक्षा।
>
> **Objection:** a teacher has settled knowledge. A statement of doubt in his text shows his own ignorance and confuses the pupil. So doubt is a defect of a text, not a device. **Reply:** No. The teacher's doubt is not his own but belongs to the subject: "a matter with reasons on both sides" — the cause of doubt is in the matter, not in the speaker. The teacher brings it to light and then gives the decision. If the decision alone were stated without the doubt, the pupil would not know why it is the decision or what it opposes, and would be bewildered when he met the contrary case. Suśruta sets out the contrary observation — "there is no death when a hand is cut off" — in advance, and resolves it, so that the pupil, when he sees it, is not thrown into doubt. Stating the doubt protects the pupil.
>
> Śaṅkā–samādhāna composed for this article.

4.2 Is doubt not merely the absence of knowledge?

ननु संशयः अज्ञानम् एव — अनिश्चयः। अभावरूपं च कथं युक्तिः स्यात्, कथं वा शास्त्रस्य अङ्गम् इति चेत्, न। अज्ञानं द्विविधम् — अनुपलब्धिः, विमर्शः च। यः विषयं न जानाति सः न सन्दिह्यति; संशयः तु ज्ञानम् एव — उभयकोटिस्पर्शि, विशेषाकाङ्क्षि। तत्र कोटिद्वयं ज्ञातं, हेतवः ज्ञाताः, केवलं निर्णायकः विशेषः अज्ञातः। "नानुपलब्धे न निर्णीते ऽर्थे न्यायः प्रवर्तते, किं तर्हि संशयिते" — अतः संशयः ज्ञानस्य अभावः न, किन्तु ज्ञानस्य प्रवृत्तिस्थानम्। चक्रपाणिः "ज्ञानम्" इति एव लक्षणे वदति।

Objection: doubt is simply ignorance — non-determination. How can something negative be a device, or a part of a śāstra? **Reply:** No. Ignorance is of two kinds: non-apprehension, and deliberation. One who does not know a subject at all does not doubt about it. Doubt is itself a cognition: it touches both alternatives and seeks the distinguishing feature. In it the two alternatives are known, the reasons for each are known; only the deciding feature is unknown. "Reasoning operates neither on what is unknown nor on what is settled, but on what is doubted." So doubt is not the absence of knowledge but the place where knowledge begins to move. Cakrapāṇi's definition says "knowledge" (*jñānam*) in so many words.

Śaṅkā–samādhāna composed for this article.

4.3 Can everything not be doubted?

ननु यदि उभयहेतुदर्शनमात्रेण संशयः, तर्हि सर्वत्र संशयः — कस्यचित् अपि अर्थस्य विपरीतः हेतुः कल्पयितुं शक्यते। "तथात्यन्तसंशयस्तद्धर्मसातत्योपपत्तेः" इति न्यायसूत्रे अपि पूर्वपक्षः। अतः शास्त्रं निर्णयं न प्राप्नुयात् इति चेत्, न। "हेतुमान्" इति लक्षणपदं — न कल्पितः हेतुः, किन्तु उपलब्धः। सुश्रुतस्य द्वौ अपि हेतू प्रत्यक्षदृष्टौ, चरकस्य मतानि वस्तुतः वर्तमानानि। किञ्च विशेषाकाङ्क्षा संशयस्य सीमा — यत्र विशेषः उपलब्धः तत्र संशयः निवर्तते। संशयः स्वनिवृत्तये प्रवर्तते, न स्वस्थितये। अतः शास्त्रीयः संशयः सहेतुकः सावधिकः च।

Objection: if doubt arises merely from seeing reasons on both sides, there would be doubt everywhere — a contrary reason can be imagined for any matter. The Nyāyasūtra itself states the prima facie view of endless doubt. So a śāstra would never reach a decision. **Reply:** No. The definition says *"having* reasons" — not imagined reasons, but reasons actually found. Both of Suśruta's reasons are observed; Caraka's views are actually held. Moreover, the desire for a distinguishing feature is the boundary of doubt: where the feature is found, the doubt ceases. Doubt operates for its own removal, not for its own continuance. A doubt in a śāstra is grounded and bounded.

Śaṅkā–samādhāna composed for this article.

5. सिद्धान्तः · The settled view

> एकस्मिन् अर्थे उपलब्धहेतुकयोः विरुद्धयोः कोट्योः उपन्यासः, निर्णायकस्य विशेषस्य आकाङ्क्षया सह, यः शास्त्रे निर्णयस्य पूर्वम् उपस्थाप्यते, सः संशयः।
>
> "Saṃśaya is the setting out, in a śāstra and before its decision, of two contrary alternatives about one matter, each with reasons actually found, together with the desire for the feature that will decide between them."
>
> Definition composed for this article.

The definition contains the four elements of a good research question: one matter, two (or more) alternatives, actual evidence for each, and the criterion that would decide. "Before its decision" records that in a śāstra the doubt is set out in order to be resolved.

6. आधुनिकसंवादः · The modern counterpart

Classical form	Modern counterpart
Saṃśaya as the start of reasoning	The **research question** and the **problem statement**
Kauṭilya: two courses of action	Decision problems; comparative policy questions ("intervention A or B?")
Suśruta: conflicting observations	An **anomaly** or paradox in data that calls for explanation
Caraka: conflicting views	A **controversy** in the literature; competing hypotheses
Viśeṣākāṅkṣā: desire for the deciding feature	The **discriminating test** or **critical experiment**; the variable that separates hypotheses

A good research proposal does what Suśruta does: it states the apparent contradiction, shows that both sides are grounded in evidence, and names what would decide. A research question without reasons on both sides is not a question but an assertion awaiting confirmation.

7. प्रयोगाः · Uses

7.1 In research

Formulate the research question as a saṃśaya: state the alternatives, the evidence for each, and the feature or test that will decide. Identify which of the three sources the doubt comes from — a practical choice, conflicting observations, or conflicting views — for each calls for a different method: decision analysis, mechanistic investigation, or critical review.

7.2 In teaching

Begin a topic with a doubt rather than a statement. Present Suśruta's puzzle — why does a palm wound kill when an amputation does not? — and let students propose distinguishing features before reading his answer. A doubt held for a while makes the resolution memorable.

7.3 In daily life

When torn between two choices, write down the reasons on each side and ask what single fact would decide. Often the doubt dissolves when the deciding feature is named, and when it does not, one at least knows what to find out.

8. अभ्यासः · Exercise

1. Write your current research question as a saṃśaya: one matter, two alternatives, evidence for each, and the deciding feature.
2. Read Caraka, Sūtrasthāna 11 on rebirth. Identify the doubt, the sources of the doubt, and the means by which Caraka resolves it.
3. Find a paradox or anomaly in your own field like Suśruta's, and propose a distinguishing feature that would resolve it.

9. उपसंहारः · Conclusion

Saṃśaya is the research question of a śāstra. Kauṭilya's doubt is a choice between courses of action, Suśruta's a conflict between observations, Caraka's a conflict between views; Cakrapāṇi's definition adds the essential element, the desire for a deciding feature, and Suśruta's own resolution of his anatomical puzzle shows that feature found. Doubt in a text is not the teacher's ignorance but the subject's difficulty brought to light; it is not mere absence of knowledge but knowledge in motion; and it is not endless, because it is grounded in actual reasons and bounded by its own resolution.

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