

THEORY OF ABHAVA OR NON-EXISTENCE IN NYAYA-VAISESIKA

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The two orthodox systems-Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika have a very significant place in Indian Philosophy. It was Gautama who propounded the Nyāya system. His Nyāyasūtra is the basic text in this system. Gautama revealed a systematic and critical way of analysing the world, by which one can find out the reality of each and every thing. The word 'Nyāya' means 'Right judgement' or 'True reasoning'. In order to make a right judgement he gave a prominent place to the Pramāṇa-the means of right knowledge.

The Vaiśeṣika system was founded by sage Kaṇāda. He wrote the Vaiśeṣikasūtra which gave a foundation to this system. It is called Vaiśeṣika due to its acceptance of the viśeṣa as a specific category. Kaṇāda was the first person who introduced the atomic theory to the world. The Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika have many similarities in their concepts. Salvation is the highest aim of these two systems. Gautama revealed sixteen categories viz -Pramāṇa, Prameya, Saṁśaya, Prayojana, Dṛṣṭānta, Siddhānta, Avayava, Tarka, Nirṇaya, Vāda, Jalpa, Vitaṇḍā, Hetvābhāsa, Chala, Jāti, Nigrahasthāna.¹ But Kaṇāda classified the categories in to six viz-Dravya, Guṇa, Karma, Sāmānya, Viśeṣa and Samavāya.² The real knowledge of these categories is the only way to attain Mokṣa.

Though Kaṇāda explained only six categories, there is the presence of a seventh category viz Abhāva, in the works written in later periods. And almost all the works written after that period deal with seven categories. After about 900AD most of the works

in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika were written but with an incorporation of the theories of these two systems. Tarkasaṅgraha of Annambhaṭṭa, Nyāyasiddhāntamuktāvalī of Viśvanātha etc are the examples of this incorporation of the theories of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika.

In this paper I would like to explain, the necessity of accepting Abhāva as a separate category, who was the first person introduced it as a Padārtha, and the definition and division of Abhāva.

Characteristics of a Padārtha

It was explained that Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika have their own separate Padārthas. But what is meant by the word 'Padārtha'? As a matter of fact these two systems have given more importance to make a clear definition of each and every term, the term Padārtha also has to be defined. The term literally means the meaning of a word 'Padasya arthaḥ Padārthaḥ'³ that generally means a thing or real entity.

In the Dīpikā commentary of Tarkasaṅgraha 'Abhidheyatva'⁴ is said to be the common characteristic of a Padārtha. More clearly it can be said that a Padārtha is that which has reality (astitva), knowability (prameyatva), and expressibility (abhidheyatva through language).⁵ So the first requirement of anything being a padārtha is that it should be real or factual and not fictional like a sky-flower. The second requirement is that it should be capable of being known. Anything which is unknowable cannot be regarded as a padārtha. Lastly the knowledge of every padārtha is amenable to linguistic expression.

The term Padārtha is used in the sense of reality according to Naiyāyikas. Whatever can be spoken of is an entity or reality and that can be either negative or positive. Just as the object of an affirmative judgement is a positive entity the object of a negative judgement is a negative entity.

Acceptance of Abhāva as a Padārtha

In the Vaiśeṣikaśāstra sage Kaṇāda has explained only six categories as previously mentioned. The seventh category named Abhāva was a later addition. Scholars have different opinion about its first introduction to be a padārtha. The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy of Karl. H. Potter (volume II, p-143) explains that it was Chandramati who recognized Abhāva as a Padārtha, who lived about in the 1st half of the 5th century A.D. Chandramati in 'Daśapadārthaśāstra' not only enumerates the Abhāva but also admits its five varieties. Those five varieties are prior negation (Prāgabhāva), Posterior negation (Pradhvamsābhāva), Mutual negation (Anyonyābhāva), Relational negation (Samsargābhāva) and Absolute negation (atyantābhāva). In the later works like Bhāṣāpariccheda, we find that the negation is primarily divided into two, Relational negation and Mutual negation.⁶

According to Dr. Prahladachar, Abhāva was accepted as a separate padārtha around 1000 A.D. He says that the clearest indication of the decision to add a totally new padārtha, that is Abhāva to the earliest six mentioned by Kaṇāda seems to have been taken by Śivāditya who entitles his work specifically as 'Saptapadārthī'.⁷ He is believed to have lived about 1150 A.D, but some scholars date him earlier than this. According to Dr. Prahladachar, whatever be the differences and dispute about the dating of Sivaditya, there can be no doubt that only after him Abhāva was regularly accepted with an ontological status as the other six padārthas of Kaṇāda in the Vaiśeṣika system. Udayanācārya also has talked of Abhāva as a padārtha in his Kiraṇāvalī (11th A.D) Udayana explains reality in Lakṣaṇāvalī that which is nameable and it is two-fold-Existence (bhāva) and non-existence (abhāva). Some philosophers say that it was Udayana who gave a new turn to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika development by postulating the reality of negation. They believe that negation probably received recognition after Udayana.

Reasons for accepting Abhāva as a Padārtha

Abhāva is considered as a Padārtha because it possesses the characteristics of a Padārtha. It is not unreal like a horse horn, or a sky flower, but a negative reality.

There were many reasons for accepting Abhāva as Padārtha. The following are the main reasons-Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika accept salvation as the highest aim. The nature of salvation is explained as the complete cessation of sufferings⁸ (Tadatyantavimokṣo apavargaḥ). So unless there is ātyantikaduḥkhadhvamsa, salvation is not possible. The concept of salvation thus pre-supposes complete cessation of Duḥkha. Being the highest aim, salvation can be explained successfully only by accepting Abhāva as a Padārtha. So this might be considered as the true reason for accepting Abhāva as Padārtha.

Likewise in the theory of Anumāna Abhāva has a significant role. Most of the definitions of vyāpti are negative in nature. All the five definitions of vyāpti in vyāptipañcaka contain the term Abhāva. (Sādhyābhāvavadavṛttitvam, bhāvavadavṛttitvam, Sakalasādhyā sādhyava dpratiyogikānyonyabhāvasāmānādhikaraṇam, sakalasādhyābhāvavanni -

iṣṭhābhāvapratyogitvam, Sādhyavadanyavṛttitvamvāke valānvayin-yabhāvāt.) Thus the role of Abhāva is thus much, that without understanding the abhāva properly one cannot get a clear idea of the definition of vyāpti given in the vyāptipañcaka.

Another reason for the acceptance of abhāva as a Padārtha was the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of Asatkāryavāda. This theory refuses the pre-existence of the effect in the cause. The effect means a new production. As the theory explains that the effect is a new production from its cause it is clear that before the production, the effect was absent. Hence there is the necessity of explaining the

absence of the effect before its production, which is capable only by receiving the Abhāva as a padārtha. The production of the effect presupposes its prior non-existence. Had been there no prior non-existence of the effect before its production, we could not have talked of the beginning of the production. So in order to explain the asatkāryavāda Abhāva is necessary.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika declare that the worldly objects are produced out of different ultimate elements. These elements are different from one another. Both systems recognize reality as multiple. Different objects are produced out of different reasons and not from one reason. So in order to explain the plurality of the things it is necessary to accept the abhava. Because if things are multiple in their existence they must have a mutual difference or mutual absence. Thus without accepting Abhāva as a distinct category it is impossible to explain the pluralistic approach of the reality.

Definition of Abhāva

It is well known that the concept of Abhāva was a later addition. Chandramati, Śivāditya and Udayana are considered as scholars who introduced Abhāva as a category at first, by different scholars. Udayana in his Kiraṇāvalī tried to agree that although absence had not been mentioned by Kaṇāda or Praśastapāda, it is nevertheless so approved by them implicitly. In the Vaiśeṣikasūtra asat is taken as opposite of sat i.e. bhāva. Asat may be defined as the opposite of positive reality. The existence becomes non-existent. It is proved by Perception and Inference that an existent product such as water pot after the operation of a hammer and, which destroys it, is now non-existent, in like manner as it is proved by perception and inference that an effect is previous to the operation of its cause, non-existent.

Śivāditya in his Saptapadārthī has given a definition of Abhāva from the epistemological standpoint i.e. 'Pratīyogijñānādhiṅa jñānaḥ abhāvaḥ'⁹-Abhāva is what depends upon the awareness of the object contrasted by it for its determination. In the Siddhāntamuktāvalī Viśvanātha has explained abhāva as a padārtha or a property of one which certifies a mutual exclusion of the six categories such as substance etc.

Viśvanātha in his Muktāvalī has classified the Abhāva into two-Samsargābhava or Non-existence of relationship and Anyonyābhāva or Mutual Non-existence.¹⁰ The Non-existence of relationship is divided into three viz. Prāgabhāva (prior non-existence), Pradhvamsābhāva (posterior nonexistence), Atyantābhāva (absolute non-existence). The non existence of relationship is that non-existence which is different from mutual non-existence.

The mutual non-existence is that non-existence the counterpositiveness (pratīyogitva) of which is determined by the relation of identity. (Tādātmyasambandhāvaccinnapratīyogitāka).

Prāgabhāva

'Anādiḥ Sāntaḥ Prāgabhāvaḥ'¹¹ it is the nonexistence of an effect in its material cause before its production. eg. Non-existence of the cloth in the threads before its production. It does not have beginning but has an end. It is brought to an end when the cloth comes into existence.

Pradhvamsābhāva

Posterior Non-existence is with a beginning but without an end-Sādiḥ anantaḥ pradhvamsābhāva.¹² It occurs after the production of an effect. It is produced by the destruction of an effect but can never be destroyed.

Atyantābhāva

The absolute non-existence is the absence of a relation between two things in the past, present, and future. There is absolute non-existence of the genus of water in the earth. It is neither produced nor destroyed. It is eternal in nature. Traikālika samsargāvacchinnapratiyogitāko atyantābhāva.¹³

CONCLUSION

Abhāva as mentioned above is very important in the systems of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. Because most of the theories in these two systems are explained with the term Abhāva. Knowledge of the same is very essential for the proper understanding of the theories of these systems. These systems have done a deep study about it and we can't get such a deep knowledge of Abhāva from any other system of Indian Philosophy except Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. About the First introduction of the Abhāva as a padārtha, it seems that it was Chandramati who lived about 5th A.D. Because the other scholars like Śivāditya and Udayanācārya are believed to have lived about 11th or 12th A.D. Though the Abhāva was used widely as a padārtha in the Navya Nyāya period, the reasons by which they accepted it as a padārtha remain in the theories of the prācīna Nyāya also. As a matter of fact that the Abhāva is negative in nature, it is not able to include in the bhāva padārthas. So that also was a significant reason for the acceptance of the abhāva. Though the mīmāṃsā and Vedānta etc had taken it as a Pramāṇa, its status of Pramāṇa is not agreed by the scholars of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. So the theory of Abhāva is a great contribution to the Indian Philosophy by the scholars of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika.

Notes

1. Nyāyasūtra, 1.1.1
2. Vaiśeṣikasūtra, 1.1.3
3. Tarkasaṅgraha Dīpikā, p. 7
4. Ibid, p. 7
5. The Navya Nyāya Logic, p. 4
6. Bhāṣāpariccheda, verse, 12,13
7. History of science, philosophy and culture in Indian Civilization, vol. x, part I, p.127.
8. Nyāyasūtra, 1.1.22
9. Saptapadārthī, p. 40
10. Siddhāntamuktāvalī, verse 12.
11. Tarkasaṅgraha, p. 222, published B.V.S, 2002.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, p. 224.

Reference

1. The Navya-Nyāya Logic, Vibha Gaur, Published B.V.P, 1990.
2. Indian philosophy, Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, Oxford University Press, 1999.
3. Nyāyasūtra of Gautama, Ganga Nath Jha, Motilal Banarsidas Delhi, 1984.
4. Outlines of Indian Philosophy, M. Hiriyanna, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1994.
5. A Critical survey of Indian Philosophy, Chandradar sharma, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, 1997.
6. Siddhāntamuktāvalī, Sri Viśvanātha Pañcānana, Krishnadas Academy, Varanasi, 1998.