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Abhava and its testimony: An analysis on the special viewpoint of Mimamsa and Vaisheshika School

Tanmay Kr sing *

Department of Sanskrit, Egra Sarada Shashi Bhusan College, Egra, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal.

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Abstract

According to all the philosophical systems of India, Liberation is the ultimate goal of livelihood. Liberation means 'Moksha'. Among the four Purusharthas 'Moksha' is considered as 'Param Purushartha'. And for attaining the Liberation knowledge is the only way. It is the key issue related to life and the world. Here the 'knowledge' means completely understanding a subject or in philosophical terms, it's 'Padartha'. Padartha literally means 'the meaning of a word' or 'the object signified by a word'. By this one can able to distinguish between real and unreal, temporary and permanent, good and bad etc. Padhartha is the subject of knowledge. Knowledge is never absolute, knowledge is always subjective and without a subject, there is no knowledge. In Indian philosophy especially in Nyaya- Vaisheshika School, there are two types of substance, one is Existing Substance (Bhava) and another is Non-existing Substance (Abhava). According to Indian Philosophy; just as a Bhava Padhartha, Abhava is also a matter of knowledge. e.g. 'There is a pot in the room'- this is how we get the knowledge of a substance, in the same way 'There is no pot in the room' thus we get the knowledge of a non-existing object. Therefore, like the Bhava Padartha, the Abhava Padartha is also knowledgeable. But the question is how makes it possible to attain the knowledge of a non-existing object? In this research paper, I want to explore the relatively firm testimony of non-existing substances.

Keywords: Padartha; Abhava Padartha; Nyaya- Vaisesika School; Mimamsa School.

1. Introduction

The word philosophy comes from two Greek words 'Philos' and 'Sophia'. Which means 'love of wisdom'[1]. It means to indulge the desire for knowledge. But in Indian Philosophy this knowledge is not only the affection, it is the knowledge of truth, the valid theory of truth. The truth that lies in the whole world, from where everything of this world originates Indian philosophy wants to know, realize and establish that absolute truth in living being [2]. Indian sage realized that only the actual knowledge of this cosmology can lead the living being to the supreme Purushartha. Hence, since the Vedic period Indian sages have taken a vow to explain the theory of the world, which flowed into later Indian philosophical communities. It should be noted here that Indian philosophy is classified into two schools, Orthodox and Heterodox.[3] But they all interpreted the world from their own perspectives and mentioned different paths of liberation. Some says, one can attain liberation through the practice of the Eightfold path or Astangikamarg[4], some says the knowledge of Triratna is necessary for liberation,[5] in this regard some says conscience, some says vedic yajna, some says niskamkamra, someone else says that the undifferentiated knowledge of Jiba and Brahman is liberation.[6] Among these theories of liberation, the theory of 'Padartha' is very important. Because the complete knowledge of the world is easily available here. Here the term 'Padartha' is derived from two words "Pada" and "Artha". It stands for the meaning or referent. Therefore etymologically the term Padārtha means "the meaning or referent of words [7]. So, whatever is the subject of knowledge that is Padartha. All objects of knowledge or all real come under padartha. Among

*Corresponding author: Tanmay kr sing

Indian philosophies, a very large discussion of Padartha can be found in the Nyaya-Vaisheshika school, especially in the Vaisheshika school.

According to Maharshi Gautama, salvation can be attained by the true knowledge of the Padarthas. Similarly to the Vaisheshika School, all things which exist, which can be cognized, and which can be designated are padarthas[8]. The Vaisheshika used the term “padartha” for categories. Padartha means an object which can be thought (Jneya) and named (abhidheya). For example, if we say that there is a book on the table, then we know the existence of a book on the table. This is an example of an existential knowledge subject. But when say that, there is no book on the table, then also we gain a kind of knowledge even though there is no book on the table. This is called the knowledge of a non-real object. But it producing knowledge. Therefore, the Vaisheshika School divides Padartha (Categories) into two titles, one is Bhava (existence) and another is Abhava (non-existence) [9]. Abhava or no-existence is the real category and it is also capable of producing knowledge. Originally the Vaisheshika believed in the six categories and the seventh that of negation was added later on. Though Kanada himself speaks of abhava, he does not give it the status of a category to which it was raised only by the later Vaisheshikas. Because they think that, to the establishment of realism we must be acknowledged Bhava padartha along with Abhava.

2. Knowledge of non-existing substances in different philosophical schools

Some Indian philosophical schools recognize ‘Abhava’ as an existing substance. Here now it is necessary to mention the views of various philosophical schools about non-existence.

2.1. Knowledge of non-existing substances in nyaya-vaisheshika view

According to the Vaisheshika system, all objects of valid knowledge come under seven categories.

These are:

- Substance (Dravya)
- Quality (Guna)
- Action (Karma)
- Generality (Sāmānya)
- Particularly (Vaiśeṣa)
- Inherence (Samavāya)
- Non-existence (abhāva)

Kanada did not mention abhava separately because abhava depends on bhava (existence). That means non-existence depends on existence for its knowledge and therefore, there is no need to state abhava separately[6]. But the later Nyaya-vaisheshika writers adopt the seven categories of the Vaisheshikas. The Vaisheshikas upholds that non-existence, like existence, is perceivable. Non-existence is the absence of an object. For example, no one can deny the absence of the sun on the dark-cloud of a rainy day. Hence, it is a necessary category in the Vaisheshikas system. According to some of the Vaisheshikas scholars, they said that abhava is an independent category or is an independent padartha as like dravya, guna and so on and so forth. Because abhava also satisfies the three features. Those are jnatva, abhidhetva, and astitva. It has its own identity and further, it can be knowable. We can know about it, we can think about it. For example, if I say that there is no tree in front of Ram’s house, now the non-existence of a tree in front of Ram’s house is understood by each and every one. The negation over here stands as existence for our understanding. From this sentence, we have understood that there is a person living in a particular house, the person's name is Ram and in front of his house, there is no tree. Also, we realize the non-existence of food in our stomachs, when we are hungry. When we see a hairless man, we count his absence of hair. Though they are negative instances, from these examples, we can get the knowledge of negation easily [10].

2.2. Knowledge of non-existing substances in Bhatta-mimansa view

Like the Nyaya-Vaisheshika, Bhatta-mimansa schools also cognized Abhava as an existing substance like Bhava. Vedantists Kumaril Bhatta admits different sources of knowledge. According to him, when we say that ‘There is no jar cloth’ then we are aware of the absence of cloth. Here a kind of knowledge arises despite the absence of cloth. We see the empty space and think of the absence of cloth[11]. Therefore, the absence of an object is also capable of imparting knowledge and he says the Non-apprehension is the pramana of Abhava. He divided Padartha into five titles, which are Dravya, Guna, Karma, Samanya, and Abhava.

3. Different testimony of negation

Now the question is what is the Pramana through which one can understand the non-existence of existence in a particular place?

3.1. Nyaya-Vaisheshika view

Nyaya-Vaisheshika said non-existence is a matter of perception and it is not an ordinary perception as we perceive pens, tables, chairs, trees, birds, leaves, so and so forth. They say that this perception is a special kind of perception. It is a matter of qualified perception which is known through specific sense-object contact termed as visesya-visesana-bhava. According to Nyaya-Vaisheshika, the absence can be cognized through 'visesa-visesana-bhava-sannikarsa'. Here visesa stands for particularity. That means to understand the particular absence in a particular place of having a particular time; it is a qualified perception of that object which may present in some other place in some other form. So, in this way, we can understand the absence of a particular object [12].

In the case of Inference, they said that we can infer the non-existence of things. For example, a man may be sitting in a place where there were no tigers, but he might not then be aware of their non-existence at the time, since he did not think of them, but when later on he is asked in the evening if there were any tigers at the place where he was sitting in the morning, he then thinks and becomes aware of the non-existence of tigers there in the morning, even without perceiving the place and without any operation of the memory of the non-existence of tigers. There is no question of there being any inference in the rise of our notion of non-existence.

3.2. Mimamsa view

The Advaita Vedantins and the Mimamsaka school of Kumarila Bhatta accept Anupalabdhi (Non-Apprehension) as an independent source of knowledge.[13] A general epistemological notion of the Bhatta Mimamsakas regarding negation is that there is some reality known as Abhava and there is a way to ascertain it which is known as Anupalabdhi. It literally means non-apprehension. He told that the non-existence of a thing cannot be perceived by the senses could come into contact in order to perceive the non-existence. For example, if I say that there is no pen on the table. That means I know that there is some object known as a pen and it exists elsewhere. Therefore, the absence of that same pen we find on the table and this absence cannot be reduced to any other Pramanas, according to Mimamsikas philosophy because here it cannot be perceived because once we say that the absence of that pen on the table. We cannot see that there is no pen on this table. What you see is an empty space, we cannot see the cognition of the absence of that pen neither it can be inferred.

For having an inference, we need a vyapti relation but here to cognize the absence of a particular object at a particular place in a particular time. All the time we may not find a vyapti relation, therefore according to Mimamsikas, the absence of cognition can be identified or recognized with the help of the pramana Anupalabdhi. So, this is stated by Purva-Mimamsikas and Advaita Vedantins.

4. Conclusion

So, as we can see that there are three types of testimony of the negation, they are perception, inference, and non-apprehension. From all of those, I want to explore the correct testimony by which we can get a definite idea of negation.

Beside the Nyaya-Vaisheshika, there is only one other school that of the Bhatta Mimamsakas, which accepts the reality of non-existence. They say that non-existence of a thing can only be perceived by one pramana namely anupalabdhi. By not seeing a jar in a place one knows that it is not there. They use this method of knowledge for evident statements like 'There is no teacher in the classroom', 'There is no sound here', 'This flower has no fragrance etc. It may seem paradoxical that non-apprehension of a thing is a means to the apprehension of its non-existence (abhava). But in fact, both non-perception, as well as perception, serve as a means to get various knowledge, for the simple reason that the knower is conscious of both. They lead to a positive and negative experiences. Knowledge of the non-existence of a thing can be on the basis of direct or indirect knowledge. It could either be on the basis of our immediate non-perception of a thing or even on the basis of inference or verbal testimony.

Compliance with ethical standards

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There are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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