

Chapter-7

Samavāya and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of Causation

The theory of causation is the crux of every school of Indian philosophy. The conception of reality of each school is based on its approach to the problem how objects are brought into existence. We propose to examine the nature of the various theories of causation held by different philosophical systems. It will give clue to their metaphysical structure.

The most natural theory of causation conforming to common sense is that of change. An object, under certain conditions, changes into another form. The previous condition of the object is the cause, and the latter condition is the effect. For instance, threads change into the form of a cloth. To take complex examples, milk changes into curd, or a seed changes into a sprout. In these cases, there may be other factors contributing to the essence of the effect, e.g., in the case of a sprout, earth, water, etc., besides the seed, contribute to the essence of the sprout. They are regarded as accessories. Besides, there are factors like the farmer, implements, etc., which, though not contributing in any way to the essence of the effect, constitute the conditions under which the change takes place. They are called efficient or instrumental causes *nimitta-kāraṇas* as against the former which are the material causes (*upādāna-kāraṇas*). We are mainly concerned here with the material cause which provides the essence of the effect.

According to the Sāṃkhya-school, causation means change from one condition to another. The theory is known *parināma-vāda*. The question arises whether an effect, whose essence is wholly

drawn from its cause, is a new reality or only the cause-essence manifested in a different form. The Sāṃkhya takes up the latter view and declares that the effect already exists in the form of its cause; it is not a new reality. The production of an effect means merely its manifestation from the unmanifested condition in which it already existed in the form of its cause. This is technically called the theory of the origination of the already existent effect or *sat-kārya-vāda*. The Sāṃkhya theory obviously diverges from the theory which holds an effect, like cloth, curd or sprout, to be a new emergent, i.e., a new reality which did not exist before. Does the view stand to logic? If an effect is merely the cause-stuff arranged in a different form to which not a bit of new reality has been added, how can it be regarded as something different from the cause? According to this view, nothing that exists can become non-existent, and nothing that is non-existent can become existent, or in other words, nothing can be added to or subtracted from the existent reality. That being so, an effect, according to the Sāṃkhya, cannot be a reality in any sense. The change from one condition to another (*parināma-vāda* or *vikāra-vāda*) inevitably leads to the Vedānta theory of *vivarta-vāda*, or unreal origination. Again the Sāṃkhya view, the Buddhist thinker Kamalaśīla had argued that the something cannot become otherwise, because becoming otherwise means the origination of a new nature: *svabhāvantarotpatti*.¹

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is pledged to realism, and advances a theory opposed to the Sāṃkhya theory. A newly originated effect, like cloth, curd or sprout brought into existence after much causal operation, cannot be held to be already existent. An effect, therefore, according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, is a new emergent which was non-existent before. This is the theory of origination of the non-existent-effect: *asatkārya-vāda* or *ārambha-vāda*.

It is Praśastapāda who formulated this theory in a clear cut and definite form. The theory was further developed in the works of Uddyotakara, Vācaspati Miśra, Jayanta and others. In Śrīdhara's *Nyāya-Kandalī*, the view was crystallized and carried to its logical conclusion.² The form in which the theory is found in such works as *Bhāṣāpariccheda* and *Tarka-Samgraha* indicates that development.

In the context of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of causation the salient features may be noted as under:

1. We take the example of threads being woven into the new entity called cloth. The new entity, i.e., the effect (cloth) appears in the form of a 'whole' (*avayavin*) made up of the parts (*avayava*), i.e., threads. As the emergent effect is a new entity, it follows that it was altogether non-existent before. The essence or the substance-stuff which constitutes the effect did not exist before its origination.

2. The new emergent 'whole' is not a mere aggregate (*samudaya*) of parts, but quite different from them; it is a new entity which has emerged as a result of the connections of parts. The fact that the effect, viz., the 'whole' (cloth) is different from the cause, viz., the parts (threads) means that the essence or stuff of the cloth is different from that of the threads. The cloth and the threads are two separate entities different in their essence, both of which exist side by side.

3. Obviously, the threads and the cloth do not appear to common sense as two separate independent entities. There is only one entity which was in the form of threads before the origination of cloth, and now the same appears in the form of cloth. Even if you look upon the cloth as threads, it is only one entity, call it cloth or threads. The obvious objection to the theory was met by the device

of *samavāya* relation obtaining between the two entities which appeared identical (e.g., the substance and its qualities, etc.), but which were held to be two separate entities. The effect, the 'whole' (cloth) is thus conceived as residing in its cause (i.e., the parts, namely, threads) by *samavāya* relation.

4. It follows that the material cause and the effect are always, according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory, in the form of 'parts' and the 'whole', and further, an effect (the 'whole') necessarily resides in its cause (the 'parts') by *samavāya* relation.

5. When a number of entities are connected, there appears a new entity which was non-existent before. It should be noted that a bundle of sticks is not a new entity; it is a mere aggregate or *samudāya mātra* of the sticks. The bundle is not a new entity or emergent called the 'whole' or *avayavin*. Nor is an army a new 'whole' produced by the soldiers as parts or a forest of many trees. There are mere aggregates. When, however, a number of threads are connected, an *avayavin* in the form of 'cloth' emerges.

6. The effect is produced in the form of an *avayavin* in the parts which are the material cause. The cause (threads) continues to exist even after the origination of its effect (cloth). In other words, the cloth is not produced *out* of the threads, but *in* the threads. The threads do not impart their essence to the cloth for the simple reason that the threads continue to exist *intact* side by side with the cloth.

Although the threads do not transfer their own essence to the cloth, the cloth when originated resides in the threads by *samavāya* relation. Threads are the cause of the cloth in the sense that they are the *condition precedent* to the origination of the cloth. The position is similar to the Buddhist theory of *pratityasamutpāda* in so

far as, according to both of them, a cause does not transfer its own essence to its effect. The only difference is that while, according to the Buddhist theory, the preceding cause-moment is totally annihilated before the origination of its effect, according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory, the cause continues its existence and holds its effect in itself.

The thread and the cloth are held by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika to be altogether two different entities, each having its separate essence-stuff and separate weight. A question was raised with regard to the difficulties in maintaining their separate weights. The question naturally arises: from where does the essence of an effect come? It could be that the essence of an effect arises of its own accord, or in other words, it comes as it were from the void. But as soon as an effect is originated, it resides in the cause by *samavāya* relation. In fact, its origination and residence in the *samavāyī-kāraṇa* come about at one and the same moment. The term for the material cause in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is *samavāyī-kāraṇa*, which means that a cause in which its effect resides by *samavāya* relation. The word *upādāna kāraṇa* (material cause) as a synonym of *samavāyī-kāraṇa* of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception is not quite appropriate, because the implication of *upādāna kāraṇa* is that it should impart its essence to its effect, as we find in the case of the Sāṃkhya view. For the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school an inherent cause is always in the form of parts (*avayavas*), while an effect is in the form of a 'whole' (*avayavin*). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school maintains against the Buddhist that a 'whole' is not merely an aggregate of its parts. A 'whole' (*avayavin*) emerges as residing in its parts by *samavāya sambandha*. This means that an effect is different in *essence* from its cause in which it resides by inherent relation as a separate entity. Cause and effect are not conceived by the Sāṃkhya as different entities; they are identical. A piece of cloth, according to the Sāṃkhya, is only a different arrangement of threads. The

thread imparts essence to the cloth, or more exactly, the essence of both is the same. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, however, the inherent cause, which exists simultaneously and side by side with its effect and as such retains its full essence to itself, cannot, in any way, impart essence to its effect. An inherent cause or *samavāyi-kāraṇa* is not a material cause or *upādāna kāraṇa*. Uddyotakara clearly suggests that an inherent cause is not a material cause, but is extraneous like the accessory causes. He remarks that yarn is an entity quite different from cloth, because it is the cause of the latter like the shuttle, etc., as the shuttle, etc., which are the cause of cloth, are different from it, similarly, the yarn also (which is a cause) is different from cloth. To quote: *arthāntaram paṭāt tantuvaḥ tad-hetutvāt turyādivad iti. Turyādi paṭakāraṇam arthāntaram iti dṛṣtam, tathā ca tantuvaḥ, tasmād arthāntaram iti.*³ Now, if an inherent cause were regarded as material cause, Uddyotakara's argument will lose its point. It has force only when it is held that the yarn does not impart essence to the cloth like the shuttle, etc. The question of the source of the essence of cloth is thus a problem for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. The only possible answer can be that an inherent cause, without transferring its own essence and retaining it intact, imparts in some way essence to its effect which resides in it by an inherent relation. This is the beauty of *samavāya sambandha*. The essence of an effect is constituted by the fact of its residing in the cause by *samavāya sambandha*. Or perhaps we may say that the same essence-stuff simultaneously serves the purpose of being the essence of the cause as well as of its effect which are, albeit, two quite different entities.

In this context, we may look at the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception of substance (*dravya*). According to the theory of substance which we can experience with eternal sense is always an effect-substance (*kārya-dravya*) and it is necessarily an *avayavin* or

'whole'. Although all the effect-substances are *avayavins*, the denotation of the term '*dravya*' or substance is wider. While all *avayavins* are *dravyas*, all *dravyas* are not *avayavins*, inasmuch as they also include eternal substances, or non-*avayavins* like ether, etc. The connotations of the two terms are different. A substance connotes an entity in which qualities and movements reside by *samavāya* relation. An *avayavin* connotes an entity which has parts in it which resides by *samavāya* relation. For instance, a cloth, an *avayavin* resides in its parts (threads) by *samavāya* relation, but as a substance, it is the abode of its qualities-colour, etc. which reside in it by *samavāya* relation.

The Buddhist refutes the conception of a separate substance apart from its qualities as emphatically as he does that of a 'whole' (*avayavin*) apart from its parts (*avayavas*). The acceptance of substance, as an entity separate and distinct from its qualities, is a bone of contention between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Buddhist. In fact, from the Buddhist point of view, the basis of the erroneous conceptions, viz. that of *dravya* and that of *avayavin* is the same. The Buddhists hold that qualities like colour, touch, etc. are atom-like point-instants (*kṣaṇas*), or unique particulars (*svalakṣaṇas*). They are discrete and disconnected point-instants which come, one after the other, in a constant flux. Apart from these point-instants which are mere *dharmas* (qualities or properties) there is no substratum in the form of a substance in which these properties may be residing, even as there is no separate entity called 'whole' (*avayavin*) apart from the aggregate of its parts. The Buddhists thus reject in the same breath the conception of substance and that of *avayavin*. Along with the relation of *samavāya* too goes out.

Now we come back to our point about *upādāna kāraṇa* as a synonym for *samavāyi-kāraṇa*. The word '*upādāna kāraṇa*' is appropriate only for the *cause* of the Sāṃkhya conception, because

it means a cause which is conceived as transferring its essence to its effect. As a matter of fact, the *samavāyi-kāraṇa* of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is as extraneous in relation to its effect as the efficient cause or *nimitta kāraṇa* is, because the former like the latter does not impart any essence to its effect. For, Uddyotakara argues that the cloth and the threads are different entities because the cause and the effect must be different entities like the shuttle and the cloth: *arthāntaram patāt tantavaḥ tad-hetutvāt turyādivad (Nyāya Vārtika)*.⁴ All the features of the causal theory of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school imply the laconic definition of *samavāyi-kāraṇa* as a cause in which the effect resides by *samavāya sambandha: yat-samavetam kāryam bhavati jñeyamtu samavāyi-janakam tat*.⁵

Notes and references

1. *Tattva-Saṃgraha-Pañjikā* – Kamalaśīla.
2. “*ayutasiddhānāmādhāryādhārabhūtānām kāryakāraṇabhūtānāmā-kāryakā raṇabhūtānām yaḥ sambandha iha pratyayahetuḥ sa samavāyaḥ*”.-Śrīdhara, *Nyāyakandalī*, p. 773, Ganganath Jha Granthamālā, 1963.
3. *Nyāya Vārtika*, II, i.36
4. *Nyāya Vārtika*.
5. *Nyāya Siddhānta Muktāvalī*, Verse 18.