

Chapter-V

Some Philosophical Problems and Their Probable Solutions

Abhāva has been enumerated as one of the seven categories (*padārthas*) admitted in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system of Philosophy. The six categories like substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*), action (*karma*), universal (*sāmānya*), particularity (*viśeṣa*) and inherence (*samavāya*) are called positive ones (*bhāvapādartha*) while the negation or absence (*abhāva*) is taken as a negative one (*abhāvapadārtha*). The present paper is an effort to show that *abhāva*, the most neglected category due to its negative character, has got a greater value in our life, in advancement towards morality and spiritualization, even in the attainment of liberation (*mokṣa*).

Abhāva is a category which is inherent in all positive entities. Let us suppose, if we take the example of a 'jar', there is an absence of 'non-jar'. In the same way, if we take the case of a 'cow' ('*go*'), there is an absence of 'non-cow' ('*a-go*'). Hence the smell of negativity is found in each and every so called positive object. Even happiness is conceived as of 'absence of pain'. A sigh of relief indicates the absence of suffering there. Had there been no negative things in this world, there would not have been the taste of positive entities in our like, either in the level of objective world or psychological world.

It may be argued that sometimes the feeling of absence makes a man crippled resulting in non-development towards economic and spiritual status. It is commonly said that a thief does not care for morality (*corā nā śone dharmer kāhinī*), because the absence of food or money makes him to adopt an unfair means like stealing, snatching etc. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay also observed that poverty does not encourage morality to enter into one's life. How can we say that absence is the pillar of advancement?

In reply, it can be said that absence becomes efficacious to one's advancement if it is felt in a moderate way. Each and every thing which is extreme in nature cannot provide us anything which is full of good. (*'Sarvam atyantam garhitam'*). Absence, if realises in a balanced way, can provide us an idea of the importance of its absentee (*pratiyogī*). An absence can only be felt if its absentee is known to us. That is why; the Naiyayikas believe that the knowledge of absence always depends on that of its absentee (*'pratiyogijñāna-sāpekṣam abhāvajñānam'*)¹. We are least bother about the absence (like absence of sky-flower etc) whose absentees are not known at all.

The theory of Double Negation proves that each and every positive entity is negative in nature. One may describe a 'jar' as 'not not jar' and so on. Hence in our empirical life we cannot get rid of *abhāva*. Considering the importance of this

negative way looking towards an object the Buddhists have discovered the theory of *apoha*.

Though we do not find detailed discussions about the implication of *apoha*-theory in sentence-meaning, it is assumed that the Buddhists might have taken a negative approach to meaning even in this case of sentence, which is substantiated by Ratnakirti in his *Prameya-kamala-mārttanda* in the following manner.

Ratnakirti said that according to Dinnāga in the expression – ‘The blue lotus’, the term ‘blue’ is used to exclude all lotuses that are not blue. In the same way, the term ‘lotus’ has been used to exclude all blue things other than lotus. Thus the whole expression signified the exclusion of ‘non-blue’ and ‘non-lotus’.²

The above- mentioned view has also been endorsed by Ratnakirti in his *Apohasiddhi*. To him every word situated in a sentence denotes a negation. In the sentence – “This road leads to Srughna” the word ‘this’ excludes all roads other than the one indicated, the term ‘road’ excludes ‘footpath etc’, the term ‘leads to’ indicates the exclusion of ‘a blind path’ and ‘Srughna’ excludes all other places.³

Ratnakirti has beautifully analyzed the *apoha*-theory after giving three possible meanings of the term ‘*apoha*’ a) *Apoha* might mean the external object. If this be the case, it will have cognition in the form: ‘This is excluded from others’ (*Idam anyasmād apohyate*) b) or the term ‘*apoha*’ may refer to the representational

cognition. If this be the case, the form of cognition would be as follows: ‘From this others are excluded’ (*asmād vā anyad apohyate*) c) Or it may refer to the exclusion itself. In this case the cognitive form is: ‘In this way others are excluded’ (*asmin vā anyad apohyate*). If this theory is expressed symbolically, the *apoha* is expressed as ‘A excludes B. Now where primacy is to be given? It may be given either to A or B or exclusion itself.

The alternatives ‘a’ and ‘b’ are not taken for granted, because *apoha* refers to a particular and not simply to the exclusion of the opposite. The third alternative does not stand in the eye of logic, because it is contradicted by our experience. On hearing the expression – ‘There is fire on the mountain’ the existence of a particular fire, not merely the negation of non-fire, is understood. Ratnakirti has admitted that the term ‘*apoha*’ means the external object itself as determined by the exclusion of others (*anyāpoha-viśiṣṭa-vidhiḥ śabdānam arthah – Apohasiddhi*, p. 52-2).

In fact, Ratnakirti thinks that there are two shades of meaning – primary and secondary. But the meaning of an expression is the positive thing, e.g, cow-individual qualified by the exclusion of other, i.e. what is not non-cow. The positive and negative meanings are the different aspects of the same meaning-complex. The gasping of the positive meaning and exclusion of other meanings (*anyāpoha*) are done simultaneously- the latter complimenting the former. That is,

the meaning of the expression ‘cow’ is understood as ‘cow-excluded-from non-cow.’ We understand something in whatever manner we understand it as qualified by the exclusion of others. All our actions are directed to an individual thing, but at the same time that desired thing is understood in terms of exclusion of the undesired things. When one is asked to tie a ‘cow’, he is at the same time directed to avoid tying ‘horse’ etc. This act of selecting a particular type of an individual proves that these two acts of understanding occur simultaneously in the same way as when we see a ‘blue lotus’. The ‘blue’ colour and the ‘lotus’ are cognized at one time and hence there is no time sequence in grasping the positive and the negative meaning. We use the word ‘*indīvara*’ to denote a ‘blue lotus’. This word does not contain any reference to ‘blue’. But nevertheless the utterance of the word ‘*indīvara*’ conveys the impression of ‘blue’ and ‘lotus’ simultaneously. Similarly, the word ‘cow’ may not contain any direct reference to the exclusion of non-cow, but as soon as the word ‘cow’ is uttered, we understand the particular as distinguished from ‘non-cow’ at one time.⁴

Now let us see how *abhava* can help us in the attainment of spirituality and morality. It is well-known to us that failure which is a negative concept is the pillar of success. Following this line it can be said that absence can give us lesson to realize the objects which are absent. Had there been no absence in our life, one would have been lost oneself in the midst of happiness and luxury. This situation is

an one-sided story, because in our life there are ups and downs. Only the feeling of absence can give to get something which is not yet available. Longing for something originates from the absence of the same. That is why; an effect (*kārya*) is defined as ‘*prāgabhāva-pratīyogī*’⁵ i.e., an effect is something whose absence is felt beforehand.

After seeing heinous crimes in our society like torture on women, trafficking, rape, bride-burning, murder etc we seriously ‘feel’ the absence of morality in the present era leading to the destruction of our peace of mind, justice, truthfulness etc. This feeling of absence can alone lead us to the attainment of life which is positive in nature available through morality. Apart from this the normal people is not always happy with this mundane morality and hence he feels again some sort of absence or gap in him and tries to get something which is non-mundane or transcendental one. The sense of *abhāva* goads him to attain such spiritual freedom which is also nothing but the absolute cessation of suffering (*tadatyantavimukto’pavargah*) which is the state of calmness, non-tranquility having no sense of *abhāva* at all.

Though *abhāva* or absence should admitted as an entity belonging to the category of real due to various reasons as mentioned above yet some of the difficulties concerning absence cannot be ignored. These difficulties are as follows.

First, no proper definition of *abhāva* has been formulated by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school. The simple definition-‘*bhāvabhinnatvam abhāvatvam*’ (an absence is something which is different from the positive entities) does not serve the purpose of pointing out the nature of absence. Moreover, this definition involves the defect of mutual dependence or *anyonyāśraya* on account of the fact that the knowledge of absence depends on the concept of *bhāva* and the *vice-versa*. Apart from this it is vitiated by the defect of self-dependence or *ātmāśraya*, because the absence is explained in terms of *anyonyābhāva* or reciprocal absence in the form- ‘*abhāvo na bhāvah*’ i.e., positive is different from the negative. In other words, the form of *anyonyābhāva* is being used to define *abhāva*. *Abhāva* is defined in term of *abhāva* in the form of *anyonyābhāva* is a form of *abhāva*, which leads us to the defect of *ātmāśraya* and *anyonyāśraya*. In fact, such type of definition is hardly acceptable. Hence a new definition given by some modern thinkers like Sri Narayan Chandra Goswami etc is more acceptable. To them *abhāva* is that through some negative things are expressed (*niṣedhābhilāpaka*). In case of prior absence (*prāgabhāva*), e.g., ‘there would be jar on the ground’ (*ghato bhaviṣyati*) though there is no usage of the negative particle *nañ* here yet there is the sense of negation. From the sentence we come to know that at present there is no jar on the ground. Moreover, the negativity of the negative is always felt by us in different occasions. How can we reject the ‘felt’ object? That is why; just as a positive object is

admitted on the basis of its ‘feeling’ in our life, the negation of something is the result of our ‘feeling’ which can never be ignored. On account of this it is a category or something which declares its existence as a negative entity.

Secondly, the absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*) involves so many problems if we understand the same way it has been defined and instantiated. The absence which remains during three times, i.e., past, present and future, is called *atyantābhāva* or absolute absence (*‘traikālika-samsargavāchhinna-pratiyogitākah abhāvah atyantābhāvah’*).⁶ The example which has been given is not all convincing. The example is- ‘There is no jar on the ground’ (*bhūtale ghato nāsti*). If this example is taken for granted, there will be no distinction between temporal absence (*sāmayikābhāva*) and absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*), because both of them may come under the purview of this definition. How can a temporal absence be equal to absolute absence? Moreover, an absence remaining in three times can never be felt. It is possible to see the absence of certain quality in some object in past and present. But so far as future is concerned, it is difficult to predict. The Naiyāyikas believe that an absence remaining in a place for the time being can never be removed even at the presence of a similar object. The absence of a jar on the ground can never be removed even a fresh jar is brought there. This is not tenable, because the absentee of the absence of a jar is the jar itself, which can never remain in our mind even a new jar is brought there. We feel the absence of a particular jar

if it possesses some special features. Otherwise, all the jars being same cannot provide us the sense of lacking of a particular jar absent earlier. Moreover, the absolute absence of the absurd entities like sky-flower etc cannot be thought of due to their non-existence. It is admitted that the absence of the realizable entities can be thought of as per the principle- *prasaktasya pratiṣedhah sambhavati*. In fact, the Naiyāyikas believe that even after a new jar is brought the absence of the earlier jar cannot be filled up. An absence of an individual (*tadghata*) occupying a particular time and space is unique in nature which can never be removed by bringing a new one. In this sense such nature of *atyantābhāva* is justified. In this connection one may think that as a particular jar has already comes, its absence cannot be felt. It is quite unnatural to feel that particular jar or *tadghata*, because its purpose is served by other jar.

Thirdly, it is very difficult to understand or rather artificial to understand absence through perception through the contact called *viśeṣaṇa-viśeṣya-bhāva* (qualifier-qualificand relationship).⁷ We normally feel that the ground possesses the absence of a jar (*bhūtale ghato nāsti*), but the relation between qualifier and qualificand (*viśeṣaṇa-viśeṣya-bhāva*) is artificially constructed, as if, to accommodate this peculiar relation. The normal way of expression is-‘There is no jar on the ground’, but not as ‘ground as absence-possessing’. Hence the perceptuality of absence is to some extent not easily understandable. When we look towards ground, it is ground

which is perceived, but not the absence. It is better if the inference is admitted as a mode of knowing absence as endorsed by the Buddhists.

Fourthly, the Prabhākara school of the Mīmāṃsakas admit that the absence is nothing but the locus of it (*adhikaraṇa-svarūpa*). This view is very difficult to accept on account of the fact that the locus of absence, i.e., ground in the example- ‘There is no jar on the ground’, (which is called *anuyogin*) is completely distinct from the absence of the object i.e., jar called *pratiyogin*. It is not possible to know the *bareness* (*kaivalya*) of locus without the admission of an absence. In the case of the absence of a jar on the ground what is to be understood by the term *bare locus*? Is it *bare* ground or *bare* jar? If an absence is called *adhikaraṇa-svarūpa* or equated with its locus, does it mean the nature of the ground or pot? Whatever may be the case, we cannot deny the role of object or *pratiyogī* in apprehending absence and hence locus is not essentially an absence.

Lastly, the concept of double negation in Indian logic creates some confusion. Does ‘the absence of absence’ amounts to to some ‘presence’ of the counter-positive or to some additional absence? There is a controversy among the Naiyāyikas themselves regarding the issue. the older school thinks that ‘the absence of absence’ of a positive entity amounts to positive entity alone. To them to admit a fresh absence gives rise to *infinite regress* (*anavasthā*). If the absence of absence is taken as a fresh absence, the fresh absence will have an absence, which will

again be taken as another fresh absence leading to the defect of *anavastha* or *infinite regress*. In order to avoid it the older school prefers to admit the absence of absence as a positive entity which is nothing but the counter-positive. The later school of Nyāya believes that the absence of absence is always an absence. There is no evidence that the third absence is a new absence. The absence of absence is an additional absence (*atirikta abhāva*), but not a positive entity, which is identified with the first absence (*ṭṭīyābhāvasya prathamābhāvarūpatvāt*).⁸ If the existence of fourth absence is admitted there, it will be identified with the second absence. Hence there does not arise any question of *anavasthā*.⁹

Moreover, in case of the absence of the absence of a jar the third absence is to be taken as an additional absence due to another reason. In case of the third absence the counter-positive is the absence of the absence of a jar (*ghatābhāvābhāva*) while in the second case only the absence of a jar (*ghatābhāva*) is a counter-positive. Due to the difference of the counterpositive (*pratyogibhinnāt*) absence is different leading to the confirmation of the conclusion given by the Neo-thinkers that the third absence is an additional one, but not equivalent to the positive entity or jar.

References:

1. *Tarkasamgraha* with *Dīpikā*, Edited by Gopinath Bhattacharya, Progressive, 1983, pp.40 and 220.

2. “*Dinnagena visesana-visesya-bhāva-samarthanartham nilotpalaḍisabda arthāntaranivṛtti-visistau arthau āhuh itya uktam*” *Prameya-kamala-mārttanda*, p. 126, quoted in Bimal Krishna Motilal and Robert D Dvans (ed.), *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, D. Reidel Dordrecht etc, 1986, p.185
3. *Apohasiddhi*, p. 5. Also quoted by D. Sharma in *The Differentiation Theory of Meaning in Indian Logic*, The Hague, Mouton & Company, 1969, p. 58).
4. *Apohasiddhi*, p. 54.
5. *Tarkasamgraha* with *Dīpikā*, Edited by Gopinath Bhattacharya, Progressive, 1983, pp.40 and 220.
6. Annambhatta:*Tarkasamgraha* with *Dīpikā*, Bengali trans by Aurobindo Basu, Mitram, Kolkata, 2010, p.326
7. *Ibid*, 156
8. *Ibid*, p.324
9. *Ibid*