

## Abstract

### Abhāva as a Category : Some Philosophical Problems

Negation or absence has been taken as a category in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophy on account of the fact that each and every individual has an awareness of absence. Hence there is no doubt regarding the existence of negation as is directly experienced by us. According to Nyāya, the absence is known through perception; the Buddhists believe that it is known through inference and the Advaita Vedānta thinks that it is known only through a distinct means of Knowing called *Anupalabdhi*. A category is called *padārtha* according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophers. In this context the term *padārtha* means the meaning of a word (*padasya arthah padārthah*). In this context a point is to be noted that the knowledge of absence (*pratiyogī*) presupposes the cognition of absence (*Pratiyogijñānasāpekṣam abhāvajñānam*). This negative fact is known through a separate source of knowing called *anupalabdhi*. The Advaita Vedāntins have justified their position in admitting *anupalabdhi* as a means of knowing, which will follow soon. The Naiyāyikas hold that non-existence is cognized through perception while the Buddhists think that it is cognized through inference. According to *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā* by Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra, the means of valid cognition as *anupalabdhi* is the extra-ordinary cause of the apprehension of non-existence which is not caused by the instrumentality of cognition (*jñānākaraṇaka*). In other words, *anupalabdhi* is an uncommon cause of the right awareness of absence (*abhāvānubhavāsādhā-*

*raṇakāraṇa*) which is not caused through the instrumentality of other knowledge.

According to Kumārila, the absence of an object in a particular locus is not identical with the locus itself (*adhikaraṇasvarūpa*). It is something more than the mere locus (*adhiṣṭhānātriktam tattvam*). Thus the positive (*bhāva*) and absence (*abhāva*) are two different aspects, but not identical. i.e., one is not reducible to other. The positive entities are known through positive means of knowing while negative ones are apprehended through *anupalabdhi*. Had positive objects been apprehended through *abhāva*, all the objects would have been known by this, which is not possible.<sup>18</sup> In each and every positive object there is the existence of positive one.

The category of absence (*abhāva*) has been taken as the object of negative cognition (*nāsty buddhi*). Now, since there are different forms of negative cognition, different types of absence have been admitted and described. The Naiyāyikas believe that there are two fundamental forms of negative cognition: (i) A is not B and (ii) A is not in B. Adhering to these forms they admit two kinds of absence (*abhāva*) namely, *anyonyābhāva* or mutual absence of reciprocal absence as the object of the first form of cognition, and *samsargābhāva* or relational absence as the object of the second form of cognition. It is so called because an entity remains on some locus just as a jar is not on the ground. In this case a relation has been established between a jar and ground, which leads the Naiyāyikas to describe it as relational absence or *samsargābhāva*. The latter kind is subdivided into three kinds: *prāgabhāva* or prior absence, *dhvamsābhāva* or

annihilative absence and *atyantābhāva* or constant absence or absolute absence. Thus we get ultimately four kinds of absence.

Though *abhāva* or absence should be 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*. 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-pratīyogitākah abhāvah atyantābhāvah*'). The example which has been given is not all convincing. The example is- 'There is no jar on the ground' (*bhūtale ghato nāsty*). If this example is taken for granted, there will be no distinction between temporal absence (*sāmayikābhāva*) and absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*). 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). 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. 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. Lastly, the concept of double negation in Indian logic creates some confusion. Does ‘the absence of absence’ amounts 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 think 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.