

PREFACE : INTRODUCING THE SUBJECT

The present work is an attempt to delineate critically the realism-phenomenalism controversy in Indian philosophical literature. Phenomenalism is a theory which tries to explain both the external world and the internal mind in terms of experienced qualities or given sense-data without postulating any underlying substance which lies beyond the scope of sense-experience. Realism, on the other hand, upholds the view that not only the external objects or given sense-data are real, but also the substance and universals are equally real in the sense of existing independently of the human mind. In India the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers are largely representative of realism and the Buddhists are mainly the proponent of phenomenalism. Consequently the scope of our discussion is mainly limited to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy and Buddhism.

In Indian philosophy, the controversy between the realism and the phenomenalism is centered round the following main issues :-

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- i) The reality of substance (dravya) as a separate category.
- ii) The existence of whole (avayavin) apart from the parts (avayavas).
- iii) The reality of universal (sāmānya) apart from the individuals or particulars (vyakti).

The Buddhists split the reality into discrete, disconnected bits called moments or point-instants (kṣanas or svalakṣaṇas) coming in continuous succession of one another. According to them the so-called unifying principles like dravya (substance), avayavi (whole) and sāmānya (universal) are not any reality at all. These are our mental concepts (kalpanās) which synthesise the given manifold of sense-data (svalakṣaṇas) into a unity and cause the appearances of unified empirical objects.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers have also stated that the world of external objects is made up of the

smallest bits called atoms (paramānus), the ultimate reals. But the fundamental difference between these two schools - the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Buddhism - is that while the Buddhists discard any real principle of synthesis in the external world, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas hold that there are two main synthetic principles which are objectively real, namely, substance (dravya) and universal (sāmānya). They assert that beside the smallest bits of ultimate material reals called atoms (paramānus) there is also some thing in the form of unifying whole (avayavin) and this unifying whole (avayavin) is an existent entity which is also a substance (dravya). The avayavin dravya (substance in the form of 'whole') is distinct and different in essence from the parts which it unifies or holds together. It is also a basic doctrine of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers that the 'whole' (avayavin) and the parts (avayavas) are two different substances. The parts, in their turn are also wholes (avayavins) in respect of their own parts, and so on, till we reach the atoms which are only parts, and themselves have no parts. It may however be noted that although a substance in the form of avayavin (whole) is

the unifying principle of its avayavas (parts), the concept of whole (avayavin) and that of substance (dravya) are not identical. Substance has wider scope and includes atoms and eternal entities like space (dik), time (kāla), soul (ātman) etc., which are not avayavin (whole), since they have no parts. For this reason we have discussed the problem of substance (dravya) and the problem of whole and parts (avayavin and avayavas) in two separate chapters.

Apart from the concept of substance (dravya) and 'whole' substance (avayavi dravya), another synthetic principle admitted by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists is universal (sāmānya). Gautam, the author of Nyāya-Sūtra defines universal in the following way: "The universal (sāmānya or jāti) is that entity which produces the notion of identity" in our mind (samāna prasavātmika jāti. Nyāya-Sūtra, 2.2.69). When a particular animal is present before me, I immediately recognise it as cow, i.e., I immediately classify it as belonging to a class named as cow. Now, this immediate classification is impossible unless I have

experienced a common character (gotva) in the cow in question, a common character which is shared by other cows of the world as well. If it were not the case, I could not have classified it with other cows. This experience of an identical common character (gotva) present in all cows does not come to be contradicted, and, since according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers, uncontradicted experience is the only criterion of reality, there must be some objective correlative corresponding to my experience of identity and this is what is known as universal (sāmānya). This universal belongs to each and every individuals (vyakti), but at the same time it (sāmānya) is ontologically different from its corresponding individuals.

This concept of universal is, however, vehemently opposed by the Buddhist phenomenologists. They (Buddhists) are of opinion that the everchanging unique particulars (svalakṣaṇas) are the only realities. Every vestige of generality is absent in them. Generality, similarity, relation or universal is always something imagined or

constructed by the spontaneous creativity of our understanding which in the Buddhist terminology is known as Productive Imagination (kalpanā). In this way the Buddhists and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists join issue with one another on the problems of ontological status of substance (dravya), whole and parts (avayavin and avayavas) and the concept of universal (sāmānya).

But all the above problems have a well-marked epistemological hinterland which shapes and determines the nature of the problems and solutions thereto. This epistemological controversy between realism and phenomenalism is vivid on the problem of perception.

We have already mentioned that the Buddhist phenomenologists have analysed the external reality into discrete and detached bits of ultimate realities called svalakṣaṇas or unique particulars. These svalakṣaṇas, according to them, can be apprehended by a kind of indeterminate non-erroneous perception which is absolutely free from the concepts of understanding (kalpanāpoḍam abhrāntam jñānam pratyakṣam). This indeterminate

perception, according to the Buddhists, is the only valid perception. In this indeterminate stage of perception, the svalakṣaṇas remain free from all qualifications - name (nāma), class (jāti), substance (dravya) etc. But on the back of this indeterminate perception our understanding, which is otherwise known as Imagination (kalpanā) in Buddhism, becomes operative (pratyakṣa prṣṭa bhāvi kalpanā) and all its concepts - dravya, guṇa, karma, jāti and nāma - are aroused and become identified with svalakṣaṇas as their qualifications. The result is the construction of empirical objects which are known by us in the so-called determinate perception. This prompts the Buddhists to say that the determinate or judgemental perception is not perception at all. It is the constructions of the understanding and is inference in the broad sense of term. Since the objects of judgemental determinate perception (qualified svalakṣaṇas) are constructed by understanding, the knowledge of them is not termed as perception (pratyakṣa), but intellection or inference by the Buddhists. So, the judgemental perception of determinate objects is mere inference. Hence, as the idea of substance(dravya) and the concept of

universal (sāmānya) are conceived or constructed by understanding, they can not be, the Buddhists opine, the object of genuine indeterminate perception at all. Thus, on the ground of the non-perceptibility, the Buddhists deny the objective existence of substance and the reality of universal as separate categories.

In reply to the above charge of the Buddhists that substance and universal are unreal because they can not be perceived, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists argue that the determinate perception is as real as the indeterminate perception, because the sense function, i.e., sense-object contact (indriyārtha sannikarṣa), is equally present in the determinate perception as well. The difference between these two kinds of perception is, according to them, one of quantity. In indeterminate stage we get non-qualified cognition of the perceived objects. In the latter stage the perceived objects are cognised being associated with substance (dravya), universals (jāti) etc. So the determinate perception, according to the Naiyāyikas, is also valid perception, and

hence the object of determinate perception. Moreover, in support of the Nyāya position we may cite the definition of perception, as uphold by Vācaspatimīśra, which asserts both the determinate and indeterminate perception as valid. To define perception Vācaspatimīśra asserts that "whatever comes within the range of the knowledge produced by the sense is the object of perception, and not merely that which comes incontact with the sense (Yad eva indriya Jasya gocaras tat pratyakṣam, na tv indriya-sambaddham. Nyāyavārtikatātparyatikā, p-118, line-17). It means that there may be an object of perception which is not in contact with the sense, and yet it may have been comprehended by a perception produced by the sense. So, it may be said from the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika point of view that the substance (dravya) and the universal (sāmānya) are realities inspite of the fact that they are objects of determinate knowledge. Consequently, the objection of the Buddhists, according to the Naiyāyikas, does not stand to reason.

Again, the realism - phenomenalism controversy may be viewed from the point of view of the problem of

whole and part (avayavin and avayavas). According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists the whole(avayavin) is something over and above its parts and this 'whole' can be perceived by our senses. For example a tree is a whole apart from its branches, leaves etc. and in perceiving any one of its parts, we perceive the 'whole' tree. But here the Buddhists join issue with the Naiyāyikas. They (Buddhists) deny the reality of the 'whole' and raise the following problem in the case of the perception of a so-called whole tree. When we say we perceive a whole tree what do we actually perceive ? As a matter of fact we perceive only the front part of the tree with which our visual senses are in contact. But what about the back part of the tree, which we can not see directly ? Since our eyes do not have direct contact with it, we can not say that the knowledge of the back part of the tree is perceptual also. In this case what happens is this: On perceiving directly the front part, our intellect indirectly interprets or imagines that there exists a back part of the tree with which our visual senses are not in direct contact. But this intellectual

interpretation follows the direct perception of the front part of the tree with such inconceivable rapidity and instinctive spontaneity that uncritical common sense fails to take any notice of it and believes the knowledge of the whole tree to be perceptual. The Buddhists thus conclude that the perception of the 'whole' is not possible over and above the perception of its parts.

But the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists do not agree with the above contention of the Buddhists. They hold that in perceiving a part (avayava) of an object we perceive the whole (avayavi) of it, since the whole (avayavi) inheres in each of its parts (avayavas). So we can directly perceive the whole object. Moreover, they argue that even if the inference of the unperceived parts were possible, that would at best provide us with the knowledge of another part side by side with the perceived one, and not with the knowledge of anything 'whole' to which these parts might be referred and in respect of which the notion of 'whole' tree might arise. Again, the Naiyāyikas argue that if it be said that the knowledge of a whole tree is obtained by effecting a synthesis of the

the two parts - its perceived front part and the inferred back part - the question would at once crop up : how could such a synthesis be possible where there is no common ground and point of reference ? Synthesis implies the connecting of several experiences by reference to one unitive principle. But no such unitive principle is admitted by the Buddhists. So the two parts of a tree, hold the Buddhists, are not really the parts of a unitive whole, but only discrete units constituting no more than an aggregate. It is natural therefore, that when two parts come to be cognized, they can not be felt as complementary to each other. They appear simply as unrelated items, indifferent slices of matter which are incapable of being synthesised or integrated in such a manner as to give rise to the idea of a tree as a single composite entity.

The Naiyāyikas further argue that even if we admit that the idea of the tree arises when two parts (the perceived front and inferred back part) are cognised together, there is nothing to indicate that the tree is cognised inferentially. We may reconstruct or imagine

a thing by ideally joining its parts. But the knowledge of the thing which has been achieved thus is by no means inferential in character. For, by any act of inference we neither relate the facts of experience nor experience facts as related, but know one thing through the medium of another because of an invariable relation (vyāpti) between the two. Moreover, the tree can not be an object of inference because the psychological condition which is necessary for such inference are found to be absent. If the tree as an aggregate of its parts is to be validly inferred from the perception of one of these parts, it is necessary that the aggregate should be known to have an invariable relation with the parts in question, which it does not have so the Buddhists claim that the 'whole' can not be cognised through perception, rather it is an object of inference, does not hold water.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter entitled 'In Defence of Substance' has four sections. In the first section I have tried to argue why the Buddhists position that the substance has no separate existence apart from its qualities does not hold

water and the Nyāya position - the substance is a separate real entity over and above its qualities - seems to be more convincing than that of the Buddhists. The second section of this chapter deals with the logical necessity of postulating substance (dravya) as a distinct category apart from the qualities (gunas), and the whole (avayavin) apart from its parts (avayavas) along with the objection of the Buddhists. The third section is an attempt to formulate a definition of substance. In the last section I have discussed the atomic theory (paramānuvāda) of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers and the objections raised by the Buddhists against this theory.

The second chapter of the thesis deals with the problem of whole and parts (avayavin and avayavas). It contains three main sections. The first section is devoted to the study of the epistemological problem arising out of the problem of perception of the 'whole' (avayavin). The second section deals with the metaphysical problem of whole and parts. This problem starts with the question: Is an object merely aggregate of its parts or something over and above them? And how is the whole

constituted and how is it related to its different parts ? The Buddhist phenomenologists hold that the 'whole' is nothing but the aggregate or assemblage of the parts. And the parts are the only existent realities, the so-called 'whole' is nothing but our mental construction (kalpanā). The Nyāya realists, on the other hand, are of opinion that the 'whole' is ontologically different from its parts and is something over and above its parts. The production of sensible material objects from infrasensible atoms, according to them, is explainable only on the basis of the assumption that the whole (avayavin) is different from its parts (avayavas). This 'whole', according to them, is related to its parts by the relation of inherence (samavāya). But the Buddhists do not admit any such relation. Both these opponent groups have advanced several arguments in support of their respective stands which I have tried to discuss in the second section of this chapter. Apart from the arguments to refute the 'whole' as an independent entity and its perceptible character, the Buddhists have also advanced various arguments on the basis of which they deny the reality of citra-rūpa or variegated colour as a whole (avayavin)

as advocated by the Nyāya realists. Moreover, the Buddhists have raised objections against the Nyāya theory of whole (avayavin) on the ground of weight and space. I have discussed all these along with the Nyāya answers in the third section of this chapter. In the last part of this section I have tried to examine from the Nyāya view point the five antinomies put forwarded by the Buddhists to refute the reality of whole apart from the parts.

The third chapter is an attempt to analyse the problem of universal and particular (sāmānya and vyakti) in its various aspects. One of the acrimonious battles in Indian philosophy was fought between the Buddhists and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers on the question of the ontological status of universal(sāmānya) - whether the universals are realities existent by themselves or they are mainly empty names or concepts with no reality affixed to them. The Nyāya thinkers are uncompromising realists and advocate the ontological reality of the universals. But the Buddhists are staunch phenomenologists and deny the reality of the universals. In this chapter I have tried to highlight the controversy between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists and the Buddhist phenomenologists on the ontological

reality of the universals. The first section of this chapter deals with the realistic arguments to prove the reality of universals. In this section I have also tried to make a case for the Buddhist phenomenalism without a clear understanding of which the stand point of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realism can not be properly appreciated. In the second section of this chapter I have discussed the Buddhists arguments in favour of the imperceptibility of the so-called universals and the Nyāya counter arguments to establish the perception of universals (sāmānya). The third section is an attempt to explain the Buddhists arguments to disprove the ontological reality of universals and their relation with particulars. In the last section of this chapter I have tried to expose the fundamental weakness of the Buddhist arguments to champion the cause of the Nyāya realists.

In the fourth chapter, which is a concluding chapter of my thesis, I have given a resumé of what have been discussed in the previous chapters and on the basis of that I have tried to state my positive conclusions.

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