CHAPTER - I

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAUSAL THEORY IN INDIAN AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS AND THEIR METAPHYSICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS BEHIND THE POSTULATION OF A PARTICULAR THEORY

A conception which has played a very great part both in science and philosophy is that of cause. It is indeed sometimes said that science nowadays is able to dispense with cause, but what the people who say this have in view is some metaphysical conceptions of cause with which they do not agree. In one sense at least science cannot possibly dispense with cause, neither can the practical man. It is essential both to science and to practice that we should be able to go beyond what has actually been observed and make inferences from it, whether in the form of generalisations as to what usually happens or predictions as to particular facts. Now, whatever else the concept of cause involves, it involves this, that we can pass from what has happened in observed cases to what is likely to happen in cases which have not been observed, and this is absolutely necessary if we are to have any science at all or if we are to take any sensible practical steps. This has always been a difficulty for the empiricist: it cannot possibly be a merely empirical matter to predict, as science does, for we have not empirically

observed the future which we predict. Not that the topic is without difficulties for the rationalist also. However in modern philosophy it was hardly questioned till the time of Hume that we knew a priori the principle that every change had a cause and that this principle was a necessary presupposition of science. Even Hume did not, as he is often supposed to have done, reject it, but merely raised philosophical difficulties which he thought made it impossible to justify or defend it. The minimum sense of the principle of causation which must be accepted if we are to have science is then that the repeated occurrence of a certain kind of event under certain conditions is generally evidence which makes it likely that similar events will repeat themselves under similar conditions. Without assuming this much we can never make any scientific predictions whatever or pass from the observed to the unobserved. Besides this, things undergo change. But no change is considered to be automatic. Every change in an object is explained with reference to the conditions or circumstances that are known to have contributed to its occurrence. Thus change in one object is referred to the action of other things. In common parlance, change occurring to an object is said to have been caused by the action of some other thing or things, which to a great extent is ascertainable. Typhoid fever is ascertained to be due to the operation of a kind of living germs on the living body. Flood is known to have taken

place due to excessive rain and so on. A set of conditions or circumstances, so far as they have been ascertained to be responsible for the occurrence of certain changes in a thing or situation are said to be the cause of the occurrence of the latter. Thus the phenomena of change leads also to the concept of causality.

Causality, thus understood, is a relation of one sided dependence of the present event on certain past events, or of the future on the present. This is the general meaning ascribed to the concept of cause by common usage and science.

The concept of "cause" has been dealt with from different points of view both in Indian and Western philosophy. From the ancient times to the present, we find that there are different theories with regard to the problem of cause.

In Indian Philosophy, the Cārvākas think that the causal relation is not ascertainable, for, a causal or any other invariable relation cannot be established merely by repeated perception of two things occurring together. For, one must be certain that there is no other unperceived condition (*upādhi*) on which this relation depends. For example, if a man perceives a number of times fire accompanied by smoke and on another occasion he infers the existence of smoke on the perception of fire, he would be liable to error, because he failed to notice a condition (*upādhi*), namely, wetness of fuel, on

the presence of which alone fire is attended with smoke. And unconditionality or absence of conditions cannot be established beyond doubt by perception, as some conditions may always remain hidden and escape notice.

In Bauddha philosophy, causal theory is regarded as *Asatkāryavāda*. For the Buddhistic philosophers, a seed has no being (*sattā*) just before the production of seedling and that state of seed is called *abhāva* and this *abhāva* is the material cause of seedling.

The Mīmāṁsā formulates the theory of potential energy (*śakti*) in connection with the question of causation. A seed possesses in it an imperceptible power (*śakti*) with the help of which it can produce the sprout; when this power is obstructed or destroyed (as, for example, by the frying of the seed), it fails to produce that effect. Similarly, there is the property of burning in fire, the power of expressing meaning and inducing activity in a word, the power of illumination in light and so on. The necessity of admitting such unperceived potency in the cause is that it explains why in some cases though the cause (i.e. seed or fire) is there, the effect (i.e. sprout or burning) does not take place. The explanation is that in such cases though the cause-substance is there, its causal potency has been destroyed or overpowered temporarily, as the case may be, by some obstructing conditions obtaining these.

Besides this, there are two main theories of cause in Indian philosophy, viz., *Satkāryavāda* and *Asatkāryavāda*. According to *Satkāryavāda*, the effect exists in the cause prior to its production. Cause and effect are not two different things, but the two names of the same thing. This theory is also known as *pariṇāmavāda*. It is supported by the Sāṁkhya system.

But the theory directly opposed to the *Satkāryavāda* is known as *Asatkāryavāda* or *Ārambhavāda*. According to this theory the effect does not exist in the cause before its production. This view is supported by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. Causation according to Sāṁkhya is *Abhivyakti* or manifestation. They hold that the effect pre-exists in its cause before its production. The new effect 'jar' is not a new production of its cause a 'lump of clay' but it is only the manifestation of what was implicitly contained in the cause namely, a 'lump of clay'. *Satkāryavāda* assumed two forms namely, *pariṇāmavāda* and *vivartavāda*. The former holds that the cause actually forms itself into the effect. It is advocated by the Sāṁkhya. The latter regards the change of the cause into the effect is apparent and not real like the change of a 'rope' into a 'snake' in illusion. It is advocated by Śaṁkara in the Vedānta system. According to this view the nature of the effect is indescribable (*Anirvacanīya*).

The causal theory in Vedānta system is known as *Satkāraṇavāda*. According to this theory this phenomenal world

as an effect is unreal from the transcendental point of view; but its cause Brahman is transcendentally real. The world is a *vivarta* of Brahman just like a snake is *vivarta* of rope in case of rope-snake illusion.

According to the popular view, a thing or a substance is regarded as a cause. When we say that the stone breaks the glass, here the stone is taken to be the cause. But the more logical notion is that a thing is not a cause, but it is the dynamic factor involved in the production of the effect that is regarded as the cause. The stone by itself is not the cause of the breaking of the glass, but the hurled stone in respect of its motion is the cause.

Let us consider the different theories of cause from Locke to Alexander in Western philosophy. Locke was the first philosopher to give causality a definite shape. Causality, according to him, means transference of energy 'or' power'. Martineau also said that causality implies force, which is purposive. In other words, cause involves choice or will. According to Locke, power is a simple idea which 'includes in it some kind of relation (a relation to action or change)'.[1] That is, it is a relation to produce something or to bring about something. Fire, for example, has a power to melt gold; (that is, it has a power to produce certain changes destroying the consistency of its insensible parts and consequently its hardness making it fluid) and gold also has a power to be

melted. The former is called active and the latter is called passive power. According to Locke, mind receives the idea of power more clearly from reflection than from sensation. As he writes: "we find in ourselves a power to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds and motions of our bodies, barely, by a thought or preference of the mind ordering or as it were commanding, the doing or not doing such or such a particular action". [2] This power is what Locke calls will. Causation involves ultimately will, will reside in mind; so mind should be regarded as the ultimate cause. According to Locke, a physical object cannot itself create motion, it can simply transfer motion to other physical objects. When a ball, for example, strikes another and sets it in motion, we do not find any active power in the first ball, but simply the transfer of motion it had received from another. To quote Locke's words: "we observe it only to transfer, but not produce, any motion".[3] From this, Locke draws the conclusion that physical objects account for the continuation of the passion and not for the production of action.

According to Berkeley, when an event, say A, regularly follows another event, say B, in such a way that given A, B follows and that in the absence of A, B does not occur, we call A the cause and B the effect. But by this Berkeley does not mean that A produces B; because producing, for him, requires power or activity which is found only in God. The

occurrence of A can be taken as a sign of the coming occurrence of B. As Berkeley himself says: "the connexion of ideas does not imply the relation of cause and effect, but only of a mark or sign with the thing signified. The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it."[4]

Mill, as an empiricist says. "the law of causation, the recognition of which is the main pillar of inductive science, is but the familiar truth, that invariability of succession is found by observation to obtain between every fact in nature and some other fact which has preceded it."[5] For him, a cause is an unconditional, invariable antecedent of an event; not only this, a cause, is the sum total of the conditions positive and negative taken together. The negative conditions, however, of any phenomenon may be all summed up under one head, namely, the absence of preventing or counteracting causes. Among the positive conditions, there are some, to which, in common parlance, the term 'cause' is more readily and frequently awarded, so there are others to which it is, in ordinary circumstances, refused. In most cases of causation a distinction is commonly drawn between something which acts, and some other thing which is acted upon; between an agent and a patient. Both of these are the conditions of the phenomenon; but it would be thought absurd to call the latter cause, that title being reserved for the former. That means, for

Mill, the distinction between agent and patient is merely verbal. In a great proportion, of all natural phenomena, they are so to such a degree as to react forcibly on the causes which acted upon them. All the positive conditions of a phenomenon are alike agents, alike active; and in any expression of the cause which professes to be complete, none of them can with reason be excluded, except such as have already been implied in the words used for describing the effect; nor by including even these would there be incurred any but a merely verbal impropriety.

Causation, according to Hume, is mere regularity of succession, when an event A, for him, is followed by another event B, we do not experience any force or power passing from the first to the second. Repeated experience of A being followed by B enables and impels us to connect the ideas of the two events in such a way that we believe, whenever A will be given, B will follow it, in future also. Regularity of sequence is the only thing that is observed empirically. The succession has been invariable so far as our experience has gone and nothing except the invariability of succession is connoted by causality.

Kant held that cause is an a priori concept which is the precondition of our experience of objective succession. It is not given in experience but comes from within and is

subjective in origin. It is an apriori category of the understanding. When we experience successive events we connect the events according to a rule. This rule is the law of causality. To say this is not to hold that we know in advance of experience what causes what. All that we know in advance in experience is that every thing that happens i.e. begins to be, presupposes something upon which it follows according to a rule. According to the law of cause and effect, we give them order and fixty. This necessary order makes the succession objective and real. The ordered world of knowledge is thus made by the understanding. Causation is thus subjective in origin. But Kant makes a distinction between phenomena and noumena. For Kant, causality is valid only within the world of experience and not in the world of thing-in-itself. This may be called disguised subjectivism, for necessary connection is not admitted in reality. But if thought and reality are identical, cause as the category of mind is also a category of reality. The necessary order amongst events which we know, is also objective and real.

According to Alexander, a modern realist, causality is a necessary category which means continuity of connection between phenomena. Existents are, according to him, motions and every motion is continuous with other motions in the space-time continuum. So when a motion is viewed as continued into some other motion, the former is called the

cause in relation to the latter, which is the 'effect'. Alexander's conception of causality is, no doubt, marvellous, but we should make further improvement upon it by saying that a supreme spiritual dynamic reality moves itself through this material cosmos for its self-expression and when it expresses through this physical world it expresses a continuous motion. Hence the cause is a dynamic entity moving through the universe in producing manifold of objects related to each other.

Thus the discussion of the concept of cause from different points of view, Indian and Western, has thrown much light on the problem. But there is even now ample scope for developing the concept of Cause from the scientific point of view. Though science has been trying to investigate into the nature of cause, the most satisfactory theory of cause has not yet been established. Consequently the concept of cause is not only a philosophical problem but has given rise to scientific discussion also. So this may be regarded as a crucial problem both for philosophy and for science.

References :

1. John Locke : *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, London, Ward, Locke and Bowden Ltd., 1689 p. 194.
2. Ibid, p. 195.
3. Ibid, p. 194.
4. Jeorge Berkely : *Treaties Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* edited by Fraser, p. 294.
5. J. S. Mill : *A System of Logic*, Longmans, green and Co. Ltd. 1967 Book - III, Chap., V, p. 213.