

The Perception of Non-existence: Dichotomy of Nyaya-Mimamsakas views

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ABSTRACT: The controversy between Nyaya-Mimamsakas regarding the perceptual knowledge of non-existence is great interest in Indian philosophy. The Naiyayikas tries to explain that the knowledge of non-existence entities is acquired through the sense-object contact. The non-existence is as a fact as an existence; but in producing the perceptual knowledge of non-existence entities, a special kind of operative relation, called characterizer-characterized (*visesana-visesya bhava*), plays an important role. The operative relation between the eyes as the sense organ and the non-existence as the object can be described as characterization of that which is in conjunction. Bhatta Mimamsakas, on the other hand, disagrees with the Naiyayikas and they hold the view that perception requires sense-object contact and there cannot be any contact of sense with non-existence. Thus the non-existence cannot be known by perception. The Bhatta Mimamsakas has recognized the appropriate non-perception (*yogyanupalabdhi*) as a separate source of knowledge. If a thing should be perceived under certain circumstances, holds Bhatta Mimamsakas, then its non-perception under those circumstances is a proof of its non-existence. In this paper, we have discussed both the views of Naiyayikas and Bhatta Mimamsakas and tried to show the claim of Bhatta Mimamsakas is not justified.

Keywords: Knowledge, , Non-existence, Non-perception, Operative relation, Perception, Pramana

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Perception is universally regarded as the primary source of valid knowledge (*pramana*) by all the Indian philosophical schools. It is the direct and immediate knowledge produced by the interaction between the object and the sense organs. Goutama, the founder of Nyaya philosophy, defines perception as the knowledge which is produced by the intercourse of an object with a sense organ, inexpressible by words, unerring and well defined[1]. In this definition (*laksna*) there are four factors-- the sense organs (*indriyas*), their objects (*artha*), the contact of the sense organs with their objects (*sannikarsa*) and cognition produced by this contact (*jnanam*). When a colour of an object, for example, comes in contact with eyes, we perceive the colour. Similarly we perceive sound with ears, we perceive smell with nose etc. Thus in the case of perception, the existence of object, good condition of sense organs, activeness of manas, the presence of sufficient light play an important role in producing perceptual knowledge. A blind man can not perceive the colour of a rose, a deaf man fails to enjoy the sweetness of Rabindra sangeet; because the sense organs (eyes in the case of blind man and ears in the case of deaf man) fail to contact with their objects. Therefore sense-object contact is a necessary condition for producing perceptual knowledge. According to the Naiyayikas, not only we perceive the existence of objects (*bhava padartha*), but we can also acquire the knowledge of the non-existence objects (*abhava Padartha*). For example, we can know the non-existence of a jar on the ground (*bhutate ghatabhava*).

But the problem is, how do we acquire the knowledge of non-existence objects? The Naiyayika's answer is that we can acquire the knowledge of non-existence objects through the sense perception. Bhatta Mimamsakas, On the other hand, holds the view that perceptual knowledge of non-existence objects is not possible since no sense-object contact is possible. According to them, we know the non-existence (*abhava*) objects by separate source of knowledge (*pramana*) called Non-perception (*Anupalabdhi*). The present paper contains an attempt to show the Naiyayika's explanation of the knowledge of non-existence and also tries to show the alternative explanation of Bhatta Mimamsakas.

II. DIFFERENT TYPES OF OPERATIVE RELATION (*Sannikarsa*)

But before entering to our main point of discussion, we should have to discuss the different types of 'operative relation'[2] (*Sannikarsa*) because these are the necessary condition for producing perceptual knowledge. According to Naiyayikas there are six types of operative relation in the case of ordinary perception (*Laukika pratyaksa*). (i) When we perceive a substance like a pot or cloth, we perceive it by the visual or tactile sense organs. In this type of perception the visual or tactile organ comes in direct contact with the object perceived. This operative relation (*sannikarsa*) is called *samyoga*. (ii) Again, when we perceive the several sensible qualities of the pot like its colour, the colour inheres in the pot which is in direct connection with the

visual organs. It has been described as *samyugta-samavaya*, because the relevant sense organ is in conjunction with the substance pot which the colour is inherent in it. (iii) According to Naiyayikas, we perceive not merely colour, we also perceive the universal *redness* existing in the particular colour. Here the operative relation is *samyukta-samaveta-samavaya*, because the universal *redness* resides in the red colour by the relation of inherence (*samavaya*), and the red colour exist in the substance (*say a pot*) by that relation. The eye as a sense organ is thus related to *redness* as the object through the second degree indirect relation of *samyukta-samaveta samavaya* (iv) When we perceive the sound by the ear, the operative relation (*sannikarsa*) between the ear as the sense organ and sound as the object, is the relation of inherence or *samavaya*. The sound is a quality of space or *Akssa*. Now a quality has to exist in some substance by the relation of inherence. The sound as a quality is to be admitted as inhering in some substance which is called *Akasa*. The relation between the ear and the sound is *samavaya* or inherence. (v) Again we do not perceive by the ear not merely sound but also universal *soundness* (*sabdatva*). In perception of the universal *soundness*, the ear is in contact with the object *soundness*, because it inheres in sound which in its turn, inheres as a quality in the ear. (vi) A non-existence (*abhava*) may sometimes be perceived by a sense organ, and it is the relation of characterizer-characterized[3] (*visesana-visesa bhava*).

III. NAIYAYIKA'S VIEW EXPLAINED

According to Naiyayikas, the non-existence is as a fact as an existence. Thus a non-existence (*abhava*) object can be perceived with a sense organ. The knowledge of non-existence (*abhava*) depends upon the knowledge of its counter entity (*protiyogi*). A table is a counter entity of the non-existence (*abhava*) of the table. The ground (*bhuta*) as well as the non-existence (*abhava*) of the table are known when my eyes function. When we turn our eyes to the ground (*bhuta*), we see both the ground (*bhuta*) and the non-existence (*abhava*) of a table, and when we shut them we can see neither the table nor the ground (*bhuta*). Therefore it may be said that if we called the ground (*bhuta*) visually perceptible, we could say the same with regard to the non-existence (*abhava*) of the table[4]. In producing the perceptual knowledge of non-existence entities, holds a Naiyayikas, a special kind of operative relation (*sannikarsa*) plays a important role. This special kind of relation is called characterizer-characterized (*visesana-visesya bhava*). When I am seeing the non-existence of a table on the ground (*bhuta*), for example, my eyes are in conjunction with ground (*bhuta*) which is characterized (*visesya*) by the non-existence (*abhava*) of a table. The operative relation (*sannikarsa*) between the eyes as the sense organ and the non-existence as the object can be described as characterization of that which is in conjunction[5].

Prof. S. N. Dasgupta[6] clearly explain the naiyayikas view. According to Naiyayikas, the perception of non-existence (*abhava*) is a unitary perception of one whole, just as any perception of positive existence is. Both the knowledge of the ground (*bhuta*) as well as the knowledge of the non-existence (*abhava*) of the table, for example, arises there by the same kind of action of the visual organ. Therefore there is no reason why the knowledge of the ground should be said to be due to perception, whereas the knowledge of the non-existence (*abhava*) of the table on the ground should be said to be due to a separate process of knowledge. The non-existence of the table is taken in the same act as the ground (*bhuta*) is perceived. The principle that in order to perceive a thing one should have sense-contact with it, applies only to positive existents and not to non-existence (*abhava*). Non-existence can be known even with any sense-contact. Non-existence (*abhava*) is not a positive substance, and thus there cannot be any question here of sense-contact. It may be argued that if no sense-contact is required in apprehending non-existence, one could as well apprehend non-existence (*abhava*) of other places which are far away from him. "To this reply is that to apprehend non-existence (*abhava*) it is necessary that the place where it exists must be perceived"[7]. We know a thing and its quality to be different, and yet the quality can only be taken in association with the thing and it is so in this case as well. We can apprehend non-existence (*abhava*) only through the apprehension of its locus (*adhikarana*). In the case when non-existence (*abhava*) is said to be apprehended later on it is really no later apprehension of non-existence (*abhava*) but a memory of non-existence (*abhava*) (for example of table) perceived before along with the perception of the locus (*adhikarana*) of non-existence(*abhava*) (for example ground). Non-existence (*abhava*) can thus, according to Naiyayikas, generate its cognition just as any positive existence can do. Non-existence (*abhava*) is not mere negativity or mere vacuous absence, but is what generates the cognition 'is not', as position is what generates the cognition 'it is'[8].

IV. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION OF BHATTA MIMAMSAKAS

Bhatta Mimamsakas, on the other hand, rejects the Naiyayikas view that the non-existence (*abhava*) can be known by perception. Perception requires sense-object contact, but there cannot be any contact of sense with non-existence(*abhava*). Bhatta Mimamsakas argues that, it cannot be said that I perceive the non-existence of a table or a jar with my sense organs. Because non-existence(*abhava*) is a negative fact which cannot stimulate any sense as a positive fact like a table or a jar can[9]. Moreover it cannot be said that the non-existence(*abhava*) of the table is inferred from its non-perception (*anupalabdhi*). Because such inference is

possible, if we already possess the knowledge of a universal relation (*vyapti*) between non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) and non-existence (*abhava*), that is, if we know that when a object is not perceived it does not exist. Thus it would be begging the question of the very thing which was sought to be proved by inference. Even we cannot explain the knowledge of the table's non-existence(*abhava*) by comparison (*upamana*) or testimony (*sabda pramana*), because it is not due to any knowledge of similarity or of words and sentences. Thus to explain the direct knowledge of the table's non-existence(*abhava*), we have to recognize the non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) as separate and independent source of knowledge.

But it should be remembered that all non-perception(*anupalabdhi*) does not prove the non-existence(*abhava*) of what is not perceived. We cannot perceive such super sensible entities as dharma and adharma, ether and atom, we do not judge them to be non-existent. Non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) gives us the knowledge of the non-existence(*abhava*) of such objects as should have been perceived if they existed. If a thing should be perceived under certain circumstances, then its non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) under those circumstances is a proof of its non-existence(*abhava*). It is called appropriate non-perception (*yogyanupalabdhi*) which is the source of our knowledge (*pramana*) of non-existence (*abhava*)[10].

V. CONCLUSION : MIMAMSAKA'S CLAIM NOT JUSTIFIED

Annabhata in his *Tarkasamgraha*[11] and in *Tarkasamgraha Dipika*[12], argues that non-perception(*abhava*) cannot possibly be accepted as a separate source of knowledge, but a special case of perception. Just as we perceive the existence of objects, so also we can perceive their non-existence under certain conditions. When there is a table on the ground (*bhuta*) before me I can perceive its existence through a direct contact between my sense organ and object, table. But when there is table on the same ground (*bhuta*), I can perceive its non-existence(*abhava*) as a characteristic of the ground (*bhuta*). The ground (*bhuta*) is characterized by the non-existence(*abhava*) of the table. Thus the non-existence(*abhava*) of the table comes in contact with my eyes through being adjectival (*visesana*) to the ground which is in direct contact with the sense organ. This perception of the non-existence(*abhava*) of a thing requires two negative conditions—the non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) of that thing and the hypothetical reasoning (*tarka*)[13]. Before we come to know the non-existence(*abhava*) of the table on the ground (*bhuta*) we must be sure of the fact that we do not perceive it there. Moreover, we must be sure that all the conditions that are necessary for its perception are present at the time when it is not perceived. The non-existence(*abhava*) of the table is perceived by me when I do not perceive it on the ground (*bhuta*) but know that it would have been perceived if it existed there. The non-existence(*abhava*) of the table is thus known by means of perception when it is combined with the non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) of the table and the hypothetical reasoning (*tarka*) about its existence. That this knowledge of non-existence (*abhava*) is a form of perception is directly felt by us. We are immediately aware of the fact that the non-existence(*abhava*) of a table on the ground (*bhuta*) is directly perceived by us. Non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) of the table is a negative condition of the perception, and the not the source of our knowledge of its non-existence(*abhava*). If non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) be taken as a source of knowledge, argues a Naiyayikas, it must be either known by some other non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) or not known at all. If we accept the first alternative we are landed in the fallacy of *argumentum ad infinitum*. Again if we accept the second alternative non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) becomes identical with perceptions, because like perception, it is knowledge which is not produced by any other knowledge. Thus, in agrees with the Naiyayikas, we may conclude that non-perception is not a separate source of knowledge, but a special case of perception.

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