

Relation-Based Explanation of the Nyāya– Vaiśeṣika Theory of Atomic Causation (Paramāṇu-kāraṇavāda)

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ABSTRACT

Samavāya (inherence) in the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika system is the eternal relation that connects two inseparable entities (*ayutasiddha padārthas*), such as part and whole, quality and substance, universal and particular, action and agent, and eternal substance and particularity. In each case, at least one relatum depends inseparably upon the other—for example, “cowness” exists only in an individual cow. Unlike conjunction (*saṃyoga*), which is non-eternal, inherence is accepted as eternal and irreducible. Nyāya maintains that inherence preserves real difference between relata. Advaita Vedānta, however, interprets such relations as ultimately non-dual (*tādātmya*), reducing difference to a conceptual level, while Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā accepts both difference and non-difference under *svarūpa-sambandha*. In the *Brahma-sūtra*, Adī Shankaracharya argues that inherence leads to infinite regress (*anavasthā*), since if it is distinct from its relata, it would require another relation to connect it to them. The Naiyāyikas respond that inherence is directly apprehended and intrinsically related to its relata, thus avoiding regress. This debate is central to the coherence of Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika atomism and its realist theory of relations.

Keywords: Atomism, Relation, *Samavāya* (Inherence), Essential Relation

INTRODUCTION

According to Nyāya philosophy, the cognition of a qualified object (*viśiṣṭa-jñāna*) arises from the cognition of the qualificand (*viśeṣya*), the qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*), and the relation (*sambandha*) between them. For example, “the man with a staff” (*daṇḍī puruṣaḥ*) is a qualified cognition. Here, the man is the qualificand, the staff is the qualifier, and the relation between them is conjunction (*saṃyoga*). Mere knowledge of the staff alone, or of the man alone, does not produce the cognition “the man with a staff.” Suppose a staff is seen in one corner of a room and a man is seen in another corner. Even though both are perceived, the cognition “man with a staff” does not arise. Only when the man is seen holding the staff—that is, when conjunction between them is perceived—does the qualified cognition arise. Therefore, relation is accepted as the determinant of qualified cognition. In Navya-Nyāya terminology it is said: “Relation is proximity (*sannikarṣa*), and it produces the qualificative–qualified structure between two distinct entities.”

CONCEPT OF RELATION

Relation is primarily divided into two types: difference (*bheda*) and non-difference (*abheda*). Non-diffe-

rence is one; difference has various forms such as conjunction (*saṃyoga*), inherence (*samavāya*), essential relation (*svarūpa*), counter-positive relation (*pratiyogitā*), locus relation (*anuyogitā*), subject–object relation, cause–effect relation, etc.

Non-difference is also known in scriptures as identity (*tādātmya*). However, the Nyāya conception of *tādātmya* differs from that of Buddhists, Mīmāṃsakas, and Baiakaraṇ. According to Nyāya, identity exists only within a single entity. For example, the identity of a pot exists only in that very pot, not in another pot. Thus, in *tādātmya* there is only one *relata*. But according to Buddhists and others, any relation must involve at least two *relata*. If two entities are inseparably related such that one cannot exist without the other, then they share a relation of identity—for example, blueness and a blue pot, or treeness and *śimśapā-ness*.

Conjunction (*saṃyoga*) must occur between two substances (*dravya*), and both must be separably existent (*yutasiddha*). “Conjunction occurs only between two separably existent substances.” For example, the relation between a bird and a tree branch is conjunction. Both are substances and can exist independently. *Yutasiddha* means independently established—two entities that can exist separately without depending on each other.

Inherence (*samavāya*), on the other hand, is the relation between two inseparably existent entities (*ayutasiddha*). It may occur between two substances, or between a substance and a quality, universal, or motion. It occurs in five cases:

1. Between parts and whole,
2. Between quality and substance,
3. Between universal and particular,
4. Between action and actor,
5. Between eternal substance and particularity (*viśeṣa*).

If at least one of two entities depends inseparably on the other for its existence, they are *ayutasiddha*. For example, “cowness” exists only in a cow. The relation between cowness and cow is inherence. Vaiśeṣikas do not accept eternal conjunction; conjunction is non-eternal. But inherence is eternal.

Nyāya also recognizes essential relation (*svarūpa-sambandha*), where the relation is intrinsic to the entity’s own nature. This is of three types: qualificative presence, absence-related qualification, and temporal relation. For example, substratum-hood resides in a substratum by essential relation; absence of a pot exists on the ground by essential relation; and any produced object exists in time by temporal relation. Subject–object relation, qualifier–qualificand relation, and counter-positive relations are included under essential relation.

Other philosophical systems also accept these relations, though with variations.

PARAMĀṆU-KĀRAṆVĀDA

The Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika theory of atomic causation (*paramāṇu-kāraṇavāda*) is constructed primarily around the concept of relation. According to this view, inherence relates part and whole, substance and quality, eternal substance and particularity, and universal and individual. Inherence itself is considered a real category (*padārtha*). It can be viewed either as a category or as a relation. As a category, it connects itself to its *relata* by an intrinsic self-relation (*svātmaka-svarūpa-sambandha*). The *relata* of inherence are called *samavāyins*. In the relation between universal and individual, the individual is the locus (*anuyogin*) and the universal is the counter-positive (*pratiyogin*).

Nyāya maintains that inherence does not negate the difference between *relata*. Advaita Vedānta, however, argues that the difference between clay and pot is only conceptual; ultimately, only clay exists. This non-dual relation is called *tādātmya*. Thus, Advaita denies real difference between *relata*. Mīmāṃsā accepts both difference and non-difference as real, calling it *svarūpa* relation, which partially resembles inherence.

In the Brahma-sūtra (2.2.13),

“samavāyābhyupagamāc ca sāmīyād anavasthiteḥ,”

Śāṅkara argues that inherence cannot adequately explain creation and dissolution. If a dyad (*dyanuka*) is distinct from the two atoms composing it and resides in them by inherence, then inherence itself—being distinct from its *relata*—would require another inherence to relate it to them. This leads to infinite regress (*anavasthā*).

Nyāya replies that inherence is directly apprehended in cognitions such as “cloth exists in threads” and “color exists in cloth.” It is eternally related to its *relata* through intrinsic relation, not by another relation. Therefore, no regress arises.

Vedāntins counter that if so, conjunction too should be eternally related to its *relata* and not require another relation. If conjunction requires another relation because it is distinct from its *relata*, then inherence—also distinct—should require one as well. Since distinctness is common to both, accepting inherence as a separate category leads inevitably to infinite regress. If inherence is invalid, then the formation of dyads from atoms becomes impossible. Consequently, the Nyāya theory of atomic causation collapses.

Viśiṣṭādvaita further argues that if inherence is eternal, then the relation between entities would also be eternal, making the world eternal and denying dissolution.

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