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## SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE NYĀYA THEORY OF ACTION

### I

The present paper gives an account of the *Nyāya* theory of human action as propounded by the older and Neo-thinkers in the field. The concluding part of the paper contains some critical and evaluative remarks with regard to this theory. An effort has been made to throw some light on phenomenon of *upeksā* as found in older *Nyāya* system and to consider whether it can be included in action. In this connection some remarks have been made regarding the conditions of being an agent (*Kartā*) of such action, which is consistent with their philosophy of action.

### II

When an individual comes to know of the nature of an object he has different attitudes to it.

In the *Prācīna Nyāya* the attitude of an individual towards an object is described as of three types : *Pravṛtti* (inclination), *Nivṛtti* (rejection) and *Upekṣā* (to become indifferent). When someone forsakes some object, it is due to one's notion of rejection (*Hānabuddhi*). In the case of the acceptance of something it is the result of his desire of acceptance (*Upādānabuddhi*). An action existing between acceptance and rejection or an action which is neither acceptance nor rejection arises due to the result of the notion of being indifferent (*Upekṣābuddhi*).<sup>1</sup>

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Where there is the knowledge of acceptance (*Upādānabuddhi*) there is an action in the form of *Pravṛtti* (inclination). On the other hand, the knowledge of rejection (*hānabuddhi*) gives rise to another type of action called *Nivṛtti* (declination). The *Upādānabuddhi* or *Hānabuddhi* becomes the cause of human action in the form of inclination or declination respectively.<sup>2</sup> (“*Anena Sarvāṇi Karmāṇi Vyāptāni*”) From the word ‘*Karmāni*’ it is known that inclination etc. is taken as ‘*Karma*’ or action. Let us try to find out the cause of these human actions.

An individual is desirous of doing those types of actions by which his purpose is served and hence, it can be said that the end-in-view (*Prayojana*) inspires him to do some activity.<sup>3</sup> In order to get or get rid of something an individual engages himself in activity.<sup>4</sup> A man’s desire (for action) is related to the result in the form of pleasure or the absence of pain and to the means of it. The longing for the result of some action presupposes the knowledge of it. Hence, the desire for the result is due to the existence of the knowledge of it<sup>5</sup>, which can be described as a form of syllogistic argument. The knowledge in the form ‘The orange is good for health’ is known as the knowledge of the conduciveness to the desired object. If the attainment of the good health is desired, the perception of an orange will give rise to the knowledge in the form : “This is conducive to its being desired” (*Idam madīṣṭasādhanam*). So, the knowledge of the conduciveness to the desired gives rise to the knowledge of acceptance from which the action in the form of *Pravṛtti* comes into being.

It may be argued that the knowledge of the conduciveness of the desired alone cannot be the cause of inclination. For, inclination is *not* possible if one has the knowledge of the conduciveness of the desired alone but does not have the knowledge of the means of attaining the desired result.

In response to the above, the Naiyāyikas are of the opinion that inclination presupposes the desire concerning result (*Phalaviṣayinī*) as well as concerning the means (for the attainment of the result) (*Upāyaviṣayinī*).<sup>6</sup> Hence, the cause of desire for the result is the knowledge of the result and the cause of desire for the means (of the result) is the knowledge of its conduciveness to the desired object. The knowledge of its conduciveness to that which is desirable is considered as *Hetu* to the desire for the means of it.<sup>7</sup> The human action in the form of inclination presupposes both types of desire mentioned above.

It may be objected that the knowledge of the conduciveness to that which is desirable is not always the cause of a man's action in the form of inclination. For, there are many things which, though desirable to us, are not feasible with our efforts. We have nothing to do with the phenomena like rain etc. though they are desirable to us. Hence, the knowledge of the conduciveness of what is desired alone cannot be the cause of our action in the form of inclination.

In response to this, the Naiyāyikas have added another criterion of our inclination. According to them, the notion of its feasibility through one's effort (*Kṛtisādhyatājñāna*) and the knowledge of its conduciveness to that which is desirable (*iṣṭasāadhanatājñāna*) are considered as the reasons behind the desire for doing something. Nobody thinks to do an action without having the knowledge of its feasibility through one's effort, the cause of desire. An inclination towards rain etc. is *not* possible due to not having feasibility through effort.<sup>8</sup> Just as the notion of feasibility of an object through one's effort is the cause of inclination, the notion of *not* producing any harm is also a cause of inclination.<sup>9</sup>

The Prabhākara school of the Mīmāṃsakas put forward a different view as to the philosophy of action. According to the followers of Prabhākara, the notion of feasibility is the cause of inclination. That is to say, inclination towards an action is possible due to having the desire to do which is caused by the notion of feasibility through one's effort. Here the said feasibility is accepted as a feature of the desire to do (*Cikīrṣā*). In other words, the notion having such feature is the cause of desire to do through which inclination follows. So the knowledge of the conduciveness to that what is desirable is *not* the cause of inclination. If it were so, there, the Prābhākaras opine, would be an inclination to the action of bringing down the orb of the moon which is not at all feasible through one's effort.<sup>10</sup> But it is an absurd thinking due to *not* having the said feasibility.

The Naiyāyikas have objected to the view mentioned above. According to them, the knowledge of conduciveness to the desired becomes the cause of inclination if there is no obstacle. Here the non-feasibility through one's effort becomes an obstacle to the action and hence, there is no inclination.<sup>11</sup> In the case of bringing down the orb of the moon the non-feasibility through one's effort has become obstacle though there may be the knowledge of the conduciveness to the desired. Hence there is no *Pravṛtti*.

The Prābhākaras again argue that the previous view of the Naiyāyikas is *not* tenable. For, if the notion of feasibility through one's effort is accepted, it comes under the 'Law of Parsimony' (*Lāghava*). If both (knowledge of conduciveness to the desired and knowledge of feasibility through effort) are taken as cause, it would lead to the defect called *Gaurava*.<sup>12</sup>

The Naiyāyikas argue that if the view of the Prābhākaras is taken as accepted (i.e. the notion of such feasibility is taken as a

cause of inclination) there would be possibility of being inclined to the food mixed with honey and poison and to the salutation of road-side tree (*Caitya*) as there is the said feasibility.<sup>13</sup>

The Mīmāṃsakas are of the opinion that the cause of inclination is the notion of feasibility produced by the knowledge of a characteristic of oneself. The characteristic of an individual differs in different activities. The desire may be taken as a characteristic feature of a man in the optional activities like cooking, sacrifice etc. From this desire the notion of feasibility comes into being and this gives rise to the notion of action which becomes the medium for attaining the desired and which is not associated with highly undesirable consequences. This is the cause of inclination. An individual who does not feel hungry does not feel inclined in eating as desire in this case is not the characteristic feature of him.<sup>14</sup> In the case of regular obligatory rites, the purity etc. are the characteristic features of a person. The notion of feasibility which is dependent on the purity etc. is the cause of inclination towards them.<sup>15</sup> The Mīmāṃsakas further argue that the knowledge of the conduciveness to the desired and of the feasibility cannot be attained simultaneously on account of the fact that there is a contradiction between what is being established (*Sādhya*) and what is the means of doing so (*Sādhana*). Here '*Iṣṭasādhanatva*' and '*Kṛtisādhyatva*' are accepted as *Sādhana* and *Sādhya* respectively. The object which is not yet accomplished becomes *Sādhya*, while the object already accomplished becomes the means (*Sādhana*). That is why, as both the *Sādhya* and *Sādhana* cannot be known by a person simultaneously<sup>16</sup>, the knowledge of *Iṣṭasādhanatva* and *Kṛtisādhyatva* cannot be the cause of inclination simultaneously.

The above mentioned view of the Mīmāṃsakas is refuted by the Naiyāyikas in the following way. For the sake of simplicity (*Lāghava*) it is better to accept that the notion of feasibility

(through one's effort) which is associated with being the means of having that what is desirable and which does not give rise to highly undesirable circumstances is the cause of inclination. If different criterion is accepted in different activities, it will lead us to the defect 'Gaurava' as there would be no common connotation (*anugata-dharma*) among the causes. The cause mentioned here contains the common connotation and hence there is *Lāghava*. There is no contradiction in apprehending an object as being end and means. For, the contradiction lies in apprehending the same object as being end and means existing at the same time, but there is no contradiction if an object becomes end and means at different times. Hence, the knowledge of being an end and means existing at different times may be attained simultaneously as mentioned by Dinakara.<sup>17</sup> So, both can be regarded as the causes of inclination.

In the same way, the knowledge of its being productive of what is extremely unpleasant (*dviṣṭasā-dhanatājñāna* or *Aniṣṭasā-dhanatājñāna*) is the cause of aversion (*Dveṣa* or *Aniṣṭa*), which is again the cause of declination (*Nivṛtti*). That which does not seem to be conducive to the desired is rejected.<sup>18</sup>

It has already been said that when object is known, the knower thinks the object as acceptable or rejectable or indifferent. If it is rejectable, an individual rejects it, which is a kind of *Nivṛtti*. If acceptable, he accepts it which is a kind of *Pravṛtti*. In the case of *upekṣā* there is neither the desire of acceptance nor rejection. Hence, there is neither *pravṛtti* or *nivṛtti*. The older Naiyāyikas think that all human activities centre around the inclination and declination.<sup>19</sup> To remain indifferent (*upekṣā*) is not an action as it is not associated with conduciveness to what is desirable (*iṣṭasā-dhanatājñāna*) with the knowledge of being productive of what is unpleasant (*Aniṣṭasā-dhanatājñāna*).

In other words, that which is neither *Pravṛtti* nor *Nivṛtti* is *upekṣā*, which is not regarded as human action in Nyāya system.

### III

If the whole theory of action provided by the Naiyāyikas is critically reviewed, the following observations can be made.

The Nyāya theory of *upekṣā* needs some attention in this context. In my opinion *upekṣā* is also an action. In this context I have taken *upekṣā* in a slight different way and hence, *upekṣā* can be regarded as a human action in the light of the following arguments.

The sense in which *upekṣābuddhi* is admitted by the Naiyāyikas cannot be taken into the account fully and I beg to differ from the Naiyāyikas in this respect. An object, I think, is either accepted or rejected but there is no scope for being indifferent. In my opinion the indifferent attitude towards an object which is described as *upekṣā* would fall under the category of rejection (*hāna*). 'To remain indifferent' is also a kind of rejection on account of the fact that it depends on the knowledge of the non-conduciveness of the desired. When an individual becomes indifferent towards an object, he takes recourse to *Tarka* in the form: 'If it would have been conducive to us, it would be accepted'. As it seems to us to be non-conducive to be desired it may be ignored which is also a kind of rejection.

It is true that when food mixed with poison is rejected it is due to having the sense of *Aniṣṭasāghanatā*, which is capable of doing harm. This *Aniṣṭasāghanatā jñāna* is of two types: the knowledge of an object capable of doing harm and the knowledge of the absence of the usefulness determined by the non-desiredness of an object, which follow from the literal

meaning of the term 'Aniṣṭa'. In the case of the former, the Naiyāyikas have accepted *Hāna* (rejection) but in the latter case they accept *upekṣābuddhi*, as the object neither serves our purpose nor does it do any harm to us.

The *Upekṣā* in the above mentioned sense is not at all *Upekṣā*, as it reveals in our awareness that the object does not serve any purpose in a particular context. That is why, an individual prefers to ignore this. This 'ignorance' in the sense indifference is, I think, not at all *Upekṣā* in the true sense of the term, but is also rejection as it is performed keeping its absence of conduciveness in view. *Upekṣā* towards an object in real sense is possible if there is the absolute negation of the sense of its conduciveness or nonconduciveness. An individual thinks the 'suitability' of an object in a particular time. If the object is not suitable to him, he remains indifferent to it, which is nothing but rejection. The real *Upekṣā* emerges when we have no scope of considering its *iṣṭatva* and *aniṣṭatva* which is determined in terms of attachment. When the nature of an object (i.e. *Savikalpaka* nature of an object) is known to us, the question of its usefulness or otherwise automatically comes to our mind. If indifferent attitude is found in an individual towards something, it is the result of the consideration of its non-usefulness. Hence it is rejection in disguise of *upekṣā*.<sup>20</sup> Actual *Upekṣā* towards an object is possible in the transcendental level (but not in phenomenal level), when the real nature of the object gets lost for which the question *Iṣṭatva* or *aniṣṭatva* in the *laukika* sense does not arise at all

That *Upekṣā* is nothing but a form of rejection is accepted by Dharmottara in the *Nyāyabindutīkā* keeping perhaps this view in mind. According to him, an object may be accepted or rejected but there is no third alternative. That which is described as *Upekṣanāya* is nothing but *Heya* (rejectable) ("*Upekṣanā-*



yohyanupādeya tvāddheya eva"). This same view is also accepted by Prabhācandra, the celebrated Jaina logician in his *Prameyakamalamūrtanda*.<sup>21</sup>

The Grammarians also have accepted *Upekṣā* in the sense of *Anīpsita* or *Aniṣṭa*. Pāṇini in the *Sūtra* 'Tathāyuktañcānīpsitam'<sup>22</sup>, has said that *Anīpsita* is of two types: *Dveṣya* (that which is taken through aversion) and *Udāsīna* (indifferent attitude towards an object). 'While going towards village he is touching grass' (*grāmam gacchan tṛṇam spṛṣati*) is the example of the *Udāsīna Karma* given by the commentator. This type of *Karma* is included under the category of *Anīpsita* or *Aniṣṭa* there. As it is included under the category of *Aniṣṭa*, it can be described as rejection also by virtue of its producing knowledge of its nonconduciveness of the desired. Keeping this in view, *Bhāṣyakāra* and *Sūtrakāra* have put this type of *Udāsīna* action under the category of *Anīpsita*.

From the foregoing discussions it can be concluded that *Upekṣā* is also a kind of human action as it is nothing but rejection. Where there is rejection, there is the action in the form of *Nivṛtti*. As in *Upekṣā* (in the sense given above) there is also *Nivṛtti*, it can be regarded as human action.

It may be argued that an individual who is inclined to act or rejects to do something is called agent or *Kartā* of these activities. For being a *Kartā* one should possess the direct knowledge of the inherent causes of a particular action, effort for doing an action, and desire for doing so<sup>23</sup>, which are also preconditions of an individual's inclination towards an object.

In the context of analysing the cause of man's inclination, all these preconditions, it seems, are not taken into the account by

the Naiyāyikas. Hence, one may raise the question of inconsistency existing within the system. In other words, there is apparent inconsistency between the conditions of being an agent and those of human action.

The above mentioned view is not tenable. For, the conditions for being a *Kartā* (as given in the definition) are incorporated in the theory of action given by the Naiyāyikas. Having *Cikīrṣā* i. e., the desire to do (an action), one of the preconditions for being a *Kartā*, is accommodated in the theory in the following way. Here also having *Cikīrṣā* is taken as one of the main causes of action, for which they opine, the knowledge of feasibility through one's effort and knowledge of conduciveness to the desired are essential. As it is already said *Cikīrṣā* depends on the knowledge of feasibility through one's effort. So incorporation of 'making an effort' as the cause of inclination is superfluous. Hence the feature 'making an effort' (*Kṛtimattva*) for being an agent is not mentioned here again due to the fear of *Gaurava*. For being *Kartā* the existence of the direct knowledge of the inherent causes of an action is highly essential which is also a pre-condition of an individual's inclination. In order to make the theory consistent, the Naiyāyikas have inserted this as the cause for inclination i. e., the perception of the material cause or inherent cause (" *Upādānasya cādhyakṣam pravṛttau janakam bhaver* ") as a cause.<sup>34</sup> This criterion of human action is elaborated more clearly in the *Dinakarī*. According to Dinakara, the ordinary perception of the materials in the form of inherent causes is the cause of an individual's inclination.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the charge of inconsistency within the *Nyāya* system in regard to the philosophy of action does not stand.

It has been stated earlier that the knowledge of the result is the cause of the desire for result and the cause of desire for the

means is the knowledge of its conduciveness to the desired object<sup>16</sup>

The above mentioned view of the Naiyāyikas is *not* tenable so far as the first part is concerned. I do not think that the knowledge of the result alone is the cause of the desire for result. For, the knowledge of result alone cannot be the cause of our desire unless it is known to us that it is conducive to be desired. When the result of an action is known to us, we can know of its conduciveness to the desired. We may have desire for taking medicine if the result of the medicine is known. The result of taking medicine is the cure of disease, which is nothing but the knowledge of its conduciveness. Hence, the result without the concept of *Istasādhanatā* cannot be known. In order to avoid logical cumbrousness it is better to accept the knowledge of *Iṣṭasādhanatā* (along with other factors) as cause of both desire for result (*phalecchā*) as well as desire for means (*Upāyecchā*) but *not* for the means only.

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#### NOTES

1. *Yadā jñānam tadā hānopādānopekṣābuddhayaḥ phalam. Vātsyāyana-bhāṣya* on Sūtra 1. 1. 3.
2. *Yamartham abhisanjihāsan vā karmārabhate tenānena sarve prāyinaḥ sarvāṇi karmāṇi sarvāśca vyāptāḥ. Nyāyabhāṣya* on Sūtra 1. 1. 24.
3. *Yamartham adhikṛtya pravartate tat prayojanam. Nyāyasūtra*, 1. 1. 24. *Yena prayuktaḥ pravartate tat prayojanam. Nyāyabhāṣya* on Sūtra 1. 1. 24.

4. Yamarthamāptavyaṁ hātavyaṁ vādhyavasāya tadāptihānopāyam  
anutiṣṭhati tat prayojanam. Tadveditvaṁ pravṛttihetuvāt. *Nyāya-  
bhāṣya* on Sūtra 1. 1. 24.
5. Icchā hi phalaviṣayinī upāyaviṣayinī ca. Phalaṁ tu sukhaṁ duḥkhā-  
bhāvaśca. Tatra phalecchāṁ prati phalajñānaṁ kāraṇaṁ. *Siddhānta-  
muktāvalī* on Verse-146.  
Nirduḥkhatve sukhe cecchā tajjñānadeva jñāyate. *Bhāṣāpariccheda*,  
Verse no. 146.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Icchā tu tadapāye syādiṣṭasādhyatvadhīryadi. *Bhāṣāpariccheda*  
Verse 146.  
Upāyecchāṁ pratīṣṭasādhanatājñānam kāraṇaṁ. *Siddhāntamuktāvalī*  
on Verse 146
8. Cikīrṣā kṛtisādhyatvaprakāreccā ca yā bhavet. Taddhetuḥ kṛtisā-  
dhyasādhanatvamatirbhavet. *Bhāṣāpariccheda* Verse 147.  
Cikīrṣā pratīṣṭaṁ kṛtisādhyatājñānaṁ iṣṭasādhanatājñānaṁ ca kāraṇam.  
Ata eva vṛṣṭyādau kṛtisādhyatājñānābhāvānna cikīrṣā.  
*Siddhāntamuktāvalī* on Verse 147.
9. Tadahetuvabuddhestu hetuvaṁ kasyacinmate. *Bhāṣāpariccheda*  
Verse no. 148.  
Balavadanistājanakajñānaṁ kāraṇamityarthaḥ *Siddhāntamuktāvalī*  
on Verse 148.
10. Kāryatājñānaṁ pravartakamiti guravaḥ. Tathā hi jñānasya pravṛttau  
jananīyāyāṁ cikīrṣātiriktaṁ nāpekṣitamasti. Sā ca kṛtisādhyatājñāna-  
sādhyā, icchāyāḥ svaprakāratvadhīśādhyatvanīyamāt. Cikīrṣā da  
kṛtisādhyatvaprakāreccā. Tatra kṛtisādhyatvaṁ prakāratatprakā-  
rakaṁ jñānaṁ cikīrṣāyāṁ taddvārā ca pravṛttau hetuḥ. Na tvīṣṭasā-  
dhanatājñānaṁ tatra hetuḥ, kṛtyasādhye'pi candramandalānayanāuḥ  
pravṛtṭyāpatteḥ. *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* on Verse 147.
11. Nanu kṛtyasādhanatājñānaṁ pratibandhakamiti cenna.  
*Ibid.*
12. Tadabhāvāpekṣāyā kṛtisādhyatājñānasya laghutvāt. Na ca dvayo'rapi  
hetuvaṁ gauravāt.  
*Ibid.*
13. Nanu tvanmate'pi madhuviśasaṁprkṭānabhojane caityavandane ca  
pravṛtṭyāpattih kāryatājñānasya sattvāditi cenna.  
*Ibid.*

14. Svaviśeṣaṇavattā-pratisandhānājanya-kāryatājñānasya pravartakatvāt. Kāmye hi pākayagādau kāmanā svaviśeṣaṇārṇ. Tataśca balavadanistā-nubandhikāmyasādhanatājñānena kāryatājñānārṇ, tataśca pravrttīḥ. Trptaśca bhojane na pravartate, tadānīm kāmanāyāḥ puruṣaviśeṣa-ṇatvābbhāvāt.

*Ibid.*

15. Nitye ca śaucādikārṇ puruṣaviśeṣaṇārṇ, tena śaucādiññānādhiṅnakrti-sādhyatājñānāt tatra pravrttīḥ.

*Ibid.*

16. Iṣṭasādhanatva-krtisādhyatvayoryugapī jñātumaśakyatvāt, sādhyatva-śadhanatvayorvirodhitvāt. Asiddhasya hi sādhyatvaṁ siddhasya ca sādhanatvaṁ.

*Ibid.*

17. Maivarṇ. Lāghavena balavadanistānanubandhiṣṭasādhanatve sati krti-sādhyatājñānasya tatra hetutvāt Na ca sādhyatva-sādhanatvayorviro-dhaḥ, yadā kadācit sādhyatva-sādhanatvayoravirodhādekadā sādhyatvasādhanatvayośca jñānāt.

*Ibid.*

Yatkiñcitkālinasya sādhyatvasya yatkiñcitkālinena sadhanena sadhana-tvena virodhābhāvādityarthaḥ. Tathā caikakālīna - krtisādhyatveṣṭa-sadhanatvayorvirodhe'pi na kṣatīḥ. *Dinakarī* on the same.

18. Dviṣṭasadhanatā-buddhirbhaved dveṣasya karaṇārṇ. *Bhāṣāpariccheda* Verse no. 140.

Duḥkhopāyaviśayakarṇ dveṣārṇ prati dviṣṭasādhanatājñānārṇ karaṇamityarthaḥ. *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* on Verse 143.

19. Yamarthamabhīpsan jihāsan vā karmārabhate tepānena sarve prāṇīṇāḥ sarvāṇi karmāṇi sarvāśca vyāptāḥ. *Nyāyabhāṣya* on Sūtra ol. 1' 24.

20. See My paper: "A Problem Concerning Nyāya Theory of Nirvikalpaka Pratyakṣa"; *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, University of Poona, pp. 210-213.

21. Pandit Phanibhūṣan Tarkavāgīśa; *Nyāyadarśana*, Vol. I, p. 90, W. B. Govt.

22. Pāṇini, Sūtra no. 1. 4. 50 Also Bhāṣya on this.

23. Upādānagocarāparokṣajñānacikīrṣā-kṛtimattvarṇī-kartṛtvam.  
Upādānārṇ samavāyikāraṇārṇ.  
*Dīpikā* on *Tarkasamgraha*, p. XII, Progressive, 1983.
24. *Bhāṣāpariccheda* Verse no. 151.
25. Tatsādhyakapravṛtṭiṁ prati tatsamavāyikāraṇātmaakatadupādānagocara-laukikapratyakṣasya hetutvarṇī.  
*Dinakarī* on *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* under Verse 161.
26. *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* under Verse-146, which is mentioned under note no. 7 above.
- \* The paper was presented in the Seminar on "Human Relation" organised by the I. C. P. R. at Lucknow in March, 1990.