

## IS THEISM CENTRAL TO NYĀYA?

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In some quarters there seems to be a totally unfounded opinion that the role of *Īsvara*, God, in the Nyāya system is practically non-existent or at best peripheral and minimal. Is this true? First of all let us clarify what it means for a reality to be central in a philosophical system. One obvious but rather extrinsic criterion is the number of important works produced by the representative masters of the system on the topic. Another and perhaps a more important sense in which a reality can be central to a philosophical system is that without accepting this reality the whole philosophical system does not make any sense. Or in other words, the dynamism and the principles of the arguments of the system naturally lead to the acceptance of the reality in question.

I argue that in both these senses the reality of *Īsvara*, God, is central to the *Nyāya* system. First of all, in the course of the development of the *Nyāya* system outstanding authors of the school have produced philosophical arguments or works either as part of larger treatises or as independent monographs on the subject of God. Thus already in the *Nyāya Sūtras* of Gautama we find three aphorisms (4.1.19, 20 and 21) which deal directly with God. These *sūtras* are the following:

(Sūtra 4.1.19): *Īsvaraḥ Kāraṇam puruṣakaramāphalyadarśanāt*. God is the cause because we find fruitlessness in the action of men. 20) *na, puruṣakarmābhāve phalānīṣpatteḥ*. It is not so because so fruit appears without the actions of men. 21) *tatkaritātvād ahetuḥ*. This reasoning is not correct since it (the actions of men) is influenced by him (God).

I have given an elaborate commentary on these *sūtras* in my work *Gaṅgeśa's Philosophy of God*.<sup>1</sup> It is not necessary to repeat all that I have developed in this commentary. Suffice to point out here that the early commentators like Vātsyāyana Pakṣilasvāmin and Uddyotakara consider these *sūtras* as proposing the view that God is the cause of the world and there is no rational justification to reject the opinion of these classical interpreters. It may be noted also that Uddyotakara not only comments on these three *Sūtras* but at the end of his commentary on the third of these theistic *sūtras* adds a relatively long section on *Īśvaraprakriyā*. In concluding this part Uddyotakara gives an inference to establish the existence of God with *Kāryatva*, being an effect, as the reason. This has remained in its various formulations by different Nyāya authors the central argument for establishing the existence of God.

Vācaspati gives decisive logical interpretations to these *sūtras* and rejects the arguments advanced by the Buddhists against the existence of God. I have also shown in my work that Vācaspati's contribution is seminal in the most important respect of showing the limitations and ultimately the untenability of the logical positions of the Buddhists especially of Dharmakīrti.

Udayana also treats the existence of God in his *Ātmātattvaviveka*, *Nyāyakusumāñjali* and *Kiraṇāvalī*. *Nyāyakusumāñjali* is entirely devoted to establish the reality of God. It is probably the first authoritative systematic and independent work as different from the *sūtras* and their commentaries, to establish with rigorous arguments the main doctrines of the Nyāya system and as the culmination of this philosophical enterprise. In the fifth and final chapter of this work Udayana elaborates various proofs for the existence of God. Naturally the most significant proof is the inference with *kāryatva*, being an effect, as the *hetu*, the reason. Whatever may be the meagerness of Nyāya literature on the existence of God prior to Udayana the situation is radically changed after his work *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, for it is a voluminous and central work in the development of Nyāya system.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving less known Nyāya authors who have contributed to the doctrine of God like Śaśadhara and others I come to the great Gaṅgeśa in whose

magisterial work *Tattvacintāmaṇi* there is a very significant section, *Īśvarānumānam*, establishing the existence of God. Perhaps the towering personality of Udayana and his magnificent work, *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, overshadowed the *Īśvarānumānam* of Gaṅgeśa and so earlier scholars like Jacobi argued that everything that could be said about God in the Nyāya tradition has already been stated by Udayana in his *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, but in the light of the studies undertaken in recent times<sup>3</sup>, it is no more possible to hold such an opinion. In fact a detailed and careful study of the text of Gaṅgeśa's *Īśvarānumānam* shows the considerable originality of the author not only in the organisation of the matter in the Nyāya tradition but also in the development of the arguments especially in as far as their logical rigour is concerned. In fact the whole work of *Gaṅgeśa's Īśvarānumānam* is a logical and epistemological defence of the basic Nyāya inference, *kṣityankurādikaṃ sakarṭṭkam kāryatvāt*, the earth and so on have an agent because they have the characteristic of being an effect, the standard Nyāya inference to establish the existence of God. The defence of this inference is carried out by Gaṅgeśa's with such philosophical depth and logical acumen that his *Īśvaraānumānam* can easily be ranked as one of the finest philosophical text in any tradition, Indian or Western. But to appreciate the philosophical significance of this statement one should have carefully analysed each sentence and phrase and reflected over for long. That is the only way to have even an inkling of the philosophical depth and logical acumen of Gaṅgeśa.

We can therefore conclude that although the literature on God in the early Nyāya confines itself to the three theistic *sūtras* and the *commentaries* on them, still the contributions of Uddyotakara and Vācaspati are so significant from the point of view of logic and epistemology that in no way can one assert that the idea of god plays only a minimal role in early Nyāya.

With the advent of Udayana and Gaṅgeśa the whole philosophical scene changes and substantial independent works like the *Nyāyakusumāñjali* and *Īśvarānumānam (Tattvacintāmaṇi)* establish god as the philosophical and logical culmination of the Nyāya system. In doing so these authors display philosophical and logical skills of the highest order and naturally they use precisely defined technical terms. Just to assert that these refinements are

mere subtleties and dismiss them as Nyāya paraphernalia would be just non-sense. It would be like the statements of A.B.Keith who dismissed Navyanyāya as a 'vast mass of perverted ingenuity'.<sup>4</sup>

Now we try to explore the intrinsic nature of some of the basic principles of Nyāya system which ineluctably point to god as the culmination of philosophical and epistemological enterprise. In Nyāya studies in general and in Navyanyāya studies in particular, it is very easy for one to miss the wood for the trees. There are so many different topics in Navyanyāya that one can easily get lost in particulars, though of course a detailed and exact knowledge of the individual topics is a prerequisite for an appreciation of Navyanyāya as a whole. What then is the basic concern of Navyanyāya? Its overriding concern is in its concern to study with unparalleled rigour and exactitude the nature, dimensions and conditions of human knowledge; and, as we know, the philosophical problem *par excellence* is the problem of knowledge. With rare insight Navyanyāya examines the problems connected with human knowledge and sets forth in detail the exact conditions in which valid knowledge is possible. It should be borne in mind that in and through the analysis of human knowledge Navyanyāya mediates also a self-understanding of human beings which deserves close examination and probably even unqualified appreciation. Thus its definition of *vyāpti*, invariable concomitance, is not a sterile definition of the concept but an exploration of a profound aspect of human knowledge itself and it may plausibly be argued that its true significance comes out in the *Īśvaravāda*.

In order to make the problem still clearer let us pose the following question; we know that the logical proof for the existence of God is developed by Vācaspati Miśra, Udyana and Gangeśa's against the logical and philosophical arguments of their opponents, especially the Buddhists. What is however most intriguing is that none of these authors nor even later commentators on Gangeśa's work like Jayadeva, Praglobha or Rucidatta ask the question why is it that according to Nyāya logic it is possible to establish the existence of God? On the other hand neither Dharmakīrti nor any of his followers like Jñānaśrīmitra or Ratnakīrti raise the question why in the Buddhist logical system it is not possible to establish the existence of God? It is also to be

noted that none of the modern scholars who studied these texts raise this question, much less answer it. The question has also escaped the attention of general philosophers who know broadly that the Buddhist tradition does not believe in god, whereas Nyāya is theistic, at least as far as the great works of Vācaspati Miśra, Udayana and Gaṅgeśa are concerned. But they never ask the question what is the reason for this difference?

An adequate answer for this question lies naturally in the concept of knowledge in the different systems and hence in the possibilities and limitations of their logic. Therefore it could be asserted without much hesitation that the Nyāya proof for the existence of God presupposes a theory of knowledge according to which it is possible to raise the question of God. The Buddhists of Dharmakīrti School propose a theory of knowledge according to which it is radically impossible not only to prove the existence of god but even to conceive an idea of him. Thus the Nyāya system has as horizon a theory of knowledge which renders possible the proofs for the existence of god. That is why it could be validly asserted that in the Nyāya theory of knowledge the Absolute becomes the horizon of all knowledge and therefore also of all human activities. This aspect of the Nyāya theory of knowledge in all its details is not developed explicitly in Nyāya treatises but implied in them. But of course it does not mean that such an interpretation is purely subjective. On the contrary an interpretation of this kind is based on the very foundation of the system itself.

In order to explain this it is necessary to refer to some of the very basic theories of Nyāya epistemology. Intimately connected with it is the fundamental Nyāya theory about what is usually known as invariable concomitance or *vyāpti*. In simple terms invariable concomitance is the invariable relationship of the reason with that which is to be established by the syllogism. Thus when you establish fire by means of smoke you presuppose an invariable relation of smoke with fire. But the concept is not as simple as that. In fact a large part of Nyāya discussions on the theory of knowledge and inference in general is all about this concept of invariable concomitance. Further this concept is of primary importance in all the major systems of classical Indian thought. In fact prolonged and persistent controversies ranged

among the different schools on this point precisely because they sought to justify their different ontological positions on the basis of this aspect of the theory of knowledge. The controversy was acute between the Buddhists especially of the Dharmakīrti school and the Naiyāyikas. And the point of difference between these two schools is that in Nyāya it is possible from what we have known to assert also what we have not known, whereas the Buddhists tend to deny this. But this of course is an over-simplified statement.

In slightly more technical terms, the Buddhist position would be the following; we know a thing whose existence we have not directly perceived only if that thing belongs to the class of things which could be the object of direct experience. And the Naiyāyikas on the contrary hold that we can, on the basis of experience of the class of things about which we have direct knowledge, assert the existence of a thing even if that thing does not strictly belong to the class of things that could be perceived. This in fact in simplified terms is the crux of the problem in the Buddhist and Nyāya theories of knowledge and of invariable concomitance. Consequently the arguments regarding the existence of God became the centre of heated controversies. Nyāya holds that it is possible for us to know the unknown from what we have known. It also means that this unknown need not necessarily belong to the class of things which are already known, but according to the Buddhist system as represented in the school of Dharmakīrti it is necessary that this unknown thing should belong to the class of things that are already known. Otherwise we cannot make any affirmation whatever about this unknown thing.

From what has been said it follows that the epistemological presupposition of Nyāya theory of inference involves by implication first of all the capacity of human intelligence to rise above what is of immediate experience. We could further draw the important conclusion that this Nyāya theory implies that human beings cannot think except in the context of an Absolute. No theory of knowledge is possible without implying at the same time the existence of an Absolute and the inherent capacity of human intellect somehow to grasp this Absolute. And such an explanation of the basis of Nyāya theory of knowledge particularly with reference of the concept of

invariable concomitance is quite legitimate. An interpretation of this kind is based on sound philosophical and philological analysis of the texts concerned. This implies therefore that the Nyāya theory of knowledge can be explained and validated only against the background of the basic and inherent capacity of the human intellect to rise above the mere phenomena which are directly perceived by it.

This is also the basic reason why it is asserted that the God of the Naiyāyikas is a transcendent one. The dynamism of knowledge that is implicitly affirmed in the Nyāya theory of inference cannot simply stop at an anthropomorphic God who is immanent to the system itself.<sup>6</sup> If the God of the Naiyāyikas is just one of the categories admitted by the system then there would not be much point in elaborating the theory of inference which tries to establish object beyond sense experience. In fact as we have explained the dynamic nature of the Nyāya theory of knowledge and inference can fully be understood only in the context of the infinite capacity of the human intellect to reach out to the ultimate.

It is quite possible that some one may disagree with the above interpretation of the Nyāya theory of knowledge and inference on the one hand, and of the Buddhist theory of knowledge and inference on the other, and with the conclusions drawn from such interpretations. But then it is incumbent on the one who disagrees to propose another plausible answer to the question which was raised: why is it that according to the Nyāya logic it is possible to establish the existence of God? On the other hand why is it that in the Buddhist logical system of Dharmakīrti it is not possible to establish the existence of God? The classical authors and their commentators do not give any explicit answer to this question. We have to reflect long on their texts themselves and their implications. I have given one interpretation based on which a plausible answer to this question is given. It is for other scholars either to accept my answer or to challenge it with adequate reasons.

I should have concluded this note here. However a further line of thought also haunts me. My impression about why certain persons still think that theism is not central to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is because of their overriding 4.

desire to judge what is purely philosophical in the philosophical traditions of India by the standards of modern Anglo-saxon philosophy which of course by and large has no place for God. Perhaps they think that by doing so and rejecting certain central concepts of Indian philosophical tradition as peripheral to it they can show that Indian philosophy is not real philosophy in the western sense of the word. This is just a futile and meaningless attempt revealing perhaps more the psychology of those persons rather than the true nature of philosophy. Indian philosophical tradition has such exquisitely rich achievements that it can just stand on its own. We need not try to judge it by other standards of philosophy elsewhere. This does not mean that we should not be open to the developments of philosophy in other places. Certainly we will have dialogue with them and develop our own traditions. In fact earnest dialogue was an inherent characteristic of classical Indian Philosophy. However what Mahatma Gandhi said in another broader context is equally applicable in the context of philosophy too: 'I keep my windows open but I refuse to be swept off my feet.'

#### NOTES

1. Cfr. Vattanky, J. *Gaṅgeśa's Philosophy of God*-Analysis, Text, Translation and Interpretation of Īśvaravāda section of *Gaṅgeśa's Tattvacintāmani* with a study on the development of *Nyāya Theism*, Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras, 1984, pp.4-11. As an introduction to the translation and interpretation of *Gaṅgeśa's Īśvaravāda* I have also given an extended treatment on the contribution of various subsequent *Naiyāyikas* to the problem of God. The arguments of these *Naiyāyikas* were developed against the Buddhist philosophers who brought in a variety of objections against the existence of God. (cfr. *ibid.* pp.1-150)

I have also treated the same subject matter in a different work entitled *The Development of Nyāya Theism*, Intercultural Publications, New Delhi, 1993.

2. Interested readers may refer to the translations and interpretations of *Ātmatattvaviveka* and *Nyāyakusumāñjli* by the distinguished scholar, N.S. Dravid, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 1995 and 1996 respectively.
3. Cfr. Vattanky's works mentioned in the earlier foot note.



Keith, A.B. *Indian Logic and Atomism*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1977, p.35.

5. Cfr. Vattanky J., *Gangeśa's Philosophy of God*, pp.155ff.
6. Of course this interpretation is not fully in the line with the usual idea of God in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system according to which in the beginning of creation, God produces movement in the atoms according to the various *adrṣṭas* of souls. The *adrṣṭa* itself is insentient and therefore God is needed to activate it. In such an interpretation of the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* idea of God he is not a transcendent reality but he is one of the categories within the system, but does not stand above it. My point here is that although this is the traditional interpretation of god in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system, still the theory of knowledge in general and of inference in particular by its inherent dynamism demands the existence of a transcendent God.

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