

RELATION IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Except in a few cases, very specifically mentioned in different systems of Indian Philosophy, relation is understood as just a real or a series of reals in line with any other real—i.e., not belonging to a different category—between two other reals called, in that context, *relata*. Betweenness is no relation : it is absolutely nothing other than the situation that two entities stand related. Difference, togetherness, and-ness, etc., are also no relations—they are the presuppositions of relations : unless entities are *different* from one another or two or many are *together* and unless they are understood as *A and B* or *A and B and C*, etc., there is no question of relation; though this does not entail that wherever there is such difference, togetherness or and-ness there must be some relation.

When the entities called *relata* are said to be related, what is there, in addition to the existence of these entities and the intermediate entities said to constitute that relation, to entitle us to say that the extremes stand related ? It is the simple phenomenon that the extremes and the intermediate entities have formed an objective unity. If the question is asked—what possibly is the relation between this unity and the entities that are said to be united ?—we shall offer our answer very soon.

In the mean time let us distinguish between two types of objective unity. The distinction is on a par with that between natural kind and artificial class. Red-haired persons do certainly form an objective group. But natural kinds are more objectively conditioned. Almost similarly, the objective unity in a relational situation may be a natural gestalt forcing itself upon our consideration unconditionally or a unity selected for a particular purpose, though that purpose may be as wide as scientific study or less wide as in the case of a social purpose or as narrow as the narrow purpose of a particular individual. Indian philosophers have concentrated more, if not practically exclusively, on relations that form objective unities of the first type. They are (*q*) the relation between parts and the presented whole of which they are parts, known either after analysis when the whole is first presented or through construction when some times the whole constructed comes also to be presented, and some times inferred

as presentable, (b) the relation between a thing and its changed state where both are present either simultaneously or successively, (c) the relation between substance and attribute (and also motion; but excluding many other things, as we shall soon see, which may be used adjectivally), (d) the relation between a universal and the corresponding particulars, supposing that there is a real universal and it is presented, (e) the relation of contact between two things, whether it produces a presentable unity or not, the contact being of different types, (f) the relation called resemblance when it is not accounted for by identity, and a few others.

Next in order come certain objective relations which though themselves evident are definable only in the context of someone perceiving both the relata. These include (a) the subject-object relation called reference understood from the subject's point of view as *referring* and from the object point of view as *being referred to* (b) the relation of greatness-smalleriness, earliness-lateness, nearness-farness etc. These are no doubt all objective relations, but their very definitions include some context of one's knowing. Not that the contexts in any way constitute these relations. No context ever *constitutes* a thing. Nor should these relations be therefore understood as subjective in the minimum sense that there are no real objective-relations in these cases. They are objective reals but knowable (through perception or otherwise) only when the subject that knows in the reflective attitude of comparison, comparing being entirely an original reflective act. We may add to the list of relations of this group those of rightness, leftness, northness, etc. which too are contextual but where there is no subjectivity intervening.

Next in order come ordinary relations such as 'giving', 'secretaryship to an institution', 'father-son' etc. which as we have claimed are not natural like natural kinds but selected only for some definite purpose.

In all the three types of cases mentioned above the entity or entities said to be intermediate form a unity with the extreme entities and that unity is objective. Only in the second and third types the unities are selected for some purposes but even of the two types of purposes the former type are *almost* as categorical as those under the first viz., clear natural gestalts. In cases under the first and second types the intermediate entities

that are called relation always belong to a separate category or categories. For example, (a), (b), (c) and (d) under first type belong to the category called *inherence*, and (e) and also (f) too where it is recognised, form each a separate category; and similarly with the cases (a) and (b) in the second group, each forming a new category, respectively called subjectivity-objectivity (*viśayitā-viśayatā*) and moreness-lessness (*paratva-aparatva*). Of these two, again, the latter viz. moreness-lessness has to be understood either in the language of space or in that of time or of number, etc. One important point concerning the relations under the second type is that though they are genuinely objective they, being contextual (in the interest of comparison), alternate, as it were, between autonomous objectivity and subjective constructedness.

To belong to a separate category does not, however, mean that one which so belongs cannot be subsumed under a wider category. As far as possible there should be such subsumption in order that the basic features of the world may be brought down to the minimum number. Contact and moreness-lessness have, for example, been brought by many under a wider category, viz. *attribute*, and *resemblance*, in a negative manner under *identity*. What we mean is that while moreness-lessness has been understood as one of the many attributes a thing may have, resemblance has been *denied* in favour of identity, the proposition A resembles B being reduced to 'A possesses many features which are identical with many of the features that B possesses.' Others, again, have contrariwise reduced identity to resemblance, treating this later as metaphysically more fundamental. Regarding the *features* that resemble, they would try to understand the resemblance too in the same manner, and in case they, through this regressive analysis, come to two *unanalysable* features that resemble one another they would just consider them as belonging to one *family*. I am not quite sure, however, that any Indian philosopher has actually said this. Or, they would treat all resemblance, and therefore, all unity, as mere intellectual construction, as many Buddhists have done. Or, more positivistically, they would hold that truly unanalysable features are only space-points and time-moments and they simply resemble, and that a character *apart from such points* is absolutely inconceivable, only *spoken of* as such.

To come back to the *unity*. How is this unity related to the entities of which it is the unity? Should it be said that between the unity and the extremes and also between it and the intermediate entity or entities that constitute *relation* there must be other relations constituted by other intermediate entities, and, if this is allowed, should it not lead inevitably to vicious indefinite regress?

There need be no such apprehension on this account. The unity in question is not on a level with the items unified. It belongs to another level altogether, quite as much as *substance* does for those who admit it and yet do not consider it co-ordinate with attributes or as the First Cause for those who admit it and yet do not take it as co-ordinate with phenomenal causes. Either, then, the propositions with these unities as subjects have to be understood in a quite different way or, from the point of view of the lower, they have to be understood as nothing other than but only liquidly comprehending the lower entities, so to say. Liquid comprehension means that the unity, *though quite objective* and, therefore, undeniable, is yet, from the view-point of the entities that are unified, *no entity other than these*. One might go further and hold that it belongs to another order of reality, or that though seeming to be denoted by the corresponding word it is not really denoted, the use of language here being non-denoting, or that—if one likes—the unity is wholly a subjective creation for whatever purpose. However, expect the Vijñānavādi Buddhist, for whom the unity is only a subjective construction, no Indian thinker has advocated any of these extreme views. Realists *par excellence* they have understood the unity as objectively real: they only understand the *relation* between it and the other items (which it unifies) by way of identity, as we have already shown.

In the situation A and B, however, they understand the unity as identical in this way with *A only*, not with *r* nor with B. That is because they raise the question of this unity only with regard to the judgment 'A is related to B'. "*A's relation to B*", though quite objectively real, is yet not another entity beside A. Their idea is that the subject of every categorical proposition is not only one of the terms, but equally also the unity of itself with *r* and B, and *r* here is nothing but *rB*. The unity would in this

sense be identical also with B if the proposition representing the same situation were BrA ; and it should be always borne in mind that r by itself is nothing if it is not either rB or rA .

I have said that most of the Indian thinkers would take the unity, first, as belonging to another order, like substance or the First Cause and then from the lower point of view, understand it as liquidly identical with the entities themselves—to be more precise with the subject of the proposition that (that = the proposition) represents the original relational situation. The Naiyāyikas alone differ so far as the first part of the thesis is concerned. They do not believe in different orders of reality. The First Cause, with them, is co-ordinate with the natural causes and substances just entities beside attributes and they try to understand the relation between any two items of reality in the language of other accepted relations as far as possible. It is only when they fail, as for example—in the case of substance and attributes, that they say they are compelled to postulate a novel relation—in other words, a novel entity as intermediate. This positivistic attitude is commendable. But it is doubtful if they have been able to hold on to it till the end. Between substance and attributes they have indeed postulated *inherence*, and they have even made a *vera causa* of it by explaining *some other* difficult cases by this inherence. But when it comes to accounting for the relation of this inherence of B to A they jump to identity. This second relation could, in whatever sense, be called identity only if they had first inquired about the *unity* of the relational situation. The problem of the relation between A and rB is intelligible only as the problem of the unity of the relational situation. Otherwise, should the problem be directly tackled as an independent one, viz., how A is related to rB , there could be offered all sorts of fantastic (fantastic to the Indians) views, such as the relation in question is completely different in quality from the entities denoted by the terms, or it is a universal, or a flexible entity, or ambulatory, etc. Those who have offered these views have not first examined what they mean by 'relation' in a relational situation. Those, on the other hand, who have done that have naturally turned to the *unity* of the relational situation and have from that point of view, either stopped with that unity, regarding the relation in question as nothing but the relational situation,

or elaborated the situation further and held that the unity of the situation is identical with what is denoted by the subject-term of the proposition in question *and* that this denotee too is identical with whatever could be shown as this denotee's relation to the denotee of the predicate-term (which, incidentally, *here* is not B, but rB). Advaita Vedānta has proceeded along this line, though the Bradleyan paradox about relation could be avoided whichever of the two ways could be adopted.

Whereas, then, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika recognises four entities, viz. A, rB , B and r " rB (in the reverse order, B, rA , A and r " rA) and considers r " rB (or r " rA) as yet not other than A (or B), Advaita Vedānta recognises only three of these, viz., A, rB and B (in reverse order, B, rA and A) and regards rB (or rA) as yet not different from A (or B). While for Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika the proposition 'This flower is red' means (1) there is a substance, viz. this flower,² (2) there is an attribute, viz. this red,³ (3) this red inheres in this flower, (4) the inherence of this red is also related in some way to this flower and (5) yet this relation of the inherence of this red to this flower is not entitatively other than this flower⁴; for Advaita Vedānta the proposition means (1), (2) and (3) only *and also* that the inherence of this red is not entitatively different from this flower.⁵ For the Advaitin the inherence-of-red belongs to the very essence of this flower.

For Y to belong to the essence of X means that X is the proper or genuine situation there, though apparently it also stands *as* Y; which, in its turn, means that though somehow we have, for the present, to put up with X *as* Y, a demand for the dissociation of X in its autonomy is nevertheless forced on us. Which, again, means that as and when X is *realized* in its autonomy—how that is to be done is not the relevant question here—it is to be found as belonging to another, or a higher order of being, Y only loosely—one might say, incommensurately—hanging on to it, which is as good as saying that it could even be de-considered completely. Later Advaitins have even substantiated this position by their dialectical refutation of the concepts of relation, difference, etc. as systematically misleading.

There are others, however, who understand the *logic of essence* in another way. Instead of saying that Y *belongs to the*

essence of X they would rather use the expression 'Y is the essence of X', where, therefore, there is no question of Y *loosely hanging* with the chance of even falling off. For them, Y as the essence of X simply means that there is no question of separating it from X, that X is X only as it carries Y, either as a necessary property or as an inalienable power. X and Y are, in other words, in identity-in-difference. This 'identity-in-difference, again, has been variously understood. Sometimes, it is held that X as the identity-base gets self-differentiated into various forms because of this Y which by itself can never be pinpointed, sometimes that Y is the identity-base (with what consequences I cannot adequately grasp), sometimes that X as the original identity develops into a richer identity through Y, sometimes that X and Y, belonging to the same order of being, are in identity and difference, etc., etc.

For two entities to be in the same order of being and yet being to be both identical with and different from each other is indeed a difficult notion to grasp. This is why some interpret it as identity in one way and difference in another, and some reject the notion whole-sale and insist on difference only, treating the so-called identity as an inadequate representation of another close relation between the items said to be identical, viz. characterization of one item by another, the two items being such that at least one of them is inseparable from the other. This is called the relation of *apṛhaksiddhi*, as in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, *ayutasiddhi* or inherence (*samavāya*).

The Advaitin, on the other hand, holds that so long as the superior order of being of one of the two items found in the relation of identity-in-difference is not *realized*, we have to put up with this paradox at the *vyāvahārika* level. Indeed, as distinct from the *pāramārthika*, the *vyāvahārika* is precisely that which, though it is acted upon and even entertained cognitively, is, at least from the point of view of logic, paradoxical through and through and has, therefore, been either already cancelled or demands to be cancelled in favour of what is not paradoxical.

Two more points may be made. One of them concerns the modern Western classification of relations, and the other about

the theory of internal relation. Western thinkers, particularly in Great Britain, have classified relations into (a) monadic, dyadic, triadic, etc. (b) into transitive, intransitive, etc., (c) into symmetrical, asymmetrical, etc. This they have done mainly in the interest of mathematical logic which, they claim, is more thorough and more general than the traditional formal logic. Indian logicians were never directly interested in formal logic. Even in their logic of inference they have scarcely introduced any formal procedure explicitly. In logic as in philosophy their attitude is as empiricistic and positivistic as possible (without, however espousing what is now-a-days called probabilism). Anyway, not interested in formal logic of any kind, they have hardly proceeded in the way of the modern logic of relations.

Yet, one may surmise how they would react if one asked for their comments. Regarding monadic relations like 'A is identical with itself,' they would react in various ways. Most of them would first reformulate the situation as 'A has its identity' or simply as 'A's identity' in either of which cases, far from there being a relation, there is not even any real difference between A and the identity, all the so-called difference being nothing but verbal. That it is so is clear from a study of the use of language: language often posits thing where they are not. That here a difference which is not real has yet been posited is evident in the very use of language. Others again, hold that sometimes as the uniqueness of each of the ultimate indivisible entities it inheres in each as a character, and is, therefore metaphysically different from that in which it inheres. In other cases, it is the attribute *prthaktva* which inheres in each and is, therefore, metaphysically different.

Regarding triadic relation, or even relations involving four or more terms, they would invariably reduce them to dyadic relations of known types. 'A gives B to C' would be interpreted by them as (1) a series of positions of A approaching C, which constitute a dyadic relation or a series of such relations between them, (2) A's hand, in his last position, touching (or almost touching) C's hand, (3) in all the positions of A, as stated in (1), a thing called B being in his hand and (4) just

after the last position of A, and since then, the thing called B being in C's hand. B to be in the hand of C is equally no triadic relation, it too being reducible to a series of dyadics. Otherwise there would be no end to such complications : one might say that ' B is in the hand of C or A ' represents a four term relation, ' A red B is in the white hand of the tall C or dwarfish A ' would represent an eight-term relation, and so on. If mathematical logic or a computer machine could tackle such complicated propositions directly without in any way breaking them into simple dyadics, for the purpose of combining them with other such propositions and deducing newer propositions one could with *some justification* recognise such multi-term relations, though even this by itself need not be taken as a logical justification proper unless it is conclusively shown that such integral process is *more convenient and more reliable* than the ordinary process of *resolution into simples followed by re-integration*. But even apart from that, all such consideration is purely formal in which the Indians had little interest. They would never favour any formal (purely logical) solution of metaphysical problems.

The formalists often hold that *difference*, *betweenness*, etc. are triadic relations. Ignoring formal considerations altogether, Indian thinkers would argue, first, that neither difference nor betweenness is a relation; the former, as already said, being a presupposition, and the latter just another name, of there being a relation at all. Secondly, if it still be argued that a M and O being there P can intervene and thus be *between them*, the Indian philosopher would, without the least hesitation, interpret the situation in the language of *dik* or *paratvāparatva* or in some such way.

As for classifying relations into transitive, intransitive, symmetrical, asymmetrical, etc., this too being entirely in the interest of formal logic has no special significance for Indian thinkers.

The problem of 'Internal Vs. external relations', once so important in Western Philosophy, particularly of the British type, was practically of no importance to Indian Philosophers, except in two contexts to be noted below.

So far as the problem is an epistemological one, arising out of the analysis of knowledge and the concept of truth, or from consideration of the Bradleyan paradox of relation, the Indians are not in the least worried about it. So far as the analyses of knowledge and truth are concerned, they find no indication anywhere that everything in the world stands vitally related to everything else. Several things in limited fields do often stand organically connected. These cases have certainly to be empirically discovered, recorded and studied. But of universal internal relations there is no epistemological evidence. It is not necessary for anything to be real that it has to be connected with everything else. Fitting in with—in other words, coherence with—other things does certainly strengthen its recognition, but first, this does not make it *real*—or even more real—and, secondly fitting in with *everything else* is never required: there is possibly no computable degree of recognition this way. What is required with every other thing is not fitting but just the negative non-clash. As for propositions and their truth, coherence is undoubtedly of considerable assistance, but the assistance received that way is entirely formal. If it be argued that even material truth *proper* that distinguishes knowledge from belief, science from opinion, is unattainable in the absence of this formal truth, Indian philosophers would reply that even for that we do not require a system that will have jurisdiction over *everything* of this world. There may well be self-complete limited systems, and as a matter of fact it is enough even for the *truth proper* of a proposition that it is confirmed by some—even one—of the propositions that embody the (assured) knowledge that we already have. What more may be said to be required, of course, is that the given proposition *must not clash* with *any* other propositions; but this 'must not clash' can never be more than 'must not have clashed'. For, who in the world can assure this 'must not clash with anything'? One may at most in a precautionary attitude develop a positive system of propositions.⁶ But, even then, there is no guarantee that the system will never have to be changed in future. Indeed, the whole system may in future collapse. The Indians believe that knowledge *grows*.⁷ But for that they do not advocate probabilism or relativism. Whatever knowledge is attained *is* true, according to them. There is no

difference in truth-*quality* as knowledge grows : in fact, the truth-*quality* does not differ even as one passes from belief to knowledge. Thus even the analysis of the concept of truth does not lead to the theory of internal relations.

Nor do the Bradleyan puzzles lead to that. We have already seen how the Indians have successfully countered one such puzzle. The other puzzles could be avoided similarly with some careful handling.

Not that the Indians have never admitted the theory of internal relations. The universe as one grand systemic whole where everything is exquisitely tuned upto everything else is the very presupposition of their law of Karma and the doctrine of rebirth. Often, again, like some German metaphysicians, they speak of a genuine grand whole, called Brahmāṇḍa, Viśva, Virāt, Pradhāna, Māyā, etc. from which diverse items in their fine inter-relations are believed to have developed. But these are often faiths derived from scriptures, not logically substantiated in as full a measure as desirable. It is not indeed impossible to find adequate logical considerations for these. But this is outside the task of the present paper.

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NOTES

1. When A is in contact with B, the whole situation is understood as that the contact with B is an attribute of A, and contrariwise when B is in contact with A.

2 and 3. We shall not discuss here the further fact that the universal 'flowerhood' inheres in this flower or the universal red-colourhood inheres in this red-colour.

4 and 5. We shall not consider the reverse order separately.

6. Of course, a system is not developed only for this purpose.

7. Except in the case of scriptural knowledge.