

KUMARILA AND PRABHAKARA'S UNDERSTANDING OF ACTIONS

The present paper aims to explicate Mimamsa views (specially the views of Kumarila and Prabhakara) regarding actions. The paper is divided in two parts. In the first part Mimamsa view is presented and analysed, in the second part views of Kumarila and Prabhakara are distinguished from each other and an attempt is made to explain their differences.

I

According to Mimamsa action is denoted by verbs. Verbs are the words which refer to action and they have meaning which relates to a way of thinking, feeling or conduct—all of which are associated with action. The verb is never independent in meaning, it means an action, it presupposes the agent and the object. Actor or the agent is described by means of nouns. Verbs can properly be understood only in association with noun because they depend on them. Verbs instigate one to perform certain acts.¹ Acts which are neither good nor harmful do not concern the agent. A person cannot perform an act which is without any purpose.² It is the purpose which distinguishes between actions and events.

From the verbs what is laid down as a rule of guidance is known by us. In every verb a command is implied. A verb cannot be meaningful if it does not command.³ For example, an act is indicated by the injunctive sentence-*yajeta-svargakamah*. No commanding is possible without an indication of what is commanding.⁴ The injunctive sentences also in this way serve the purpose of commanding. The commandatory words eulogising

the act (enjoined), persuade the performer and thus help the act itself. In the same manner all such (commandatory) words eulogise something and thereby help its being enjoined. Thus, action represents command. Command is that which makes one active.

The sentence—'one desiring heaven should perform sacrifices,' lays down the fact that the sacrifice is instrumental in bringing about attainment of heaven. One may raise a question : How can the sacrifice which ceases to exist at the moment that it is complete bring about the result at a much later time ? In answer to this question, Mimamsa says that the sacrifice accomplishes the final result through the agency of the force called, Apurva or transcendental potency. There is Apurva, says Jaimini, because it is enjoined.⁵ Apurva connects the act with fruition.

Kumarila is of the view that Apurva is a potency in the principal action or in the agent which does not exist prior to the performance of the action and whose existence is proved by the authority of the Vedas.⁶ This can be explained only by the hypothesis that the sacrifice on its completion, produces directly a certain potency in the agent which resides in him throughout life, at the end of which it leads him to heaven. Without such intervening potency—as the connective link between these two it cannot be explained.⁷ The Apurva is an unseen potency generated by the performance of prescribed acts which is the immediate cause of their final results which cannot be due to the acts.⁸ But Kumarila also regards the Apurva as an objective potency of the prescribed act itself.⁹

Prabhakara dissents from Kumarila's view on Apurva as an objective potency. In his opinion Apurva does not arise directly from the action, because a prescribed act is transient and thus cannot bring about its final result (i. e. heaven) at a subsequent time. Injunctive sentences, according to Prabhakara, lay down

a mandate (Niyoga). The *Apurva* is *ought* or *duty* which is different from the act and is revealed by the Vedic injunctions. *Apurva* incites the man to exertion and this exertion pertains to some form of action indicated by the verb of the injunctive sentence. The *Niyoga* prompts the agent and induces him to put forth volition and exertion to accomplish the act. Here a question may be raised: How *Niyoga* or *Apurva* can lead to attain the final result of the prescribed act done by it without producing a potency or disposition in the permanent self? Dr. Jha has rightly said that "While Prabhakara appears to assume a *Niyoga* intervening between the *action* and *something lasting* that is produced in the agent, he does not call it a faculty, (disposition) but which comes to the same thing.¹⁰ Shalikanath tried to help Prabhakara by saying that when the *Niyoga* is aided by *fate* it brings about the result. The act or its potency is not permanent but the disposition of the self is permanent. It can bring about the accomplishment of the final result.¹¹

According to both Kumarila and Prabhakara there is a clear relation between the injunction and the action of the agent; the former possesses a verbal energy (*Sābadi Bhavanā*) in its tendency to produce action by the agent while the later puts actual energy (*Ārthi Bhāvanā*) towards the end indicated in the injunction.¹²

Action as a category covers the restricted field of motion, viz. going upward, going downward, contraction, expansion, locomotion or motion in general (Viz. walking, evacuation, flow, flaming up, etc). Prabhakara maintains that motion is only an object of inference while Kumarila holds that it is perceived. Prabhakara's argument is based on the fact that when we think we see motion we only see conjunctions and disjunctions with points of space, these contacts subsisting only in outside space and not in the moving thing in which the activity of motion must reside. Kumarila, on the other hand, believes that we really see motion which is in the thing and which brings about conjunction

and disjunction in space. Kumarila as a reply to Prabhakara would say that if motion could only be inferred as the immaterial cause of the conjunction and disjunction of a thing with points in space which would mean that it must subsist both in space and in the thing whereas it exists in the thing only.¹⁴

Action may be classified in various ways. There is a clear distinction between vedic and wordly actions. Vedic actions may be classified as positive, as negative (pratiśedh) or as partaking of both characters (Paryudasa) as in the case of a vow 'not to look at sun' taken by a student. The sacrificial actions are the most important. They fall under the three main classes of *Yoga* (the offering to a diety of a substance), *Homa* (the offering of a substance in fire or water), and *Dāna*.¹⁵

The most important division of action is based on purpose. From this point of view actions are of three types—*Nitya Naimittika*, *Kāmya* and *Niṣiddha*. The *Nitya* sacrifices must constantly be performed at the due seasons. The *Naimittika* must be performed on certain special occasions while the *Kāmya* offerings are optional being undertaken by a man who desires some special ends. Refraining was also considered an action by Mimamsa.¹⁶ The direction to perform an offering is laid down in an originating injunction (utpattividhi) or an injunction of application (*Viniyoga Vidhi*) according as the matter concerned is a principal or as a subordinate offering.¹⁷ The originating injunction do no more than excite in the mind of the hearer the desire to perform the action which they enjoin. Other injunctions (*Viniyoga Vidhi*) denote the exact manner of procedure (*itikartavyatā*) by specifying the numerous subsidiary actions requisite and the materials and other necessities for the performance. The discrimination between what is principle and what is subsidiary (*śeṣa*) occupies the greater part of the attention of the Mimamsa and it stands in a close relation to the motive for the performance of various actions. Actions may be undertaken according to Jaimini (MS IV : 1: 1)

DISCUSSIONS :

**ARVIND SHARMA ON THE ROLE OF MEMORY
IN
HINDU EPISTEMOLOGY**

There are two opposite views on the question whether memory is a source of knowledge. The view that it is and the view that it is not appear to be equally poised. Recently, Prof. Arvind Sharma has tried to revive the question and establish that memory is a source of knowledge.¹ It appears to me that certain basic issues are involved in the question itself and that they require clarification before providing a categorical answer to it. In the course of the present paper, I want to clarify some such issues. I shall maintain that a philosopher does not deal with 'sources' of knowledge. He deals with different forms of justification of knowledge-claims. From this point of view, memory cannot be regarded as a form of justification of knowledge-claims.

This brings us to a distinction between 'sources' of knowledge and 'methods' of knowledge. When a speaker claims that he knows something, e. g; "This is a pot", "That is a goat", "This horse is black", "That house is on fire" or "I am happy", a hearer can very well ask him, "How do you know that?" This question about the 'how' of the speaker's knowledge is not concerned with the sources of his information or the process of his internalisation. The reply to this question does not consist in a description regarding the origin and growth of information about the world in the mind of the speaker. The question is rather concerned with the support of his information—in whatever way he has it—and the basis of his internalisation. The reply to this

followed by Sabar-Svamin, Kumarila and Prabhakars either for the sake of the agent (Purusartha) or for the sake of the offering (Kratvarth)¹⁸ while Parthasarthi adds a third class of these actions which are neither for the one purpose or the other giving as an instance the Agnidhāna or piling of the sacred fire.¹⁹

The problems of knowledge of actions²⁰ has two aspects : 1) how do we know what others are doing and, 2) how do I know what I am doing. Neither Kumarila nor Prabhakara have discussed the first problem directly. Their views on this problem may be seen in the light of their discussion on motion (gamana). For Kumarila other's actions are perceived while Prabhakara believes that they are inferred. We are thus left with the second question. Kumarila, as we have seen earlier, gives importance to Agent (with his motives, desires, etc.) and the goals as an explanation of action.²¹

It is generally believed that what the agent chooses or wants or desires to do, whatever he does is a necessary condition for counting whatever he does an action. What justification can be offered in defence of pronouncements like 'every action must have a motive?'. Several objections have been raised to this view that 'what a man does without a motive does not count as an action.' *Firstly*, it is circular to assume that we discover some one's motives from his actions and his actions from his motives. *Secondly*, what precisely is meant by saying that our knowledge of what others are doing is based on observation without knowing whether the agent has a motive? We generally make the assertions of the kind 'He did X', 'He is doing X', about the actions of others without knowing his motives, choices or desires, etc.

For Kumarila the cause of action is the agent himself. This theory (i.e. the agent theory of action) rules out the event as a cause of an action. The weakness of this view is that it lacks the possibility of prediction, explanation or causal laws. But it is true that for moral purpose viz. for purpose of assigning responsi-

bility, giving approval and disapproval, rewarding and punishing etc., it is necessary to know who the agent was-Kumarila's views regarding actions give a prominent place to this important element.

It seems that Kumarila is of the opinion that the action is done for the sake of some future state of affairs which, it is hoped will be brought about by the action. Future state of affairs come into the picture in two important ways : *First*, as a need to explain the action and *second*, to describe the action. An explanation which consists of a description in terms of end, result or goal aimed at, is called a teleological explanation. What makes a moment an intentional action is that it is appropriate to give a teleological explanation for the movement.²²

Teleological explanation becomes controversial when it claims to be irreducibly different from and incompatible with ordinary causal explanation in terms of prior circumstances.

Prabhakara, on the other hand, holds that actions can be analyzed independently of a particular agent, his desires or motives or goals. Prabhakara analyzes voluntary action in the following steps :

1. the cognition of something to be done or the sense of duty (Kāryatājñāna);
2. the desire to do it (cikīrṣa) which includes the cognition that it can be done by an effort of will (Kritisādhyatājñāna).
3. the act of volition (Kriti);
4. the motor impulse in the body (ceṣṭā) and
5. the overt action.

The agent must identify himself with the idea chosen by him in order to execute it into action. The desire to act involves the consciousness that the act can be done by an effort of the will. The cognition that something is to be done (Kāryatājñāna) leads to will or volition through desire to act. It does not depend upon

the knowledge that it is conducive to the agent's good. Prabhakara holds that a volition is determined by the sense of duty and not by the knowledge of the agent's good or the knowledge of the absence of stronger undesirable consequences.

It is true that actions are performed by people but it is wrong to think that all our knowledge of actions is always the knowledge of 'what x did' or of 'why x did what x did.' We are also concerned with what can be done (or ought to be done) and whether it can be (or ought to be) done. Prabhakara believes that actions can be analysed independently of a particular agent and his desires or motives and goals. According to him whenever we are concerned with actions we are concerned not with the matters of fact (notice that Kumarila does not ignore matters of fact) but with rules, commands, prescriptions or imperatives. Peter Winch, is like Prabhakara, is also of the opinion that "all behaviour which is meaningful is *ipso facto* rule governed."²³ For example the knowledge of *kāmya-karma*, *Nitya naimittika karma* and *Nisiddha karma* is impersonal knowledge. These actions may also be taken as an elucidation of the notion of following rules. R. S. Peters, has rightly said that "man is a rule following animal. His actions are not simply directed towards ends, they conform to social standards and conventions and unlike a calculating machine he acts because of his knowledge of rules and objectives."²⁴

Prabhakara's neglect of matters of fact in connection with actions is due to the prominence given to imperatives by him. He believes that Moral Imperative (Niyoga) is of transcendental nature for it is revealed by the Vedic injunctions. It is neither a personal command nor a command of God. Acts do not derive their authoritativeness from their conductiveness to any ulterior end or goal (phalas) but from their intrinsic validity as self-revealing transcendental moral law. The moral law is revealed to the self by the unique feeling of moral obligation which differs from physical compulsion and psychical impulsion.

Like Kant, Prabhakara also gives importance only to imperatives which are (according to Kant) addressed to general will. The categorical imperatives of Kant are the imperatives of morality and are unconditional. The example of such an imperative might be 'one ought not to lie', 'one ought to do x' or 'do x.' These examples may be compared with the examples of Nisiddha Karma or Nityanaimittika Karma. Imperatives of morality differ from Hypothetical imperatives. Hypothetical imperatives too are addressed to a will but are conditional upon the wants or desires of that will. They are of the form 'You ought to do x if you want y' or 'if you want y then you ought to do x'; Kāmyakarma (yejet-Svargekamah) may be regarded as an example of hypothetical imperatives. Kant is of the opinion that whatever the status of hypothetical propositions they are not statements of fact.²⁵

One may say that conditional duties are prudential acts prompted by desires for material gain. They involve empirical volitions. They fulfil desires for selfish ends. But, according to Prabhakara, the mere cognition of conduciveness to the agent's good (Iṣṭasādhantājñāna) does not bring about volition (prvṛti). The desire for the realization of the good as appropriated by the self is the real incentive for volition. Mere desire for pleasure is not the real motive force. But self as qualified by the desire for pleasure is the spring of action. In unconditional duties there is no desire for realization of any good. But there is the desire to perform an action determined by the pure sense of duty. The unconditional duties are free from empirical motives and involve purely rational will undetermined by any consideration of material gain. But the self's representation of the acts to itself and identifying itself with them prompt it to will. In conditional duties there is the cognition that the acts are conducive to the self's good. But unless the self identifies itself with the desire for realization of the good there can be no volition even in the case of the performance of unconditional duties. Prabhakara emphasizes this element of self's reference in all voluntary acts.²⁶

Prabhakara's views on action may very well be named as contextual accounts of actions. What is distinctive about action is an implicit reference to some set of rules, norms, practices, principles or standards in terms of which the action is described and can be evaluated.²⁷ As we have seen earlier, Kumarila in his analysis of action has given importance to Agent (with his motives, desires, etc.) and the result (Phala). Prabhakara's theory does not give importance to Agent and Phala. For him actions are typically done for reasons and reasons involve reference to rules, standards or principles. Any voluntary action, according to Prabhakara must follow rules. For the contextualist, even description of the simple actions like 'raising one's arm' depends upon context.

The appropriateness of actions which are based on injunctions such as *Yajet Svarga-kamah* depends upon a context of rules and norms. Not only this, the appropriateness of the rules or norms will depend upon whether the agent intended to act in accordance with these rules or norms or not.

Like Kumarila, Prabhakara also believes in intentions, but his account of intention is quite different from Kumarila's notion of intention, which he conceives of in the form of mental state or events. Kumarila is of the opinion that actions are movements having mental causes. Here, one may raise an issue: How Prabhakara would account for his notion of intention or 'reference to self'? In response to this problem Prabhakara would say that in conditional duties there is the cognition that the acts are conducive to the self's good. And unless the self identifies itself with the desires for realization of good there can be no volition. For Prabhakara to act intentionally or intend to act in some way is to be prepared to give reasons to justify the action. To give reasons is to show how command leads one to perform action. One's reasons must be operational. They must do work.

The contextualists *justifying reasons* for an action may be termed as non causal account which is different from giving a

causal explanation of the action. The causal explanation of action involves citing prior events and empirical laws which correlate these events with subsequent events. Kumarila's theory of actions give importance to psychological determinants such as motives, desires, etc., and also to secondary acts with their Apurvas may be called as causal explanation of the action or mental cause theory. Contextualists and 'justifying-reasons-for-action approach' involves showing how the action is a case of how things ought to be. Thus, it may be said that if we characterize intentional actions as those which the person is prepared to defend in the context of justification, then we can avoid characterizing them by their cause.

Finally, it may be said that Kumarila gives a psychological explanation of action (which includes motives or desires of agent and Phala) and Prabhakara is emphasizing reason approach to actions. Perhaps this difference of opinion between Prabhakara and Kumarila is based on thier understanding of imperatives. Kumarila is trying to understand imperatives as propositions which express the connection of cause and effect.²⁸ Prabhakara believes that imperatives and not commands are addressed to will and therefore, are not empirically verifiable and can only be intended. It seems Kumarila is giving much importance to subordinate actions and Prabhakara is concerned with principal action.²⁹

Deptt. of Philosophy,
University of Rajasthan,
Jaipur.

K. L. SHARMA

NOTES

1. Jaimini : *Mimamsa Sutra* 2:2:1

Those words denoting action (i. e. verbs) which denote Bhāvanā (activity) from these proceeds the cognition of accomplishment (of the resultant Apurva) as it is this fact is enjoined. See also *Sabara Bhasya Vol. 2*

Tr. by Ganganath Jha, Oriental Institute, Bombay. (1973) pp. 167-181.

21. Kumarila's analysis of knowledge is based on four factors viz. a cognising self, an object of cognition, an instrument of cognition and result of cognition or cognizedness. Corresponding to these four factors of knowledge he also conceives four factors of voluntary action viz. an agent of action (Kartā), an object of action (Karma), instrument of an action (Karṇa) and a result of an action (Phala).
22. Charls Taylor has defended such view in his book: *The explanation of Behaviour*; * Humanities Press, New York (1964). Also see Richard Taylor: *Action and Purpose*; Englewood Cliffs N. J. Prentice Hall Inc. 1966.
23. Peter Winch: *The idea of Social Science*. p. 52.
24. Peters, R. S. *The Concept of Motivation*, London. p. 5.
It is controversial that all the actions of man are explicable by reference to social standards and conventions or all our actions are rule governed. It may be argued that not all actions are to be elucidated by reference to rules whether one considers these to be social or moral or prudential.
25. Kant, I: *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*; Academic edition p. 416 (Although both Prabhakara and Kant advocate rigorism but Kant's categorical Imperative is a subjective law of practical reason, while Prabhakara's moral imperative (Niyoga) is super sensuous variety of the moral order; Kant's categorical Imperative is an ought. But Prabhakara's moral Imperative is a transcendental Being or an accomplished fact. The similarity between Kant and Prabhakara should not be pushed too far. Prabhakara is an exponent of rationalism and rigorism) *Ethics of Hindus* pp. 137-140.
26. Vishvanatha: * *Siddhānta Muktāvalī* pp. 473-44.
27. For defence of such views Melden's *Free Action* and R. S. Peter's *The Concept of Motivation* may be seen.
28. MS 2:1: 10.
29. MS 2:1: 9.