

## THE CONCEPT OF KARTRTVA IN THE NYAYA - VAISESIKA PHILOSOPHY

In this paper\* I seek to clarify the concept of *Kartṛtva* from the *Nyāya - Vaiśeṣika* point of view. I shall also try to show how this concept is applicable to different usages of *kartā* as found in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy.

In common-sense parlance, a *kartā* or agent is one who performs an action. Not only that, he can perform an act freely. This idea is not abandoned in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy. If we consider some of the famous *Nyāya - Vaiśeṣika* uses it would be clear to us. According to Annambhaṭṭa, the concept of agenthood involves direct cognition of the materials (of the product), desire to perform the action and capacity to do the action (*upādānagocaraparokṣajñāna - cikīrṣākṛtimattvam*)<sup>1</sup>. The writings of Gotama indicate that an agent is one who is at least partly responsible for an action. In a verse of *Nyāya-Sūtra* it is stated that "the so-called untruth in the *Veda* comes from some defect in the act, operator or materials of sacrifice (*na, karma kartṛ sādhana vaigunyat*)"<sup>2</sup>. From both these descriptions we can understand that among other characteristics an agent to perform an act must possess volition<sup>3</sup>. An action, prompted by volition is a voluntary action. One who performs a voluntary action is responsible for his action. Let us try to understand the point with an example. Suppose I want to throw away the tea from my cup and I actually do it. I can be said to be the agent of that action. Now suppose, it so happens that though I have the intention to throw away the tea, and the tea actually spills all over the ground, still I may not be able to perform the intended action. Because it may so happen that somebody pushes me from behind and the tea falls on the ground. In this case, it cannot be said that I am the agent of that action, though I intended that. My action is determined not by my volition, but something else.

Anyway, let us come back to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* position. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers think that there are two types of *kartā*

(i) infinite and (ii) finite, since they admit two types of selves - infinite and finite.

(i) It is clear that the Infinite *kartā* is no other than *Īśvara* as conceived in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy. That *Īśvara* is the *kartā* has been proved with the help of an inference by the *Nyāya* philosophers. We can discuss this argument briefly<sup>4</sup>. "The World has some *kartā* (here it means creator), because it is an effect just like a jar (*Kṣityādikam sakartṛkam, kāryatvāt, ghaṭavat*). We know that every effect is preceded by certain causes. Apart from the materials, it requires some conscious being who assembles the materials to be transformed into an effect. For example, in the case of an earthen jar, apart from the mud, there is a person who makes the jar out of sheer mud. Now, the world is constituted of atoms of different kinds. Unless a conscious being desires to create the world out of these atoms and actually creates the world, the world cannot come into existence. And this conscious being or *kartā* or creator of the world is *Īśvara* or God. It may be questioned as to why *Īśvara* has been regarded as the *kartā* of the world, why are we not accepting *jīva* to be the *kartā*? It is required that there should be a conscious *kartā* and *jīva* fulfils that requirement. In reply, it has been said that one must have direct cognition of the materials which are operative in producing the effect. Atoms are not perceptible to the normal *jīvas*. These are perceptible only to God. Hence, God is the creator of the world. By his volition and desire to create He creates the world. His volition causes motion in the atoms. Such motion leads to conjunction between two atoms and a new substance called *dvyanuka* emerges. Three *dvyanukas* combine to form a *trasareṇu* and so the process of creation continues.

The inference by which the *Naiyāyikas* try to prove the agency of God, has been challenged in many ways. Speaking in a general way, we can say that in any inference, the referent of the middle term acts as the mediator between the referents of the major term and the minor term. In *Nyāya* terminology, with the help of *hetu*, a relation between *sādhya* and *pakṣa* is established. It is required that the *hetu* must be present in the *pakṣa* and there must be universal concomitance between the *hetu* and the *sādhya*.

Now, the opponents offer a counter-argument to disprove the former argument, that tried to prove that God is the *kartā* of the world. According to this new argument - "The world etc. have no *kartā*, because

they are not produced by any physical body" - (*kṣityādikam akar-  
trkam, śarīrājanyatvāt*). Here, the presupposition is that a *kartā*  
should have some physical body. Now, if the world has no such *kartā*,  
then it is ridiculous to establish that God is the *kartā* of the world. This  
objection however cannot be accepted. The *hetu* of the counter -  
argument needs to be modified. There is no necessity to add the phrase  
'by any physical body' in the *hetu*. The argument would have been  
sufficient, if it would have run thus. "The world etc. have no *kartā*,  
because they are not produced". Hence the argument offered cannot  
hinder the former argument to establish the fact that God is the *kartā* of  
this world.

Again it has been argued that the characteristic of being  
embodied is involved in the very notion of *kartā*. God is disembodied.  
Hence he cannot be a *kartā*. That the world etc. do not possess any *karta*  
can be established by perception also. In reply, it is said that the  
definition of *kartā* or agent does not have any *essential* reference to the  
body. So, a disembodied being can definitely be a *karta*. Again, the  
argument that it is a perceptual truth that world etc. have no *kartā*, is  
a type of forced argument. It has no backing behind it.

Some opponents want to reject the *kartṛtva* of *Īśvara* on the  
ground that the concept of *kartṛtva* is a self-contradictory concept. It  
includes the feature of having physical body and a gain does not include  
it. It is logically impossible to conceive this. This objection can be  
answered very easily. It has not been proclaimed that the notion of  
*kartṛtva* would involve the characteristic of having a body and its  
negation at the same time. Sometimes *kartā* possesses body and  
sometimes he does not. This is acceptable. Hence, God can be regarded  
as a *karta*. Therefore, an infinite self can be termed a *kartā* in *Nyāya-  
Vaiśeṣika* philosophy.

(ii) There is another kind of *karta* accepted by the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣik*  
philosophers. The finite selves are considered to be *kartā* in this sense.  
In other words, the finite *jīvas* are such *kartās*. In the case of the infinite  
self there is no reference to the body. But as the finite *jīva* is a complex  
of body and mind, *kartṛtva* here involves reference to some body. A  
*kartā*, on this interpretation, satisfies, however, the criterion accepted  
in the case of infinite self. *Kartā* here, can have  
*upādānagocaraparokṣajñānacikīrṣā kṛtimattva*. But the *kṛt*, in this  
case, requires some elucidation<sup>5</sup>. This *kṛt* or *prayatna* produces *ceṣṭā*

or physical effort, which in its turn gives rise to *kriyā* or act. According to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers, this *prayatna* can be classified into two broad types. (a) *Jīvanayoniprayatna* or such processes which are actuated by the life of the organism and which give rise to involuntary physical functions etc. (b) *Ichhādveṣapūrvakaprayatna* i.e. volition which is actuated by *iccha* (desire) and *dveṣa* (aversion). In other words, this second type of *prayatna* emerges because of my own will. Presently we shall confine ourselves to this second type of *prayatna*. *Kṛti* in this second sense, can be translated as volition. It is preceded by at least three conditions. The agent can have *kṛti* or volition regarding a particular action when he has desire to perform that action (*cikīrṣā*). This desire is the result of the cognition of one's ability to perform that action (*kṛtisādhyaatājñāna*) and also the belief that the action is conducive to the good of the agent (*iṣṭasādhanaatājñāna*). (*Cikīrṣūkṛti sādhyeṣṭasādhanaatvamatastathā*). Now, the *iṣṭasādhanaatājñāna* is qualified by the cognition of the absence of any stronger evil consequence (*balavadaniṣṭānubandhiṣṭasādhanaatājñāna*). This qualification requires some clarification. Whenever we perform an action with a goal, we are pleased if we attain the goal. But for this we have to undergo some amount of exertion accompanied by pain. Still we do not withdraw ourselves from the action. Why is it so? It is so because the pleasure which we get afterwards is not overwhelmed by the pain. In the terminology of the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers, it is *anubandhi* to *balavadanista*. If we realize that the pain of exerting would be preponderant to the pleasure to be attained, generally we would not have intended to perform the said action.

According to the older *Naiyāyikas*, all the three conditions of *kṛtisādhyaatājñāna*, *iṣṭasādhanaatājñāna* and *cikīrṣā* are necessary for the production of a volition and consequently a volitional action. If *kṛtisādhyaatājñāna* were dispensable, then one would have tried to bring moon for lighting up his room. But a normal person does not do it. If *iṣṭasādhanaatājñāna* were dispensable, then one would have been seen to involve in some futile action like playing with water. If *cikīrṣā* were dispensable then a hungry man would have taken some poisonous food intentionally. He does not take it, because though he has *kṛtisādhyaatājñāna* and *iṣṭasādhanaatājñāna*, he does not have *cikīrṣā*.

In the writings of Visvanātha and Dinakara we find more clarification of these conditions. According to them

*kṛtisādhyatājñāna* must be *tadānīm*, i.e., must be present while the agent intends to perform the action. For example, a boy does not bother for the pleasure he is going to enjoy in his youth. The *Neo-Naiyāyikas* do not consider *kṛtisādhyatājñāna* as a necessary condition of volition and consequently a volitional action.

Just like *kṛtisādhyatājñāna*, *iṣṭasādhanaatājñāna* must also be *tadānīm*. It is a fact that what appears to be good at one moment and under certain conditions may not appear to be so at another moment and other conditions. When a man is hungry he desires food. But he does not have any desire for food after having it to his heart's content.<sup>6</sup>

Now, if we consider these conditions and the volition, which is the result of them, then it appears that the whole explanation presupposes that finite selves have *kṛti* only when they are embodied. Though every self is omnipresent, cognition, volition, pleasure, pain etc. are localised for each individual. Only when a self is conditioned by a body, it becomes the locus of these qualities. Again, volition leads to *ceṣṭā* or some physical movements. Without these movements a volition cannot be translated into act. Thus, the body is an important factor in the whole process.

If body is of such an importance, then how can we say that Isvara or God has *kṛti* and that He is the *kartā* or creator of this world? In the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣik* philosophy, God does not possess any body, but he is considered to be having *kṛti*. Should we then come to the conclusion that the *kṛti* for God is something different from the *kṛti* found in the finite *jīva*? The *Naiyāyikas* may not give any direct answer. But they can explain the *kṛti* of God. They hold that the qualities like volition, cognition etc. associated with God, do not require any physical body for their being localised and actualised. These qualities are uncaused and eternal with God. This observation, however leads to another problem. Cognition, desire and volition are related in a causal chain with the finite *kartā*. God's cognition, desire and volition cannot be connected in that way. Then how can God be said to be having *kṛti*? The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers would say that in the case of God what is required is not the causal connection among these qualities, but the coexistence of them. This again throws up a very crucial problem. God's qualities being eternal and coexistent, God should have created the world always. But He does not do so. So the answer is that the *adṛṣṭa* of the finite *jīvas* (i.e. the merits & demerits acquired by the

finite *jīvas* for their action) is the auxiliary cause of creation. The time of the realization of *adr̥ṣṭa* is the time when God creates the world. Again, the factor of *iṣṭasādhana-tājñāna*, which is so active in the production of *kṛti*, cannot be applied in the case of God. God can have no *iṣṭasādhana-tājñāna* or the cognition of something being conducive to His good, because nothing is good or evil for Him. He is *āptakāma* or one who has no necessity or need.<sup>7</sup> It seems that at this point, at least, the explanation of *kṛti* for the finite *jīva* and the analysis of *kṛti* with reference to God differ. Speaking literally, we can suggest that a *kartā* is one who performs some action (*yaḥ karoti*) and in this sense both God and the finite self are regarded to be *kartā*.

The factor of *iṣṭasādhana-tājñāna* i.e., the factor which distinguishes God's *kṛti* from that of the finite *jīva* brings forth many questions for the *jīva*. As has already been explained, this *iṣṭasādhana-tājñāna* is qualified by the cognition of the absence of any stronger evil consequence. In the first place, it can be asked that if the awareness of good is so important in producing a volitional action, how can one explain the concept of moral evil? How can a person act unethically if he knows that there is no good in doing that? A possible answer is that for the time being the person is unaware of the evil or he knows that stronger evil consequence (*balavadanīṣṭa*) will follow unless he does that action. For example, suppose a person steals some money from another person. From one point of view it is wrong to steal something. But the person, who is stealing, may consider this to be absolutely necessary to maintain his family, i.e., he considers the collapse of his family to be a stronger evil consequence than being involved in stealing. Similarly, we find that people often commit suicide, being fully aware of its consequence. What is the explanation for this? The *Nyāya* philosophers offer another explanation also. According to them, the strong passion or immediate pleasure (*utkāṭa-rāgādīnā*) may make some people temporarily unaware of stronger evils. As a result, these people indulge themselves in forbidden acts.

Now, it is clear that the cognition of stronger evil varies from person to person at the same time and to the same person from time to time depending upon circumstances. The factors of the sense of duty or responsibility, sense of *dharma*, lust, greed, passion etc. all these mould the sense of *īśa* and *anīṣṭa*. Even those who believe in the *Vedas* and also in the existence of hell, sometimes perform such actions, which are forbidden in the *Vedas*. Generally we accept that

the duties prescribed in the *Vedas* should be admitted and performed universally. But there is always a difference between what should be done and what is actually done. Again, there is a section of people who does not accept the *Vedas* as the authority. Hence, there is no necessity for them to perform actions prescribed in the *Vedas* and consequently it is not necessary for them to accept the result of these actions to be *īṣṭa*. So, their conception of *īṣṭa* and *anīṣṭa* will differ from those who believe in the authority of the *Vedas*.

Should we then accept that there is no absolute standard of morality in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy? Somebody may suggest that we should consider the factor of social prescriptions and social values. It is true that these social values do change in different societies and in different times. But for a certain society at a particular time these relatively stable values seem to be operative in deciding what is to be regarded as *īṣṭa* and *anīṣṭa*.

Perhaps this course of argument is not to be taken by the *Naiyāyikas*. Therefore, I am not entering into a discussion regarding them. Though *īṣṭa* and *anīṣṭa* vary from person to person and to the same person from time to time, still underlying the notion of relative good there always is the concept of Absolute good in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* framework. So, in the ultimate analysis that which will produce Absolute freedom from suffering will be considered Absolute good by the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers. Here, we find that there is a difference in kind between the empirical actions resulting from attraction (*rāga*) and aversion (*dveṣa*) (that cause the sense of difference in *īṣṭa* and *anīṣṭa*) and the non-empirical impulses leading to *mokṣa* or the Highest good? In empirical actions we seek *sukha* or happiness and try to avoid *duḥkha* or pain. My volition in such cases is prompted by the forces of attraction and aversion. As such, I can not attain *mokṣa* if I follow such a course of action. My empirical action can give me only relative freedom from pain. It has nothing to do with the Transcendental impulse where complete or absolute freedom from suffering can be attained.

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### NOTES & REFERENCES

1. Quoted by Nyāyakośa under *kartrtvam* (pp. 203-204) Bhīmacārya Jhalkīkar, *Nyāyakośa*, Revised and reedited by Vasudev Sastri Abhyankar, (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1978).
2. Gotama, *Nyāya-Sūtra* (2.1.58) (P-313) Edited by Phanibhusana Tarkavagisa, *Nyāyadarsana O Vātsyāyana Bhāṣya* (Pascimabanga Rajya Pustaka Parsad - June, 1984).
3. For some other description of agent see Siddhesvar Varma's "The concept of Agent - Philosophical & Grammatical - in Sanskrit Tradition" in *Journal of the Ganganatha Jha Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha* (Vol. XXVIII, Jan - April, 1972, Part I) (Allahabad).
4. This discussion is based mainly on the fifth chapter (*pañcama* stabaka) of Udayanācārya's *Nyāya-kusumāñjali* with the commentary Haridasi. Udayanacarya, *Nyāyakusumāñjalī* (With Sanskrit Commentary of Haridas Bhat tacharya. Hindi explanation by Visvesvara Bhattacharya). (The Chowkhamba Vidya Bhavan, Varanasi, 1962).
5. This exposition is given depending mainly on Visvanatha's *Bhāṣāparicchedaḥ* with the commentaries *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* and *Dinakarī*. *Karikāvalī* of Visvanatha Nyāyapañcānana Bhaṭṭācārya with the commentaries *Muktāvalī*, *Dinakarī*, *Ramarudrī* - Edited with footnotes etc. by aAtmaram Narayan Jere (Krishnad-as Academy, Varanasi - 221001, Reprinted 1982).
6. See Amita Chatterjee's article "Can There be an Inconsistent Action in the Nyāya Scheme of Intentional Actions" in *Jadavpur Journal of Philosophy* (Vol. I No. 1) 1989 (Jadavpur University, Calcutta - 700032) for a very interesting discussion of *kṛti*.
7. An observation regarding the agency of God can be found in detail in Srilekha Datta's paper "Self as Agent" presented at the National Seminar on *Self and Ontology* organised by the Department of Philosophy, Jadavpur University in 1985.
8. See S.K. Maitra's *The Ethics of the Hindus* (University of Calcutta, 1963) for an analysis of volition in Hindu Ethics.