

ANOMALIES OF THE NYĀYA- VAIŚEṢIKA CONCEPT OF SELF

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (to be referred to simply as Nyāya throughout this essay) and Jainism are perhaps the only two Indian philosophical schools which attach great importance to the concept of the embodied or corporeal nature of the individual self called *Jīva* or *Jīvātman* in Sanskrit. In no other school this aspect of the self has been given due importance. We are going to consider the Nyāya view of the embodied self and the serious consequences which are entailed by it.

Let us start with a brief outline of the basic metaphysical doctrines of Nyāya which are relevant to its conception of self. There are two kinds of selves, viz. the innumerable individual selves and a single universal self, that is God. Both these kinds of selves are substances which are eternal and ubiquitous. Being substances, these are endowed with certain general and certain special qualities. The general qualities are number, dimension, separateness, conjunction and disjunction from other substances. The special qualities that are common to the individual and universal selves are cognition, emotion or desire, happiness and conation; but those belonging to God are all eternal, while those belonging to the individual selves are transitory. Besides these four, the individual self is endowed with certain other special qualities like aversion, virtue, vice, misery and residual trace. These too are transitory in nature. The relation of these qualities with their substantive locus is inherence. While none of the qualities of God is transitory and therefore God can never be devoid of any of His qualities, this is not the case with the (special) qualities of the individual self. The qualities though inherent in the self can be and are dissipated temporarily or permanently. The self may be devoid of cognition, desire etc. during sleep and similar states and in the state of release all these qualities disappear for good from the being of the self leaving it in an insentient stone-like condition. These are the basic metaphysical ideas about the individual self and God advocated by Nyāya.

The individual self is the embodied self in the sense that most of its special qualities are engendered in it by the contact of the sense organs and the mind with it in certain sensitive portions of the body. The self being ubiquitous it is in contact with the whole body which it inhabits and also all other bodies, but the mind and the sense-organs which are of limited dimensions can come in contact with the self in the sensitive parts of the body only occasionally. This is why the self is not endowed with its own qualities at all times. In the technical terminology of Nyāya the self is the material cause of its qualities, but their efficient cause is the body-mind-sense-and-object-contact, in the absence of which the self's own qualities cannot emerge in it. Obviously, this is a rather queer view to adopt; but without it Nyāya cannot account for the embodied character of the self. If the self is absolutely different from the body, its embodiedness must serve some purpose and the only purpose that it can be expected to serve is to determine the biopsychological career of the self as a human being. It stands to the credit of Nyāya thinkers that although they regarded the self and the body as radically distinct from each other they did not, like Descartes in the west, treat the distinction as preventive of the mutual contact of the self and the body. Even a material and a non-material entity can quite well come in contact with each other according to the Nyāya view.

Here another peculiarity of the Nyāya view of the self or its qualities needs to be taken note of. Conation, emotion, happiness, misery etc., which are self's qualities, are not conscious qualities. That is, consciousness does not characterise these qualities. They are not conscious because consciousness is not a property common to all these qualities. It is just one of the qualities which is commonly known as cognition and is different from the non-cognitive qualities and may emerge in the self without its being cognisant of their occurrence.

So, unless the desire, feeling etc. of the self are followed by their cognition or consciousness, the self would remain totally unaware that it is desirous, emotional etc. even if these changes of state in it are prompted by cognition. The cognition prompting a desire would precede and not follow it, and not have the desire or the self as its object. In fact the self is not the object of any direct cognition by itself. It is always cognised as endowed with one or other of its attributes. Only in an unconscious state like that of sound sleep the self is free of all its states or attributes, but if in such a stark condition the self is supposed to have the cognition of itself, then this very cognition would adversely affect its starkness. So, there is not only no self-awareness in the strict sense in the self even in the

waking state, there is no awareness in it of its own changing states, unless any of these states is followed by reflection of itself (or memory). But just as body-mind-sense-contact is needed to engender cognition, desire, etc. in the self, so it is needed to engender even reflective cognition or memory of these states. The self cannot by itself bring about any such cognition. Even the effort of self is in fact the effort that is induced by the body-sense-contact. Thus, the conscious or sentient life of the self is in reality a somnambulist type of life, which is wholly dependent upon conditions extraneous to it. Even the self-consciousness of self, which is not strictly to be called as such, is at the mercy of the body and what is called the conation or effort of the self is really the result of body-mind-sense-activity. The self does not of itself have or initiate any activity; it only suffers activity and bears the qualities including cognition produced by mind-sense-object-contact.

Such a view naturally raises the question; 'Is a self devoid of the sense of self-identity or wholly dependent upon its association with the body to acquire this sense temporarily, good enough to sustain the felt identity of the individual, which it is supposed to constitute?' Mere ontological continuity, based upon the eternity of the self, cannot explain how the experiential gap taking place during sound sleep and such other states can be filled by unconnected experiences preceding and succeeding the gap. The self in its absolute pristine condition cannot bridge the gap. Perhaps the impressions called '*Samśkāra*' in Nyāya's technical terminology, which are supposed to be left behind by an evanescent (in its third moment of existence) experience can connect the past and the present experiences belonging to the same self. The impressions, though as short-lived as the experiences generating them, go on producing similar impressions which, when revived, give rise to experiences similar to the past ones. Thus, a link is established between the frequently-interrupted experiential states of the self. So, even during the intervals, when the self is totally bereft of any its special qualities (excluding the impressions) due to the quiescence of the biopsychical processes (including experiential states in the self), its sense of self-identity is not lost.

There are, however, some difficulties in this answer to the above question. First, the impressions also are the qualities of the self and like the remaining qualities engendered in it they too must be supposed to be engendered mainly by the biopsychical processes. So, when these processes are in abeyance all the impressions are sure to disappear as do the other qualities. If impressions are supposed to give rise to their similars then they may do this either by themselves

or with the help of the biopsychical processes. If the first alternative is true, then there would be no end to the series of impressions one succeeding another so that every experience - even the most trivial one - would be indelibly impressed on the mind or what is once remembered would be remembered always. Moreover, it would be rather odd to maintain that the first impression of an experience arises as the result of the biopsychical processes, while the subsequent impressions similar to the first one do not require these processes to generate them. If the second of the foregoing alternatives is upheld, then as in the case of other qualities, in the case of all impressions too the causality of biopsychical processes would have to be admitted. But since during sleep and other sleeplike conditions these processes are in abeyance, the self would then be totally bereft of all its special qualities including the impressions. There would, then, be nothing there to connect cognition, conation etc. preceding and succeeding a sleeplike interruption in the sentience of the self. Secondly, it has to be noted that in Nyāya view impressions, though a quality of the self, are quite unlike cognition, conation etc. of which they happen to be residual effects. Impressions are neither conscious nor subconscious. As explained above, even conation, volition etc. cannot be regarded either as conscious or subconscious in Nyāya view. If this is so, how can impressions constitute a conscious link between the different states of the self which are separated from each other by wide gaps of consciousness? Nyāya cannot slur over the difficulty by treating the bare eternal self itself as such a link. The bare self is a totally unconscious self. Even the consciousness of its being a particular self is not present in the sleepstate. Even this consciousness is engendered in it by mind-body-contact of a special kind. So, in sleep and other similar states there is always the possibility of the self of one individual being confused with any other self associated with another body. Impressions are supposed to survive the body by which they are engendered and they are transmitted to the body of the next incarnation of the self. The newborn baby's reflex activity of sucking its mother's breast is considered to be due to the revival of the baby's impressions of experience of its previous birth by all Indian philosophers. This implies that despite their association with a particular body, the innumerable impressions of experiences engendered by that body are not tied down to that body as the experiences are. This is one more peculiarity of the Nyāya view of self's qualities. Though impressions are just like cognitions, conations etc., yet they are not totally dependent upon the body. What kind of biopsychological causation is this which differs in nature from quality to quality? Can there be such a causation at all? Obviously the self - the material cause of all its qualities is eternal, while the biopsychological process is the non-material cause of the

latter. So, just as a clay-pot for example is destroyed if the conjunction of its component parts, which is the nonmaterial cause of the clay-pot is disrupted, so the impressions associated with a body must be dissipated, if the body is destroyed. It is, therefore, not quite correct to say that the impressions of experiences are transmitted from one body to another in which the self incarnates itself. Destiny is another quality about whose causation also there seems to be some confusion in the Nyāya view. Destiny is built as a result of the conscious, voluntary activities of the embodied self. The body acts due to the conative prompting of the self and the result of the acts of the body accumulates in the self in the form of its destiny. Destiny, too, is transmitted from one body to another, but as in the case of impressions, its causality is not confined to one body. The destiny built up, so to say, in one body gets its supplementation in different bodies - which means that, although the bodily activity is needed to produce destiny, yet the activities of one body are not sufficient to produce it. Different bodies at different times help produce the destiny (or perhaps the destinies) of the self transmigrating through those bodies.

Another peculiarity of the Nyāya view of the causation of impressions and destiny needs to be particularly noted here. Body-mind-contact or the biopsychical process is needed for the production and revival or fructification of impressions and destiny, but it is not supposed to be needed for their upkeep or continuity of existence. Such a view is unavoidable for Nyāya because after the death of one body and before incarnation in another body there may be long or short intervals during which the self is supposed to subsist in a disembodied but not a qualitless state. Cognition, conation etc. are of course absent in the self in this state but impressions and destiny somehow cling to it without getting any accretion because of the absence of the body. The impressions and destiny remain, so to say, in a potential condition during this interim period. Like other schools of philosophy, Nyāya cannot account for the persistence of these two qualities in the disimbodyed state by means of the causality of the subtle body as the admission of such a body over and above the physical body and its causation in respect of the two qualities would militate against Nyāya's own doctrine of causality. It can never be the case that different kinds of non-material causes are needed for the production, preservation and destruction of the same effect. It would be rather odd to hold that while the physical body is needed to produce destiny and impressions in the self, it is the subtle body succeeding the physical body that is needed for the persistence of these qualities in the latter and the last body preceding the salvation of the self is alone needed for the complete elimination

of the self's destiny. Destiny is the quality which is associated with all different bodies through which the self transmigrates. Moreover it is destiny itself which is supposed to predetermine the incarnation of the self in a particular body after the destruction of a previous body inhabited by it. This is the queer view to talk of destiny. It cannot be both the cause and the effect of the same body. The body that comes into being as a result of the causation of a certain self's destiny cannot also be the cause (or part-cause) of the preservation of the latter. It is true that mere destiny does not bring into being the different bodies of the self. God, space, time etc. are joint causes with destiny of the self's different bodies. But destiny is one of these causes and the main cause at that. So, the inconsistency in the view of the causation of destiny remains.

A more puzzling peculiarity of the Nyāya view of self is related to its view of God. The main proof for the existence of God adduced by Nyāya is based upon its conception of the similarity of divine creatorship with self's creatorship. The human individual creates things by means of his or her effort which is born of the desire to create, which arises as the result of the creator's knowledge of the material causes of the things to be created. God is such a creator of the whole cosmos as He alone has the knowledge of the material cause of the cosmos and the desire and effort capable of producing the cosmos. So, human and divine creativity are-- in Nyāya view-- almost parallel with each other. If this is so, how can human creativity be supposed to be so thoroughly dependent upon the body? As we have seen, the dependence upon the body of self's creativity is absolute, while divine creativity is absolutely independent.

As a matter of fact Nyāya seems to have completely botched the conception of divine creativity or causality by regarding it as similar to human creativity or causality. God along with self's destiny, space, time etc. is supposed to be the common efficient cause of everything. How can such a view of common causation of two such unlike entities be explained, specially so when divine causality is taken to be inferrible from human causality? It is, therefore, quite pertinent on the part of some thinkers to raise objection against the inference of the divine creativity that, since God has no body, He cannot create anything. The Nyāya answer to the objection is not quite convincing. The answer is to the effect that God's knowledge, will and effort are eternal and absolutely unrestricted. Only because of the unrestricted and universal operation of his will and effort, God is supposed to be able to bring about the conjunction of atoms after the periodical annihilation of the world and its consequent disintegration into atoms. The atoms brought together, mainly

by divine effort, give rise, in due course, to the whole composite structure of the world. Thus, the necessity of embodiment for God in his creative activity is denied by Nyāya. In fact, neither body nor anything else can be needed by God's will, effort, knowledge etc. as they are all supposed to be eternal like God. But when it comes to the question of reviving the scriptural lore and its propagation among select sages as of each epoch, Nyāya admits that God reincarnates Himself as a master or teacher and imparts the knowledge of the scriptures to the sages. Teaching is an activity which cannot be carried on without there being an embodied person as teacher and an embodied person as student. In this explanation of its view Nyāya forgets the very obvious fact that if for the omniscient, omnipotent and omnivolent God no physical body is needed for creating the world, then it should not at all be needed for Him to teach the scriptures to the first-born sages. God could directly make the first born enlightened about the scriptures by His infinite power. If despite his infinite power God cannot do without physical incarnation in carrying out the teaching activity, He cannot do so even in the case of the creation of the world.

It may be urged by Nyāya against these arguments that the embodied nature of the individual self is a fact of experience. Also, the limitation of the individual's cognitions, desires, conations etc. is an undeniable fact; God's cognition, conation etc. are, however, not directly known; they are inferred on the basis of their broad similarity to the individual's cognition, conation etc. This similarity between them is only in respect of their co-objectivity, that is to say, the individual's self cognition, conation etc. have identical objects as God's cognition, conation etc. But in respect of their causation there is no similarity between the two groups of qualities.

But if we look closely into this matter, we find that there is not the slightest similarity between the individual self's and God's qualities. The former are noneternal, while the latter is eternal ; the former have only a few things as their objects, while the whole world is the object of the latter; there is mutual causation among the former, but all the latter qualities are uncaused; the former depend upon the body of their origination, preservation etc., but the latter depend upon nothing as they are eternal and, lastly, the former are causally-related to specific effects, but the latter have everything as their effects. The only features common to these two types of qualities is their intentionality; but even this differs as limited and the unlimited in the two cases. In view of such radical difference between these, it would not be reasonable to base the inference of God's creativity upon its similarity to individual creativity.

Ubiquity, however, is a feature which the individual self is

supposed to share with God. The reason for regarding the self as ubiquitous is that the destiny of the individual is effective in places where the individual is not physically present. A certain job, for example, is offered to me only by a firm based in a foreign land far away from me, although a number of persons had applied for the job. This cannot happen unless my destiny is connected with the job. Only if the self is present with its destiny at the place from where the offer is made, there can be connection between the destiny and the job. But does the admission of self's ubiquity explain this phenomenon satisfactorily? I get a certain offer while others do not get it despite their best efforts to secure it. Why do not others get the job when their selves too are ubiquitous? If the self alone is the connecting link between destiny and things predestined (for the self), then everything must be predestined for everybody. Moreover, how can the operation of the destiny of a self far away from the body it inhabits be explained? Can destiny--a quality of the self--be operative in the absence of the body-mind-contact? If it can, then even the goings-on in the body can occur without the operation of its destiny. If body-mind-contact is supposed to be needed only for the origination and not for the operation of destiny, then even divine will and effort would not be needed for the operation. So, God as the common efficient cause of all that happens cannot be inferred at all.

Thus, neither destiny, impression nor any other quality is found to be associated with the self throughout the series of bodily transmigrations it undergoes. If this is so, then there arises the question of the individuation of the self. What is it that distinguishes one self from another? It is not the question how the self is identified as a particular self? The body which the self inhabits in a particular incarnation may help identify it so long as the body exists, but when the body ceases to exist some quality like impression or destiny may help the self's identification. This is an epistemological answer to an epistemological question. But the above question is an ontological one regarding the intrinsic nature of the self. If, apart from its qualities and the various bodies it assumes, one self is exactly like another (in the state of final release, if not in other states), how are they distinct from each other? Nyāya has considered this question, but its answer to it is least satisfactory. It says that a property like 'specificity' characterises each self and that this property differs from self to self. If it is asked: 'what distinguishes one self's specificity from that of another self?' the only answer that is given is that each specificity is self-distinguished from another. Obviously such an answer can be given even in the case of the selves' mutual distinction. Without specifying what this so-called specificity consists in, to say that the selves differ because of their different specificities is

tantamount to saying that the selves differ amongst themselves but this difference is inexplicable. It is also difficult to say that such mutually-distinct selves are characterised even by selfhood. One bare self cannot be said to be either alike or different from another. If it is alike what is the ground of their likeness and if it is different what is the ground of their difference?

Further, can the attainment of bare selfhood dissociated from all the special qualities of the self be upheld as the summum bonum of existence? It is for such an utterly insentient state of self that one is expected to strive by means of his or her cognitive and other faculties. If so, such a striving is sure to defeat its purpose. How can one attain cognitionlessness by means of cognition? It is understandable that an imperfect or hazy cognition leads, when deepened, to perfect and determinate cognition. But no true cognition is known to lead its own complete absence, nor a sensible person can be expected to aspire after the attainment of such a condition of cognitionlessness. Nyāya appears to aggravate the bizarreness of such a view by maintaining that a definite inference to the effect that the self is different in nature from every other thing including the mind-body-complex it inhabits is conducive to the attainment of its bare selfhood. If this inference is the only means of salvation, it must be the most important kind of cognition one can have. Having acquired this cognition by dint of one's unrelenting spiritual efforts how could one be persuaded to relapse for good in a state which completely excludes the cognition?

A comparison of the Nyāya view of self with that which is upheld by Sāṃkhya is worth attempting here. Nyāya regards the self as the agent, the doer, and the originator of all the voluntary activities in which the body enveloping the self is involved. According to Sāṃkhya, however, the *Puruṣa*--the replica of Nyāya's self--is sentient but inactive and it is *Prakṛti*--the material matrix of the whole universe--which is active and the agent of all actions. What, therefore, belongs to *Prakṛti* is wrongly imputed to *Puruṣa*. In the Nyāya view, as we have seen above, the self is depicted as just the material repository of all the qualities that are induced in it by the activity of the body-mind-sense-complex. The self only suffers the existence of these qualities. In no sense, therefore, the self can be regarded as the agent of the activities. The ultimate condition of the self is also totally bereft of agency or doership. Thus Nyāya seems to do violence to its own view of self by treating it as the agent of all voluntary activities while Samkhya rightly considers the *Puruṣa* as a seeming but not real agent of the activities initiated by the dynamic *Prakṛti*.

If we think carefully we may come to the unpalatable but unavoidable conclusion that the Nyāya view of self does not serve the purpose for which it is formulated. If the experiential life of the human individual confined to the organism of the current incarnation alone is to be explained, there is no necessity to admit the self as the sustainer of the former. The living body itself or its metabolic activity (which is homeostatic and self-regulating) can be treated as the sustaining ground of the individual's experiential existence. We have seen above how body-mind-contact or sense-mind-contact is essential for all bodily activity. The self-feeling also may be supposed to be caused by some special kind of continuous bodily activity. But when the bodily life comes to an end, no sustainer is left for the ongoing astral life of the self surviving the death of the body. So, it is thought, specially by Nyāya, that the eternal self carrying the residual traces in its being of all its bodily experiences persists as surrounded by a subtle body during the interval preceding its reincarnation in another body. But if the self's empirical existence, whether terrestrial or astral, always depends upon its being enveloped by some body or another, then Nyāya may as well discard the notion of self as redundant. All that the notion of self seems to explain is very well explained by the notions of the physical body or subtle body, the latter of which has to be postulated any way by all Indian philosophies. It is true that the self-reference involved in the expressions like 'my body' cannot be satisfactorily accounted, if the body is supposed to be the referend of the expressions. The living body cannot refer to itself as 'my body', if the referer and the referend are identical. But a similar difficulty is associated also with the conception of the self as different from the body. The self which is quite different from the body (or body-mind-complex) can refer to it as 'my body' (which means that the body is a possession of but not identical with the self) but it cannot use the expression 'I' while pointing to the body (indicating thereby that it is the same as its body).

In view of the ultimate, ideal nature of self as bereft of all its special qualities postulated by Nyāya, it appears to be uncommonsensical and counterintuitive for this school to hold that the special qualities are related by the inherence-relation with the self. This relation of inherence is defined as one whose relata are inseparable from each other (like conjuncts in the conjunctive relation) and one of them exists only as characterising or as located in the other. Neither of the relata can exist by itself apart from the other. A pot and its colour, smell, or the genus potness are so related with each other. Neither can there be a qualityless pot, nor one uncharacterised by the genus potness. Also, there cannot be the qualities of a pot or the genus potness in the total absence of points.

But in the case of the self such a possibility is precisely what Nyāya maintains. As we have already seen, the self can subsist after its salvation in a qualitiless state for eternity, despite the inherence of qualities in it prior to salvation from beginningless eternity. Such a qualitiless state of the self is conceived to be its ideal state by Nyāya. This is not how entities related by the inherence-relation are supposed to subsist. Of course, a non-eternal substantive locus of its qualities is admitted to subsist without its qualities during the moment of its origination in order to account for its causality in relation to the latter. A cause has to pre-exist its qualities at least by one moment. But this is not the case with the self which is an eternal substance.

Can Nyāya tide over the above difficulties by holding a different view of the individual self--as for instance the view advocated by a school of Mīmāṃsā? According to this view the self is itself of the nature of sentience and this sentience is overpowered by mental states like cognition, conation etc. which are engendered by the body-mind-complex associated with the self. When this complex comes to an end permanently, the self is freed from all the mental states and shines out in its true sentient nature.

This view can create more difficulties for Nyāya than those which it is intended to solve. Nyāya cannot hold that the self-substance is identical with sentience which is a quality. Nyāya cannot also make sense of the proposed relation of the self, as sentience and its objective cognition, conation etc. The nature of the sentience that is supposed to be left behind after the cessation of all the so-called mental states, when the self is freed from bondage, is equally difficult for Nyāya to make sense of. Is this sentience eternal? Is it cognitive, conative or emotional or is it all these simultaneously? If the sentience is eternal and cognitive, how can it be distinguished from divine cognition? None of these questions can be answered by Nyāya without compromising one or other of its metaphysical doctrines, which are basic to its view point. By seeking to defend both the embodied as well as the qualitiless nature of the self Nyāya has failed to defend either. If the self is naturally endowed with its special qualities, it cannot wholly depend upon the body for being endowed by the latter. If, however, the self is intrinsically qualitiless then the body-mind-sense-contact cannot induce any qualities in it.

About the nature of self-knowledge that is supposed to result in the self's freedom from bondage, Nyāya's view is no less disputable. Nyāya cannot deny that the common cognition of self is an instance of veridical self-cognition. Even if some quality like cognition or desire or conation etc. appears as characterising the self in this

cognition it is yet the cognition of self and it is quite true. There is neither confusion nor error in it. Why should it not, then, bring about salvation? Nyāya says that the inferential cognition of the self's distinction from all that is not-self is the cause of salvation. But the internal perception of self is, as a direct determinate cognition of self, more potent than the inferential cognition. So, there should never be bondage to any self as introspective self-cognition is always available to every self.

'Affection'

474/A, Professors' Colony
Hanuman Nagar
Nagpur- 440009

N. S. DRAVID