

UNIVERSALS IN NYAYA-VAIŚEŚIKA PHILOSOPHY

Writers and thinkers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school do not appear to have consciously recognized that there had been any development in their theory of universals after the composition of the Sūtras. An attempt has been made here to trace this development as it occurred under the critical pressure from other schools. Different schools of Indian philosophy produced a variety of theories concerning the nature of universals. While the Cārvākas and the Buddhists categorically deny the existence of universals, the Jainas seem to be divided on the point (20, pp. 74-76; 34, p. 10). The Buddhists identify the universal or its appearance with *apoha*, (11, p. 97; 28, p. 17) i. e., consciousness of otherness or difference of one kind from others. According to them the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) alone is real and the universal is merely phenomenal or appearance. The particular alone has causal efficacy (*arthakriyākāritā*) which, according to them, is the defining property of the real. The Vedānta recognises only one reality, namely, the Brahman. According to Śaṅkarācārya, the categories of quality, universal etc. do not indicate anything other than the substance. Universals, therefore, should be conceived as being identical with substance. However, Śaṅkara as well as his commentators recognise sensible form (*ākṛti*) as an entity real on the phenomenal level (2, p. 21; 4, p. 444, pp. 251-52). Kaiyaṭa and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, the celebrated grammarians who were followers of the Vedānta, also accord practical or phenomenal reality to universals (42, pp. 11, 46). The Sāṅkhya and the Yoga systems do not recognise the universal as a separate category (44, Vibhūtipāda 53, Samādhīpāda 9). The grammarians, including the Sphoṭavādins and the Mīmāṃsakas are supporters of the reality of the universals (7, Sūtra 1/3/33; 11, p. 95; 33, *Ākṛtivāda* 3; 35, p. 21).

THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSAL

Gautama defines the universal (*sāmānya* or *jāti*) as what produces similar cognition (17, Sūtra 2/2/68). Praśastapāda, Śrīdhara, Udayana, Śaṅkara Miśra and others, who clearly advocate the doctrine of logical realism, define the universal as that which is one and eternal, and inheres in a plurality of particulars (8, p. 159;

17, *Sūtravṛtti* 2/2/68; 19, p. 40; 21, p. 677; 27, p. 39). The universal has no being (*sattā*) which belongs only to substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*) and activity (*Karma*). Being is the highest universal. By this, however, they do not mean that it is the universal of all universals and is related to them as a genus to its species. They simply mean that the universal being is united with all substances, qualities and activities. The above definition of the universal is accepted by later Naiyāyikas such as Keśava Miśra, Annambhaṭṭa, Dinakara and Rāmarudra also (12, pp. 55-56; 36, p. 179; 37, p. 89).

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools recognise two kinds of generality the higher (*para*) and the lower (*apara*). The highest generality is that of being (*sattā*). It covers the largest number of things. It includes all, and is not included in anything. It is not a species of any higher genus. *Sattā* is the highest universal, since it is of the widest extent, and comprehends all other universals under it. The universal substance (*dravyatva*) is of wider extent than the universal earth (*pṛthvīṭva*), but of narrower extent than being (*sattā*), which is the highest universal. The universal jar (*ghaṭatva*) is of the narrowest extent. It is narrower than substantiality (*dravyatva*) and being (*sattā*). So it is the lowest species (12, pp. 55-61; 14, p. 691; 19, p. 42; 21, p. 677; 27, p. 12; 36, pp. 179-80; 37, p. 90; 39, p. 49). Here the highest and the lowest, higher and lower, refer to wide and narrow extent. The extension determines the grade of generality.

Proofs for the existence of universals

As logical realists the Naiyāyikas are committed to defend the existence of the universals; as nominalists, the Buddhists are equally committed to disprove their existence. The main contentions of the Buddhists relating to the universals are as follows : (1) The particulars alone are real; they alone exist; they alone are revealed in sense-perception *qua* individuals; and all the particulars are different from one another. The illusion of similarity is due to the fact that we apply the same name to refer to a number of individuals. The name alone is general, it does not stand for any common essence to be found in all the particulars or individuals. The so-called generality is but a name. The general name, the so-called universal, in fact has a *negative* function. All that it indicates is that the individuals called or

known by one name differ from individuals called or known by other names. (2) Those who hold the universal to be an independent reality should tell us whether the whole of a universal or only a part of it is present in the individual. If the universal is wholly present in one individual then it is obvious that it cannot be present in other individuals, which defeats the purpose for which the universal was conceived. If it be contended that only part of the universal is present in an individual then it would follow that the universal is divisible and so perishable. (3) Is the universal all-pervasive, or is it confined to individuals belonging to the same class? Neither alternative is plausible. If the universal is found in all objects, then the quality of being, e. g., cow, must be found in horses, stones, etc. also. In that case there would be intermixture of classes and they would become indistinguishable from one another. On the other hand, if the universal exists only in a special group of individuals, then how comes it that we begin to perceive cowness in a newly born calf, since cowness did not exist in that place before? Since the universal is held to be eternal, it cannot be maintained that the universal was born along with the individual cow. Nor can it be argued that the universal is transmitted to the new individual from some other individual. (4) What happens to the universal when the individual in which it is present, dies? Is the universal destroyed along with the individual?

The Naiyāyikas maintain the independent existence of the universals on the following grounds. (1) The universal is not a mere figment of our imagination. It is as real as the individual and is given in perception like the latter. We also feel the difference between the cognition of the universal and that of the particular. Simply because we perceive in the same object and at the same time both the universal and the particular, we should not confuse the two. The perception of the universal is effected by several kinds of sense-contact (*sannikarṣa*), according as the universal in question resides in substance, quality or action. This is the view of the older Naiyāyikas. According to later Naiyāyikas, beginning with Gaṅgeśa, the universal is perceived through *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*, which means the perception of entire class of objects through the generic property perceived in any individual belonging to that class. The hypothesis that such perception

occurs is necessary to account for the fact that, having observed an individual in the past, we are able on a future occasion to identify another object or individual as belonging to the class of the first individual (which was perceived in the past). It will also be argued later that the admission of the type of perception called *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa* is necessary for the explanation of our knowledge of universal concomitance (*vyāpti*) on which inference depends. (2) Answering the objection of the Buddhists, it has been pointed out that experience itself is our authority for believing that the universal, though entirely present in each individual, is yet present in all the individuals at the same time. (3) As regards the third objection, it is pointed out that while the universal is all-pervasive, it can manifest itself only in the members of a particular class. When a new member of a class is born, the universal becomes manifest in it. Before birth it lay unmanifested within the embryo. (4) When the individual member of a class dies, what is destroyed is not the universal but its manifestation in that individual. Hence the Buddhists' objection is pointless. (3, pp. 111-12, p. 119; 8, p. 163; 9, p. 42; 13, pp. 79-80; 14, p. 685; 15, p. 20; 16, p. 20; 18, p. 333; 21, pp. 677-78; 27, p. 79; 36, p. 179; 41, p. 23).

In his *Sūtra* (41, *Sūtra* 1/1/3) Kaṇāda observes that generality (*sāmānya*) and particularity (*viśeṣa*) are relative to the cognising *Buddhi* or Intellect. Some modern writers on Indian philosophy, such as Radhakrishnan (22, p. 213), Jadunath Sinha (31, p. 181; 32, p. 164) and P. T. Raju (23, p. 391) have been led by this *sūtra* into believing that Kaṇāda was in favour of a conceptualist view of generality (*sāmānya*) and would reduce it to a conceptual factor existing only in thought. This is a misapprehension due to the neglect of the later interpretations of the *Vaiśeṣika-sūtras*. Thus Praśastapāda (21, pp. 677-78) and Vyomaśivācārya (21, Vyomavati, p. 680) maintain that universals are eternal, existing outside the sphere of thought in the same sense in which other realities exist; and that a universal (*jāti*) is apprehended as a generic feature (*sāmānya*) or a specific differentia (*viśeṣa*) according as it is conceived of as a unifying or differentiating factor (*anugatabuddhi* or *vyāvṛtta-buddhi*). Here *sāmānya* and *viśeṣa* both signify the universal. For example, substantiality (*dravyatva*) is a *sāmānya* (generality) when it is looked

upon as a generic feature common to all the substances; but it is a *viśeṣa* (particularity) when it is looked upon as the differentia of substances, by means of which they are distinguished from other things like qualities and activities. Hence Kuppuswami (10, p. 25) has rightly stated that "one could clearly see how solicitous Kaṇāda really is to establish the reality of *jātis*, from the significant way in which he uses the phrase *antya-viśeṣa* (the end of all differentiating feature) to designate the distinct category known as *viśeṣa*, so that they may not be confounded with *jātis* looked upon as differentia".

Restrictive conditions (*jāti-bādhaka* and *upādhi*)

Does everything in the universe possess a universal ? The Naiyāyika reply to this question is in the negative. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika the following six factors, called the *upādhis* or *jāti-bādhakas*, are destructive of true generality (12, pp. 58-59) :

- (i) Singleness of the individual (*vyaktya-bheda*),
- (ii) Co-extensiveness (*tulyatva*),
- (iii) Cross-division (*saṁkara*),
- (iv) Infinite regress (*anavasthā*).
- (v) Destruction of essential nature (*rūpa-hāni*),
- (vi) Absence of relation (*asambandha*).

These are explained as follows :

1. There is no class comprehending ether or space (*ākāśa*), since there is only one entity known by that name (12, p. 57).

2. ' Jariness ' (*ghaṭatva*) and ' pitcherness ' (*kalaśatva*) are not two different classes, because they are co-extensive. They are two different names for the same class. They inhere in the same individuals (12, p. 57).

3. If there is a cross-division between two classes they cannot be recognised as true universals (12, p. 58). Four kinds of atoms (e. g., earth, water, fire and air) and ether are physical substances (*bhūta dravya*) (12, p. 98), the same four atomic substances and the mind (*manas*) are corporeal substances (*mūrta dravya*) (12, Kārikā 25). Ether is physical (*bhūta*)

but not corporeal (*mūrta*). Mind is corporeal (*mūrta*) but not physical (*bhūta*). So physicality (*bhūtatva*) and corporeality (*mūrtatva*) are not universals (*jāti*). They involve cross-division.

4. Nor can there be a class of classes. No generality can subsist in another generality, since that would lead to infinite regress (12, p. 58). (Russell's recognition of class of classes is fallacious according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika).

5. No generality can subsist in particularities, since that would destroy the very nature of the particularity (12, p. 58).

6. Nor can generality subsist in inherence, since there is no relation of inherence between that generality (*samavāyatva*) and inherence (*samavāya*). So there is no generality of inherence (*samavāya*) (12, p. 59).

Every common quality does not constitute generality (*jāti*). Some persons are fair, blind or deaf, but fairness, blindness or deafness does not constitute an independent class. If blindness be recognised as a class, blind men, blind cows and blind horses etc. will have to be grouped under the same class. Again if men are grouped according to their language, race or religion, the same persons may belong to several classes. So generality is distinguished from *upādhi* (12, p. 78; 26, Kārikā 17).

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSAL IN VARIOUS MEANS OF VALID KNOWLEDGE (PRAMĀṆAS)

Perception (*pratyakṣa*)

The ancient school of the Nyāya declares generality to be given in perception. The perception is made possible by a kind of extraordinary contact called *sāmānya-lakṣaṇa* (12, Kārikā 64). While perceiving the individual person, we also perceive the generic character or universal 'manhood' and through it all men, past and future. All individuals cannot be directly present to the senses; however, they are presented indirectly through the knowledge of a generic character. Viśvanātha says that we know only the general character of all individuals and not their mutual differences (12, pp. 205-6). The apprehension of generality is said to be non-sensuous, since it can be had even when there is no particular subsumed under the universal in

question is present (38, p. 773). Thus according to the Nyāya the universal is not a construct of the human mind. It is out there in the external world having an independent existence unaffected by the observing agents.

Inference (*anumāna*)

Inference, according to the Indian systems of philosophy including the Nyāya, depends on *vyāpti*, defined as the relation of invariable concomitance between the middle term (*hetu*) and the major term (*sādhya*) (21, p. 562; 36, pp. 52-53; 37, p. 57; 40, p. 207). The *vyāpti* is obtained by repeated observation of unconditional togetherness of the two terms in many instances. Here the question arises: How can the perception of a limited number of cases of smoke being accompanied by fire lead one to infer the relation of universal concomitance between the middle and major term? This was the form in which the familiar problem of induction presented itself to Indian logicians. The Nyāya offers an ingenious solution of this problem. We perceive the universal in the given particular; we then visualise all the particulars, past and future through the universal. Thus we are able to perceive uniform concomitance between all instances of smoke on the one hand and those of fire on the other. While it is not possible to physically perceive all the instances, past and future either of smoke or fire, it is possible to have a sort of extraordinary perception of them all through the perceptual awareness of their respective universals. (30, p. 54; 38, p. 771, *Dīdhiti*, p. 402).

Comparison (*upamāna*)

Upamāna, according to the Naiyāyikas, is the process of knowledge through which we come to know that a certain word denotes a certain class of objects (37, p. 72). To take their usual example, the sentence 'gavaya (wild cow) is like the cow' leads the person, ignorant of the denotation of the term 'gavaya' to identify, on being confronted with the individual *gavaya*, the whole class of *gavayas* as constituting the denotation of that term (17, *bhāṣya* 1/1/6, *Sūtra-vṛtti* 1/1/6; 30, p. 84). For, once the person concerned knows the animal which is denoted by the term *gavaya*, he comes to know the whole class of the *gavayas* which constitutes its denotation.

Testimony (śabda)

Three different views have been held in Indian philosophy concerning the nature of meanings expressed by words. According to the Sāṃkhya and the Buddhists what the words denote are the individuals. According to the Jainas word, though it primarily and directly means the universal, comes indirectly to mean particulars as well. The Advaita Vedāntins hold that the primary and explicit meaning symbolised by a word is the universal alone and not the universalised particular. Patañjali maintains that the word means only the form (*ākṛti*). Prabhākara and Kumārila hold the view that the word means only the universal; the individual is denoted only by inference or implication through the *ākṣepa*.

According to the Naiyāyikas, all these views are partial and do not express the whole truth. For a word means all three—the individual (*vyakti*), the universal (*jāti*) and the form (*ākṛti*) (17, Sūtra 2/2/65). However, in different contexts, one meaning may be predominant and the rest subordinate to it. When emphasis is laid on the individual aspect of the object, the word indicates mainly the particular, though its universal import either as regards form or essence is not altogether absent. When the intent of the speaker is to emphasize similarity of form, then that meaning predominates in the given context. Similarly, in a different context, the common or universal aspect of the term may receive emphasis from the speaker. Thus the Nyāya theory of meaning attempts to reconcile the conflicting views held by the different schools.

CONCLUSION

The theory of universals is the cornerstone of the epistemology of Nyāya Vaiśeṣika schools. It is the universal which gives form to the objects of our experience. Its existence is positive. Consequently, if the universal is positive and objectively real, the empirical world will be real. Hence the theory of the universal as an objective reality is the basic tenet of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realism.

The pluralistic ontology of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika was severely criticised by the Vedāntists. Ontologically, it may be admitted

that the Vedāntic criticism was justified. The acceptance of universals as separate entities violates the principle of parsimony embodied in 'Occam's razor'. However, there is greater justification for the assumption of universals on logical grounds. Even the Vedāntist is compelled to concede practical or phenomenal existence to universals (4, pp. 250-52).

In Western philosophy, universals were admitted by Plato and his many mediaeval followers (6, p. 313). In modern philosophy the reality of universals has been defended by several realist thinkers including Bertrand Russell in his earlier phase (1, Introduction p. 7, pp. 27-28, p. 32, pp. 33-34; 5, Introduction p. 20; 24, p. 93). However, now the meaning of the term universal has become widened (25, pp. 259-61). Plato and the thinkers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools conceived universals to be entities underlying natural classes. In recent times it has been contended that qualities and relations, too, should be regarded as universals. All words, excepting the proper nouns, it has been argued by others, stand for universals. Though ontologically obnoxious, the universals do not appear to betray any sign of disappearing from philosophical discourse in foreseeable future.

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NOTES

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