

The Advaita Critique of Vaiśeṣika Theory of Creation

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Abstract

Sankara, in his Bhāṣya, has logically considered the Vaiśeṣika view of atomism and shown his polemic attitude to them on account of the fact that the Advaitins believe in the theory of Brahmakāraṇatā (i.e., the world is created by the Brahman) with the help of some logical arguments. and substantiated his Brahmakāraṇatāvāda. In this paper, an effort has been made to refute the view of the Vaiśeṣikas that deals with atomic conjunction as the cause of the world. The atom is described as the cause of this universe, which is taken as an effect. The desire of God, as aided by unseen factors (adr̥ṣṭa-s), i.e. merits and demerits of an individual, initiates primordial activity between atoms, resulting in the combination in them from which a dyadic compound (dvyaṇuka) is produced. This initial action again needs some cause, without which it is not possible. For an initial action in the atoms cannot be originated automatically due to their material character. If a material object is involved in some action, it is due to the presence of the Conscious Principle, the cause of conjoining unconscious atoms. If initial action continues to exist in the atom, the creation process will go on for an endless period of time, giving no room for dissolution, which is not acceptable. If the human effort (prayatna) is regarded as the cause of the initial action in the atom, it is not possible at all owing to the absence of its cause (i.e. effort) at the time of dissolution. At the initial stage of dissolution, no human being is found and hence it is possible to make an effort to disjoin the atoms. For this, the Advaitins must agree that the atomic conjunction is one of the factors of creation. This atomic conjunction, the Advaitins may say, cannot be the sole cause of it. It may be the cause if it is guided by some Conscious Principle, i.e., Brahman.

Key-Words: *paramāṇukāraṇatā, Brahmakāraṇatā, prayatna, adr̥ṣṭa, samavāya.*

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I

In Indian Philosophy we come across various theories on the origination of world or creation of the world in general. It is found in different systems of Philosophy that world is created due to having ‘the will to create’ (*sisṛkṣāvaśāt*) in a Conscious Being while the beautiful world is destroyed due to having ‘the will of destruction’ (*jihīrṣāvaśāt*) of the same Conscious Being. The Vaiśeṣikas think that the world is created from the atomic conjunction while the Sāṃkhya is of the view that it is originated from the unconscious Prakṛti or Pradhāna. In this way, we come across diverse theories by different schools after keeping their different metaphysical or ontological presuppositions in view. Sankara in his *Bhāṣya* has logically considered each and every view and shown his polemic attitude to them on account of the fact that the Advaitins believe in the theory of *Brahmakāraṇatā* (i.e., the world is created by the Brahman) with the help of some logical arguments and substantiated his *Brahmakāraṇatāvāda* in the *Tarkapāda* section of the *Bhāṣya*. In this paper an effort has been made to refute the view of the Vaiśeṣikas, which is *paramāṇukāraṇatāvāda* dealing atomic conjunction as the cause of the world, which I would like to undertake in this paper.

According to the Advaitins, the universe is originated from a conscious being called Brahman. In other words, the Advaitins believe in the theory of *Brahmakāraṇatā* (*Brahmakāraṇatāvāda*), which regards Brahman as the cause of the universe.

II

The Vaiśeṣikas believe that the whole universe is originated through the combination of atoms, but not from any conscious principle. Sankara has come forward to criticize the view of the Vaiśeṣikas and shown that the combination of atoms is not at all possible for being a cause of the world-origination with the help of the following arguments.

This universe is described as having its own parts or constituents (*sāvayava*) and hence, it has got its beginning as well as end. Atom is described as the cause of this universe which is taken as an effect (*kāryavastu*). The desire of God as aided by unseen factors (*adrṣṭa-s*) i.e. merits and demerits of an individual initiates primordial activity between atoms resulting in the combination in them from which a dyadic compound (*dvyaṇuka*) is produced. Along with this the colour etc. in a dyadic compound are originated. In this way, a material object comes into being.¹

At the time of dissolution (*pralaya*), the conjunction between atoms needs some disjoining factor which may be taken as initial action (*prayatna*) just as initial action exists behind the conjunction of threads as a combining factor. This initial action again needs some cause, without which it is not possible. For, an initial action in the atoms cannot be originated automatically due to their material character. If material object involves in some action, it is due to the presence of Conscious Principle, the cause of conjoining unconscious atoms. If the human effort (*prayatna*) is regarded as the cause of the initial action in the atom, it is not possible at all owing to the absence of its cause (i.e. effort) at the time of dissolution. At the initial stage of dissolution, no human being is found and hence it is possible to get an effort disjoining the atoms. During this time effort which is described as an attribute of *ātman* remains in *ātman* having connection with atoms due to its all-pervasiveness (*vibhūtvā*). For, effort (*prayatna*) is produced in *ātman* connected with the mind existing in body. So, effort cannot be considered as the cause of the initial action among the atoms. as body does not exist at the time of dissolution.²

It may be argued that the unseen principle (*adr̥ṣṭa*) i.e., merit and demerit is the cause of the initial action in atoms. Now there may arise a question whether this unseen principle exists in *ātman* or in atom through relation of inherence (*samavāya*) or not. The initial action cannot be explained by unseen factor existing in either of the two mentioned above, as it is unconscious in nature. It is a fact that an unconscious object cannot guide others if it is not guided by a conscious being.³ The unseen factors like merit, demerit etc. cannot give result without the interference of Conscious Principle as they are unconscious in nature.

If it is argued that the unseen principle exists in an individual soul (*jīvātmā*) and this unseen principle along with the help of this individual soul can create initial action, it can be said

that the individual soul in which consciousness has not been produced remains unconscious at the time of dissolution (*pralaya*) and hence, it cannot help unseen factor in initiating primordial action. Moreover, it (i.e. unseen factor) cannot be regarded as the cause of the same, as it is inherent (*samaveta*) in the individual soul.⁴

It may be argued again that as contact of atoms exists in an individual soul, the substratum of the unseen factor, the unseen factor is related to atoms in the indirect manner and hence it can create the initial action in atoms.

The above-mentioned view does not appear to be logically sound. For, all-pervasive individual soul has got connection with atoms and this connection is mentioned as eternal. Due to its eternity, the initial action in atoms will be eternal, which leads to the absurdity of dissolution.⁵ If initial action continues to be existing in atom, the creation process will go on for endless period of time giving no room for dissolution. 1 |

So, the seen as well as unseen factor cannot create initial action, which indicates the impossibility of the conjunction of atoms and hence creation from this is not possible.

If it is accepted somehow that there is the conjunction of atoms, the question may be raised as to whether atom combines with another entirely or partly. It is said that an atom combines with another entirely, it will be practically lost in another and the enhanced size will not be cognized due to its minuteness. In fact, we cannot apprehend the enhanced size of a binary atom (*dvyanuka*) constituted with two atoms. Moreover, it has been found in the empirical world that an object having parts (*sāvayava*) can be combined with another object that has got some parts of its own (*sāvayava*). As atom is described as part less, it can never be combined with another. If it is said that an atom may be combined with another part, it will turn into an object having some parts, as the combination of a part is possible between objects that have got their parts. The parts of an atom cannot be imagined. If somehow imagined, they are unreal due to their imaginary status. So, the conjunction between atoms is not possible resulting in the non-production of a dyadic compound. In this way, total creation can never come into being.⁶

The minutest part (of a substance having some parts) which is not further divisible is, according to the Vaiśeṣikas, atom. This atom having colour, taste, etc. is of four types. The atom having colour etc. becomes the producer of four elements bearing colour etc. and also material objects according to them.

This view of the Vaiśeṣikas is baseless on account of the fact that, as soon as one accepts atom as having colour etc., the eternity and minuteness of atom is denied. If it is accepted that atom has colour etc. it would have to be treated as gross and hence, no eternal object has got some cause in the empirical world. Had there been a cause, it would have been taken as an effect leading to the loss of its eternal character. An object having colour is more gross and non-eternal than its cause, i.e. thread. In the like manner, if the Vaiśeṣika-view, namely that atoms have colour is taken for granted, it has to be assumed that atoms have their cause which is more minute than atoms. From this the grossness and non-eternity of atom has to be accepted which is actually a kind of *aniṣṭāpatti* i.e. imposition of the undesired as pointed out by the Advaitin.⁷

With the help of these arguments Śankara has proved that world cannot be originated through atomic conjunction. Hence Brahman which is the conscious principle is the cause of the world. In fact, this characteristic of Brahman is described in Advaita Vedānta as *Taṭasthalakṣaṇa* or secondary characteristic feature.

The Advaitins admit that the characteristic feature of Brahman which is accepted as the Ultimate Reality in Advaita Vedānta is of two types: essential characteristic (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*) and secondary characteristic (*taṭasthalakṣaṇa*). When it is said that Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and Infinitude as evidenced from the Śruti – ‘*Satyam Jñānam Anantaṁ Brahma*’, it is called essential characteristic feature. The definition, which, though it does not exist as long as the definiendum exists, can differentiate it from others (*yāvallakṣyakālanavasthitatve sati yadvyāvartakam*) is called *Taṭasthalakṣaṇa*.⁸ The secondary characteristic of Brahman lies in its being the cause of the origination, etc. of the universe (*jagajjanmādikāraṇatva*). Here, the term ‘cause’ actually denotes the agency of the universe. (*jagatkatṛtva*)⁹: Brahman which is Truth, etc. cannot be the creator of the Universe. When Brahman becomes associated with *māyā* or *avidyā* can create or can be an agent. Hence, Brahman associated with *māyā* is called *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īśvara* which has got capability of creating this world, which is the conclusive part (*Siddhāntapakṣa*) of the Advaitins. Brahman is one having no variety. But through nescience or ignorance Brahman seems to be different having variety of aspects or forms.

If an individual suffers from eye-problem, he perceives a moon as double, though there is only one moon in reality. The variety of forms, names presented by ignorance or misconception without having any reality in it. Brahman viewed under illusion or ignorance is subject to modification and change, which constitutes the basis of empirical thoughts and activities. Actually, Brahman is changeless having the lack of modification which is called *nirupādhika*. But Brahman associated with ignorance or *māyā* becomes qualified by limiting adjuncts (*sopādhika*), who alone can be creator, sustainer and destroyer of this world (*jagajjanmādikāraṇatva*).

Even if it is accepted that the whole world is originated through atomic conjunction, there is some logic behind accepting the Advaitin’s standpoint. For, the Advaitins must agree that the atomic conjunction is one of the factors of creation. This atomic conjunction, the Advaitins may say, cannot be the sole cause of it. If this conscious principle is accepted as Brahman having *Śuddha, Mukta, Nirupādhika* characters, it cannot also help in conjoining atoms for not

having capacity of being an agent. Hence, Brahman associated with *māyā* or *avīdyā* can be the creator of this world through the conjunction of atoms. The Advaitins may admit that the conjunction of atom is one of the various processes of creation, but this can never be the direct cause of creation. The direct cause of this world is only Brahman which is, of course, *māyādhīna* as said earlier. This characteristic feature of Brahman is formulated by Bādarāyana himself in his sūtra-‘*Janmādyasya yataḥ*’.¹⁰

The above-mentioned view is supported by the Naiyāyikas in the similar manner. To them as the effects like jar etc. are caused by an agent, the earth (*kṣiti*), dyads (*ankura*) etc. must have caused by an agent. The agency of it, not being possible in ordinary persons like us having limited knowledge and power, remains in God. Hence, God or Conscious Principle is inferred as the agent of earth (‘*Yathā ghaṭādikāryam kartrjanyam tathā kṣityankurādikamapi*’ or ‘*ksityankuradikam kartrjanyam karyatvat ghatavat*’).¹¹ In this context the term *ankura* means dyadic compound or *dvyanuka*. In *Kiraṇāvalī* on *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* it is said that, just as the object which is seen at first as the promoter of a tree arising out of the sprout of a seed is called *ankura*, the object which is the promoter of the world-tree (*saṃsārataru*) arising from two atoms has got resemblance with *ankura* or seeds and hence the *dvyanuka* is metaphorized as *ankura* and the world as tree.¹²

The refutation of the views of the Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, etc. by Sankara has opened a vista in the methodology of theory-building in Indian tradition. The theory which is to be substantiated is called *Brahmakāraṇatāvāda*. The term ‘*vāda*’ attached to *Brahmakāraṇatā* clearly shows that it is an open debate where the opponent’s views are respectfully and critically adjudged and logically refuted. Through mutual discussion Sankara has arrived at the conclusion that Brahman alone can be the cause of the world, but not atom, Prakṛti, etc

Lastly, Bādarāyana and Sankara have forwarded an argument against the theory of atomism in the sūtra- ‘*aparigrahāccātyantamanapekṣā*’¹³ (i.e., due to non-recognition of atomism as a cause by the wise persons in Śruti etc., it should be highly ignored) which, I think, does not stand in the eyes of logic. According to this Sūtra, the *paramānukaranatāvāda* cannot be accepted or rather it should be ignored as this theory has not been admitted by the Vedic seers. Generally, a theory propagated by some scholar of some school seems to be baseless if it is not substantiated through logic (*ekākinī pratijñā hi pratijñatam na sādhyet*) i.e., a philosophical conclusion, if not well-grounded in logic, cannot be substantiated to others. According to this principle, the theory propounded by the Vaiśeṣika philosophers is grounded on some logic,

which may not be accepted by some seers or wise men. On account of this it does not follow that their view is ignorable. Moreover, the last statement is contradictory to what the Advaitins have done earlier. The Advaitins have carefully adjudged the Vaiśeṣika view and critically refuted it. From this it is proved that the Advaitins have taken care of their view seriously and the whole process of refutation does not confirm the later statement mentioned above and hence, they are a little bit contradictory in their position. This statement of the Advaitins, however, may be supportable if it is taken as an additional independent argument in favour of not accepting the Vaiśeṣika- position. First, they have developed some independent argument against the Vaiśeṣikas and afterwards have added another argument which ultimately states that the Advaitins do not accept any theory as a valid one if it is not accepted by the Vedic seers. Though this stand seems to be dogmatic, there are some points in propagating this for the Advaitins as they believe *Śruti* or *āgama* as an independent *pramāṇa* or as they are mostly *Śruti*-dependent.

References:

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2. *Ibid* on *sūtra* 2.2.12.
3. *Ibid*.
4. *Ibid*.
5. *Nityameva ca bhāvāt*-2.2.14
Sankara-bhāṣya on the same.
6. *Sankarabhāṣya* on *sūtra* -2.2.12.
7. *Rūpādīmatvāttācca viparyayadarśanāt*- 2.2.15.
Sankarbhāṣya on 2.2.15
8. “*Tatra lakṣaṇaṁ dvividhaṁ-svarūpalakṣaṇaṁ taṣṭhalakṣaṇaṁ ceti tatra svarūpameva lakṣaṇaṁ svarūpalakṣaṇam. yathā satyādikaṁ brahmasvarūpalakṣaṇaṁ yāvallakṣyakālamānavasthitatīve sati yādvyaṅvarttakam*”
Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra: *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, Viśayaparichheda, Bengali Translation and elucidation by Panchanan Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1377 (BS), p.223.
9. “*prakṛte ca jagajjanmādikāraṇatvam. Atra jagatpadenda kāryajātaṁ vivakṣitam. Kāraṇatvaṅca karṭṛtvam*”
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10. *Catuḥsūtrī*, 2nd sutra, *Adhyāśabhāṣya* of Sankara with *Bhāmatī*, p.46, Bengali translation and elucidation by Srimohan Bhattacharya, Midnapur, 1973. Henceforth, *Adhyāśabhāṣya*
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