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THE LANGUAGE OF NEGATION IN NYĀYA

Traditionally, in many *nyāya* authors, the topic of negation is treated along with the subject of absence. Absence itself, in *nyāya* treatment of it, involves the following questions : (a) Is non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) to be considered a separate means of valid cognition? (b) Is absence itself to be accepted as a separate category? (c) How is absence to be cognized? (d) Finally, how many kinds of absences are there? Though not treated in *nyāya* works as a separate topic, we can include such questions as the following also in treating absence and negation : (a) What role did the concepts of absence and negation play in the formulation of the *nyāya* ideas on souls and their liberation (*mukti*)? (b) Why did *nyāya* authors prefer to give advanced definitions of such complex notions as that of invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) with double negatives? It will not be possible to discuss all these problems within the compass of this short article. Only certain aspects of the idea of negation will be dealt with¹.

In all languages, there are particles of negation, and the statements made with the help of these are usually called negative statements. With regard to these negative statements the following problem arises : A sentence is true or false because of the presence or absence respectively of a positive fact. But a negative sentence does not fit in with this kind of interpretation. This is because it is often thought that the absence of a thing is itself not an entity in itself. As for example,

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1. Primary literature in Sanskrit on this subject is vast and complex. Cf. *Nyāyasūtra* 2-2-7-12 and commentaries on them by Vātsyāyana, Uddyotakara and Vācaspati Misra. There are many references to the topics under discussion in the works of Udayana, notably in *Ātmatattvaviveka* and *Nyāyakusumāñjali*. Cf. also the section on *abhāva* in *Nyāyalīlavati* by Vallabha in *Nyāyasiddhāntadīpa* of Sridhara, and in *Nyāyamañjari* of Jayanta Bhatta. The *abhāvavāda* of Gangesa in his *Tattvacintāmaṇi* and the independent essay of *nañvāda* by Raghunathaśiromani, have become classics in the *nyāya* tradition. The best study of these problems so far is *The Navyanyāya Doctrine of Negation* by B. K. Matilal, Harvard, 1968.

the sentence "The jar is blue" is true if there is the characteristic of being blue to be found in the jar ; but the truth of the sentence "The jar is not blue" cannot be verified in the same way. And if it can in some sense be verified, it would show that things also have negative characters. This would lead to the position that things have an infinite number of characters positive and negative. Further the following question also arises : By saying that something is not the case, do we really give some worthwhile information? Yet the fact remains that in our experience we make use of negative statements and they do describe reality in a meaningful way. This led some to conclude that an appropriate affirmative statement corresponds to every negative statement ; and it is these positive statements which are implied in the negative statements and these reveal the truth or falsehood of the instance in question.

Many objections may be raised against these positions. First of all it may be asked just what this positive fact is upon which all the above theories insist. Further, although it is true that a negative statement does not describe reality in the way in which a positive statement does, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that even the negative statements do describe the reality in some way or other. Again, the implication and the validity of the contention that a negative statement does not truly describe the reality may be questioned: in the final analysis, that objection may only mean that a negative statement is not a positive one and so it is trivial. If, however, one insists that reality reports only positive facts and therefore negations do not have any valid contents, it would only mean that things are what they are. This again is trivial.

It would be worthwhile to consider also certain other aspects of the problem of negation and relate them to the *nyāya* concepts. Thus at times negation is interpreted as non-being as opposed to being. Plato's concept of negation is somewhat similar to that of certain Indian Philosophers like Kumārila.² According to Plato, negation is difference, a form of some kind, and without this reality of difference we cannot account how one thing is different from another. Aristotle, however, was more interested in the logic of negation rather than in its ontological status. According to him denial is a negative assertion whereas an affirmation is a positive affirmation. He also believed that every affirmation has a corresponding denial ; similarly, every denial has a corres-

2. Kumārila's views can be gathered from *abhāvaprāmānyavāda* of his *śloka-vārttikam*.

ponding affirmation. It is clear from this that Aristotle described negation by using the principles of contradiction and of excluded middle.

Negations, in the Hegelian tradition of logic, are meaningful only in so far as they presuppose a corresponding attribution of a contrary or even a contradictory property. Hence, the statement "The wall is not red" means that the wall is green, or yellow, etc. But here an infinite number of judgements have to be rejected as unmeaningful. According to Bosanquet every significant negation "A is not B" can be interpreted as "A is X," which excludes "B", where "X" is an unknown property which excludes the property "B". Ryle expressed the opinion that there are negative propositions which could be the expression of something and indicated that negative propositions may be taken as expressions of otherness. This is a position which bears some similarity to that of *nyāya*, for *nyāya* also held that one of the possible meanings of negation is that of mutual absence (*anyonyābhāva*). Ryle's analysis also has something common with that of Plato. Plato maintained that "not blue" may be interpreted as that which is different from the nature of blueness. And Ryle maintained that the sentence 'the colour of the wall is not blue' should be analysed as "The colour of the wall is other than or different from blue." But he himself stated that such an analysis will not be applicable in all cases of negations.

It is also sometimes objected that negative statements are purely subjective; the argument in support of this contention is that we utter such sentences as "This pot is not red" because we actually believe or believed that this pot is red. But this kind of charge of subjectivism is not well-founded, for if we apply Russell's argument it could as well be said that we utter the affirmative sentence like "the wall is red", because we thought that the wall is not red. Arguments like this may lead to subjectivism, and that is why modern logicians avoid any reference to the subjective activity of thinking and speak only of the objective content of a proposition. The *nyāya* system also insists on the objective content of a cognition, but goes one step further and states that both the presence of red colour and its absence should be considered as the property of the pot though there is some fundamental difference between these two types of property. But insofar as they are treated to a subject, they argued that negative statements are subjective because they involve comparison of concepts; it could as well be argued that even affirmative statements involve comparing of concepts. Thus certain Buddhist thinkers would say that what is present is but non-constructed reality, and therefore

even in affirmations, there is construction and comparison. In fact, *nyāya* holds that our perceptual potencies are quite enough to give both affirmation and denial the character of assertions. Hence the *nyāya* position is that both negation and affirmation should be considered as ultimates.

Actually *nyāya* asserts that there should not be any kind of dichotomy between affirmative and negative statements. All determinate cognitions are to be considered as counterparts of statements; they therefore involve a qualification or attribution. And it is impossible to interpret these attributions merely as positive or negative. For, in the *nyāya* system, the contents of a judgement can be analysed as the qualifier, the qualificand and the relation by which both are connected. In this way *nyāya* asserts that in an affirmative judgement, the qualifier is expressed in the ordinary language, by a positive phrase and in a negative judgement, the qualifier is expressed by a negative phrase. *Nyāya* insists that if 'red-colour' is a property, absence of 'red colour' also should be considered as a property. And the judgement just asserts that a qualifier, negative or positive, qualifies the qualificand. Frege also seems to have held such a view, though for different reasons. It should further be noted that the *nyāya* concept of negation is not what is sometimes called the act of negating or denying a judgement. For *nyāya*, negation is an objective component of the content of a judgemental cognition; it is an absence and not the psychological act of denying something. To the question why absence of red colour should be treated as a genuine property, *nyāya* answers that a property is real or genuine and can be used in all technical discussions in philosophy or logic, if and only if there is some locus in which it occurs as a characteristic. Thus red-colour qualifies all things that are red and absence of red colour characterizes things that are not red. In this context an interesting aspect of the *nyāya* doctrine may be mentioned. If there were nothing in the world which was not red we cannot talk of the absence of red colour. In technical *nyāya* language, if there is no instance of the absence of red in the universe, absence of red is an unexampled property, that is, it is an unreal property. And such a property cannot be used in any meaningful philosophical discourse. Thus it may be noted that Gangesa rejects all the first five definitions of invariable concomitance based on the notion of non-deviation, because they all can be shown to imply the use of certain unexampled properties. Thus according to *nyāya*-metaphysics all things are knowable. This means that knowability characterizes everything and absence of knowability characterizes nothing. Thus absence of knowability is an unexampled property

like the property of being a rabbit's horn. Such a property cannot be used in describing any reality ; we cannot also negate such properties and thus use the absence of such properties in order to describe any reality.

It may be remarked further that according to *nyāya*, properties like the absence of red colour are dependent on their counterpositives. Here the term counterpositive is used in the sense of that thing whose absence is predicated. Thus *nyāya* says that in the world of properties there are some which are dependent, that is, the very notion of them depends on their counterpositive and they cannot be expressed in any way at all without using the negative particle, in some way or other. Such properties are called negative. There are other properties which may be called positive and independent in the sense that there is always at least one instance of them in language without using any negative particle like 'not'.

It is important to insist on the fact that absence as a property, is necessarily, dependent upon a counterpositive ; Gangesa himself insists on this feature of absence.³ By emphasizing this aspect of absence, Gangesa rejects the Prabhākara position that absence is identical with its locus ; for example, absence of red colour is identical with the locus in which the absence of red colour occurs. Such a concept of absence cannot be accepted because, the locus itself does not involve the notion of a counterpositive, that is, in the constitution or concept of absence, there is no counterpositive, nor even any reference to it. Gangesa makes use of a similar argument to reject also the Buddhist position that absence is nothing but a relation of the substratum with that particular time segment when the thing in question, for example pot, does not exist on the locus. Here, also, it is evident that there is no reference to any sort of counterpositive and without any counterpositive, we do not have also any absence.

We should discuss also some aspects of the *nyāya* theory of negative sentences. *Nyāya* reduces a declarative sentence to a complex of ideas. It is to be noted that the negative particle is not retained as a component of the resulting complex term but it is conveniently regarded as an attributive use of an adjective meaning that which has the absence of the attribute in question. Further, it may be noted that a declarative sentence combines the subject and the predicate in two different

3. Cf. Gangesa's *Tattvacintāmaṇi*, the beginning of *abhāvavāda*,

ways with different meanings. The combination may be attributive as in *ghaṭo nīlaḥ*, the pot [is] blue or identifying as in *Rāmo narāḥ*, Rāma [is] a man. In English an indefinite article serves to distinguish the second sentence from the first, but in Sanskrit, there is no indefinite article. Thus *nyāya* was not in a position to distinguish between these two positive expressions by the use of ordinary non-technical words. But the distinction became clear in the following way when a negative particle *na* (not) was inserted in their predicates. The negative of *ghaṭo nīlaḥ* (The pot is blue) is *ghaṭo na nīlaḥ* (The pot is not blue). *Nyāya* analysed this negative judgement as *ghaṭo nīlarupābhāvāḥ* ("the pot is in the possession of the absence of blue colour"). Now in the negative statement in question, the attribute has become *nīlarupābhāva* (absence of blue colour). This, in *nyāya*, terminology, is an instance of absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*). The negation of *Rāmo narāḥ* (Rāma is a man), however, is *Rāmo na narāḥ* (Rāma is not a man) which *nyāya* analyses as *Rāmo narabhinnaḥ* "Rāma [is] different from man." Here the attribute is *narabheda*; the difference from man and this kind of absence according to *nyāya* is an instance of mutual absence. Thus in negative sentences according to their different forms, two kinds of absences are expressed: absolute absence and mutual absence. This position has also been developed further by Raghunathaśiromani.⁴

All these points of *nyāya* doctrine had a very long historical development. As in the case of the other important systems, *nyāya* also began with the collection of aphorisms (*sūtras*) attributed to Gautama (c. A.D. 200). The *sūtras* were commented upon by Vātsyāyana (c. 300 A.D.); this was further commented upon by Uddyotakara (c. 600 A.D.). Vācaspati (c. 950 A.D.) defended Uddyotakara against the Buddhists. Even in the *sūtras*, the *nyāya* did not accept more than four instruments of true cognition, *viz.*, perception, inference, analogy and verbal testimony. Thus the *naiyāikas* did not postulate a separate *pramāṇa* for cognizing absence. In fact, Uddyotakara explicitly stated that an absence can be known through perception. But this position was not always held. Thus Gautama explicitly stated that the *pramāṇa* (means of valid knowledge) of *abhāva* should be included in *anumāna* (inference).⁵ Prasastapāda explicitly asserts that absence is to be included in inference.⁶ Thus, early on, *nyāvaiśeṣika*

4. Cf. the very beginning of *nañvāda* of Raghunāthaśiromani.

5. Cf. *Nyāyasūtras*. 2.2.2.

6. *Abhāvo'pi anumānam eva*.

agreed that absence should not be considered an independent means of cognition. On the contrary, absence, as a separate category, was already admitted by Gautamā and his followers. Vācaspati gives the two-fold division of absence as *tādātmyābhāva* (*anyonyābhāva*), mutual absence and relational absence (*samsargābhāva*). The latter is divided into prior absence, destruction and absolute absence.⁷ This division became quite established in *nyāya* in all the subsequent treatises on absence. Further, Jayanta in his *Nyāyamañjari* attacked the Buddhists who did not want to accept any category of absence ; he rejected also the Prabhākara position that absence is identical with its locus. Further, he opposed with extensive arguments the theory of Kumārila according to whom a separate *pramāṇa*, *anupalabdhi*, is to be admitted for the cognition of absence.

The great Mimāṃsaka, Kumārila (c. 625 A.D.) discussed his views on absence as a *prameya* and as a *pramāṇa* in his famous *Sloka-vārttika*, in the section of *abhāvaprāmāṇyavāda*. According to him there are six instruments of true cognition. They are the four *pramāṇas* accepted by the *naiyāyikas* together with implication (*arthāpatti*) and non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*). This sixth kind was also called *pramāṇābhāva*. According to Kumārila, this *pramāṇābhāva* is to be explained as follows : “ where the five other means of cognition meant for revealing the presence of an object are not available, *abhāva* or non-cognition becomes a means there for revealing absence.”⁸ It may be noted that Pārthasārathi Misra (c. A.D. 950), commenting on this verse of Kumārila, also explained *pramāṇābhāva* as the absence of the other five means of cognition by which we cognize a positive object.

In the Vaiśeṣika tradition, there had been very important discussions on absence. But it might, however, be noted that early on Vaiśeṣika, excluding Candrāmati's *Daśapadārthasāstra*, did not speak of absence as a separate category. There is no difficulty in explaining *Vaiśeṣika sūtras*, 9.1.1-10 without assuming that Kaṇāda was speaking here of absence as a separate category. In *Prāśastapāda* also there is no mention of absence as a separate category. However, it is interesting to note that later authors like Sridhara (c. 990 A.D.) in

7. Vācaspati writes commenting on *nyāyasūtras* 2.2.12. *paramārthatas tu prathamam abhāve dvaitam tādātmyābhāvaḥ samsargābhāvaśceti, samsargābhāvo'pi prak-pradhvamsātyantābhāvabhedenā trividhā iti catasro vidhā abhāvasyeti.*

8. *Pramāṇapañcakam yatra vasturūpe na jāyate vastusattāvabodhārtham tatrābhāva pramāṇatā.*

his *Nyāyakandli* and Udayana (c. 1050 A.D.) in his *Kiraṇāvali* tried to show that absence is a separate category although Kaṇāda and Praśastapāda never mentioned explicitly that absence is a separate category. The direction of the arguments of both the authors is that absence as a category has been implied in the opinions and theories of Kaṇāda and Praśastapāda. Sridhara also discussed various other aspects of absence. As for instance, he raised the interesting question of how to distinguish mutual absence (*anyonyābhāva*) and an absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*) in spite of the fact that both are eternal (*nitya* or *sadātana*) according to *nyāya* tenets. Sridhara pointed out that what we deny in an absolute absence is in some way imaginary (*asat*) since it never occurs in the locus of denial but is imagined to do so. But in a mutual absence what is denied is the identity of two real objects. It may be noted that Jayanta's argument in his *Nyāyamañjari* has much in common with that of Sridhara. However, Jayanta accepted only a two-fold division of absence, prior absence and destruction, unlike the four-fold division of absence in *nyāya*, in general. In the *Nyāyalīlāvati* of Vallabha also, we find a comparatively short but exceedingly intricate discussion on the various aspects of absence : first of all he points out that absence is not a separate instrument of cognition, then he establishes that absence is a separate category and, finally, he explains the meaning of negation.

In the Buddhist tradition also, there have been prolonged discussions on the epistemological question of how we may know that something is absent. Dharmakīrti (c. 650 A.D.) has discussed in his *Pramānavārttika* the unreality of *abhāva* and particularly *dhvaṃsa* (destruction). Dharmakīrti also makes the interesting remark that the meaning of the particle of *nañ* is something fictitious when it is taken away from the word to which it is attached. Arcata (c. 800 A.D.) in his *Hetubindutika*, in the section of *sahetuvināsakhaṇḍana*, upheld the position of Dharmakīrti and declared that negative cognition is *nirviṣaya* (i.e., it has no object to which it may refer). He also agrees with Dharmakīrti in denying any reality to destruction (*dhvaṃsa*). Śāntarakṣita (c. 775 A.D.) in his *Tattvasamgraha* and Kamalasila in his commentary on this work *Tattvasamgrahapañjika* went into the details of the arguments of Kumārila to show that *anupalabधि*, non-cognition, is a separate means of cognition, and rejected them all. Jñānāsri (c. 1050 A.D.) discussed the problem of absence and non-cognition at great length ; his disciple Ratnakīrti (c. 1075 A.D.) also dealt with the same problems but much more briefly. He also first discusses whether absence is a real object and then raises the second question, whether non-cognition is a separate means of cognition,

Historically it is interesting to note that the arguments in his *pūrvapakṣa* (opponent's view) bears close resemblance to the views of *prāñcāḥ* (the old *naiyāyikas*) in the *abhāvavāda* of Gangeśa.

It may be noted further that Sri Harṣa (c. 1075 A.D.) in his *Khandanakhaṇḍakhādyā* strongly criticized the *nyāya* view that absence is a separate category. He examined several definitions of absence and tried to expose their inconsistencies, through his dialectical logic. Further, he maintained that the distinction between mutual absence and relational absence cannot stand the test of his dialectical logic and therefore it has to be rejected.

However, it is in the works of Gangeśa and Raghunāthaśiromani that the *nyāya* position became consolidated. Gangeśa, in the *abhāva* section of *Tattvacintāmaṇi* establishes with considerable dialectical skill and philosophical insight that absence is a separate category.⁹ We shall consider here some of the important arguments which he brings forward in order to establish his position. Absence is a separate category because such unrefuted cognitions as "There is no pot on the ground..." cannot have "ground" as the object, for in that case the same cognition might as well refer to a ground with a pot on it. Nor can the same cognition refer to mere ground because none has admitted mereness (*kaivalya*) as a separate category; and if one says that mereness is just ground, it is tautological. Again if there were no difference between absence of pot and the ground on which it occurs, the relation of superstratum-substratum (*ādharādheyabhāva*) that holds between them would be impossible. Gangeśa refines this argument of the early *naiyāyikas* and at the same time brings in additional elements in the reasoning as follows. An absence is always apprehended along with a counterpositive. We cognize absence in such forms as, 'It is not a pot' and so on. Hence absence is not a mere suchness (*tanmātram*). Hence our experience is that in cognizing an absence, we cognize also its counterpositive (*pratīyogī*). Hence it could be affirmed without any difficulty that our cognition of absence depends upon our cognition of the corresponding counterpositive. Further, the cognition of the locus or the cognition of mere locus is equivalent to the cognition of absence, because we can have cognitions of all such objects without the cognition of a counterpositive. This means to say that in such cognitions, the counterpositive is not a part of their objective contents. But in the cognition of absence the corresponding counterpositive is also a part of the objective contents.

9. Cf. *abhāvavāda* in the *tattvacintāmaṇi* of Gangeśa.

But it is Raghunāthaśiromani who has contributed most to the clarifications of the philosophical significance of negative statements, in his famous essay called *nañvāda*.¹⁰ This is one of the three small but highly original essays that Raghunātha wrote and it was held in high esteem especially since Gangeśa himself did not have a section in his *Tattvacintāmaṇi* dealing with the meaning of negative particles. Various commentaries by various authors have been written on this essay. The arguments presented in the *nañvāda* are on the borderline of linguistics and philosophy. The basic contention of Raghunātha is that negative particles denote either a relational absence or a mutual absence. The symbol *nañ* stands in general for all negative particles in Sanskrit. Hence free particles like *na*, *no*, etc., and bound particles like *a* or *an* are also included in *nañ*. By the force of their denotative function (*śakti*) such particles designate two types of absences ; relational absence and mutual absence. These two types of absences may be distinguished as follows : In the first, it is denied that the counterpositive occurs by some relation other than the relation of identity in some other entity called the subject ; in the second, it is denied that the counterpositive is in a relation of identity.

Grammarians enumerate six different meanings of *nañ* ; similarity¹¹ [relations] absence, difference or mutual absence, smallness or scarcity, impropriety, and finally, contrariety¹². Of these six, the *naiyāyikas* accepted only two and according to them they are the primary meaning of *nañ* and the rest are secondary. It may, however, be noted that even in the tradition of grammarians, we find that *nañ* is admitted to denote primarily absence. And Patañjali characterized *nañ* as *nivṛttapadārthaka* (cf. Panini 2.2.6) which is interpreted as *abhāvārthakaḥ* (that which denotes absence) by Kauṇḍabhatta.

10. *nañvāda* by Raghunāthaśiromani, text to be found in the Bibliotheca Indica edition of *Tattvacintāmaṇi*.

11. This concept of similarity as a possible meaning of negative particle seems to be rich in comparative theological reflections. But such a meaning of negation can be found only in the *Vyākaraṇa* school. The line of thinking here is broadly as follows. When it is enjoined *abrāhmaṇam ānaya*, bring someone who is not a brāhmin, what is intended is to bring some being which is similar to a brāhmin, viz., bring another human being who is not a brāhmin. Although a cow is *abrāhmaṇa* you cannot bring it because it is not like a brāhmin. The development and the wider implications of this interpretation in the *Vyākaraṇa* tradition is well worth studying.

12. The famous *Kārika* is as follows :
tat-sādrśyam abhāvaśca tad-anyatvam tad-alpatā aprāśastyam virodhaś ca nañ arthāḥ sat prakīrtitāḥ,

However, even within the *nyāya* tradition itself the question arises whether we should accept two different *śaktis* (denotative functions) with regard to the two types of absence or by *lāghava* (logic of simplicity) accept only one *śakti* by which *nañ* will denote only absence in general. Gadādhara suggests two possible answers in his commentary on *nañvāda*. One answer is that mutual absence and relational absence are so different that they cannot be denoted by the same *śakti* and so one has to admit two *śaktis* and so this necessary heaviness (*gaurava*) has to be admitted. The other answer is that there is only one *śakti* for the negative particle, but there are two different syntactic constructions with regard to the two types of absence illustrating two different semantic rules. In the case of a relational absence, the negated word should occur along with another word in the locative. In the case of a mutual absence, it is essential that the two words used to express it are in the same case. Gadādhara calls this the view of the right thinkers indicating thereby that this is his opinion also.

Such, in short, is the development of thought regarding absence, negation and negative particles in the *nyāya* system. There are certain important applications of these concepts in the highly technical discussions on invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) and also in the more theological treatise on the concept of liberation (*mukti*). Similarly, certain application of these in the concepts of individual souls and God would be well worth studying. But such studies cannot be undertaken within the limits of this short article.