

Chapter Eleven

VAISHEṢIKA

I

INTRODUCTION

THE Vaishēṣika system is next to Sāṅkhya in origin and is of greater antiquity than the Nyāya. It may be prior to and is certainly not later than Buddhism and Jainism. The word is derived from 'Viśheṣa' which means particularity or distinguishing feature or distinction. The Vaishēṣika philosophy, therefore, is pluralistic realism which emphasizes that diversity is the soul of the universe. The category of Viśheṣa or particularity is dealt with at length in this system, and is regarded as the essence of things.

The founder of this system is Kaṇāda who is also known as Kaṇabhuk, Ulūka, and Kāshyapa. This system is also called after him as Kāṇāda or Aulūka darshana. He was called Kaṇāda because he used to live as an ascetic on the grains picked up from the fields. Kaṇa (in addition to meaning 'grain') also means a particle or a particular and the word Kaṇāda suggests one who lives on the philosophy of particularity—viśheṣa.

Prashastapāda has written his classical Padārthadharmasaṅgraha which is called a Bhāṣya or Commentary on the Vaishēṣikasūtra of Kaṇāda, but is really a very valuable independent treatise. It has been commented upon by Udayana and Shrīdhara. The Vaishēṣika was, later on, fused together with the Nyāya which accepted the ontology of the former and developed it in the light of its epistemology. Thus Shivāditya, Laugākṣi Bhāskara, Vishvanātha and Annambhatta treat of the two systems together.

II

PADĀRTHA

THE Vaishēṣika system is regarded as conducive to the study of all systems.¹ Its main business is to deal with the categories and to unfold its atomistic pluralism. A category is called padārtha and the entire universe is reduced to six or seven padārthas. Padārtha literally means

¹ Kāṇādam Pāṇinīyañcha sarvashāstropakāram.

'the meaning of a word' or 'the object signified by a word'. All objects of knowledge or all reals come under padārtha. Padārtha means an object which can be thought (jñeya) and named (abhidheya). The Aristotelean categories are the mere modes of predication and represent a logical classification of predicates. The Kantian categories are the moulds of the understanding under which things have to pass before becoming knowable. The Hegelian categories are the dynamic stages in the development of thought which is identified with reality. The Vaiśeṣika categories are different from them all. While the Aristotelean categories are a logical classification of predicates only, the Vaiśeṣika categories are a metaphysical classification of all knowable objects or of all reals. They are not, as the Kantian categories are, mere moulds of the understanding. Nor are they, as the Hegelian categories are, dynamic stages in the development of thought. Hegel's is a philosophy of Absolute Idealism, a dynamic and concrete Identity-in-difference. The Vaiśeṣika system is a pluralistic realism, a philosophy of identity *and* difference, which emphasizes that the heart of reality consists in difference. It is a mere catalogue of the knowables, an enumeration of the diverse reals without any attempt to synthesize them.

Originally the Vaiśeṣika believed in the six categories and the seventh, that of abhāva or negation, was added later on. Though Kanāda himself speaks of abhāva, yet he does not give it the status of a category to which it was raised only by the later Vaiśeṣikas. The Vaiśeṣika divides all existent reals which are all objects of knowledge into two classes—bhāva or being and abhāva or non-being. Six categories come under bhāva and the seventh is abhāva. All knowledge necessarily points to an object beyond and independent of it.¹ All that is real comes under the object of knowledge and is called a padārtha. The seven padārthas are: (1) substance (dravya), (2) quality (guṇa), (3) action (karma), (4) generality (sāmānya), (5) particularity (viśeṣa), (6) inherence (samavāya), and (7) non-being (abhāva).

III

DRAVYA

SUBSTANCE or dravya is defined as the substratum where actions and qualities inhere and which is the coexistent material cause of the composite things produced from it.² Substance signifies the self-subsistence, the absolute and independent nature of things. The category of substance at once unfolds the pluralistic realism of this system. Substance is the substratum of qualities and actions. Without substance,

¹ na chāviśayā kāchid upalabdhiḥ.
See Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra, I, 1, 15.

² kriyāguṇavat samavāyikāraṇam dravyam.

we cannot have qualities and actions for they cannot hang loose in the air, but must be contained somewhere. Substance is the basis of qualities and actions, actual or potential, present or future. Not can substance be defined apart from qualities and actions. Ultimate substances are eternal, independent and individual and are either infinite or infinitesimal. All compound substances (avayavidravya) which are made of parts and arise out of the simple ultimate substance are necessarily transient and impermanent and subject to production and destruction. But simple ultimate substances which are the material causes of the compound substances are eternal and not subject to production and destruction. The dravyas are nine and include material as well as spiritual substances. The Vaisheshika philosophy is pluralistic and realistic but not materialistic since it admits spiritual substances. The nine substances are: (1) earth (pṛthivī), (2) water (Ap), (3) fire (tejas), (4) air (vāyu), (5) ether (ākāsha), (6) time (kāla), (7) space (dik), (8) spirit (ātman) and (9) mind or the internal organ (manas).

Earth, water, fire and air really signify not the compound transient objects made out of them, but the ultimate elements, the suprasensible eternal partless unique atoms which are individual and infinitesimal. Ether is not atomic but infinite and eternal. These five are called elements (bhūta) and are physical. Each of them possesses a peculiar quality which distinguishes it from the rest. The peculiar qualities of earth, water, fire, air and ether are smell, taste, colour, touch and sound respectively which are sensed by the five external senses. The external senses are constituted by the respective elements whose specific qualities are sensed by them—the sense of smell is constituted by the element of earth and so on. The elements are the substrata of these qualities. Time and space, like ether, are one each (eka), eternal (nitya) and all-pervading (vibhu). They are imperceptible and infinite substances and are partless and indivisible. They are conventionally spoken of as having parts and divisions. Time is the cause of our cognitions of past, present and future and of 'younger' and 'older'. Space (dik) is the cause of our cognitions of 'east' and 'west', 'here' and 'there', 'near' and 'far' and is different from ether (ākāsha) which is the substratum of the quality of sound. There are innumerable souls and each is an independent, individual, eternal and all-pervading spiritual substance. It is the substratum of the quality of consciousness. Consciousness is not the essence of the self. It is not even an inseparable quality of the self. It is regarded as an adventitious attribute possessed by the self. It is adventitious because the self does not possess this quality during deep sleep. The quality of consciousness must reside somewhere. It is not the property of the body or the senses or even of mind. It resides in the self. Other important qualities possessed by the self are desire (ichchhā)

and volition (yatna). Jñāna, ichchhā and yatna are cognition, affection and conation respectively. The fact that the self is the substance of these qualities is directly known through expressions: 'I know', 'I am happy', 'I want to do this' etc. Mind (manas) is also regarded as a substance. It is the internal sense (antarindriya). It is atomic; but unlike the first four atomic dravyas, it does not give rise to compound objects. It is many and each is eternal and imperceptible. Each self has a mind. It is the organ through which the self comes into contact with the objects. Its existence is inferred from the fact that the self must perceive internal states of cognition, desire and conation through an internal sense, just as it perceives external objects through external senses. Moreover, in the perception of external objects the mind is selective and active. We do not perceive colour, touch, taste, smell and sound simultaneously, even though all the external senses may be in contact with their objects. Perception requires attention and attention is active turning of the mind towards the object of perception. Hence in perception, the self must fix the manas on the object of perception with which the external sense is already in contact. Manas, therefore, is a substance and it is atomic and partless and can come into contact with one sense only at one time. These are the nine substances of the Vaisheshika. All of them are objective realities. Earth, water, fire, air, and manas are atomic and eternal. The first four produce composite things; manas does not. Earth, water, fire, air and ether are the five gross elements. These and manas are physical. Soul is spiritual. Time and space are objective and not subjective forms of experience. Ether, space, time and soul are all-pervading and eternal. Atoms, minds and souls are infinite in number. Ether, space and time are one each.

IV

GUṆA

THE second category is guṇa or quality. Unlike substance, it cannot exist independently by itself and possesses no quality or action. It inheres in a substance and depends for its existence on the substance and is not a constitutive cause of anything. It is called an independent reality because it can be conceived (prameya), thought (jñeya) and named (abhidheya) independently of a substance where it inheres. The qualities are therefore called objective entities. They are not necessarily eternal. They include both material and mental qualities. They are a static and permanent feature of a substance, while action is a dynamic and transient feature of a substance. A quality, therefore, is different from both substance and action. It is defined by Kaṇāda as 'that which inheres in a substance, which does not possess quality or action, which

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does not produce any composite thing, and which is not the cause of conjunction and disjunction like an action.¹

Kaṇāda mentions seventeen qualities to which seven more are added by Prashastapāda. These twenty-four qualities are recognized by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika School. It is not necessary to mention them all as their importance is not much philosophical. They include material as well as spiritual properties. Smell is the quality of earth; taste of water; colour of fire; touch of air; and sound of ether. Cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, volition are the mental qualities which inhere in the self.

V

KARMA

THE third category is Karma or action. Like quality, it belongs to and inheres in a substance and cannot exist separately from it. But while a quality is a static and permanent feature of a substance, an action is a dynamic and transient feature of it. Unlike a quality, an action is the cause of conjunction and disjunction. Action is said to be of five kinds: (1) upward movement (utkṣepaṇa), (2) downward movement (avakṣepaṇa), (3) contraction (ākuñchana), (4) expansion (prasāraṇa), and (5) locomotion (gamana).

VI

SĀMĀNYA

THE fourth category is Sāmānya or generality. It is class-concept, class-essence, or universal. It is the common character of the things which fall under the same class. The sāmānya is more like the 'universal' than like the 'genus'. The genus stands for the class and includes the sub-classes or species. The sāmānya stands, not for the class, but for the common characteristic of certain individuals and does not include the sub-classes. It is the universal by the possession of which different individuals are referred to as belonging to one class. It is called eternal, one and residing in many.² It is one, though the individuals in which it resides are many. It is eternal, though the individuals in which it inheres are subject to birth and death, production and destruction. It is common to many individuals. There is the class-essence of the universal of man, called 'man-ness' or 'humanity', which inheres in all individual men. Similarly 'cowness' inheres in all individual cows. Kaṇāda calls generality and particularity as relative to thought (buddhyapekṣa). But this does not mean that the universal and the particular are mere subjective concepts in our mind. Both are objective realities. The system is staunchly realistic. The universal has as much objective reality as the

¹ Vaiśeṣikasūtra I, 1, 16. ² nityam ekam anekānugatam sāmānyam.