

Establishment OF THE AIR AS AN IMPERCEPTIBLE ENTITY: ANALYSIS OF THE Vai÷eùika VIEW

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Abstract

In Indian philosophy Nyàya and Vai÷eùika schools are known as allied system. Both of these two schools admit air as a distinct kind of substance, but unlike Naiyàyikas, Vai÷eùika thinkers recognize air as an imperceptible entity. Hence, Vai÷eùikas gave various arguments to establish air as an imperceptible entity. In this paper an endeavor has been made to convey all those arguments of the Vai÷eùika thinkers.

Key words: extraneous condition, probans, probandum, pervader.

In Indian philosophy Nyàya and Vai÷eùika schools are known as allied system. Both of these two schools admit air as a distinct kind of substance, but unlike Naiyàyikas, Vai÷eùika thinkers recognize air as an imperceptible entity. They maintain that just like the àkà÷a, air must be considered as an imperceptible substance, since air is an external substance that is devoid of any colour.¹ The Naiyàyikas, however, admit air as a perceptible substance, and they give following argument in favour of their standpoint:

“Air is perceptible, because it is the substratum of a perceptible touch-quality, e.g. a pot”.

According to the Vai÷eùikas, this argument is not at all free from blemish. They argue that the probans, viz. ‘being the substratum of a perceptible touch-quality’ is not unconditionally related to the probandum, viz. ‘being perceptible’, and the relation between these two is indeed subject

1. ...vàyurna pratyakùap nārāpabahirdravayatvāt gaganavadityanumānādatāndriyatvasyaiva siddhep. Vai÷eùikasātropaskāra, p. 127.

to an extraneous condition (*upādhi*), viz. ‘having manifest colour’ (*udbhātarāpavattva*).² An extraneous condition is something that pervades the probandum (*sādhyavyāpaka*), but does not pervade the probans (*sādhnavyāpaka*). The presence of such a property renders the probans defective, since it turns out to be deviant (*savyabhicāra*). The opponents can say here that although the self as well as the qualities like colour etc. are perceptible, they lack the property ‘manifest colour’. Hence, the property ‘having manifest colour’ cannot be considered here as the extraneous condition. In response to this objection, it can be said here that while it is true that ‘having manifest colour’ is not by itself the pervader (*vyāpaka*) of the relevant probandum, viz. ‘the property of being perceived’ or ‘the property of being the object of perception (*pratyakūaviūayatva*)’, it can very well be the pervader of the property ‘being perceived while being an external substance’. This property does not pervade the probans, since it is absent in air, which is characterized by perceptible touch. In other words, it cannot be said that whatever is the substratum of a perceptible touch-quality, is also an object of external perception. In this way, ‘having manifest colour’ becomes the extraneous condition of the *pakūadharmāvacchinnaśādhyavyāpaka* type, since air that is the subject (*pakūa*) of this inference is an external substance, and the probandum of this inference is delimited by a feature of the subject. Since the relation between probans, viz. ‘being the substratum of a perceptible touch-quality’ and the probandum, viz. ‘being perceptible’ is not an unconditional relation, the abovementioned argument of the Naiyāyikas cannot be considered as veridical, and thereby, their opinion on this issue is not acceptable.³ In other words, it is not correct to say that air is a perceptible substance.

The Naiyāyikas can, however, say further that ‘having manifest colour’ can be considered as the cause of visual perception, but not of tactile perception; since there is both agreement in presence and agreement in absence between the properties, viz. ‘being perceived through visual

2. *nanu vāyup pratyakūaḥ sparḥārayatvād ghañavaditi pratyakūatvānumānamiti cenna udbhātarāpavattvasyātropādhitvāt ca.* *Ibid.*

3. *na rāpādāvātmani ca sādhyavyāpakametāt, pakūadharmabahirdravyatvāvacchinnaśādhanaśādhyasya vā sādhyasya vyāpakatvāt.* *Vaiḥeikasātropaskāra*, pp. 127-128.

sense-organ' and 'having manifest colour'. On the other hand, 'having perceptible touch' can be considered as the cause of tactile perception. But this opinion is also not tenable, because there is both agreement in presence and agreement in absence even between the properties, viz. 'being perceived through tactile sense-organ' and 'having manifest colour', and hence, 'having manifest colour' has to be considered as the common cause of visual perception as well as of tactile perception. Now, since air is devoid of this property, it must be considered as an imperceptible substance. One can suggest here that perceptible touch is the common cause of all external perceptions. But if this suggestion is followed, then the aura (*prabhā*) of light that is admitted by all as a perceptible object would become imperceptible, since it lacks this property, viz. perceptible touch. The Naiyāyikas maintain that if due to this reason, 'perceptible touch' is denied to be the common cause of external perception; then in the same way, 'having manifest colour' cannot also be considered as the common cause of all external perceptions; since air, which is a perceptible object, would become imperceptible as it lacks this property. So, they draw the conclusion that air must be considered as a perceptible object.⁴

The Vaiṣeṣikas then give another argument to establish that air is an imperceptible object. The argument is—if air is admitted as a perceptible object, then the general qualities like number etc. must also be apprehended in the air; but in fact, no one apprehends such qualities in air. Against this argument, one can say here that the possibility of apprehending such qualities in the air cannot be denied. Indeed, at the time of whiffing, one can apprehend the number of such air in the form 'this is one whiff of air', 'these are two whiffs of air' etc. In the same way, we can apprehend the other qualities like magnitude (*parimāṇa*), otherness (*pṛthaktva*), remoteness (*paratva*), proximity (*aparatva*) etc. in air. Thus, e.g. we can identify a certain air that is coming from a distant place, as having the property, remoteness, and another air that is coming from a near place, as having the property, proximity. Moreover, it is not correct to say that if something

4. *na ca cākūṅapratyakūatvau tattantraū tatraiva tadvayavyatirekānuvidhānāt spār-anapratyakūatve tu yogyaspar-avattāmātrasya tantrateti vācyau rāpānvayavyatirekayorubhayatrāpi tantratvāt, na hyubhayasiddhaspar-enaiva pratyakūatā rāpasya grahaṁamantareṁ dṣṇā. Vaiṣeṣikasātropaskāra*, p. 128.

is admitted as a perceptible object, then the general qualities like number etc. must also be apprehended in it, since it has been noticed that no one is able to apprehend the qualities like number etc. in the cloth that has been placed on one's back although that cloth is a perceptible entity. For them, it is also not correct to say that apprehension of air as determined by the universal airhood (*vàytutva*) is essential for the apprehension of those qualities in air. But this opinion can be easily refuted. In fact, there is a rule that prior apprehension of the universal, viz. airhood is needed for the apprehension of such qualities in all instances of air, which are characterized by the universal, viz. airhood (*vàytutva*), and such apprehension is not at all possible. And for the *Vai÷eùikas*, the apprehension of the qualities like number etc. of the cloth placed on the back becomes possible in that case where the cloth is not folded, whereas apprehension of those qualities of that cloth becomes impossible in such cases where that cloth is folded or curled up.⁵

What follows from the previous discussion is that perception of the 'common' qualities (*sàmànyaguõa-s*) like number etc. that belong to air is not at all possible, since air is an imperceptible object. One question may arise here that if air is admitted as an imperceptible entity, then how air can be cognized? According to the *Vai÷eùikas* air can be known through inference. They maintain that among the qualities of air, touch (*spar÷a*) alone can be apprehended through tactile perception, but not air itself; and the existence of air can be inferred as the substratum of that quality, viz. touch. According to *Kaõàda*, the quality known as touch is the inferential mark (*liüga*) of air. In this connection, let us consider *Vai÷eùikasåtra* no. 2/1/9—“*spar÷a÷ca vayoþ*.” Here, the term ‘*ca*’ indicates the trembling of leafs etc., which also can be

5. *kiñca yadi vayoþ pratyakùap syat saükhyàdisàmànyaguõopalambhe'pi tantraü syat. nanvastyeva phâtkaàràdau saükhyàyaþ parimàõasya ca hastavitastyàdeþ ubhayapàr÷vavartinor-vayoþ pçthaktvasya ca paratvåparatvayo÷ca pratyakùatà vayoþjâtãyasya vyaktiparatayà tu na tavàpi niyamaþ pçüñhalagnavastràdau tadanupalambhàditi cenna vyaktiparatayaiva niyamàt pçüñhalagnavastràdau càrjavàvasthàne saükhyàdånüü grahaõàt, anàrjavàvasthànadoùattu tadagrahaþ. Ibid.*

considered as the inferential mark of air.⁶ Kaõàda maintains that although like air, the following three substances, viz. earth, water and fire also possess the quality known as touch, air alone has to be inferred as the substratum of this quality, and not the other three substances; because those three substances are visually perceptible substances, whereas air is not a visually perceptible object.⁷ Here, the quality known as touch functions as the subject (*pakùà*) of the inference that establishes the existence of the air. In this connection, it should be noted that touch, trembling of leafs etc. have been mentioned in the previous aphorism of *Vai÷eùikasâtra* as the inferential marks of the air, but unlike touch, trembling of leafs etc. are not invariably related with air in the manner in which smoke and fire are invariably related, as can be seen in kitchen etc. That is why trembling of leafs etc. can be considered here as the *apratyakùà liïga*. Actually, establishment of the fact stated in the preliminary statement ‘this is air’ is not at all possible through such inferential probans; the existence of air can be established only through that inference where the quality known as touch functions as the subject. We have to employ here more than one inference. In the first one of them, it is claimed that touch must inhere in some substance, since it is a quality. In the other inference, it is claimed that this substance is different from earth (*pçthivã*), since it is devoid of colour. It is also different from fire (*tejas*) and water (*jala*), since its touch, unlike those of fire and water, is neither hot nor cold (*anuùõà÷ãta*). It is also different from *àkà÷a*, space (*dik*), time (*kàla*), self (*âtman*) and mind (*manas*), since these are devoid of touch. Thus, we have to admit some substance that is different from these eight types of substance, and that substance is air (*vàyu*).

Like touch, sound heard from leaves of the tree, floating of cloud in the sky, trembling of the branches of the trees etc. cannot happen unless these things come into contact with some substance that is characterized by touch. Now, one has to show in the manner stated above that

6. *cakàràt ÷abdadhçtikampàþ samuccãyante.*

Vai÷eùikasâtropaskàra, p. 125.

7. *na dçùñànàü spar÷a ityadçùñaliïgo vãyup.*— *Vai÷eùikasâta* no. 2/1/10.

this substance is different from earth, water etc. In this way, the existence of air can be inferred from sound etc. as well.⁸

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8. (a) *yadyapi dçùñameva spar÷àdicatuùkaü lügamiti tathàpi vàyunà sahàgçhãtavyàptikatvãdadçùñaliügatvamuktaiü. na hyayaü dharmã vàyuriti pratijñàya vàyuþ sàdhayituiü ÷akyate, tathàca sàmànyatodçùñàdevetarabàdhasahakçtàdvàyusiddhiriti bhàvaþ. Vai÷eùikasâtropaskàra, p.*

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(b) *viüayastâpalabhyamànaspar÷adhüñhànbhãtaþ spar÷a÷abdadhçtikampaliügastiryaggamana-svabhàvo meghàdipreraõadhàraõasamarthþ. Padàrthadharmasaiùgraha, pp.114-115.*

[See also *Nyàyakandalã*, pp.114-118 for a detailed explanation of this sentences in *Padàrthadharmasaiùgraha*.]

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