

Ethics of Debate: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract: Indian Philosophers have undertaken some methods of argumentation regarding the determination of the truth of an object. These methods are neither biased nor dogmatic, but based on some ethical values. In Nyāya the right cognition of categories leads us to the attainment of the mundane and transcendental values which are called *dṛṣṭa* (seen) and *adṛṣṭa* (unseen) well-being (*niḥśreyasa*). The ethics of propagating such view lies in the fact that the right cognition of the categories can associate us with mundane well-being which has got some pragmatic value in our life. Truly speaking in philosophy no standpoint is to be taken as final and hence all positions are adhoc. The Indian term for Philosophy is *darśana* (literally seeing) which actually means 'critical subsequent seeing' (*anvīkṣā*). It is the ethics of Philosophy that nothing can be taken in blind faith, but it should be judged through critical eye. To follow something without proper reflection gives us a training to follow blindly what our tradition says and hence there is no fresh air to receive a new thing or idea. *Tarka* is a judicious or ethical method to refute opponent's position. At the same time scepticism is in the root of morality of argumentation.

Key-words: *Vāda, Jalpa, Vitanḍā, Tarka, Samśaya.*

Introduction:

Indian Philosophers have undertaken some methods of argumentation regarding the determination of the truth of an object. These methods are neither biased nor dogmatic, but based on some ethical values. In Nyāya the right cognition of categories leads us to the attainment of the mundane and transcendental values which are called *dṛṣṭa* (seen) and *adṛṣṭa* (unseen) well-being (*niḥśreyasa*). The ethics of propagating such view lies in the fact that the right cognition of the categories can associate us with mundane well-being which has got some pragmatic value in our life. At the same time the import of the transcendental value like emancipation etc has not been ignored. The right cognition of the categories like *pramāṇa, vāda, jalpa, vitanḍā, chala, hetvābhāsa* etc. leads to the former while the right cognition of the *prameya-s* leads to the latter.¹

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ad hoc. The Indian term for Philosophy is *darśana* (literally seeing) which actually means ‘critical subsequent seeing’ (*anvīkṣā*). It is the ethics of Philosophy that nothing can be taken in blind faith, but it should be judged through critical eye. To follow something without proper reflection gives us a training to follow blindly what our tradition says and hence there is no fresh air to receive a new thing or idea. That is why; *ānvīkṣikī* or critical thinking has occupied an important role in Philosophy. Such phenomenon is also described as *manana* by the Advaitins.² It is nothing but a mental exercise, which when in respect of a particular meaning of a word there is doubt as to the conflict with other *pramāṇa-s* causes knowledge in the form of *tarka*, which ultimately removes doubt.

II. Methods of Argumentation and its Ethical Base:

In order to bring clarity about some concept the Naiyāyikas have forwarded their argument in a very precise educative manner of *uddeśa* (mere introduction of the object), *lakṣaṇa* (definition of the object) and *parīkṣā* (critical examination of the same), which makes a particular system more philosophically alive. If a researcher wants to know something, he may be given a rough idea about the object through *uddeśa* (*nāmnā samkīrtanamuddeśaḥ*).³ At the successive moments one should give a definite description of the object which is called *lakṣaṇa*. At the end it is essential to judge what is said earlier as definition and to see whether it is free from defects or not. *Parīkṣā*, hence, is to be taken as an ascertainment of reality (*tattva-nirṇaya*).⁴

While critically reviewing a certain standpoint, one may partly or wholly reject or re-interpret the earlier view of the opponents (*pūrvapakṣa*). It is the custom that the whole system achieves philosophical growth through opponent-proponent-debate. The opponent’s standpoint is taken so seriously by the proponents that the explanation of opponents given by the proponents is more understandable to us than that of the opponents, which evidences the intellectual honesty of the philosophers. If the opponent’s view is not tenable; it is expressed as *tanmandam* i.e. the thesis achieves less merit. If the position of the opponent is considered absurd, it is described as *tattuccham* i.e., the thesis is ignorable.

Indian Philosophers have undertaken some methods of debate regarding the determination of the truth of an object. These methods are neither biased nor dogmatic, but based on some ethical and argumentative values. Logic developed in Indian soil is called *vādaśāstra*, a discipline dealing with the categories of debate over various religious, philosophical, moral and doctrinal issues. They are introduced in order to train the students who wanted to learn how to conduct debates successfully, what tricks to learn, how to find out loopholes of the opponent’s position etc. Debate, according to the Naiyāyikas, can be of three types: a) an honest debate called *vāda*

where both sides, proponents and opponents, are seeking the truth, i.e., desirous to establish the right view, b) a tricky debate called *jalpa* where the goal is to win by fair means or foul and c) destructive debate called *vitandā* where the goal is to defeat or demolish the opponents.⁵ The first kind favours the employment of logical arguments, and use of rational means and proper evidence to establish a thesis. It is said that the participants in this kind of debate were the teacher and the student or students themselves belonging to the same school.

In the Nyāya system of Indian Philosophy the right cognition of categories leads us to the attainment of the mundane and transcendental values which are called *dr̥ṣṭa* (seen) and *adr̥ṣṭa* (unseen) well-being (*niḥśreyasa*). The ethics of propagating such view lies in the fact that the right cognition of the categories can associate us with mundane well-being which has got some pragmatic value in our life. At the same time, the import of the transcendental value like emancipation etc. has not been ignored. The right cognition of the categories like '*pramāṇa*' ('means of knowing') '*vāda*', '*jalpa*' (argumentation for achieving victory, but not truth), '*vitandā*' (argument only to refute others views without substantiating one's own), '*chala*' ('adopting tricks in argumentation'), '*hetvābhāsa*' (fallacy of arguments) etc leads to the former while the right cognition of the 'objects to be known' (*prameya*) leads to the latter. In a debate between an opponent and a proponent the determination of truth which is called technically *vāda* is the main objective of the Naiyāyikas leaving the question of victory aside. In the *vāda* type of debate there should be the adoption of one of the two opposing sides (*pakṣa-pratipakṣa-parigraha*), which is defended by *pramāṇa* and *tarka* (*pramāṇa-tarka-sādhmopalambha*) and which is not opposed to the established tenets (*siddhāntābirudhha*).⁶

If the desire of victory prevails in debate, and determination of truth is by passed, it is called *jalpa*, which is not taken as an ideal pattern of forwarding argument in a philosophical debate. If some one refutes the opponent's view only without forwarding his own, it is called '*vitandā*',⁷ which is not honoured as a better philosophical method. Hence each and every theory based on philosophical doctrine is called *vāda*, e.g., *nirvikalpakavāda*, *apohavāda*, *īśvaravāda* etc. In case of *vāda* type of debate two contestants are strong enough to go in favour of upholding the thesis and the anti-thesis (*pakṣa-pratipakṣa-parigraha*) through substantiation (*sādhana*) and refutation (*upālambha*) with the aid of means of knowing (*pramāṇa*-s) and hypothetical argument (*tarka*). At this time two points are to be adhered to. First, it must not be contradicted with the doctrine already proved (*siddhānta-abirudhha*) and it must employ the five-member five-member-syllogism (*pañca-avayava-upapanna*).⁸

It is to be borne in mind that in case of *vāda* two contradictory features are to be conjoined

to the same subject by the two contestants on account of the fact that they are mutually exclusive. For this reason, the constitution of thesis (*pakṣa*) and anti-thesis (*pratipakṣa*) is possible. This can be explained with the help of an example. One claims that the self exists, while the other contestant demands that the self does not exist. The thesis is the assertion of the existence of self while anti-thesis is denial of the existence of self.

If two contradictory features are not related to the same object (i.e. self), but attributed to different subjects, the thesis and anti-thesis are not to be constituted. As for example, if two contradictory attributes are attributed to different objects like 'The self is eternal' and 'Knowledge is non-eternal', it is not possible to constitute the thesis and anti-thesis.

In case of *vāda* an individual must uphold (*parigraha*) a thesis, which means he must adhere to a thesis as a matter of regulation (*vyavasthā*). *Vāda* is a kind of debate where there is establishment of a thesis and refutation of anti-thesis. It is to be done with the help of *pramāṇa* and *tarka*. The substantiation is done through them (*pramāṇa-tarka-sādhana*) and refutation is also done with them (*pramāṇa-tarka-upālabha*). In this context the term *sādhana* means 'substantiation of one's own thesis' while *upālabha* means 'refutation of an opponent's theory'.

Such a battle of argumentation in the form of *vāda* continues as long as the claim of one is finally silenced or refuted and other's viewpoint is established. In fact, such *sādhana* and *upālabha* are related to (*vyatiṣakta*) both the contestants and they adhered (*anubaddha*) to them.

In case of *jalpa*, another form of debate, there is a provision of the application of 'the points of defeat' (*nigrahasthāna*). In order to differentiate *vāda* from *jalpa* it has been pointed out that the point of defeat is not to be applied in case of *vāda*. Though the application of the points of defeat are prohibited in case of *vāda* yet the expression – '*siddhānta-abiruddha*' (without being contradicted by an established theory) incorporated in the *sūtra* signifies the legitimacy of the application of a few forms of point of defeat (*nigrahasthāna*) even in case of *vāda*. The *nigrahasthāna* in the form *hetvābhāsa* (pseudo-probans) is accepted in case of *vāda* on account of the fact that Gautama has admitted the pseudo-probans (*hetvābhāsa*) called *biruddha* which is in contradiction with one's own thesis. Vātsyāyana in his *bhāṣya* has mentioned that the term *biruddha* as found in the phrase-'*siddhānta-abiruddha*' of the *sūtra* is to mean pseudo-probans.

Hence it has been argued by Vātsyāyana that though the points of defeat are forbidden in case of *vāda* yet the use of *hetvābhāsa* (pseudo-probans) which is one of the *nigrahasthāna*s is not so (forbidden) due to its mention (*siddhānta-aviruddha*) in the *sūtra*.

The phrase of ‘employment of five inferential components (*pañca-avayava-upapanna*) in the aphorism has been incorporated in order to justify the application of the *nigrahasthāna*-s in the forms of *nyūna* (deficient) remaining in the omission of any of the five inferential components and *adhika* (redundant) consisting in mentioning more than one probans and more than one instance.⁹

Though the *pramāṇa*-s and *tarka* are already included in the constituent of inference yet they are again mentioned separately in the *sūtra* in order to emphasize the relation of substantiation (*sādhana*) and refutation (*upālambha*) with both the contestants. Otherwise, if in a debate both the contestants are motivated by the arguments for substantiation alone, such cases would not be called *vāda*. In other words, it will not be a case of *vāda* so long as both the contestants try merely to substantiate their own theses without refuting each other. The separate mention of the words *pramāṇa* and *tarka* further implies that in *vāda* type of debate substantiation and refutation may alternatively be affected with the help of those *pramāṇa* and *tarka* alone without employing the components of an inference. For, it is well-known that the *pramāṇa*-s can prove a thesis without being connected with inferential components. Lastly, *pramāṇa* and *tarka* are separately mentioned to imply that since it is said that *jalpa* is a debate in which substantiation and refutation are made with the help of *chala*, *jāti* and *nigrahasthāna*, it is not to be understood that *jalpa* is without those forms of *nigrahasthāna*-s, which are legitimately employed in *vāda*. In other words, it should not be understood that in *jalpa* substantiation and refutation are affected through *pramāṇa*-s and *tarka*. This factor differentiates *jalpa* from *vāda*.¹⁰

Regarding the importance of *Tarka* as a method it can easily be mentioned that the point mentioned by the opponents is given in due honour by admitting their statements initially, though afterwards some contradictions are to be shown. From this method it is to be noticed that no view in philosophy is negligible whatever less its importance be. Such an ethical aspect of debate is always commendable.

The definition of *Tarka* as found in the *Nīlakanmhaprakāśikā* on *Dīpikā* of *Tarkasamgraha* runs as follows: ‘*Āhāryavyāpakavattābhramajanyaāhāryavyāpyavattābhramastarkaḥ*’¹¹. That is, *Tarka* is an imposed (*āhārya*) erroneous cognition of the existence of a pervader (*vyāpaka*), which is produced by another imposed erroneous cognition of the existence of a pervaded (*vyāpya*). Now the question is: what is meant by the term *āhāryajñāna* (imposed cognition)? In reply, it can be said that the knowledge which is produced out of one’s desire at the time when the contrary knowledge is present then the previous one is stated as *āhāryajñāna* or imposed cognition (*virodhijñānakalīnecchāprayojyajñānatvamāhāryajñānatvam*)¹². If

the knowledge in the form: 'There is fire in the lake' (*hrado vahnimān*) is produced out of one's desire at the time when there is the existence of the contrary knowledge in the form: 'There is the absence of fire in the lake' (*hrado vahnyabhāvavān*), it is called an imposed one, i.e. *āhāryajñāna*.

Such *Tarka* is of two types: determinant of the definite valid knowledge (*viśayapariśodhaka*) and remover of the doubt of deviation (*vyabhicāraśamkānivartaka*). The former in the form: 'If it has no fire, it has no smoke' (*yadyaṁ vahnimān na syāttadā dhūmavān nasyāt*) determines the certainty of the existence of fire in a particular locus (i.e., mountain). Here by the absence of the *āpādya* or the consequence (i.e., by the absence of the negation of fire) the certainty of the existence of the absence of *āpādaka* (i.e., the absence of the negation of smoke) is confirmed. Here, doubt about the existence of fire on the mountain may be removed by applying this type of *Tarka*.¹³

Tarka is a kind of hypothetical argument. Both the parts of *Tarka* are full of imaginary thought. If smoke were endowed with doubt of deviation of fire, it would not be caused by fire. If the first part is true, the second part will also be true. But it is known through experience that the second part is not true in so far as we do not get any smoke which is not caused by fire. From the falsity of the second half, the falsity of first half (i.e., smoke is deviated from fire) is determined. In our everyday life also, we remove doubt in respect of something after following this method of argumentation. From the knowledge of consequence, the idea of an antecedent is revealed. *Tarka*, being a kind of mental construction, is useful for removing doubt and hence *Tarka*, though invalid (in the sense of not being a source of valid cognition) is the promoter of the *Pramāṇa-s* (*pramāṇanugrahaka*). This *Tarka* is otherwise known as *āpatti* i.e., the introduction of the undesired through which the desire is established. It is also a kind of indirect method through which the truth is ascertained. If the negation of p is proved as absurd, it would automatically follow that 'p' is true. For these various reasons much importance has been laid on this method in the Navya Nyāya.

IV. Sceptical Method:

In this way, doubt can also be taken as a philosophical method, because only reason can be applicable towards the object which is in doubt, not ascertained and not known (*nānupalabdhe na nirṇīter the Nyāyaḥ pravarttate, kim tarhi samśayitēthe*). To determine the nature of reality the role of *saṁvāda* and *pariprasna* bears some ethical value. It may play a positive role particularly in case philosophical analysis. Philosophy cannot go further, had there been no confusion or doubt regarding some concepts. The arousal of confusion leads to the composition

of so many commentaries like *Tīkā*, *Bhāṣya*, *Vārtika* etc. That is why; in philosophy no conclusion is to be taken as final but ad hoc. One can easily doubt or challenge the thesis propounded by an individual or a section of philosophers and can refute or substantiate the earlier thesis. In this way, philosophy grows through *Pūrvapakṣa* and *Uttarapakṣa* debate. Doubt is the seed through which the philosophical plant grows and hence doubt is the mother of invention.

Notes and References

1. *Nyāyasūtra*, 1.1.1. and *Nyāyabhāṣya* on the same.
2. ‘*Mananaṁ nāma śabdāvadharitē the mānāntara-birodha-śaṁkāyāṁ tannirākaraṇānukūla-tarkātmaka-jñāna-janako mānasa-vyāpārah*’ *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, *Viśayapariccheda*.
3. ‘*Tatra nāmadheya-śabdenapadārtha-mātrasyābhidhānam uddēśaḥ*’ *Nyāyabhāṣya*, 1.1.2.
4. *Nyāya-darśana*, Vol.1, Phanibhusan Tarkavagisha,(ed.), WBSBB, Kolkata, 1989, p. 82.
5. *Nyāyasūtra*-1.2.42-44. with *Vātsyāyanabhāṣya*
6. Ibid, 1.2.42. with *Vātsyāyanabhāṣya*
7. Ibid, 1.2.43-44. with *Vātsyāyanabhāṣya*
8. Ibid, 1.2.42. with *Vātsyāyanabhāṣya*
9. *Vātsyāyanabhāṣya* on *Nyāyasūtra* no.1.2.43-44.
10. Ibid.
11. *Tarkasaṁgraha with Dīpikā* with seven commentaries, Satkari Sarma(ed.), Bangiya Chowkhamba, 1970, p.235.
12. *Bhāṣāpariccheda with Siddhāntamuktāvalī* under verse no 137.
13. Ibid