

## Negation

The problem of negation is an important one since it has a bearing on the nature of truth itself. Negation involves firstly the denial of something and it cannot be said to be mere denial. The denial of something involves the apprehension of something that is other than that which is denied, whose place it has taken, or it might be it is the denial of the existence of the something merely without any reference to any other thing's existence or presence. Secondly, it might mean the apprehension of the absence at some place and time of something already experienced, and as such it is definition or determination of non-correspondence with the past experience merely without a detailed investigation of the present experience. Negation taken as a judgment even does not and cannot escape the reference to the negative fact, so to speak, of the actual apprehension of a thing's absence. If we inspect this phase of negation, we shall see that absence as such is experienced to be the nature of the situation, and as such perception is the instrument of our cognition of absence. It may be said that perception can only give the 'given,' the presented objects, and cannot present non-absence of the objects, and as such we must have a different instrument of cognition such as non-cognition or non-perception, *anupalabdhi*, to prove non-existence (*abhāva*). But this is all right so long as we take this non-existence presented in the so called non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*), (for it is indeed an apprehender of the *alleged abhāva*),<sup>1</sup> to be a mere *abhāva*, an uncharacterised somewhat and not a positive entity of absence. Carefully inspected we find that the situation or position taken up by the Advaitin is similar to his position in regard to the *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*, a bare and un-inspected or unimagined or integrated experience of absence because of non-perception of anything determinate over there. There is an element of contra-definition or counter-correlative which is defined more or less clearly even in the most incipient perceptual experience of negative fact or absence, which precisely reveals the difference,

The Prabhākaras hold that non-existence has no reality apart from that as an existent thing<sup>2</sup>. The Nāiyāyika view is that non-existence of a thing in a particular locus is not identical with the locus but adjectival to it, for we always say that the ground is characterized by the non-existence of a jar that was previously there. This involves the view that non-existence as such can become an adjective or *viśeṣaṇa* of

---

<sup>1</sup>Vedānta Paribhāṣa

<sup>2</sup> Bhāvāntaram eva bhāvāntar pekṣayā abhāvaiti vyavahryate: *Saptapad ārth*, p.76. Uddyotakara held that *abhāva* is apprehended by sense organs *abhāvam indriyena grhyate* and Kumāriḷa Bhatta agrees with above view. It is something additional to the ground wherein there is non-perception of pot: *adhiṣṭhānātriktam tattvam cf. Six ways of knowing*: D.M.Datta p.159ṣṭa

the sound. This is so to speak non-sense except when we hold that there is a negative predicate in judgement about the existence of a thing. The adjectival theory suffers from its incapacity to see that the loss or absence of thing cannot be an adjective, for, it is not a fact that has any-thing but a difference to the original locus. Nor should we say that *viśeṣaṇa* as particular difference is an adjective as something marking out a difference from the original experience that was characterized with the Presence of a thing, say, a pot. Nor could a general theory which holds that the counter-correlateness of negation of pot is cloth and what determines its counter-correlateness is clothness as genus differentium be right, for there are cases, individual to be sure, which may have both pot and cloth and bench or chair, but the absence of one thing does not entail the counter-correlateness of others. We should therefore see that whilst it may be perceptually right to say that A was where B is now at the same place and therefore B is the counter-correlate of A, it will not reveal the necessity of some one thing say B being the counter-correlate of A, so much so we may be able to affirm the inference in the form of a negative judgment or judgment of affirmation.

Sri Rāmānuja's views on Negation are those closely related to the concept of non-knowledge or ignorance. The question between the Advaitic and his own standpoint was whether non-knowledge was a positive entity or otherwise, whether indeed it was perceived, whether also it was absence of knowledge and as such a vacuum, or whether it was positive power that illudes or veils knowledge or abolishes it. Rāmānuja points out that knowledge and non-knowledge are contradictory only in so far as they refer to one and the same object: *Jñānājñānayoṛ ekaviśayatvena hi virodhaḥ*<sup>3</sup>. He points out the importance of recognizing the content and locus of the negation, for it is in special respect of these that our ignorance (*avidyā*) has to be defined. A universal ignorance is not at all what is being affirmed when we say that 'I am not knowing' Ignorance is not a positive entity, it is only absence-an absence that may hinder the action needed and in that sense positive. But this cannot be proved either by perception or by perception aided by reasoning or inference: *Ahamajñō māṁ anyam ca na janāmi 'ityatropapattisahitena kevalena ca pratyakṣena na bhāvarūpam ajñānam pratiyate yastu jñānaprāgabhāva-viśayatve virodha uktaḥ sa hi bhāvarūpjñāne pi tulyaḥ*.<sup>4</sup> Whether we view non-knowledge as a positive entity or as the antecedent non-existence, in either case it comes out as what the word indicates, namely, non-knowledge means either absence of knowledge or that which is other than knowledge or that which is contradictory to knowledge, and in any of these cases we have to admit that non-knowledge presupposes the cognition of the nature of knowledge." *Bhāvarūpasyā jñānasyāpihyajñānum iti sidhyataḥ prāgabhāvasiddhāviva sāpekṣatvam aṣṭeya. Tathā hi ajñānam iti jñānābhāvas*

---

<sup>3</sup> Sri Bhasya: I.i.1

<sup>4</sup> Sri Bhasya I.i.1. p.110

*tadanyas tadvirodhī va? Trayāṇam api tat-svarūpājñānāpekṣa vasyā śyāśrāyaṇiyā.*

Taking the first, it is not true to affirm that negations are all of the same kind. It is on the contrary correct to err on the side of pluralism by affirming that there are different kinds of negation. Negation can be of existence; negation can be of meaning; negation can be of context in time and place and relationship with other objects. It is this last type of negation that is usually mistaken for the former two. Obviously it cannot be correct to affirm that the negation of existence of a particular thing is also negation of its meaning unless this meaning is something that is involved in its existence. If idea involves existence, then the denial of the one can be the denial of the other also. If, on the other hand, existence is a predicate, if to mean a particular meaning is not identical with its actuality in time and place, then the negation of meaning need not be the negation of the existence, or the negation of existence the negation of the meaning as well.

Existence is characterised by the features of time and space and also of relationship with other objects, This relationship may be of the causal type as well as other kinds of relationships such as genus and particular, *jāti* and *vyakti*, and therefore there can be no existential occasion without the characteristics of space and time and causal nexus. Negation of existence means the absence of existential predicates. Negation however is not absolute since it depends on these considerations of space and time and causal relationship even like existence itself. Thus to exist means to exist at a, certain place, and time and causal relationship with its antecedent, lacking which, it must be presumed to have no existence then and there and under those conditions.

The main defect of most thinkers arises from the fact that unrealistically they tend to identify or subsume all negation under one omnibus negation which does not distinguish between previous non-existence, present non-existence and future non-existence: but all things are characterised by these three features of time. To affirm that they are characterized by these three features of reference to time is also to affirm that whilst a thing is at one place it cannot at the same time be at another place also, Thus the negative judgment that 'A is not at a particular place' only negates A's existence at that place and at the time the judgment is being made, and not that at any future time A may not go over there at all. Thus the negative judgment is not definite except in relation to the time and place that it exhibits at that moment.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> It is moot question whether negative judgement(sic) is an inference based on non-apprehension of an expected or sought for subject at a particular place and time.

It is true that all things are not of the same temporal duration. And some of the entities may have a coevality with time itself, so as to be called timeless or eternal, like the souls (as in Vedānta), and like some other things which whilst undergoing transformation or becoming their essential materiality may not be denied at any moment. The absolute negation of matter's existence, or rather the affirmation of ultimate non-existence leads to absurd consequences or compromises with existence. In these cases whilst change is predicated of things, what is negated in their contexts is not their materiality nor eternity as such, but only the particular state which they enjoyed at any prior moment. Change thus is relative to the previous state, even as destruction is relative to the previous state. Thus we find change and destruction to be mutually interchangeable terms, and these have reference to the permanent thing in itself, or to the previous states of things and their consequent states. The Buddhist view that if there had been previous non-existence and if there is to be a consequent non-existence, there could never be a present existence sandwiched between the two<sup>6</sup> is answered by the reference to the state or a thing rather than to the thing itself which is the fundamental reference and base or locus of all change and time and space. Thus non-existence instead of being a perpetual and anxious dragon awaiting the emergence of existence to gulp it up and leave nothing behind but the Void, is a myth and unacceptable. The doctrine of momentariness or flux is relative to the subjective apprehension, and the moment is not to be treated as a mathematical moment having no duration at all. Bergson's observation that nothing is not is appropriate.

Mere, or bare non-existence as we have said has no locus and is neither dynamic nor fertile. Dynamic negation entails the concept of destruction, a thing which causes disintegration; and even to speak of a thing disrupting itself is possible only on basis of a real entity causing another to disintegrate. Do we find this concept of dynamic disintegration within the scheme of negation as represented to us by the schools of thought? It is true that the Buddhist schools speak of negation as *itarstara bhāva* or *paraspara apekṣatā*, which is intended to convey the relativity view. The concept of destruction of being by non-being so as to lead to a realization of Becoming or change is not so clearly available in Indian Philosophy as it has been found in Hegelian dialectic. On the other hand, we find that negation as a category of existence with which it is related in relation to which alone it has any meaning. Negation means, in the perceptual sense, the perception of emptiness of otherness than what was exhibited at a previous moment and what was anticipated to exist at that place and at that time. The concept of *abhāva* non-existence<sup>7</sup>, is thus closely

---

<sup>6</sup> Māyāvāda considers such a sandwiched existence to be unreal or illusory

<sup>7</sup> Whether *abhāva* can be equated with *anupalabdhi* is an important point. *Abhāva* as a category in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika metaphysics is an apprehended absence of things, and in fact, undoubtedly dependent upon the apprehension of things prior or after, ideally anticipated or

related to the doctrine of relative occupation or non-occupation by a thing and the sense of prior occupation and present non-occupation or future non-occupation. The feeling of vacancy is thus a positive index to the judgment of negation. The perception of black as the absence of white in psychology is equivalent to the perception of the vacancy space or other occupation of the identical space. To say thus as the Naiyayikas say that Non-existence, *abhāva* is a perceptual fact is correct. Further that it is positively a contrast experience can be proved. On entering into the house where previously children were playing and finding that no children are there we declare that none is there, though there might be elders. In the darkness loneliness is a positive experience of sensing of emptiness or absence. Thus negation can be both negative (or passive) and positive (or aggressive, or painful or pleasant).

Thus the experience of *abhāva* does not mean that it is an entity, but that it is the experience of an absence of a previous entity.

Sri Venkaṭanātha points out that negation is related to and defined by the conditions or limitations (*upādhis*) of time, place and causality.

The mention of causality involves reference to other objects that have been, with which it is related in a necessary manner as consequent. Thus the non existence of a cause at the, time when the consequent comes into existence is a necessary condition, just as much as its existence at the previous moment was necessary to bring about the effect. Thus we find that though such existence appears to be undefined:in so far as it is in-itself incapable of being described as existence, since it is its absence, it is defined by limits or conditions. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that negation of A involves only the non-existence of A at a Particular place, time, and as a cause or effect and not that no other thing is there, nor that it would not be there later, nor that it was not there previously.

Negation is thus distinct from destruction; things might be destroyed and suffer change. They need not on that account be considered to be unreal. The criterion that the momentary is unreal is not of the school of Buddhism which is realistic enough to affirm reality to be such. Nor is it that of the realist. Negation is a principle of contradiction which makes it a logical weapon that limits and circumscribes a universal judgment.

So far we have been showing that the experience of absence itself is definitely of the relational type. For when we deny the existence of something or affirm its non-existence, (though to affirm appears to give the case away not because the very

---

perceptually directly known. But to say that *abhāva* is *anupalabdhi* will lead to the doctrine of solipsism ; esse est percipi non-esse est non-percipi

possibility of affirmation lends colour to the view that there is something over there clamant for affirmation) three questions arise. Where? When? and What? about that which is negated. Thus writes the author of Nyāya-kulīśa in his chapter on Bhāvāntarābhāva-vāda. Thus Negation may mean either mere absence of an object or entity which was looked out for or suggested by prior experience of the particular place, due to destruction of it or the passing away of it. In this case it merely intimates non-presence of that which was anticipated to exist. The reasons for its non-existence at the present moment or moment of apprehension of negation are not relevant as such. But this too was investigated by some later writers who have seen that negation is due to the perception of a special modified nature of the entity in which the negation is affirmed: *prati-yogi-buddhau vastu-viśeṣa-dhir evopeta nāstīti vyavahārahetuḥ* says Vātsyāyana (Nadāthūr Ammāl<sup>8</sup>). Ātreya Rāmānuja holds that there is no need to posit negation as a separate entity, for indeed it is only the perception of difference between the previous and the present, or the present and the future occasion. Negation is that which, is antagonistic to a positive entity and there is no way in which a negation can be conceived by itself without reference to a positive entity. Abhāvasya tad-rū-pam yad-bhāva-pratipakṣata naivam adyāpy asau yasmād bhāvottirṇena sādhiḥ.<sup>9</sup> The difference between the positive entity from another is regarded as negation. The last view takes up the notion of *viśeṣa*, uniqueness of difference as the content of mutual exclusion. This is stated to be at the root of the concept of otherness. Thus we can see that there are three types of negation; the later writers tended to reduce all types into one and made negation identical with otherness. Thus suppose we take the word Avidyā, it may mean non-knowledge or contradictory to knowledge according to Rāmānuja; whereas in the later systems non-knowledge is distinguished by an otherness to knowledge, whether absence or contradictory. Even in the case of otherness, Rāmānuja was prepared to see in it not general 'otherness' as in the case of horse being other than a table, but rather a special □otherness□ that is, that which is relevant to the topic.

Thus the experience of *abhāva* is not that it is an entity so-called but that it is the experience of another entity different from this. Sri Rāmānuja refuting in the context of Nyāya-refutation speaks that "non-existence (*abhāva*) is clearly conceived as special state of something actually existing: Abhāvasya vidyamāna padārtha vasthāviśeṣat-vopapādanāc-

(Sri Bhasya II, ii. 23.) This means that A-vidyā when used in the context of *Upāya* to the realization of (God will mean action which is usually the other *upāya* than *vidyā*.

---

<sup>8</sup> cf. *History of Indian Philosophy*. S.N.Das Gupta Vol III. P. 353

<sup>9</sup> *Journal Annamalai Uni*, vol X pts 2&3 *Prameyamālā*

Sri Vekāṭanātha speaking on the notion of Avidyā as identical with *karma* under the mantra 11 in the Īśāvāśyopanishad-bhāṣya writes:

Avidyayā vidyāṅgatayā coditnkarmaṇā mṛtyum jñāna-saṅkocarūpa mṛtyuhetum prākta karma□ Iha tu avidyāśabdaḥ prakaraṇādaucityācca vidyāṅgakarmaviṣaya ityabhāṣi Bhāṣyakāraiḥ: Atrāvidyā śabdābhihitam varṇā śramavihitam karam iti mṛtyu-taranopāyatayā pratītā vidyā vidyetarad vihitam karmaiva iti ca. Vidyām paryudasyannayamavidya-śabdhaḥ kṣatriyādi viṣayabrāh-maṇaśabdādivad āsanna-tadanantara-vṛttir-aṅgakarma-viṣaya iti bhāvah.

The term avidyā which excludes knowledge, having to mean that which in proximate and next to it, like the words *a-brāhmaṇa* and others which denote kṣatriyas and others, refers to works which are intimately related (to knowledge).

Thus according to Srī Rāmānuja no negation as such can be made without it at the same time intimating some thing about that negated something which because of the negation means that it is different from what was previously apprehended or what was expected to exist or else what was relevant to the need to make this negative assertion. Taken thus the negation is a definite enough statement so far as the modification of the situation goes but is indefinite about what is affirmed to exist as different from that which is being denied. The transition from the negative to the determinate judgment of assertion of the other is perceived by the observation of the conditions of the Otherness, and this Rāmānuja and Venkaṭanātha consider is easy enough to find when they limit it to proximateness, relevance and purpose of the negation and close relation of subsidiariness to it - *āsannatva*, *tad-anantaravṛttitva* and *aṅgatva*.

The third type of negation referred to by Srī Rāmānuja is that which was contradictory to the existence or contradictory to the smerganae of a hing intoienietence. They may be designated as *prāgabhāva* and *pradhvams-ābhāva* but the dynamic quality of the oposition is not brought out into clear relief. If the previos type of negation revealed the distinctive and subsidiariness (*aṅgatva*) of the negation expressed by such a phrase as *avidyā* (that-is karma), in this we have the actual conflict between the two: when the one exists the other cannot exist, just as there is conflict between Good and Evil; though to be sure-we come across many persons who are good in some respects and evil in others, but certainly not good and evil in respect of the same aspect. Equally the terms *Sambhūti* and *Asambhūti* mean birth and non-birth (*vināśa*). But taken in the context of their usage in the Upaniṣad (Īśā 14) we find that *asambhūti* means the destruction of impediments to birth into Divine life. When we look at the philosophy of Hegel we come across the oppositional character of negation though this type of negation can only be reduced to the level of contradictory negation of one force by another or ruling out of one force by another.

There is still a kind of negation affirmed at the levels of mystic consciousness—the state of total transcendence. The *Asat* of the Upaniṣads and the *veda* is quite a positive Existence but about that nothing is humanly measurable or knowledgeable. "Negation is that to which we come at the end of all the researches of reason and faith to a dark night, and enter there [ ] to unite ourselves in wise ignorance with Him who dwells in the shadows [ ]" says Gerald Venn writing about St. Thomas Aquinas's central teaching on Negation. Is it also Buddha's (though not the Buddhist's) *Nirvāṇa*,

It is the description of the unknowable, but that too is a positive and most real experience of Deity as mystics have continuously affirmed. This truly is the only place where the content is undefinable or indeterminable—with the help, *upādhis* or conditions: but its otherness, or even organic otherness to our experience is definitely available. Thus Rāmānuja clearly points out the central truth of negation to lie in its determination of the 'other existent' which is proximate and near and in accord with it, in respect of existence, or value or purpose.