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Presumption (*arthāpatti*) as an Epistemological Instrument: An Enquiry **Tarak Nath Nandi**

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Abstract

In Indian Philosophy, we know that there are different epistemological tools/ instruments to manifest the reality. There are six epistemological tools in Indian Philosophy viz. Perception, inference, comparison, testimony, presumption and non-apprehension. Though, *samvab* and *oitihya* are accepted as an epistemological tool in *Purāṇ*. Different Indian philosophers accept different epistemological tools for establishing their metaphysics. An effort has been made in this paper that presumption can be developed as an epistemological instrument. Presumption (*arthāpatti*) is enumerated as an instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) by *Mīmāṃsā* and *Vedānta* philosophers. Though, presumption is not accepted by all the Indian philosophers as an independent instrument of valid cognition, but no one can refute the cognition which is produced by it. Also, the epistemological importance of presumption is highly mentionable. All of Indian philosophers recognize such type of cognition, i.e. so called presumption (*arthāpatti*) which is treated by me as an epistemological instrument, but some have reduced its epistemological importance into another.

Keywords: *Vedāntic texts, Brahman, upapādaka-upapādyā, apūrva, semantic-gap, grief, māyā*

All Indian philosophers hold that the cognition of an object is derived from an instrument of valid cognition (*mānādhīnā meyasiddhiḥ*) and they deal with the instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) for this. Different Indian philosophers have discussed different sorts of *pramāṇa* for their metaphysical status. *Mīmāṃsā* and *Advaita Vedānta* schools accept presumption as an independent instrument of valid cognition. *Pramāṇa* and *pramā* both are designated by the term presumption (*arthāpatti*). The meaning of ‘*artha*’ is the real object (fact), and ‘*āpatti*’ means imagination (*kalpanā*). *Arthāpatti* is an assumption of something to resolve a contradiction. Śābara, treats presumption as, the presumption of something which was not seen on the ground that a fact already perceived or heard would not be possible without that presumption; for example, it is found that Devadatta who is

alive is not in the house, and this non-existence in the house leads to the presumption that he is somewhere outside the house.¹

Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa in his *Mānameyodaya* says that “*anyathānupapattiyā yadupapādakakalpanam, / tadarthāpattirityebariṃ lakṣaṇaṃ bhāṣyabhāṣitam.*”² i.e. in the case when something is otherwise unintelligible, the assumption of something which will make it intelligible is presumption and this is the only definition given in the *Bhāṣya*. When it is known that Devadatta is alive, but he is not in the house, then some sort of inconsistency arises. This inconsistency can be resolved if we assume that he is outside. This type of assumption is called *arthāpatti* (presumption). Actually, the conflict between two instruments of valid cognition is called presumption. Here, two instruments of valid cognition are: one is the general instrument of valid cognition and another is the specific instrument of valid cognition. When something is assumed for removal of such type of conflict is called presumption. In the aforesaid example, Devadatta is alive is known by the general instrument of valid cognition, i.e. inference and the absence of Devadatta in the house is known by the specific instrument of valid cognition i.e. non-apprehension. Devadatta’s aliveness is general in the sense that there is no specific place where Devadatta exists. Here, ‘exist’ means, either in house or outside house. But, his absence in the house is known through the non-apprehension. In that situation, the conflict between inference and non-apprehension leads to the presumption that Devadatta is outside the house. Reconciliation of the conflict is possible by this presumption. So, the uncommon causal condition for the cognition of presumption is the conflict between two instruments of valid cognition. Though, the two instruments of valid cognition are not specific, because if they are specific then the reconciliation will be impossible. If it is stated that, ‘there is gold’ and ‘there is no gold’, then here in both the cases the instrument of valid cognitions are specific and hence irreconcilable. Therefore, one instrument of valid cognition must be general and other is specific to the case of presumption. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa says, the cognition to remove the conflict between two instruments of valid cognition is called presumption.

Advaita Vedānta accepts presumption (*arthāpatti*) as an instrument of valid cognition to explain the *Vedāntic* texts. For example, the *Upaniṣads* describe the creation of this world with the help of *Brahman*³ and again say that *Brahman* is alone real⁴. This inconsistency is resolved by assuming that the creation of this world is not real, but apparent (*vivarta*) as shell appears as silver. Here, Advaita Vedāntin assumes the existence of *māyā* as the power

¹ “*arthāpattirapi drṣṭaḥ śruto bā artho’anyathā nopapadyate ityarthakalpanā. yathā jībati Debdatte gṛhāvābadarśanena bahirvābhyādrṣṭasya kalpanā.*” *Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra-Bhāṣya*, 1-1-5.

² Bhatta, Nārāyaṇa. *Mānameyodaya*, Sridinanath Tripathi Nabatirtha (Ed.), Vol II, Sanskrit College, Kolkata, 1989, p. 120.

³ “*tasmād varamā atasmādātmana ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ.*” *Taiterīya Upaniṣada*, 2/1.

⁴ “*ako debaḥ sarbabhūteṣu gūṛaḥ sarbavyāpī sarbabhūtāntarātmā, karmādhyakṣaḥ sarbabhūtādhibāṣḥ sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇaśca.*” *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣada*, 6/11.

of *Brahman* for resolving such conflict and such type of assumption is called Presumption (*arthāpatti*) – “*idānīmarthāpattinirūpyate*”.⁵

Dharmarājā Adhvarīndra gives the definition of presumption (*arthāpatti*) as ‘the assumption of an explanatory fact (*upapādaka*) from a knowledge of the thing to be explained (*upapādya*) – “*upapādya-jñānenopapādaka-kalpanamarthāpatti*”.⁶ Here, the cognition of the seen facts is the instrument and the cognition of the unseen or assumed fact is the result. *Upapādya* is one which cannot be explained without assuming another fact. The fact which is assumed to explain *upapādya* is known as *upapādaka*. We may explain this with the help of an example. The stoutness of a man who does not eat at day (*‘pīno Devadatta divā na bhūñkte’*) is inexplicable without the assumption of his eating at night. One who does not eat both day and night cannot be stout. Here, the stoutness of such man in the absence of eating at day is called *upapādya* and the presumption of eating at night is called *upapādaka*. So, the assumption of an explanatory fact from an unexplained fact is called presumption (*arthāpatti*).

So far, our discussion concerns regarding the importance of presumption for epistemological instrument. However, we have seen that most of the Indian philosophers are accepting its cognition. But, they are disagreeing regarding its separateness. For example, Naiyāyikas cannot be recognized presumption (*arthāpatti*) as an independent instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*), it is actually nothing but a case of *kevala-vyatirekī* (only of agreement in absence) inference (*anumāna*). Vācaspati like the Naiyāyikas also thinks that presumption should be treated as a case of inference viz. *avīta anumāna*. Vācaspati Miśra in his commentary called *Sāṃkhya-Tattvakaumudī*, explains the Sāṃkhya views in this regard. According to him, Devadatta is a spatio-temporary limited being. It’s the general rule of an object that, which is limited by space and time that the absence of it in a certain place implies the presence of the same in the other place. Our body is the living example of this type of object. In this case, the relation of invariable concomitance which is otherwise called *vyāpti* can easily be established. The very form of this invariable concomitance stands as, ‘If an object is absent in a place at a particular time, then that object must be present in another place at that time’.

This rule is equally true in the case of Devadatta, since he is a person confined within a particular place and time. More clearly, to say, the absence of Devadatta in a certain house at a particular time necessarily implies the presence of him in a certain place outside the house at the same time. Thus, it is seen that the cognition of the presence of Devadatta’s outside from house is attained through inference, but not through any other instrument of cognition called presumption. The Sāṃkhya philosophers hold that this inference can be formulated in the following way: ‘Devadatta is outside the house, because he is alive and

⁵ Adhvarīndra, Dharmarājā. *Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, Panchanan Bhattacharya (Tr.), Srinath Bhavan, Contai, Medinipur, 1377 (BN), p. 214.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

absent from the house'. The persons who are alive and absent from the house are somewhere other than the house, like me. Thus, it is shown that the instrument of cognition called presumption can very well be reduced to inference.

We have seen that presumption is nothing but a case of inference as it is held by the Naiyāyikas. In order to overcome this problem the Advaitin has restored to the help of his allies the Mīmāṃsakas, specially the Bhāṭṭa. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa accompanied by his followers has produced a number of sound arguments to substantiate the position that the importance of presumption as an epistemological instrument cannot be refuted. The Bhāṭṭa thinkers mention that sometimes contradiction arises in our mind and in order to resolve this contradiction we take the help of presumption. Going back to the well-known examples of presumption, we fall in contradiction when we cannot find Devadatta at home and when we know through some authentic source that 'he is alive'. Here, this contradiction is not resolved unless and until we assume that 'he is outside'. Likewise, conflict arises between the cognition that a man does not eat by day time and he is stout. This contradiction can be resolved by assuming the fact that 'he is eating at night'. Here, the very assumption in both of the cases is justified and is a valid piece of cognition, simply because of the fact that the two events between which there is apparent conflict are known to be certain, and again it is only the assumed facts through which the conflict can be explained away. Thus, it cannot be recognized as the case of inference (*anumāna*).

On the other hand, we know the presence of the fire in the hill through inference, then we also know that we have the cognition of the presence of fire in the hill through inference. Keeping this in view, it is said that in none of the cases mentioned do we say "I am inferring" (*anuminomi*), rather on the contrary we say "I am assuming" (*kalpayāmi or arthāpayāmi*)⁷. So, this argument proves, once again, that presumption is not a case of inference.

In our foregoing discussion, it is seen that a controversy arises among different thinkers, whether presumption (*arthāpatti*) should be treated as an independent and separate epistemological instrument (*pramāṇa*) or not. It is further notice of that the Naiyāyikas hold that presumption is a valid cognition, yet they do not admit presumption as an independent instrument of valid cognition.⁸ They argue that for the sake of logical economy (*lāghava*) presumption should be reduced to inference i.e. *keval-vyatirekī* inference. But, I think that it is not a wise method to take the path of logical economy (*lāghava*) at the cost of truth. If we have a close scrutiny, then it can be understood that presumption is an independent and separate instrument of valid cognition. Therefore, to deny the presumption as an independent and separate instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) is to deny the truth.

⁷ Ibid., p. 220.

⁸ "Śabda aituhyānarthāntarbhābādnumāne'rthāpattisambhabābhābānarthāntarbhābāccā - pratiṣedhaḥ." *Nyāya-sūtra*, 2-2-2.

In Mīmāṃsā School, the concept of ‘*apūrva*’ plays an important role, but this concept of *apūrva* cannot be established unless and until presumption is admitted as an independent and separate instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*). In the Mīmāṃsā philosophy, the theory of Potential Energy talks about causal relationship. Seed has potentiality of sprouting and if the potentiality is lost, then the seed cannot sprout; likewise, fire has a potentiality for burning and the potentiality of word is to manifest the meaning. If we accept this theory of potential energy, then thereby we accept the causal relationship. Mīmāṃsā philosophy accepts *Veda* as eternal and *Vedic* texts are explicit as an *Injunctive Word*. One *Vedic* injunction states ‘one who desires heaven should perform the *agnihotra* sacrifice’. We know that according to Mīmāṃsakas, every action is ephemeral i.e. stay only for a moment and then destroy.⁹ But sometimes one does not get the result immediately after the sacrifice. So, we have to assume a tertiary alternative to explain this fact. These types of tertiary alternative are accepted by Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas through the ‘*Apūrva*’.¹⁰ *Apūrva* is recognized here as intermediary cause. *Apūrva*, according to Mīmāṃsakas, is nothing but potential underlying the activity of performing sacrifice to producing the result. Mīmāṃsakas also hold that it is assumption by which *apūrva* is established to resolve contradiction between performing sacrifice and attaining the result of the same. It is important to note that to resolve such types of inconsistency Mīmāṃsakas have accepted presumption as an instrument of valid cognition.

Moreover, if we look the examples given by Mīmāṃsakas for accepting presumption as an instrument of valid cognition, then we shall see that none of the examples can be explained without the help of presumption. Here, I think that the view of Mangala Chinchore is right one in this context. He accepts presumption for the sake of *semantic-gap*, “*Arthāpatti* has something to do with semantic-gap that leads to inconsistency. Semantic-gap forces us to bring in requisitic additional information on matter given to us through description or through acquaintance to remove inconsistency”.¹¹

I shall positively say that the view of the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā and the Advaita Vedānta schools are stronger due to the epistemological importance of presumption. We have truly applied this in many of the instances. But, here I would like to mention one example where without presumption we cannot determinate the truth of object e.g. the scriptural statement ‘*tarati śokam ātmavit*’¹² (the knower of self transcends grief) i.e. knowledge is the cause of making one free from bondage. But, the question arises: if the bondage is the real one, then

⁹ In this context, it is important to mention the view of Heraclitus. He says, “You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you”. (Russell, Bertrand. *The History of Western Philosophy*, p.45). According to him everything in a state of flux, nothing is fixed.

¹⁰ *Śabara-Bhāṣya*, 2-1-5.

¹¹ Chinchore, Mangala. ‘*Arthāpatti*’, *Annals*, Vol. LXV, The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 1984, p.101.

¹² *Chāndogya Upaniṣada*, VII, i.3.

how one can be free from bondage through the help of knowledge? To avoid such conflict the hearer assumes that bondage is not real, but illusory; and such type of assumption is not possible without the help of presumption.

One cannot be said that such type of presumption is reduced to inference. Actually, what we have seen for the case of inference is that, we establish probandum (*sādhyā*) in subject (*pakṣa*), through the help of probans (*hetu*). But in the case of presumption we are assumed another thing so that the statement can be established properly. Here, I have put forward an Advaitin statement i.e. “*Brahman satyaṁ jagannmithyā...*” *Brahman* is the only real entity and the world is false. Now, the question arises: if the *Brahman* is the only real entity and the world is false, then how can we illustrate the present world where we are living. Here, Advaita-Vedāntin Śaṅkara resolve this controversy very beautifully by the acceptance of *māyā*. Here, he assumes *māyā* for resolving the controversy. The assumption of *māyā* is called presumption. Actually, this world is real in the practical sense, but the world is unreal in the ultimate sense. So, the question arises: is it possible to give a tenable answer for resolving the aforesaid controversy for Naiyāyikas? Someone may say that such type of controversy can be resolved through inference i.e. *keval-vyatirekī* inference. But, a closely scrutinize shows that the *keval-vyatirekī* inference is a negative process, but presumption is a positive process in its nature. Also, another very important point is that we are arranged the first premise by assuming some new alternative in the case of inferring. But, by which process one can assume this new alternative. Here obviously Naiyāyika should not say the process is *keval-vyatirekī* inference, because of the fallacy of circularity. What exactly I want to say that our goal is to know the reality through the instrument. Now, if we have found a simple process to establish reality, then we should avoid the complex process. Here, Advaita Vedāntin accepts presumption to establish their metaphysical position due to this reason. So, presumption is accepted by Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta as an epistemological instrument according to their metaphysical view. Hence, one should accept presumption (*arthāpatti*) as an epistemological instrument by which an object can be known.

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