

.MĪMĀMSĀ THEORY OF APŪRVA

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Abstract: In the process of establishing the authority of the Veda, so far as knowledge of Dharma is concerned, Mīmāṃsā evolved many innovative ideas which may be applied in the contemporary field of discourse-analysis. Many of these ideas were the outcome of their dialogue with the heterodox systems of Indian Philosophy. Apūrva is one of them and is advanced to explain the cause and effect relationship between a sacrifice and its result. The primary aim of the system was to observe that no sentence of the Veda should remain redundant. The application of the Apūrva theory to the karma doctrine explains the disparities in the world.

The term Mīmāṃsā in the title stands for Pūrvamīmāṃsā (PM). PM is the biggest of the six orthodox systems of Indian Philosophy (IP) which may be renamed as Indian Hermeneutics in modern idioms. It is so because the system concerned itself with the interpretation of the Veda and evolved principles of sentence-interpretation for this purpose. Jaimini, for the first time, systematized these principles by composing the Mīmāṃsāsūtras. In other words, the Mīmāṃsāsūtras of Jaimini (JS) are nothing but rules and principles of interpreting the Veda. These were evolved out of the need to interpret the whole Veda meaningfully. This arose because of the questions and objections of the heterodox systems regarding the authenticity and authority of the Veda. Actually the Veda was the basis of the ritual culture, prevalent in the then society. According to the view of the heterodox systems, the Veda contained many meaningless sentences, many non-understandable, ambiguous, ridiculous and also contradictory sentences. Such a text, in their opinion, could not be the basis of a culture. This was the main point of the opponents. To answer these questions and to establish the authority of the Veda beyond all possible doubt, it was necessary to interpret the whole Veda and to show that it contained no redundant sentences. It was a challenging task which Jaimini took up and achieved the goal of the system by composing twelve chapters of *Mīmāṃsādarśana*. He started with some presuppositions. They were: 1) The Veda is eternal. It is not a creation of any human being i.e. it is self-valid or autonomous. 2) It is also not created by God. No God is required to be postulated for this purpose. 3) Action (i.e. ritual) is the meaning of the Veda. This means the Veda is meant for inducing a human being into an activity which leads to his good. 4) The action, in other words, is the duty (*Dharma*) of human beings, which can be understood only from the Veda. Along with these basic assumptions many criteria were evolved to establish that there was no lacuna in the Vedic texts and as such the Veda must be accepted by the society as the source and basis of the ritual culture. In the light of the first presupposition that the Veda is autonomous, the PM system held that the Veda had to be interpreted on the basis of itself. As far as possible, for this purpose, no help of any source should be taken which is external to the Veda. As such many questions were answered taking

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recourse to the Veda itself. Vedic sentences were classified into five categories: *vidhi* (injunction), *mantra* (incantation), *nāmadheya* (name of a rite), *niṣedha* (negative injunction) and *arthavāda* (narratives). In the light of the third presupposition above that action is the meaning of the Veda, injunctive sentences which prescribed different acts to be taken up or which refrained the human being from taking up a particular act were treated as the most important sentences among the five types. It was accepted that the injunctive sentences primarily prescribe an act as a means of obtaining desired result or refrain a human being from an act which may lead to some undesired result. Here one important logical difficulty was to explain the cause and effect relationship between the ritual and the result it was supposed to yield. To solve this difficulty, PM evolved the concept and theory of *Apūrva*. Let us first understand the exact difficulty in accepting the cause and effect relationship between the *yāga* and its result and then look into the point how the concept of *Apūrva* could overcome this difficulty. The *yāga* was defined as ‘offering an oblation in the fire with reference to some deity’. Offering is an act. For accomplishing the main act of offering there were many preparatory and subsidiary acts which formed the part and parcel of the *yāga* in the sense that they contributed towards the main offering. Thus, *yāga* was a collection of many small acts along with the main act. An act is a momentary phenomenon so, *yāga* also being an act is momentary. It vanishes in the thin air as soon as it is performed. The result of the *yāga*, such as heaven would occur quite late after the performance, when it does not exist anymore. To produce the effect it is required that the cause should be present before the effect and also at the time when it is produced. In other words, both cause and effect should be collocated. To show the collocation of the cause and the effect in the present case, there are two options: either it should be said that the *yāga* continues to exist until the effect of the *yāga* is produced or it should be accepted that even if *yāga* is destroyed it produces its effect. However, both these options are not acceptable as none of them stands logical. As the *yāga* is an act it cannot continue to exist until the effect is produced because an act is momentary and it also is not logical to say that the destroyed and hence absent *yāga* produces its effect later because it is not possible for the dead parents to produce a son. Thus, both the options are rejected because they do not stand logically consistent. Here, Pārthasārathī Mishra brings in the concept of *Apūrva*. The argument is: the *yāga*, no doubt, gets destroyed when performed but it produces something before getting destroyed. This something is given the name *Apūrva*. *Apūrva* means that which was not there before the performance of *yāga*. So this is the logic behind accepting the concept of *Apūrva*. Pārthasārathī Mishra puts it in a single verse: *Vinaṣṭasyasatastavāt na kāryārambhasambhavaḥ; Kṣanikatvena siddhasya navasthānām ca yuktimat. Atāḥ Apūrvam eva kalpayitavyam*. This states the same point that we have discussed. Let us now look into various aspects of *Apūrva*, which will help us understand the Mīmāṃsā theory of *Apūrva* in a better manner. Let us do it by answering the following questions. Let us take the first question first. What is *Apūrva*? Kumārila Bhaṭṭa answers this question as follows: *Karmabhyaḥ prāg ayogyasya karmaṇaḥ puruṣasya vā Yogvatā śāstrāgamya ya para sa'pūrvamiṣyate*. This means: the potential which was absent before the performance of the act and which is produced after the performance that (potency or potential) is known as *Apūrva*. (vide *Tantravārtika* (TV) of Kumārila, on the *Bhāṣya* of Sābara (SBh), on the JS II.1.5). Kumārila explains: Before the ritual is performed it cannot be the means of (obtaining) heaven and the

performer also is not in a position (is not compatible) to obtain the result like *svarga*. So one has to accept that performance of a ritual generates some potential. Because if there is no such potency then it will mean the performance and the non-performance of the rite are the same. Therefore, the potential in the performer as well as in the performance is named as *Apūrva* in this (i.e. PM) system. (TV on SBh on JS II.1.5.) The next question is: What is the means of knowing *Apūrva*? Kumārila answers: There is only one means of knowing it and that is *śrutarthāpatti*. *Arthāpatti* means implication or presumption. Kumārila explains, perception etc. cannot be the means of knowing *Apūrva*. It has to be known by implication. He says: *śrutarthāpattirevaika pramāṇam tasya veśyate*. (Ibid)

To elaborate, the Vedic sentence which enjoins that a sacrifice leads to heaven and the subsidiaries (of the sacrifice) help the main sacrifice, must also accept (by default) that the acts have the potency of generating the effect only because those acts which have no potency, cannot produce the effect. Further, an act is momentary and also not perceptible. Hence it can never be simultaneous with the effect it produces. Kumārila argues, this is true with reference to a single act, what to talk of the rites like *darśapurṇamāsa* which consist of many acts and are also separated by time. (*Darśa* and *Purṇamāsa* are performed on new-moon-day and full-moon-day respectively. Thus, they are separated from each other by a fortnight. They consist of three main rites each.) So if it is accepted that without generating any potency in the performer, the rites simply vanish then the person will be the same before and after the performance. But if the *Apūrva* is accepted to come into being after each and every performance then the performer will become capable of enjoying the result of his action. Another advantage would be, even if the acts do not exist one can explain the simultaneity of the subsidiary acts on one hand and that of the main act and the result on the other. Thus, by now two points are clear that *Apūrva* is a potency produced by the act taken up by the performer and it is to be known by implication. Now the further question is: Where is *Apūrva* produced and where does it reside? Kumārila's answer to this is: *Ātmaiva cāśrayas tasya kriyāpyatraiva ca sthitā* (ibid). The *Apūrva* is produced and resides in the self (*ātman*) because *kriya*, the act also resides there. It is the self who resolves to perform the act and through this resolution he alone is accepted to be the agent of all acts and hence when they get vanished, they do so after generating the potency of enjoying the results like heaven etc. in the (*ātman* of the) performer.

Here a question may be asked how come the act gets vanished but its potency remains even after? The answer that Kumārila gives is: had the potency inhered in the act itself then certainly it would have vanished along with the act but if it is accepted that the potency resides in the performer, there is no question of its getting destroyed. Then further there may arise the question: how is it that the potency of one (that of the act) resides in another (in the performer)? Kumārila says, the performer and the act are not absolutely different from each other. Moreover, the potency, or the *śakti* i.e. *Apūrva* is inferred on the basis of its effect and it has to be accepted to reside in the substratum where it will be utilized to bring about the effect. Such a substratum could be the same or different, it does not matter. The only point is, it should be a substratum which is capable of bringing about the result. This is why *Apūrva* is accepted to reside in the *ātman*. This will explain how the result is collocated with the cause. Our next question is: How many *Apūrvas* are to be postulated? Kumārila's straight forward

answer is: At first one *Apūrva* is accepted on the basis of presumption. To explain, without *Apūrva* it is not possible to explain why the injunctions like, *darśapurṇamāsābhyām svargakāmo yajeta* explicitly state that the *yāga* is instrumental in bringing about heaven. Thereafter, to explain this very fact that the *yāga* is the cause and *svarga* the effect through *Apūrva*; one may accept more *Apūrvas*.

To quote Kumāṛila: *Arthāpatter ihapūrvam Pūrvam ekam pratīyate. Tatastāt siddhaye bhūyaḥ syādapūrvāntara-kalpanā.* (Ibid) The purport of this statement is: As the main *yāga* generates the final result, only one (main) *Apūrva* is accepted at first. But as the main *yāga* consists of many subsidiaries, it is necessary to accept more *Apūrvas* to explain how the main *Apūrva* is produced through the subsidiaries. In other words, for contributing to the main *yāga* and also to the main *Apūrva* all the subsidiary rites must have *sahitya* i.e. togetherness and also there has to be simultaneity or togetherness between the subsidiaries and the main rite for which it is necessary to postulate more *Apūrvas*. Thus there will be many *Apūrvas*. Nevertheless, there are grounds to postulate them. Kumāṛila asserts, *Pramāṇavantiyadrṣṭāni kalpyante subahunyapi; Adrṣṭasatabhāgo'pi na kalpyo hy apramāṇakah.* (Ibid) What Kumāṛila means is this: one may postulate many or good many *Apūrvas* if there is a reason to accept them. But without a ground one should never accept even one hundredth of *Adrṣṭa*. Here he has used the term *Adrṣṭa*. *Adrṣṭa* is another name for *Apūrva*. We shall come to this point later. What one gathers from the statement of Kumāṛila is the fact that basically one *Apūrva* is accepted to explain the cause and effect relationship between the ritual and its result but when it comes to look into the fact about how that one *Apūrva* is produced, it becomes necessary to postulate more *Apūrvas*. To explain: *Apūrva* is the intermediate causal link between the performance of the ritual and its result. It is known from an injunctive sentence of the Veda, such as *darśapurṇamāsābhyām svargakāmo yajeta* that the performance of the rite is the instrument and heaven is the effect, we have already seen. *Apūrva* is accepted to be the link between the two to explain their relationship. True. But, a ritual, again, consists of many subordinate acts. A ritual is a conglomeration of many acts. If it is so, then the same question persists regarding all these acts. The fact that each and every act is momentary does not change. Hence, just as there is a need of a link between the main performance and the result, so also there is a need of a link between any two acts being performed. This becomes clear by the example that we have seen above. The two rituals, *darśa* and *purnamāsa* consist of three rites each and are performed on new-moon and full-moon-days respectively. The point is, the dual number in *darśapurṇamāsābhyām* says that these are two rituals. The performance of these two leads to heaven. Here also the question of togetherness of these two rituals arises and also there arises a question of togetherness of all subsidiaries which are required to be performed to complete these two rituals as well as even to complete one single act. Accordingly, one has to postulate more *Apūrvas* to solve the question of togetherness of all acts. This is the intention of Kumāṛila. This is how one finds in the later texts of PM different types of *Apūrva* explained elaborately.

To continue with the example of *darśapurṇamāsa*, it is accepted that each of the subsidiaries generates one *Apūrva* (*angapūrva*) all the *Apūrvas* produced by the subsidiaries contribute to produce *utpattyapūrva*, *utpattyapūrvas*, again, contribute to produce two *samudāyapūrvas*, which, in turn, contribute towards generating the *pradhānapūrva*. This main

potency would reside in the performer until the result is produced. This *pradhanapūrva* is also called *paramapūrva* or *caramapūrva* or *phalapūrva* because, it is the main and final *Apūrva* which would produce the *phala* when it is due to the sacrificer. So we have seen some main types of *Apūrva* here. Thus, the PM theory of *Apūrva* has filled in the apparent gap between the cause and its effect. In the absence of this theory it would not have been possible to accept the cause and effect relation between the ritual performance and the future effect on one hand and it would have been impossible to establish the authority of the injunctive sentences of the Veda on the other. Injunctions of the Veda, both positive and negative, are the most important parts of the Veda which guide a human being to take up right acts and to avoid the wrong ones respectively. After understanding the Mīmāṃsā theory of *Apūrva*, let us now turn to the last part of our discussion: How is this theory connected with the *Karma* theory? Let us look into the significance of the Mīmāṃsā theory of *Apūrva* in the context of the *karma* theory of IP. The origin of the *karma* theory is the Veda. In the *Śatapatha Brahmana* (IV.4.1.2) it is mentioned that everyone is born in this world fashioned by himself. The *Kāṭhapaniṣad* says, one enters the womb of a mother and attains a bodily form, another goes to a plant, each of these as per his or her own deeds and knowledge (*Kāṭha Upa* V.7). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad* asserts: Just as one acts and behaves, so will he be born. He becomes holy by holy deeds and he becomes evil by evil deeds. (*Sādhukāri sādhu bhavati, pāpakāri pāpo bhavati. Puṇyaḥ puṇyena karmaṇa, pāpaḥ pāpakena. Bṛh Upa-* IV.4.5). From these and such references it is clear that a good act leads to a good result and a bad one to an evil one. The acts are primarily divided into Worldly and Vedic.

The above theory is true in both the divisions of acts. In other words, any type of act, when it does not produce its verifiable result immediately, does produce some potency which remains with the agent and yields its fruit at the proper time, only because the act itself, being an act, is momentary and perishes immediately after it is performed. The question here is: do we call the potency produced by the worldly acts like studies or drinking ghee or agriculture by the name *Apūrva*? Or is there any other name for it? Etymologically, it is possible to call any such potency by the name *Apūrva* but Kumārila does not accept it to be so. In his opinion, in case of worldly acts also one has to accept that they produce some *śakti*, some potency because only on that basis can one explain their results on a later date. But he categorically denies the name *Apūrva* to be given to such worldly potency. He argues, this potency is not called *Apūrva* because the acts are not Vedic. So, it seems that according to him, the potency generated by the worldly act (*laukika karman*) may be known as *adrṣṭa*. *Adrṣṭa* literally means unseen. It is understood that such potency is not visible or verifiable but it certainly exists because it is inferred on the ground of the result that it later produces. Kumārila asserts: *Laukikām cāpi yat karma phale kālāntarodgatau; Tatrāpi śaktirevāste na tv apūrvamiheṣyate. (Ibid)* This means, even in the case of a worldly act, where the result comes later, one has to accept the potency (generated by the act) but the same is not known as *Apūrva*. He further explains his point with the help of examples we have mentioned earlier, i.e. studies or drinking ghee or agriculture. These are worldly acts the results of which are not seen as soon as the acts are performed. The results are certainly seen at a later date. Observations: From whatever we have discussed so far, it is clear that the theory of *Apūrva* which is a contribution of PM, was originally evolved to explain the cause and effect relation between a performance of ritual and

its result. This, in other words, is a logical postulation to bridge the apparent gap between them. It may be considered as a function (*vyāpāra*) of the ritual which is instrumental in bringing about the final result. Its nature is that of a potency, generated by the performance.

Later on, this theory is extended to all good and bad acts to explain the happiness and suffering of a human being. A human being goes on accumulating good and bad potency through his good and bad acts respectively. The same leads him towards happiness or suffering. This theory, most significantly, puts the responsibility of human happiness and suffering on the shoulders of one's own acts. Nobody or nothing else is responsible for the state of affairs in which a person finds himself. In other words, a fate of man is earned by himself. PM holds that this world has no beginning. The cycle of the universe is *anādi* and hence human life also is *anādi*. This means, a human being is and has always been engaged in some act or the other. (The Bhagavadgītā III.5 says *Na hi kaścit kṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt.*) If the act is good one accumulates good potency (*puṇya*), and if it is bad one obtains evil potency (*pāpa*). This is *Adrṣṭa*. This has been going on beginninglessly. The Nyāya system, which accepts God as the creator of the universe and does not accept the world to be beginningless, has accepted *Adrṣṭa* as the cause of human happiness or suffering. God simply monitors the phenomenon of the results distributed to all as per their *Adrṣṭa*. Even God cannot go beyond *Adrṣṭa*. Here the theory of *Adrṣṭa* saves God from the blame of not being equal to all. Udayana, in his *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, has accepted *Adrṣṭa* as the cause of difference (*vaicitrya*) in the world. Hence, it is one's *Adrṣṭa* (*puṇya* or *pāpa*) that is responsible for one's happiness or suffering. Thus, the original theory of *Apūrva*, when applied to the *karma* theory, is capable of explaining all apparent gaps and disparities in the world.

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