The Conception of “Svataḥ Prāmāṇya” in the Mīmāṃsā-śloka-vārttika⁽¹⁾

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Kumārila Bhaṭṭa expresses his own view concerning epistemology in the term “svataḥ prāmāṇya-vādin.” The conception of “svataḥ prāmāṇya” (the self-validity or the self-evidence of cognition) forms the corner-stone on which the whole system of Kumārila’s philosophy is based. By this conception it is generally meant that all cognition excepting memory (smṛti) is of the certitude of truth in itself, and neither does it require any other extraneous condition nor any other extraneous cognition for its validity.⁽²⁾ Now we will cast light on the meanings of the very conception in his “Mīmāṃsā-śloka-vārttika.” As for the passages that directly deal with the conception of “svataḥ prāmāṇya” in the vārttika, we can give more than ten verses of the commentary on codanā-sūtra (aphorism 2).

Kumārila begins by raising a question; it runs as follows:

As to all cognition or conception (vijñāna), we must consider the following question: “Is the validity or non-validity of any cognition due to itself or to something else?” (K. 33)

To this question he prepares four possible replies, —

(1) The validity or non-validity of the cognition is due to itself. (2) Both of these are due to the excellences and discrepancies of its cause. (3) Validity is due to itself, and the contrary is due to extraneous causes. (4) Non validity is due to itself, and the contrary to extraneous causes. (K. 34, 35)

Examining each of these views,⁽³⁾ he defines his own attitude to this question in the following verse.

(1) The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, No 2, and Bibliotheca Indica, new series, No. 965 (English transl.)

(2) Dasgupta; A History of Indian Philosophy, vol. 1, pp. 372-375.

(3) cf. Kārikās 35-37 on Codanā-sūtra.

We should understand that the validity of cognition is inherent in all Means of Right Perception (*pramāṇa*). (K. 47)

The reason for this conviction of his is held out in the latter half of the same verse. That is:

For faculty, by itself non-existing, can not possibly be brought into existence by any agency.

It is a matter of course that the word "faculty" (*śakti*) in the above argument means the faculty to establish the validity of cognition. Hence, this verse shows that the cognition having no faculty to establish its validity by itself can never hope for it in any other agency. This is the first reason for the doctrine of "svataḥ prāmāṇya".

We have difficulty in approving his conviction only by the above mentioned reason. But we can easily find not a few verses in which are put forth other reasons for his conviction; for example, verses 49-51, 53, 61 etc. ... Verses 49-51 assert if even a right-produced conception should be made to depend upon the ascertainment of the purity of its cause (*Kāraṇa-śuddhatva*) for the purpose of comprehending its object, —then, for the ascertainment of such purity too, we would need another conception, which would be due to something other than the aforesaid cause, and so on we would have to proceed *ad infinitum*. He indicates in another passage too, as follows:

If you should admit of a self-validity in any one of these (other conceptions) in order to avoid the fallacy of a regressus *ad infinitum* (*anavasthā*), then to what cause is due your repugnance to such validity belonging to the very first conception? (K. 76)

According to these verses we may conclude that Kumārila is desirous of demonstrating to result in falling into the fallacy of a regressus *ad infinitum*, in refusing the doctrine of "svataḥ prāmāṇya" or asserting the doctrine of "parataḥ prāmāṇya". Moreover, for the purpose of avoiding the fallacy, if man finds it necessary to postulate the self-validity in a certain conception in the end, he should approve it the very first conception. As mentioned above, Kumārila induces to the conclusion of "svataḥ

prāmāṇya" through criticisms of "parataḥ prāmāṇya-vāda". And this is the second reason.

Furthermore, he is about to prove his conviction by means of the analysis of the nature of cognition itself, and this analysis makes the third reason for the doctrine of "svataḥ prāmāṇya". He states:

Cognition has self-validity by nature because of the mere fact of its having the character of cognition (buddhi). (K. 53)

In this case, as what does he regard "the character of cognition"? The above mentioned "cognition" is concretely "pratyakṣa" (sense-perception), as it is called; and he treats of this problem in detail in the commentary (K. 53 ff.) on pratyakṣa-sūtra (aphorism 4).

First of all, cognition is not a mere being, because——

Not even for a moment, does the cognition continue to exist, (K. 55)

nor a phenomenon like any other phenomenon of the world, because——

In the case of all causes, we find that their operation is something apart from their birth (utpatti), the contrary, in the case of cognition we can not find the same. (K. 53)

In the case of cognition, the operation of cognition is identical with its birth. There is no operation of cognition excepting its birth. By this it is meant that no cognition is produced and subsequently operates towards the apprehension of the objects. This is indicted in the verse as follows:

The only operation of cognition, with regard to the objects, consists in its being produced. And that alone is the reality of cognition. (K. 56)

And in another passage too, explaining the word "buddhi-janma" in aphorism 4, he states as the following.

By "cognition-production" (buddhi-janma) is meant that cognition becomes authoritative as soon as it is produced. (53)

Further in another passage,

The truthfulness of cognition belongs to the state of its birth.⁽⁴⁾ (K. 88 on aphorism 2)

According to these views of his, cognition is always produced as cor-

(4) cf. Kārikā 61 on Pratyakṣa-sūtra.

rectly, and the operation of cognition consists in its being produced. Hence, there can not be any operation of cognition but its being produced as correctly. Cognition reveals to us the real object at the same time as its birth. The validity of cognition can not be depend upon any objective fact, for we are never aware of it before it is revealed by cognition. And there can be no validity in extraneous things, for truth naturally applies to cognition and cognition alone. Therefore, its validity or truthfulness belongs to cognition itself, in Kumārila's words, "the state of its birth".

Thus the object of cognition is nothing but the real or truth. Of course, we know that man is inclined to fall into error in apprehending the object, but from this fact we can not infer that the object of cognition is the unreal or error. He perceives the unreal as the real by mistake and nothing more. If that is the case, why does man fall into error in apprehending the object? Kumārila believes that fallacy attributes to the discrepancies in the cause or the origin of cognition. Therefore, the truthful character of cognition can be set aside only by the contrary nature of its object, or by the recognition of a certain discrepancy in the cause. (K. 53, 60) In other words, it is only the recognition of discrepancies in the means of the conception that sets aside the conception. When we do not come across any such discrepancy, we can not reasonably doubt the truthfulness of the conception. But he will not positively admit of its functioning of the excellences of its cause, but he admits of its mere negative part in the sense that its excellences help the ascertainment of the absence of discrepancies only by means of their presence, which serves to suppress the discrepancies. (K. 67) For Kumārila, as we have seen, the excellences of its cause do not form an indispensable condition for the validity of cognition.⁽⁵⁾

Cognition has self-validity by nature. Therefore, it can not get at its validity or authoritativeness by means of its being comprehended as such through any other conception. On the contrary, even prior to comprehension, the validity of cognition has an independent existence of its own,

(5) He distinguishes himself from Yogacāra-school in this point.

and it subsequently comes to be comprehended as such. Hence, the fact of its being comprehended as such does not in any way help the validity of cognition.

He has said that the truthfulness of cognition belongs to the state of its birth. Then, in what way is cognition produced? He also is of the popular opinion that the cause of cognition is the fixed relation of the sense and the object, but through their inherent amenability to one another.⁽⁶⁾ (K. 64) Moreover, the contacts of the sense and the mind, and of the mind and the soul are required for its birth. He states on these contacts:

The contact of the mind (manas) and the soul (ātman), on account of being the best means and the sameness of the substratum, is the only Means of Right Perception,⁽⁷⁾ and therefore the true character of the Means of Right Perception⁽⁸⁾ can not belong to something other than this contact. (K. 68)

The cognition which is produced by such means comes out as a mere undefined perception (ālocana-mātrika) and subsequently gives rise to a defined conception (niścaya). (K. 71) In this case its validity belongs to the former. As to this verse, Pārtha Sārathi Miśra explains in his Nyāyaratnākara as follows:

In all cases, as soon as the sense and the object are brought into contact, the cognition which is "niścaya-ātmika" and "ālocana-mātrarūpa" is produced. This cognition (ālocana) subsequently gives rise to judgment or discrimination (niścaya). And its validity depends upon intuition (ālocana), and judgment is the result of the cognition...

According to this explanation, cognition has twofold characters, — judgment as an inherent nature and intuition as an extraneous form. As to the latter of these, Kumrāila himself indicates that it is the cognition in the shape of mere observation in the abstract which is undefined, — similar to the cognition of the infant or the dumb, arising out of the pure

(6) cf. Nyāya-bhāṣya on Sūtra I. 1, 3; I. 1. 4; Nyāya-bindu 1. 6 etc.

(7) cf. Nyāya-Sūtra 2. 1. 22.

(8) As to this problem, Pārtha Sārathi Miśra enumerates many different views in his Nyāyaratnākara.

object (śuddha-vastu). (K. 112) Ālocana is no other than the so-called "nirvikalpa-pratyakṣa". [It can be said "pre-judgment" or "pre-expression" because of lacking the operation of discriminating. At the time of "ālocana", neither any specification (viśeṣa) nor generalization (sāmānya) is recognised; what is cognised is the absolute individual (vyakti), which is defined as the substratum of such characters (lakṣaṇa). (K. 113) This view of his reminds us of the pratyakṣa theory of Yogacāra school⁽⁹⁾. But he does not assert that cognition (perception) consists of only "ālocana" without "niścaya" or "kalpanā"; on the contrary, he accepts "niścaya" as a subservient cause (upakārin) for bringing its completion, and in this point he is different from Yogacāra school.

As we have seen above, cognition is produced by means of the contact of the sense and the object, etc., and its being produced is nothing but its operating as intuition. Intuition reveals to us the pure object or the absolute individual, and it results in judgment or discrimination. Then there is no intermediate link between the rise of cognition and the revelation of the real object. Thus, cognition is not only independent of anything else in its own birth but in its own operation as well. Therefore, so far as not find discrepancies in its cause, cognition can not have any chance to fall into error; in brief, all cognition has the selfvalidity or the self-evidence.

It is for these reasons that Kumārila holds the doctrine of "svataḥ prāmāṇya", and the same reasons form the meanings of the conception of "svataḥ prāmāṇya".

(9) cf. Nyāya-bindu 14-15 etc.