

## Causation In Indian Philosophy

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**Abstract:** Causation is an important role in Indian Philosophical system. Every school of Indian Philosophical system are accepted different type of causal relationship. In India both the heterodox and the orthodox philosophers explain the cause and effect according to their own view. Causation was acknowledged as one of the central problems in Indian philosophy. Indian philosophers extensively discussed a number of issues relating to causation, like; Svabhāva-vāda, Pariṇāmavāda, Vivartavāda, Ārambhavāda, Pratītyasamutpādavāda. They stressed the importance of the material cause, rather than (as is western philosophy) the efficient cause. The Indian theories of causation are traditionally classified by one question. That is: “Does the effect pre-exist in its material cause?” Those who answer this question negatively are called Asatkāryavādins (Nyaya, Vaishesika, Buddhism and some followers of Mimamsa). While those answering it in positive are called Satkāryavādins (Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Advaita). Some philosophers try to take the middle ground and claim that an effect is both identical and nonidentical with its cause. I will discuss different type of causal relationship accepted by different Indian philosophical system elaborately in this paper.

**Keywords:** Nature of cause, Svabhāva-vāda, Pariṇāmavāda, Vivartavāda, Ārambhavāda, Pratītyasamutpādavāda, Argument of Satkāryavāda.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

There is an important role of causation in all branches of Indian philosophy. Philosophers accept the concept of causality as one of the main topics of study. The conception of reality of every system of Indian philosophy depends upon the theory of causation. According to Mahesh Chandra Bharatiya, the importance of causality has two types - metaphysical and logical. There is metaphysical importance as it has relation to the conception of reality. A thing changes into another. This change takes place due to some effort of an active agent, for example, the potter turns the clay into a pot with the help of his stick and wheel. Here, the potter is called the cause and the pot, effect. In India both the heterodox and the orthodox philosophers explain the cause and effect according to their own views.

### II. Nature of Cause:

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas system defines a cause as that which is an unconditional and invariable antecedent of an effect and an effect as that which is an unconditional and invariable consequent of cause. There is some similarity between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view of cause and the western view of cause, “Hume defines a cause as an invariable antecedent. Now these definitions of cause depend on the conceptions of the effect. Hence it is necessary to define effect before going to explain the definition of cause. An effect is defined as that which has a prior non-existence. It means, an effect does not pre-exist in its cause, i.e. it was non-existent before production. The opinion of Annambhaṭṭa about causation is not different from the general view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system. Annambhaṭṭa defines cause, as that which invariably (*niyata*) precedes (*pūrvavṛtti*) the effect (*kārya*). A cause must be antecedent of its effect; otherwise it will not be a cause. Annambhaṭṭa remarks in his commentary, *Dīpikā* that *pūrvavṛtti* is inserted in the definition to exclude *kārya* itself. As the definition of cause depends on the understanding of the concept of effect, so Annambhaṭṭa proceeds to define effect first. He says that the effect is the counter-correlative of its own antecedent non-existence. The definition of cause mentioned above refers to three essential characteristics of a cause. Firstly, it must be an antecedent of the effect (*pūrvavṛtti*). Secondly, it is invariable, it must invariably precede the effect (*niyatapūrvavṛtti*), and the last is its unconditionality or necessity, it must unconditionally precede the effect (*ananyathāsiddha*).

### III. Causal Relationship:

Now I will discuss different type of causal relationship. In Indian philosophical systems, there are three principal theories regarding the cause and effect relation. These are: 1) *Svabhāva-vāda* or *Yadṛcchāvāda*, 2) *Satkāryavāda*, 3) *Asatkāryavāda*. *Satkāryavāda* is of two types: (a) *Pariṇāmavāda* and (b) *Vivartavāda*. *Asatkāryavāda* has also two divisions: (a) *Ārambhavāda* and (b) *Pratītyasamutpādvāda*. These theories are accepted by Naiyāyikas, Vaiśeṣikas, Buddhists, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Philosophers, Advaita Vedāntins, and Mīmāṃsakas.

#### 1. Svabhāva-vāda:

*Svabhāvavāda* or *Yadṛcchāvāda* is upheld by the Cārvāka system this view is very old and is found mentioned in the Upaniṣads. It is also found in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* that *svabhāva* or nature is the cause of the world. *Svabhāvavāda* is also discussed in the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, where it is said that the phenomenon of the world is produced spontaneously from the inherent nature of things. It is said there that the heat of fire, coolness of water, refreshing coolness of wind etc. are all come into existence because of their own nature.<sup>1</sup> There is no creator of these phenomena. Cārvāka states that some entities are eternal, some are non-eternal and some are mixed (*vicitra*). These particularities of the entities depend upon their natures inherent in them. Gautama also refers to the Cārvāka view of causality when he discusses about the causality of Īśvara. He refers to the objectors, i.e., the Cārvākas who argue that thorns are by nature sharp, hills beautiful and stones smooth. There is none who has created them as such. It is their nature only. Similarly this world is not produced by any God or some divine entity; they come into existence by nature. Aśvaghōṣa states about the *Svabhāvavāda* in his *Buddhacarita*. He discusses that good and bad things are originated according to their own nature. Life and death of human beings are also the same. The *Svabhāvavādins* describe that the thorn is sharp, different birds and animals are different in colour, form, behavior etc. because of their nature. Explaining the view of the *Svabhāvavādins* Guṇaratna says that these philosophers maintain that all things of this world are produced by nature. It is the nature of earth that from it pot is produced. Similarly cloth is produced from threads naturally. Again it is the nature of the weaver that he makes cloth and not pot. Hence everything is produced by its own nature.

#### 2. Satkāryavāda:

*Satkāryavāda* is upheld by the Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Advaita Vedanta philosophers. According to *Satkāryavāda* the effect already exists in the cause in a potential condition. So, it is not basically new creation and different from the material cause. But effect is only an explicit manifestation of that which is contained in its material cause. For example, a pot is not different from the clay; a cloth is not different from the threads. There are two divisions of *Satkāryavāda* - *Pariṇāmavāda* and *Vivartavāda*. They are called to be *Pariṇāmavādins*, who believes that the effect is a real transformation of its cause, but who believes that the effect is unreal, they are *Vivartavādins*. Sāṃkhya-Yoga's view is known as *Prakṛti-Pariṇāmavāda*, Rāmānuja's view is known as *Brahma-Pariṇāmavāda*, Śaṅkara is *Vivartavādīn*. It is the Sāṃkhya who have actually established the theory *satkāryavāda* by different arguments. Īśvaraḥṛṣṇa has discussed the theory of *satkāryavāda* in his *Sāṃkhyakārikā*.<sup>2</sup> He gives five arguments to prove this theory. The five arguments are discussed here as follows:

- (i) If the effect does not pre-exist in its cause, it became a mere nonentity like the hare's horn or the sky-flower and can never be produce (*Asadakaraṇād*).
- (ii) The effect is only a manifestation of its material cause, because it is invariably connected with it (*Upādānagrahaṇāt*).
- (iii) Everything cannot be produced out of everything. This suggests that the effect before its manifestation is implicit in its material cause (*Sarvasambhavābhāvāt*).
- (iv) Only an efficient cause can produce that for which it is potent. This again means that the effect, before its manifestation, is potentially contained in its material cause. Production is only an actualization of the potential (*Śaktasya Śakyakaraṇāt*). Were it not so, then curd should be produced out of water, and cloth out of reeds and oil out of sandpaticles.
- (v) The effect is the essence of its material cause and as such identical with it. When the obstruction in the way of manifestation is removed the effect naturally flows out of its cause. The cause and the effect are the

1. agnirusṇo jalam śitam śitasparśastathānilaḥ kenedam citritam  
tasmāt svabhāvāt tad vyavasthitiḥ. *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, chapter 1, p. 11

2. asadakaraṇādupādānagrahaṇātsarvasambhavābhāvāt/  
śaktasya śakyakaraṇāt kāraṇabhāvāvācca satkāryam// *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, 9

implicit and the explicit stages of the same process. The cloth is contained in the threads, the oil in the oil-seeds, the curd in the milk. The effect pre-exists in its material cause (*Kāraṇabhāvāt*).

The Advaita Vedāntins are also satkāryavādins. Śaṅkara gives arguments to establish the pre-existence of effect in the cause. He says that if a thing does not exist in and in identity with something, it cannot be originated from that, as for example, oil from sand. In his view, the effect exists in the cause and is non-different from the cause production. It also may be believed that the effect must be identical with its cause after production. Again Śaṅkara argues that the effect is not revealed before it's before its production because the effect exists in an unmanifest condition in its cause. But it becomes manifest when it is produced. Śaṅkara also points out that it is seen that people takes particular cause for a particular effect. For example, people take up milk for curd as its cause. Similarly clay is taken up for making pot, gold for necklace etc. No one takes earth to make curd or milk to make a pot. This fact does not fit in with the theory of nonexistence of the effect before origination. If everything is not existed everywhere before its creation there is reason that curd is produced from milk and not from earth and pot is produced from earth not from milk. Hence, it must be admitted that the effect pre-exists in the cause.

According to asatkāryavādins cause has some special power for which the effect is produced from that cause. The meaning of this is that milk alone has some special capacity for curds and not for pot. The clay alone has some special potency for pot and not for curd. Against this argument of the asatkāryavādins, Śaṅkara points out that if this capacity of the cause remains before the origination of the effect, the *asatkāryavāda* becomes meaningless and the theory of *satkāryavāda* becomes confirmed. Śaṅkara again points out that the potency is assumed in the cause which determines the effect cannot influence the effect being different from it or being non-existent. If there is difference between potentiality and both cause and effect or if the potentiality is non-existent, it cannot produce the effect because its features of being different and non-existent are equally present in relation to other things. So, cause must have the potentiality as its essence and the effect is the essence of the potency. "Cause and effect are not two different things which can be seen independent of each other like horse and cow. The difference between the effect before manifestation and after is a relative one. The cause and the effect represent two phases of one thing and are really of one nature." Again Śaṅkara points out that the son of a barren woman is impossible, it can never be born. If it becomes possible is then only the effect which is non-existent before its production can be produced. As a matter of fact, the son of a barren woman and the non-existence of an effect both are equally non-existent. The effect which is non-existent cannot be produced even by the activity of the causal agents just like the barren women's son cannot be brought about by any operation of cause. The asatkāryavādins say that the activity of the causal agent will become useless if he tries to bring into existence what already exists. Therefore, to make the activity of the causal agent purposefull, it must be accepted that the effect does not remain before its production. Refusing this point Śaṅkara argues that this is not acceptable as the activity of the causal agent becomes meaningful by transforming the cause into the shape of the effect. He says that the effect is non-different from the cause and anything, not existent already in cause cannot be produced. A thing does not become different just because of the appearance of some peculiarity. Thus, things like milk etc. are themselves called products when they exist in the form of curd etc. Although Śaṅkarācārya has established *satkāryavāda* refuting the views of the asatkāryavādins, actually he is a *vivartavādin*, according to which the effect has no real existence. In his view, the effect has no existence as distinct from that of the cause. No modifications exists as apart from its cause. That is why the *Upaniṣad* says that the effect is nothing but respective names and forms; ultimately the cause is real. This is the idea of *vivartavāda*, since in *vivartavāda*, the cause does not actually change into the effect, but falsely appears to be something different. However, in empirical cases, *pariṇāmavāda* is also accepted by Śaṅkara. It is only in case of the origination of the world from Brahman, Śaṅkara accepts *vivartavāda*.

### 3. Asatkāryavāda:

#### (a) Ārambhavāda:

According to the *asatkāryavāda*, the effect is a new beginning (*arambha*), a new creation; it is different from its cause and it can never be the same with cause. The effect is not the transformation of the cause. The main point of this doctrine is that the effect is not existent in its material cause before its production. If it pre-exists, then there will be no sense in saying that the effect is produced. If the jar already exists in the clay, the cloth in the threads and curd in milk, then how it is said that the potter makes the jar from the clay, the weaver makes cloth from threads etc. Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Buddhists, Materialists and some followers of Mīmāṃsā are asatkāryavādins. The Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika theory is also known as *arambhavāda*, i.e., production is a new beginning. The asatkāryavādins have refused the *satkāryavāda*. Śrīdhara gives different arguments in his *Nyāyakaṇḍalī* to refute the view of *satkāryavāda*. At first Śrīdhara has discussed the five arguments which are given to establish, *satkāryavāda*. He states that if the effect exists in the cause before its production then why the effect is not seen in it, though all conditions are found for the perception of the effect. He explains it with the

example of cloth (i.e., the effect) and the threads (i.e., the cause). To this, the *satkāryavādin* may reply that it is not seen because of the non-manifestation of the effect. Śrīdhara here asks what the meaning of this non-manifestation is. If non-manifestation means the absence of power of producing an effect which is capable of perception, then it follows that this power of producing the effect is first non-existent in the cause and comes into existence only afterwards. This actually vindicates the theory of *asatkāryavāda*. Again if the manifestation of the causal activity is said to be unmanifested at first and becomes manifest afterwards, then also *asatkāryavāda* will hold good. For here the effect is not first perceived in its material cause and then it is perceived later. Therefore, the *asatkāryavāda* is acceptable, as this perceptible form is non-existent before the production of the effect and afterwards it comes into existence. The *satkāryavādins* point out that the cloth, i.e., the effect is not perceived in the cause, i.e., thread because there is the absence of the activity of the weaver etc. (i.e., the cause). Śrīdhara argues here that if, according to the *satkāryavādins*, the activity of the cause (*kāraṇavyāpāra*) is existent, and then the cloth also will always be perceived. If on the other hand, the causal activity is non-existent then the effect will also have no existence. The *satkāryavādins* again say that which is non-existent cannot be produced by any activity of the cause e.g. the sky flower. But according to Śrīdhara, there is difference of nature between a jar and sky-flower. The sky-flower has no existence in nature, whereas the jar has the nature of both existence and non-existence. Before their production, they are non-existent and after production, they are existent. Refuting the Sāṃkhya view that if the effect is not related to the cause, any effect would be produced from any cause, Śrīdhara says that for a particular kind of effect there is the efficiency (*śakti*) in a particular kind of cause. The restriction of a particular material cause producing a particular effect depends upon the nature of the things. The pre-existence of any effect in its cause is not required. A particular cause produces only that effect for which it has the capacity. The thing which being present, the effect is produced, and which being absent the effect is not produced is the material cause of that effect. Śrīdhara also does not accept the non-difference of the effect with the cause. He argues that our perception testifies to the difference of the cause and the effect. It is perceived that a cause and its effect are different in their nature. Otherwise it will be possible to wear threads instead of a cloth. Hence, effect does not pre-exist in the cause. Gautama maintains that an effect is non-existent before it is produced because it is witnessed to have both origination and destruction. Origination means being existence and such origination is impossible in the *satkāryavāda*. According to Vātsyāyana, if the effect is pre-existent in the cause before its production then it cannot be produced. Uddyotakara, Vācaspati Mīśra, and others also do not accept *satkāryavāda* and have given arguments to establish *asatkāryavāda*. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas directly reject the Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Vedānta view of *satkāryavāda*. According to this theory, the effect (*kārya*) is non-existent (*asat*) in the cause before its production. It is a new beginning (*ārambha*), a fresh creation. In this view, cause is different from the effect.

#### (b) *Pratītyasamutpādvāda*:

The Buddhists also do not accept the pre-existence of the effect in the cause. Hence, they are also *asatkāryavādins*. The Buddhist theory is known as *Pratītyasamutpādvāda*. The term means that the emergence of something after the presence of something else. The Buddhists hold that causation means the succession of two events, of which the former is the cause and the latter is the effect. They hold that a thing can never change into another thing, because a thing is what it is (*svalakṣaṇa*). Causation, according to them, is dependent origination. There being some event, another event is sure to follow. It is generally believed that the cause continues to exist in the effect. But the Buddhists uphold that the effect is produced only after the cause is destroyed. According to them, the sprout (i.e., the effect) arises only after the destruction of the seed (i.e., the cause). Thus, the Buddhists are also *asatkāryavādins*. The Buddhists also refute the view of the *satkāryavādins* that the cause and the effect are identical. They point out that it is meaningless to hold that the effect is identical with the cause. The Sāṃkhyas also accept the fact that there emerge some new elements or modes in the effect. Moreover, if it is accepted that the cause itself reappears in the effect, then there will be ceaseless production of the effect. Because, says the Buddhist, the presence of the cause entails the emergence of the effect. Again the Sāṃkhya maintain that the origination of the effect only means the manifestation of some modes or forms, while the essence of the cause remains the same. To this the Buddhists argue the acceptance of such a manifestation of modes also goes against the view of the Sāṃkhyas. For the modes which are manifested should be accepted as the new elements, the modes being not there in the cause. There is also differences in practical efficiency of the cause and effect in as much as that while a jar can hold water, earth cannot. Hence, there is difference between the cause and the effect. Nāgārjuna also, "Identity between the cause and the effect is utterly untenable, since if it were so, there would be no difference between the doer and the thing done. Now, the Naiyāyikas are *asatkāryavādins*, the Buddhists are also the same. They also look upon the effect as completely different from the cause and as a new creation, just like the Naiyāyikas. But there is a difference between the views of the Naiyāyikas and the Buddhists. K.P. Sinha rightly observes, "The Naiyāyikas regards the effect as produced from the cause and as related to it through the relation of *samavāya* or inherence. This means that, though different, the cause exists inseparably along with the effect. The Buddhists on the other hand, do not say that the effect is

produced from the cause; nor do they regard the effect as related to the cause. In their view, the cause is completely destroyed before the production of the effect and, hence, does not exist long with the latter.”

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