

Chapter - II

THE CONCEPT OF TARKA IN OLDER NYĀYA :

In this chapter, we shall deal with the different opinions regarding '*Tarka*' as proposed and suggested by various thinkers belonging to old Nyāya-system.

Tarka is accepted one among the sixteen categories adopted in *Nyāya*.

The definition of *Tarka* given by Goutama is as follows : " *Tarka* or *Reductio-ad-absurdum* is a form of deliberation (*Ūha*) which is applied for the purpose of determining the specific nature of 'an object whose real nature is yet be known' by pointing out some real grounds in favour of it."¹

The principal objective of *Tarka* is to reveal the right knowledge of an object. It is important to note that *Tarka* can be applied neither for the revelation of an object which is purely unknown nor for the revelation of an object which purely known. It can be applied for the revelation of an object which is partially known and partially unknown.

As to an object not known properly an enquiry may be seen in an individual. Afterwards the individual concerned in some cases becomes confused by seeing the existence of two contrary characteristic features in the enquired object. As long as confusion persists, one cannot know the enquired object. So ultimately he removes his doubt by way of ascertaining one of the characteristic

features of the same object on the strength of some proofs found in favour of this alternative. In other words, the particular individual has got some proofs in favour of particular alternative, which automatically eliminates the other one.²

Let us try to understand the method following the line of Vātsyāyana, with the help of an example. Let us suppose an individual has got desire to know the real nature of the self or knower who knows all the knowables. Afterwards, he may have doubt in the form 'whether it possesses the properties of something which is produced or those of something which is not produced. How to eliminate one of the two alternatives ? In order to show the method , Vātsyāyana opines that the individual proceeds to eliminate one alternative by applying some arguments of the following type. He thinks that, if the knower or self possesses the properties of something not produced, which is otherwise called eternal, it can enjoy the result of *karma* performed in the previous birth . In *Nyāya* philosophy it is believed that among suffering, birth, inclination, evil and false knowledge each of the succeeding one causes the preceding one which is the state of liberation. On account of this an individual will have both transmigratory as well as liberated states.³ If the knower, on the other hand , is taken as possessing the properties of the produced, he will not have these. For, the knower after being produced becomes associated with body, sense organ, happiness, miseries etc. On account of which he does not have any scope for enjoying the result of *karma* done by him as he is non-eternal in nature. For the knower does not exist before his coming into being.

The knower who does not exist before or who is absolutely destroyed at the time of the destruction of his body is not capable of enjoying his result of *karma*. As the knower is non-eternal, like other non-eternal objects he has no existence before his coming into being and then he is completely destroyed at the destruction of his body. If this be the case, the relation of a knower with more than one body and the absolute cessation of body, i.e. absolute cessation of birth would be impossible. Leading to the impossibility of liberated and transmigratory states.

But liberation, according to Nyāya, is a fact, so, the second alternative, i.e. self as possessing the produced properties cannot be taken as granted because of the absence of proper ground mentioned above. This type of argumentation or this method of elimination is called *Tarka*.⁴

But it is important to note that the method of *Tarka* as described by Vātsyāyana is a promoter to the ascertainment of right knowledge, but not the instrument of the right knowledge itself. *Tarka* cannot be taken as the instrument of the right knowledge itself, because, by pointing out some grounds, it asserts one of the alternatives, but it does not point out this alternative definitely as having such and such characteristics. In other words, *Tarka* does not definitely assert a particular alternative, in the form, 'This object is of such nature'. So, the main characteristic features of the object are not deliberated through this method.⁵

Vācaspati Miśra and Uddyotkara think that *Tarka* or reasoning does the act of elimination. Sometimes we see two competing alternatives to be present in one and the same enquired object at the same time. Unless and until one of the alternatives is eliminated the actual nature of the enquired object cannot be revealed to us and thereby remains unknown. *Tarka* is a process which helps us in eliminating one of the competing alternatives on the very superior logical strength of one of them. Reasoning thus indicates that one of the alternatives is logically impossible and by the method of elimination it is found that the remaining alternative is the possible truth.

And *Tarka* is a promoter to the instrument of right knowledge, because, it, after pointing out some grounds in favour of the ascertainment of the right knowledge of an object, i.e. correct alternative, becomes auxiliary to the *pramānas*. As *pramāṇa* is associated with *Tarka*, the power of it would be enhanced and this enhanced power becomes helpful for the revelation of the right knowledge (*tattva*).⁶

Here '*tattva*' means 'thatness' i.e. to know an object as it is. In other words, the positivity of the positive and the negativity of the negative entity may be described as '*tattva*' i.e. the absolute sameness or non-contrary.⁷ This ideal nature of an entity is revealed through *pramāṇa* associated with *Tarka*, the promoter.

Vācaspati Misra agrees with Vātsyāyana in respect of the status of *Tarka*. Both of them are of the opinion that *Tarka* is an

auxiliary factor to the independent instrument of knowledge like, perception, inference, etc.

Vācaspati considers that the true contribution of *Tarka* lies in the aspect of elimination . It is thus the *reductio-ad-absurdum* of the two contrary competing possibilities. Reasoning enables us to conclude in some steps.. In the first step it enables us to think that both these alternatives cannot belong to one and the same thing at the same time. In the second one it enables us to reject one of the alternatives which is shown to be logically impossible by putting forward considerations against it. And ultimately the remaining alternative which is the real nature of the object in question is revealed to us. So Vācaspati maintains that *Tarka* serves to demonstrate the absurdity of the truth-claim of the false competitors and this demonstration of absurdity subserves the purpose of the instrument of knowledge. He uses to think that when an individual begins to enquire the nature of anything, sometimes he falls in doubt due to the presense of two conflicting possibilities. At this stage *Tarka* spreads its hand to help him to know the truth by removing the doubt.

So far as the foregoing discussion is concerned it is obvious that the services and functions performed by *Tarka* are of indirect and negative character. *Tarka* helps us to know any object not directly by pointing out the real nature of it but indirectly by rejecting the false nature of it.

And Udayana like Vātsyāyana and Vācaspati also is of the opinion that reasoning or *Tarka* is not regarded as an independent instrument of valid knowledge because it has no direct bearing upon the determination of positive truth. It only helps us to reject a false conclusion by showing its absurdity and thereby paves the way of other independent instrument of knowledge e.g. inference.

On the basis of the discussion so far we may think that Udayana completely agrees with Vacaspati about the nature of service performed by *Tarka*. But actually this is not the case. Vācaspati holds that *Tarka* serves to remove the doubt which comes into being due to the imposition of two conflicting alternatives in one and the same enquired object at the same time. But Udayana here differs from Vācaspati though he is a commentator of him (Vācaspati).

Udayana says that, in fact, doubt is due to the incapacity to find out conclusive reasons in favour of one of the conflicting alternatives and these reasons are nothing but the characteristics which belong to one and one only of the alternatives. By citing an example we may clear this idea. Let us suppose, I perceive an entity standing in front of me in a dim light and become perplexed whether it is a man or a tree. Unless and until the doubt is removed, knowledge cannot be taken place. Let us suppose, after a while I recognise the hands and feet and then come to know that the entity is nothing but a man. So, here the doubt is rulled out through the knowledge of such

Udayana also agrees with Vācaspati Miśra and endorses his (Vācaspati's) position by saying that *Tarka* serves to eliminate the opposite issue by showing the absurd consequences, in the opponent's position as a matter of logical necessity. Let us make this idea clear by citing an instance. Let us suppose the sceptic questions as to the causal efficiency of water in quenching thirst. But how the sceptic's position can be shown to be wrong?

Udayana proves their position to be wrong by resorting to *Tarka* in the following way, "If water did not allay thirst, nobody would drink water when thirsty." As a matter of fact, people drink water to allay thirst and nobody has been disappointed in his expectation. The form and the function of *Tarka* resembles the form and the function of *reductio-ad-absurdum*. In the instance just cited *Tarka* like the *reductio-ad-absurdum* serves to demonstrate that the doubt or denial would entail rejection of an admitted truth. Here in this *Tarka* the established fact is rejected and thereby the absurdity of the rejection of this established fact is demonstrated subsequently.⁸

But, Udayana says, that another type of *Tarka* is there in which we accept an unestablished fact to be true for the time being and subsequently the absurdity of the acceptance of this nonestablished fact is demonstrated. For, example, let us suppose one says that drinking of water causes burning. Here water's burning is a nonestablished fact. Here his position can be shown to be absurd by applying *Tarka* in the following way. "If water causes burning then drinking of water gives rise to the burning sensation which becomes clearly invalidated and false by our day to day practical experience."

characteristics, as hands and feet which can belong to a human being and a human being only, not to a tree. But can we say that this knowledge of this crucial evidence i.e. the knowledge of hands and feet in terms of which the doubt is removed is derived through *Tarka*? Certainly not. This knowledge is derived through perception. So it is clear that *Tarka*

does not directly help us in removing doubt which is thought to be the case by Mishra.⁹

Here sharing this view of Mishra on this point I want to negate Udayana's view. No doubt, in the instance cited the knowledge of hands and feet is derived through perception, not through *Tarka*, as Udayana maintained. But the mere knowledge of hands and feet alone cannot be the cause of removing doubt. The knowledge in terms of which the doubt under consideration is removed is the knowledge of hands and feet as the specific characteristics of man and not of others. This knowledge cannot be derived through perception.

This idea may be made more clear by citing an instance. Let us suppose one perceives smoke in a hill and comes to the conclusion that there is fire in it. Here undoubtedly, the knowledge of smoke is derived through perception. But this knowledge alone cannot be the ground of the knowledge of fire in the hill. The knowledge which is the ground of the knowledge in question is the knowledge of smoke as a necessary con-comitant of fire which cannot be derived through perception. In the above example the knowledge that the object

concerned is a man is not perceptual one as the knower does not perceive the man directly. It is an inferential knowledge as it is based upon the knowledge of hands and feet as the specific characteristics of man. And though the knowledge of hands and feet is derived through perception, the knowledge of hands and feet as the specific characteristics of man can never be ascertained in terms of perception. So, the view of Udayana cannot justifiably be accepted.

The knowledge of necessary concomitance between smoke and fire is established through *Tarka* along with some other means, likewise the knowledge of hands and feet as the specific characteristics of man is ascertained through *Tarka* accompanied by some other means.

Udayana's position can be understood more clearly if we go through the elucidation given by Bhatta Vadindra. He says that two types of characteristics are found to belong to an object. One of them is the common and the other is special. An entity shares the first one in common with some other entities, say for example, in the instance already cited man shares the features as straightness, height etc. with trees, whereas, it also possesses some characteristics without sharing with others, man for example possesses hands and feet without sharing with trees.

Vadindra argues that the knowledge of the common characteristics accompanied by the lack of the knowledge of the specific ones of the enquired object gives rise to doubt. This doubt can be removed only through the knowledge of the specific features.

In the example given doubt is ruled out due to the knowledge of hands and feet which are the specific characteristics of a human being. But it is *Tarka* not perception which yields this specific knowledge. So, perception nothing to do with removing doubt. That is why; Udayana's position cannot be maintained in respect of the status of the service of *Tarka*.¹⁰

Another sound argument has been advanced by Udayana to stand his own position by rejecting the position of Vācaspati Mishra in this regard. He holds that *Tarka* would have been competent to remove doubt if it were opposed to doubt in contents. But the fact is otherwise. With a view to making this idea clear an instance may be cited. Let us suppose a man is in doubt of the existence of fire in a hill where he sees smoke. The doubt is of the form. "Is the hill possessed of fire or not?" To be free from this doubt the man in question resorts to *Tarka*. And the form of a *Tarka* is hypothetical one, namely, "If the hill did not possess fire, it would be "devoid of smoke." Here it is obvious that doubt and reasoning under consideration are not opposed in contents. The existence or non-existence of fire in a place where the smoke exist is the content of doubt. And the absence of smoke is the content of *Tarka* for it asserts that the absence of fire would entail a necessary consequence, the absence of smoke, which certainly is not opposed to the presence of fire. The absence of fire is opposed to the presence of fire, similarly, the absence of smoke is opposed to the presence of smoke. So the consequence, namely, the alleged absence of smoke being not antagonistic to the presence of fire, the reasoning in question cannot logically remove the doubt of

the presence or absence of fire which made the appeal to reasoning necessary.¹¹

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, it is clear to us that *Tarka* does not directly help us in removing doubt. So, here naturally the following question arises. What is the instrument through which doubt under consideration can be removed? In reply, it is said that the instrument is the knowledge of the specific characteristics of one alternative. In the instance cited smoke is a specific characteristic of fire and thereby smoke is the necessary concomitant of it (fire). So here the perception of smoke as the necessary concomitant of fire is the instrument of the removal of doubt of the presence of fire. Doubt comes into being due to the absence of knowledge of its specific characteristics, smoke as the necessary concomitant of fire. So as soon as the knowledge of this specific characteristics of fire is attained, the doubt of the presence of fire is ruled out. Thus doubt is removed not by the knowledge of absence of smoke entailed as consequence by reasoning (*Tarka*) but by the recognition of smoke as the concomitant of fire, which is completely different from what is entailed by *Tarka* (reasoning).

In replying to the argument advanced by Udayana we can maintain that one doubts the existence of fire in a hill in spite of seeing the smoke in it, because he doubts the necessity of the relation between smoke and fire. But when Udayana observes that the perception of smoke as the necessary concomitant of fire is the instrument of removal of doubt of the presence of fire, he grants the said relation to be necessary. The necessity of this relation itself

demands to be free from doubt. So, Udayana has no right to take this relation as granted and therefore his account of removing doubt cannot be accepted.

Perception can afford us only the knowledge of smoke. But this knowledge cannot eliminate the doubt in question. The knowledge through which this doubt is removed is the knowledge of smoke as the necessary concomitant of fire which is established in terms of *Tarka* along with some other means.

We may raise a question : – If *Tarka* has no bearing upon removing the doubt, why do we resort to it ? What is the nature of its service then ? In reply, Udayana says that *Tarka* serves to remove the desire for knowledge of opposing alternative and not doubt. It is important to note that Udayana maintains that, no doubt, doubt is a necessary condition of the application of *Tarka* but it is not a universal condition. That doubt is not a universal condition of *Tarka* can be understood clearly with the help of an example where *Tarka* is requisitioned though there is no doubt at all. Let us suppose a hungry man sits to eat a plate of food and a friend warns him that the food is poisoned and will prove fatal if consumed. Now this warning, if logically stated, should be expressed as follows. "If you take food in question, you will die", which is the form of statement in which the reasoning is necessarily expressed. The warning here is a *reductio-ad-absurdum* which is the usual form of reasoning. So, this is the case where *Tarka* is present but doubt is absent.

What is the result suggested by Udayana through the application of *Tarka*? We have already seen that *Tarka* is called for when we are in confusion due to the imposition of two contrary alternatives on one and the same thing at the same time. One of the alternatives is undesirable. And this one alternative is undesirable again because its consequence is undesirable. *Tarka* serves its function i.e. it removes the desire for knowledge of the opposing alternative by demonstrating an undesirable consequence of the acceptance of that alternative. In the example cited above *Tarka* removes the desire of the hungryman for the consumption of the food under consideration by showing the undesirable consequences that would necessarily follow.¹²

Udayana is of the opinion that even in the cases where doubt furnishes the occasion for resorting to reasoning, the service of it consists in the removal of desire for the opposite alternative, though the removal of doubt comes as a remote consequence. In the case of doubt about the existence or non-existence of fire, reasoning serves to remove the knowledge of the non-existence of fire by demonstration of the undesirable consequence, namely, the absence of smoke. The doubt of the possibility of the non-existence of fire is ruled out by the knowledge of fire which is attained indirectly through the knowledge of the presence of smoke-as-concomitant of fire.¹³

But even if what has been said by Udayana is taken to be true, a strong objection may be raised against him. He holds that opposition of contents is the determinant of logical opposition between two propositions. But if this is the case then obviously the

opposition of *Tarka* to the desire for knowledge cannot be considered as the logical opposition since they are not opposed one from another in their contents. Udayana argues that *Tarka* has nothing to do with removing doubt because *Tarka* and doubt are not logically opposed and again they are not logically opposed for they are not opposed in their contents. In the same way we can argue that *Tarka* fails to rule out the desire for knowledge of opposing alternative as *Tarka* and the desire concerned are not logically opposed and again they are not logically opposed since they are not opposed in their contents. So, Udayana's view is not better than that of Vācaspati Miśra in anyway.¹⁴

Besides, 'desire' is something without having any logical value which plays a vital role in the explanation of Udayana.

But inspite of these limitations, Udayana's view can be shown to be superior to that of Vacaspati Mishra to some extent by representing the superiority of the opposition of *Tarka* with desire for the knowledge of the opposing alternative as maintained by Udayana to the opposition of *Tarka* with doubt as Vācaspati holds. The opposition of reasoning with doubt as Vācaspati maintains would be a case of specific causality which was not deduced from a general proposition, whereas, the opposition of the untoward consequence, shown by reasoning with desire for the belief or the action proceeding from such a belief, is one which is deducible from the general proposition. This can be understood through the explanation given below :

We desire so many things in our day to day life. But all of them are not similar in their nature . Some of the things are desired by us on their own accounts e.g. pleasure, happiness etc. and some of them are desired on account of their consequences which are desirable but not for their own sake e.g. wealth. We desire wealth because it is a means of securing happiness. Likewise aversion or cessation of desire has reference to thing, which is either undesirable on its own account or which is an instrument of an undesirable consequence.

The relation between cessation of desire and knowledge of an undesirable consequence is thus necessary and universal. When reasoning demonstrates an undesirable consequence to follow from a belief or a course of action based upon such belief the opposition of the later to desire for entertaining such a belief or consequential action is only, an instance of this universal truth. So the opposition is not at par with the opposition between a frustrating agent and an expected happening. Thus Udayana's contention seems to be more agent than that of Vācaspati Miśra.

Here a question arises - What is then the cause of the removal of doubt according to Udayana ? In reply to this question, Udayana says that it is inference through which doubt is removed. We can clear this idea by citing an example. An individual sees smoke coming from a hill and goes to infer the existences of fire in it. But meanwhile a doubt about the necessary relation between smoke and

fire crops up and prevents an individual from drawing an inference. The doubt is of the form that smoke in question may be possible in the absence of fire. Here *Tarka* can be applied by him. The individual argues that if smoke be not the effect of fire as it is not known to be the effect of anything else the smoke would be an uncaused effect which is an absurdity. This realisation of this absurdity removes the desire for belief in a fireless smoke. And now inference of the existence of fire is taken place through which doubt concerned is ruled out. So, doubt, Udayana thinks, is always eliminated by inference.¹⁵ This view of Udayana can be criticised first by showing the fallacy of circularity as inference is possible due to *vyāpti* and vice versa.

Udayana observes that one's inference about the existence of fire in the hill from the perception of smoke in it is not taken place due to the doubt about the necessary relation between smoke and fire. So, inference in question cannot be taken place unless and until the said doubt is eliminated. But he maintains that afterwards through the imposition of *Tarka* the inference in question is taken place and the doubt concerned is removed by that inference subsequently. That means, according to him, inference is taken place before the removal of doubt. But actually, this cannot be the case. As if here he puts the cart before the horse. Here, the possibility of inference presupposes the absence of doubt, for as long as doubt persists the very question of the possibility of inference does not arise at all. So, it is absurd to maintain that it is inference through which doubt under consideration is ruled out.

However, so far as our discussion is concerned it is clear that Vātsyāyana, Vācaspati Miśra, Udayana, all of them agree on the point that *Tarka* is resorted to when object is in confusion due to having the existence of the two contrary characteristic features. And ultimately this doubt is removed through *Tarka* directly or indirectly with the elimination of the other possibilities.

But if we ponder over the problem, we can see that the above view cannot be accepted to be true due to a problem. So long as the elimination through *Tarka* is concerned, we are adopting *Tarka* in each and every case of knowledge. We are going on eliminating one object from another following this process of elimination. Say for example, when the knowledge of a cow is attained, the cow is eliminated, though unconsciously, from the 'non-cow'. We are unconsciously following the methodology of *Tarka* in the form: "If this cow were horse etc., it would not have possessed the characteristics existing in a cow." From this we draw our conclusion in the form – "As this cow does not possess the characteristic features of a horse etc. this animal is cow." In this way each and every piece of knowledge is the outcome of *Tarka* though we are not always aware about the technicalities of the method. That is why, the Buddhists have given much emphasis on the concept of *Apoha*. In fact, Ramanuja has explained the term '*Apohana*' found in the *śloka* of the *Bhāgavadgītā* I, as *Ūha* or *Tarka*. Venkatanatha in his *Nyāyapariśuddhi* has admitted the above mentioned meaning of the term '*Tarka*' and has mentioned Ramanuja's view. From this it

follows that *Tarka* has wider perspective. It is used in each and every case of knowledge, not to speak of the object which is in confusion.

From the foregoing analysis it is found that we are going on applying *Tarka* even when the object is known. In other words, it automatically comes to our mind that the known object i.e. 'jar' is different from 'non-jar' is known on the strength of the knowledge of the characteristic features of a jar as well as 'non-jar'. So, the concept of *Tarka* of the above mentioned thinkers should have been much more wider.

In response to the above mentioned problem, one solution may be offered to substantiate their position. It is true that we are going on eliminating when we attain the knowledge of an object. Though it is done automatically, it would be improper for us to give justification of the knowledge of an object which is not at all in confusion. If it were not in confusion what is the use of providing *Tarka* (in a demonstrative way) for the justification of its knowledge? To provide justification or proof for the object which is already established gives rise to a logical defect called *Siddhasādhana*. Though this method of elimination is adopted unconsciously, the intellectual demonstration of the method gives rise to the defect mentioned above; as this attitude is nothing but an effort to prove the object already established. Keeping this in view the ancient Nyāya thinkers mentioned have emphasised that *Tarka* is to be applied in an object which is not specifically known. This view of them is strengthened when Vātsyāyana opened that argument is to be provided in the case when the object is neither

ascertained nor unknown (completely) but in confusion . This theory is applicable in any type of argumentation, not to speak of *Tarka*.

Moreover, this method or *Tarka* is highly essential in the *Vāda* category of debate. It is mentioned in the *Sūtra* and *Bhāṣya* that one should establish one's position and refute other's with the help of *pramāna* and *Tarka* in the *Vāda*. If the object were completely known, there would have no provision for *Vāda* and hence no question of applying *Tarka* there.