CHAPTER 7

POSTULATION (अर्थपति)

The etymological meaning of the word ‘अर्थपति’ is the assumption, supposition or postulation of a fact (अर्थ - fact), आपति (supposition). Only the Mīmāṃsakas and Vedicōnts accept this pramāṇa. They claimed that, this process, though which are obtain the knowledge of a fact that explains what is otherwise inexplicable, is a peculiar method of knowledge which cannot be included within any of the other five pramanas. In which knowledge of the fact to be explained leads to the knowledge of the fact that explains it, is called arthāpatti.

In other words Arthāpatti or postulation is the necessary supposition of an unperceived fact, to explain some conflicting phenomena. When a given phenomenon is such that we cannot understand it in any way without supposing some fact, we have to postulate some other fact by way of explaining one phenomenon. This process of explaining an otherwise inexplicable phenomenon by the affirmation of explaining the fact is called Arthāpatti. For eg. A person who is known to fast by day is still quite stout. This stoutness cannot be accounted for unless we suppose that he eats at night. We find here that the knowledge of the fact to be accounted for (उपपाय-ज्ञान) is instrumental (करण) to the knowledge of the explaining fact (उपपादक-ज्ञानम) which we obtain. The instances of arthāpatti have been
divided into two classes – अनुमान्यति और श्रुतार्थपति. The first literally means supposition of a fact in order to explain perceived facts. It is illustrated when, for instance, on the negation of the perceptual judgement ‘this is silver’ by a subsequent perceptual judgement ‘this is not silver but a shell’, we assume the falsity of the silver that previously appeared to sight.

The second is श्रुतार्थपति, literally means the assumption of a fact in order to explain a fact known through testimony. It is of two forms, according as it concerns the supposition of a verbal expression (अभिधानम्) or of a thing meant (अभिलक्षम्). The first is illustrated when, for instance, on being asked ‘to close’ we supply the word ‘door’ in order to explain the sense with reference to that context, finding it otherwise inexplicable. The second is illustrated when on being told by the scriptures that by performing the ज्याौतिस्तोम sacrifice. One can go to heaven; we assume that the sacrifice must generate some lasting unperceived merit (अपूर्व) without which a sacrifice, which has ceased to be, cannot be the cause of a life in heaven.

There a question can naturally be asked; cannot all these instances of arthāpatti be taken as cases of anumāna? The author of वेदांत Paribhāṣa replies that if we try to reduce any of these to the form of an inference, we shall have for its major premise not a proposition expressing a direct relation of universal concomitance between the middle and the major term (अन्य-व्याप्ति) but a proposition expressing a universal relation between the absence
of the major term and the absence of the middle term (વ्यातिरेकयाप्त). It has been already shown that vyatirēkavyāpti cannot directly lead to an inference. Hence a case of arthāpatti cannot be treated as an anumāna. In support of this suggestion Vēdānta Paribhāṣa insists that in none of these cases do we say ‘I infer’ (अनुमितनविषमि) but on the contrary we say ‘I suppose’ or ‘I assume (कल्पययमि अध्वा अर्थययमि). On these two grounds the Vēdāntaparibhāṣa concludes that arthāpatti is not a case of anumāna. It asserts on the contrary that all cases of vyatirēki anumāna can be and should be considered as cases of arthāpatti. That is in the case of inference we feel that ‘I infer this from that’ but in the case of arthāpatti. We always feel that “I assume that fact on account of this fact”.

The Advaitins in their criticism assume that arthāpati, it is an anumāna at all, must be of the vyatirēki type and argue that as the vyatirēki is not anumāna, arthāpatti cannot be one. It is true that the instances of arthāpatti can be rendered in the vyatirēki form. To illustrate the argument that the man who fasts by day and yet remains stout must eat at night, may be put in to the form ‘No case of absence of eating at night while fasting by day: ie this is a case of night eating. Vācaspatimisra put more conveniently in the form of a disjunctive categorical syllogism. Thus this may argue,

1) A man, who is stout, eats either by day or by night.
2) Dēvadatta does not eat by day.
3) Therefore he eats at night.
Again the argument of the Mimāmsakas regarding,

1) Dēvadatta who is alive is either at home or out.
2) Dēvadatta is not at home.
3) Therefore he is out.

Here the Vēdanta Paribhāṣa declares that, the major premise of such an inference will express only the universal relation between the absence of the major term and the absence of the middle term. The relation will be vyatirekavyāpti, and not anvayavyāpti. The Advaitis do not accept vyatirēki or merely negative inference. For example, in the syllogism ‘Earth is different from the other elements, because it possesses odour’, the vyāpti or pervasion is negative in the form of ‘what ever is not different from the other elements has no odour’. But it cannot be said positively that ‘whatever has odour is different from other elements’. Since, odour exists only in earth’. And with regard to that earth, since it is the subject or minor terms, there is doubt or uncertainty whether the major term, ie difference from the other elements, exists in it or not. So the Advaitins does not accept the inferential character of Kevalavyatirekī. Here in the case mentioned, the major premise will be “the absence of eating at night while fasting by day is a case of the absence of stoutness”. For reasons stated above, the vyatirēki type of inference is not
admissible to the Advaitin. According to him, vyātiṁēki type of inference can only indicate an unintelligibility thus calling for a postulation. In the example of the earth, it is thus; earth could no intelligibly posses a quality not present in other elements, without being different from those elements. In the case of Īdevadatta, Īdevadatta cannot intelligibly be stout while eating at daytime without eating at night.

Regarding to the above syllogisms, the objection against a vyātiṁēki inference does not at all apply against arthāpatti when put in the form of a disjunctive inference. Consequently there is no difficulty, at least on that score, in regarding arthāpatti as a case of inference. The Advaitin has nothing left to him, therefore, to stop the mouth of his opponents except the ineffectual appeal to the testimony of self-reflection.

To avert this obvious defeat the Advaitin has to seek the help of his allies the Mīmāṁsakas, especially the Bhāṭṭas whom he follows in this as in many other respects. The Bhāṭṭas have devised many powerful arguments in defense of arthāpatti, and the Advaitin may very well use them for his own safety.

The first thing that the Bhāṭṭas point out is that arthāpatti arises when there is doubt or contradiction in the mind, and we try to free the mind from it by discovering an assumption which dissolves the conflict. Regarding the argument, a man fasts by day and that he is stout, till the idea strikes us that
he may be eating at night. Here we can understand that the easy method of
knowing arthāpatti is through which we do not consider it as a case of
anumāna. It will be admitted by all that in anumāna we know the middle
term first and ascertain the major term, through that afterwards. To go back
to the instance given above, we cannot say that mere fasts by day can serve
as the middle term for inferring that the man may be eating at night since he
is stout and altogether fasts by day, neither can we say that the mere fact of
his stoutness is a mark of his food. Since he may not be stout, we must say,
therefore, that the fact of his stoutness is related with that of his food, is the
mark from which we can infer the fact of his night food. But we find that the
relation of these two facts constituting the middle term is not possible
without the assumption that he eats at night, for until that alternative come to
the mind stoutness, and fasts by day appear in incompatible. That is to say
the knowledge of the middle term presupposes already the knowledge of the
fact to be proved, and nothing remains to be proved by the inference. And
this two data ‘the stout Dēvadatta’ and ‘fasts by day cannot by themselves’
constitute an inference; for that we require also some major premise which
would some how contain the information, atleast in a hypothetical way, that
if a man is stout and yet fasts by day, he must eating at night or that if a man
is neither eats at day nor eats at night he must not be stout. And when we
want to know how the major premise was acquired, we are faced with the
same original problem, how from the knowledge of a stout man and being
fasts by day we could know that he is eating at night. Hence the attempt to reduce arthāpatti to inference fails. In addition to this we are to make start we must stop somewhere, and admit that the major premise need not be known through an inference. In the case that non-inferential method through which we know, without the help of a major premise, such propositions as ‘If a man is stout and yet fasts by day, he must eating at night’ requires a name. The name arthāpatti can be given to it. This name which means, ‘postulation or assumption of a fact’ aptly describes the process which consists in assuming or finding out the only fact without which a conflict cannot be resolved.

CONCLUSION

On all grounds, therefore we have to admit that arthāpatti is a distinct method of knowledge, that it cannot be reduced to inference. Inference and postulation – anumāna and arthāpatti are two opposite and yet complementary processes. The first tries to find out what follows from given premises, where as the second tries to find out what is presupposed by the given and explains the given by showing its grounds. Advaitins find this method useful for explaining the Vēdānta texts. For example, the upaniṣads sometimes speak of the creation of the world by Brahman and out of Brahman; but sometimes they teach that there is no multiplicity, Brahman being the only reality. This conflict is removed by supposing that creation is not a real transformation (परिणामस्) of Brahman, it is only an apparent change
just like the appearance of a rope as a snake. The supposition of māya (as a power of Brahman to create an apparent world) is a kind of postulation.

The Advaitins use this method also in supposing some unperceived facts and principles for explaining experienced facts. For example they suppose the existence of an objectless blissful consciousness during dreamless sleep, in order to explain the memory we have on rising from such a sleep when we say, 'I had a comfortable sleep, I did not know any thing then' (सुखमहामर्यादा न किभिष्ठिदेविष्ण) we can again, trace this method of postulation in the supposition (made by the Advaitins for explaining the world and empirical experience) that the six things – the individual, God (ईश्वर:) pure consciousness, māya, the difference between the individual and God, and the relation between māya and pure consciousness, are all beginning less. In fact, all necessary and indispensable suppositions, such as power or potential energy in things necessary for explaining their effects, the law of karma necessary for explaining the otherwise inexplicable good and bad lucks of persons and the existence of God for explaining the distribution of fruits in accordance with an individual's actions, etc are cases of Arthāpatti. It has thus a very wide scope.
References.


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. P 158.

5. Ibid. P. 159.


7. Vēdānta Paribhāṣa P 159.

8. Sāstradīpikā P. 78.

9. Brahmaśūtram. 3.2.38.