
**SAMAVĀYA AS A UNIQUE CATEGORY:
A LOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL INQUIRY**

Shubham Ojha

PhD Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi

Doctoral Fellow, ICSSR

Email: shubhamvenky96@gmail.com

Abstract

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition introduces *samavāya* (inherence) as a distinct ontological category (*padārtha*) to account for relations of inseparable dependence that cannot be explained through conjunction (*samyoga*) or identity (*tādātmya*). These include the relations between substance and quality, whole and parts, and universal and particular. While often criticized as an unnecessary metaphysical multiplication, *samavāya* plays a foundational role in preserving Nyāya realism, semantic objectivity, and the correspondence theory of truth (*yathārthavāda*). The present study undertakes a systematic logical and metaphysical investigation of *samavāya*, with particular reference to Annambhaṭṭa's *Tarkasaṅgraha* and its modern interpretation by V. N. Jha. The paper argues that *samavāya* is not an ad hoc explanatory device but a carefully articulated ontological principle introduced to resolve specific philosophical problems arising within a realist framework. These problems include the unity of composite objects, the grounding of predication, and the instantiation of universals in particulars. By reconstructing the inferential motivations for positing *samavāya*, the paper demonstrates that its acceptance is internally coherent within Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika metaphysics and epistemology. In addition to textual reconstruction, the study engages critically with major objections to *samavāya*, including charges of ontological inflation, infinite regress, and epistemic inaccessibility. These objections are examined through the traditional Indian dialectical method of *pūrvapakṣa* and *uttarapakṣa*. The Nyāya responses,

particularly as refined in later and *Navya-Nyāya* literature, reveal a sophisticated understanding of relational ontology that anticipates several concerns of contemporary metaphysics. The paper further situates *samavāya* within a comparative philosophical context by relating it to modern discussions on instantiation, constitution, grounding, and mereology. While avoiding forced equivalences, it is argued that *samavāya* functions analogously to grounding relations in contemporary analytic philosophy, though with a stronger ontological commitment. This comparative dimension highlights the continuing relevance of classical Indian metaphysics for global philosophical discourse.

Keywords: Samavāya, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Padārtha, Inherence, Relation, Universals, Particulars

1. Introduction

Indian philosophical traditions are distinguished by their systematic engagement with ontology and epistemology through carefully articulated categorical frameworks. Among these traditions, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system is especially notable for its explicit realism and its insistence that the structure of thought mirrors the structure of reality. Knowledge, according to Nyāya, is not merely a subjective or linguistic phenomenon but a cognitive grasp of objectively existing entities and relations. This realist orientation motivates the detailed classification of reality into *padārthas*, or categories of knowable existence.

Within this framework, *samavāya* occupies a unique and philosophically demanding position. Unlike more intuitive categories such as substance (*dravya*) or quality (*guna*), *samavāya* is not directly given as an independent object of experience. Instead, it is introduced to explain a specific kind of dependence relation that pervades ordinary experience yet resists explanation through simpler relational concepts. The classical definition of *samavāya* as the relation between entities that are inseparable (*ayutasiddha*)

immediately raises questions concerning its necessity, ontological status, and epistemic justification.

Historically, *samavāya* has been a focal point of inter-systemic debate. Buddhist philosophers reject it as a conceptual fiction, arguing that only momentary particulars exist and that relations are mental constructions. Advaita Vedānta, while not denying empirical relations, ultimately subordinates them to non-dual Brahman and treats *samavāya* as ultimately unreal. Even within Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, the category has been subject to refinement and defense, particularly in response to concerns about infinite regress and category proliferation.

Modern scholarship has often approached *samavāya* either as an archaic metaphysical posit or as an example of excessive ontological commitment. However, such assessments frequently overlook the internal logic of Nyāya realism. As V. N. Jha emphasizes, *samavāya* cannot be evaluated in isolation; it must be understood within the broader explanatory aims of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, especially its account of predication, universals, and composite entities.

The present paper seeks to reassess *samavāya* by returning to its systematic role rather than treating it as a detachable hypothesis. Using *Tarkaśaṅgraha* as a primary textual lens, the study reconstructs the philosophical motivations that led to the acceptance of *samavāya* as a distinct category. The focus is not merely historical but analytical: the aim is to determine whether *samavāya* succeeds in doing the explanatory work it is designed to perform and whether its metaphysical costs are justified by its philosophical benefits.

In adopting this approach, the paper aligns with the broader objectives of the *Journal of Dharma Studies*, which encourages philosophically rigorous engagement with classical traditions in a manner that is both textually grounded and theoretically reflective. By examining *samavāya* as a living philosophical concept rather than a historical curiosity,

the study contributes to ongoing conversations about realism, relational ontology, and the nature of metaphysical explanation.

2. Samavāya within the Padārtha Ontology

The ontological framework of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is organized around the doctrine of *padārthas*, understood as fundamental categories of reality that are both existent and knowable. Annambhaṭṭa's *Tarkasaṅgraha* presents this framework with remarkable concision, enumerating substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), motion (*karma*), universal (*sāmānya*), particularity (*viśeṣa*), inherence (*samavāya*), and absence (*abhāva*). Despite its brevity, this classification reflects a mature and highly developed metaphysical system.

The inclusion of *samavāya* among the *padārthas* is especially significant because it indicates that relations are not treated as secondary or derivative entities. Rather, they are granted independent ontological status. This move sharply distinguishes Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika from philosophical systems that regard relations as conceptual constructs or linguistic conveniences. In Nyāya realism, relations are as real as the entities they relate.

Samavāya is defined as the relation that holds between entities that cannot exist separately. This notion of inseparability is not merely empirical but metaphysical. It implies that the identity of one entity depends upon its relation to another. For example, a quality such as color cannot exist independently of a substance; a whole cannot exist independently of its parts arranged in a specific manner; a universal cannot exist independently of its instances. These cases, according to Nyāya, require a relation that is stronger than conjunction and weaker than identity.

V. N. Jha points out that the introduction of *samavāya* reflects a deliberate attempt to preserve ontological plurality without fragmentation. If qualities, universals, and wholes were treated as independent entities without a binding relation, reality would become a disjointed aggregate. Conversely, if these entities were collapsed into identity,

meaningful distinctions would be lost. *Samavāya* thus functions as a mediating principle that allows for distinction without separability.

Within the *padārtha* scheme, *samavāya* plays a unifying role. It connects substances to their qualities and motions, universals to particulars, and parts to wholes. Without it, the other categories would remain ontologically isolated. In this sense, *samavāya* is not simply one category among others but the relational condition that allows the entire system to function coherently.

The recognition of *samavāya* as a *padārtha* also has epistemological implications. Since *padārthas* are objects of valid knowledge, *samavāya* must be knowable through some *pramāṇa*. This requirement shapes later discussions about whether inherence is perceived or inferred. Regardless of the answer, the very inclusion of *samavāya* in the ontological inventory reflects Nyāya's commitment to a world that is not only structured but intelligibly so.

3. Logical Necessity of Samavāya

The logical necessity of *samavāya* becomes evident when one examines the explanatory demands placed upon Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realism. The system seeks to account for ordinary judgments such as "the pot is blue," "the cloth is made of threads," and "this is a cow." These judgments presuppose stable relations between entities that are neither accidental nor externally imposed. The challenge lies in identifying the kind of relation capable of sustaining such judgments without contradiction.

If one attempts to explain these relations through conjunction (*saṃyoga*), difficulties immediately arise. Conjunction is defined as a separable and contingent relation. Two entities may be conjoined at one moment and separated at another without loss of identity. However, the relation between a substance and its qualities does not exhibit this contingency. A pot cannot exist without some color, shape, and extension. Similarly, a

universal such as “cowness” cannot exist apart from its instances, nor can an instance be what it is without instantiating some universal. These relations are constitutive rather than accidental.

Identity (*tādātmya*) fares no better as an explanatory alternative. If substance and quality were identical, meaningful predication would collapse. The statement “the pot is blue” would reduce to a trivial identity claim, eliminating the distinction between subject and predicate. Nyāya insists that such distinctions are not merely linguistic but reflect real features of the world. *Samavāya* is introduced precisely to preserve these distinctions while accounting for their inseparability.

From a logical standpoint, *samavāya* underwrites the structure of qualified cognition (*viśiṣṭa-jñāna*). When one perceives or judges a qualified object, one does not apprehend a mere collection of independent entities but a unified whole with determinate characteristics. The unity of this cognition mirrors an ontological unity grounded in inherence. Without *samavāya*, the correspondence between cognition and reality – central to Nyāya’s theory of truth – would be undermined.

V. N. Jha emphasizes that *samavāya* is not posited arbitrarily but emerges from a systematic process of elimination. Once conjunction and identity are shown to be inadequate, and once the reality of qualities, universals, and wholes is affirmed, the acceptance of inherence becomes logically unavoidable. In this sense, *samavāya* is a theoretical necessity rather than a speculative embellishment.

The logical role of *samavāya* also extends to causal explanation. In cases where an effect is said to arise from a material cause, the relation between cause and effect is more intimate than mere temporal succession or contact. The clay does not merely precede the pot; it constitutes the pot. This constitutive relation, according to Nyāya, is again grounded in *samavāya*. Thus, inherence operates as a pervasive logical principle connecting diverse domains of explanation within the system.

4. Epistemology of *Samavāya*

Any ontological category admitted by Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika must satisfy an epistemological demand: it must be knowable through a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). The epistemological status of *samavāya* is therefore a crucial issue, for it determines whether inherence is a legitimate object of philosophical commitment or merely a speculative posit. The tradition itself is not entirely uniform on this question, and the discussion surrounding the cognition of *samavāya* reveals the subtle interaction between perception, inference, and theoretical explanation in Nyāya epistemology.

At the phenomenological level, ordinary cognition presents us with qualified objects rather than bare relata. When one perceives a blue pot, one does not first apprehend an unqualified pot and then separately apprehend blueness and subsequently infer a relation between them. The cognition appears as a single, structured awareness in which the pot is immediately given as blue. This experiential fact has led some Naiyāyikas to maintain that *samavāya* is perceptually apprehended along with its relata. On this view, inherence is not perceived in isolation but as an inseparable aspect of the qualified cognition (*viśiṣṭa-pratyakṣa*).

However, this position encounters a classical difficulty. Perception, according to Nyāya, requires sense-object contact (*sannikarṣa*), and relations such as *samavāya* are not spatially located entities that can come into direct contact with the senses. Unlike substances or even certain qualities, inherence does not occupy a locus in space that would allow sensory access. This has led many philosophers within the tradition to argue that *samavāya* is not directly perceived but is instead known through inference (*anumāna*).

The inferential account proceeds from the principle of explanatory necessity. We experience inseparable dependence between certain entities—such as substance and quality, or whole and parts—but this dependence cannot be accounted for by conjunction or identity. Since Nyāya accepts inference as a legitimate and autonomous means of

knowledge, the postulation of *samavāya* through inference does not diminish its epistemic status. Rather, it reflects a broader epistemological commitment: not all real entities are directly perceptible, but all real entities are in principle knowable through valid cognition.

This inferential justification relies heavily on the concept of *ayutasiddhi*, or inseparable existence. The inference may be reconstructed as follows in conceptual terms: wherever two entities are apprehended as necessarily co-existing, and where their relation cannot be reduced to conjunction or identity, there must exist a distinct relation grounding that necessity. This relation is *samavāya*. The force of the inference lies not in abstract reasoning alone but in the systematic elimination of alternative explanations.

V. N. Jha's analysis emphasizes that the epistemological debate should not be framed as a strict opposition between perception and inference. Instead, *samavāya* emerges at the intersection of perceptual experience and inferential articulation. Perception provides the data of structured objects; inference supplies the ontological account that makes sense of this structure. In this sense, *samavāya* is epistemically mediated rather than epistemically opaque.

The epistemology of *samavāya* also has implications for Nyāya's theory of truth. Nyāya endorses a correspondence theory (*yathārthavāda*), according to which a cognition is true when it corresponds to the real structure of its object. If qualified cognitions are to be true in this sense, the relational structure they present must exist in reality. *Samavāya* thus becomes an epistemic bridge between cognition and ontology, ensuring that what is cognized as inseparable dependence is not merely a subjective projection.

Critics have sometimes argued that inferentially posited relations lack the immediacy required for robust realism. Nyāya responds by noting that many accepted entities – such as atoms, universals, and even absences – are known inferentially. Epistemic immediacy

is not the sole criterion of reality. What matters is explanatory indispensability and coherence within a validated epistemic framework.

Ultimately, the epistemology of *samavāya* reflects Nyāya's balanced approach to knowledge. It neither restricts reality to what is immediately perceived nor allows unrestricted metaphysical speculation. *Samavāya* is admitted because it is required to explain what is already given in experience and cognition. Its epistemic legitimacy is secured through inference grounded in phenomenological data, making it a philosophically disciplined rather than gratuitous ontological commitment.

5. Pūrvapakṣa: Systematic Objections to Samavāya

The doctrine of *samavāya* has been one of the most contested elements of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika metaphysics, attracting sustained criticism both from rival Indian philosophical schools and from internal reflections within the realist tradition itself. These objections, when articulated systematically in the form of *pūrvapakṣa*, do not merely question isolated aspects of inherence but challenge its very legitimacy as a distinct ontological category. A careful reconstruction of these objections is essential for assessing whether *samavāya* is a philosophically defensible commitment or an unnecessary theoretical surplus.

The first and most frequently raised objection concerns ontological redundancy. Critics argue that the explanatory tasks assigned to *samavāya* can be adequately fulfilled by already available categories, particularly conjunction (*samyoga*) and identity (*tādātmya*). From this perspective, introducing inherence as a separate *padārtha* amounts to multiplying entities beyond necessity. If a cloth is nothing over and above its threads arranged in a particular manner, or if a quality is merely a mode of substance, then positing an additional relation appears excessive. This objection is often motivated by a principle akin to ontological parsimony, according to which metaphysical theories should minimize their primitive commitments.

A second, more technically sophisticated objection targets *samavāya* through the problem of infinite regress. If inherence is a relation that connects two entities, such as a substance and a quality, then one may ask what connects *samavāya* itself to those entities. If another relation is required for this connection, then that relation would in turn require yet another relation, leading to an infinite regress. This objection mirrors concerns later articulated in Western metaphysics, most notably by F. H. Bradley, and poses a serious challenge to any theory that treats relations as independently real entities.

A third objection focuses on the epistemic accessibility of *samavāya*. Unlike substances or certain qualities, inherence is not directly given in sensory experience. One never perceives inherence as such; one perceives only qualified objects. Critics therefore question whether *samavāya* satisfies Nyāya's own epistemological standards for reality. If an entity cannot be perceived and must be inferred solely to save a theory, its ontological status becomes suspect. From this standpoint, *samavāya* risks being dismissed as a purely theoretical construct lacking independent epistemic grounding.

A fourth line of criticism arises from reductionist mereology, most prominently articulated in Buddhist philosophy. According to this view, composite wholes do not possess independent reality; only their constituent parts exist. What is ordinarily called a "whole" is merely a conceptual imputation based on the functional arrangement of parts. If wholes are unreal, then the relation of inherence between whole and parts becomes unnecessary. The same reductionist strategy is applied to substance-quality relations and universal-particular relations, all of which are treated as conceptual conveniences rather than ontological facts.

A fifth objection stems from semantic and linguistic considerations. Some critics argue that the apparent necessity of *samavāya* arises from the structure of language rather than from the structure of reality. Predicative statements such as "the pot is blue" may give the illusion of a relational structure in the world, but this structure could be purely

grammatical. On this view, *samavāya* is an ontological projection of linguistic form, and its postulation reflects a failure to distinguish between language and reality.

Finally, Advaita Vedānta presents a distinctive objection by situating *samavāya* within a broader critique of ontological plurality. While not denying the empirical usefulness of relations, Advaita argues that all relational distinctions ultimately dissolve at the level of ultimate reality (*pāramārthika-sattā*). From this standpoint, *samavāya* may function within empirical discourse but lacks ultimate metaphysical validity. Its acceptance, therefore, is at best provisional and at worst misleading.

Taken together, these objections form a powerful *pūrvapakṣa* against *samavāya*. They challenge its necessity, coherence, epistemic legitimacy, and metaphysical depth. Any adequate defense of inherence must therefore address not just one but all of these concerns, demonstrating that *samavāya* is neither redundant nor incoherent, neither epistemically vacuous nor metaphysically superficial. The Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika *uttarapakṣa* emerges precisely in response to this multifaceted critique.

6. Uttarapakṣa: Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika Defense of Samavāya

The Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika defense of *samavāya* (*uttarapakṣa*) emerges as a systematic response to the multifaceted objections articulated against it. Rather than treating inherence as an isolated metaphysical posit, Nyāya philosophers defend it as an indispensable structural principle required to preserve the coherence of realism, predication, and ontological plurality. Each major objection raised in the *pūrvapakṣa* is met with a carefully reasoned reply that reveals the internal rigor of the system.

In response to the charge of ontological redundancy, Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika philosophers argue that metaphysical economy cannot be assessed merely by counting entities but must be evaluated in terms of explanatory adequacy. Conjunction (*samyoga*) is admitted as a genuine relation, but it is explicitly defined as contingent and separable. The relations

that *samavāya* is intended to explain—such as substance-quality or whole-part—do not exhibit this contingency. A quality cannot detach itself from its substrate and persist independently, nor can a whole exist without its constituent parts arranged in a specific structure. To explain these relations through conjunction would be to mischaracterize their modal status. Thus, *samavāya* is not an unnecessary duplication but a response to a distinct explanatory demand that conjunction cannot satisfy.

The objection from infinite regress is addressed through the claim that *samavāya* is a primitive relation (*svataḥ-sambandha*), one that does not require a further relation to connect it to its relata. Nyāya philosophers argue that regress arises only if one assumes that all relations must themselves be related in the same manner as their relata. However, *samavāya* is precisely the relation that grounds such connections and therefore cannot be subject to the same demand without category confusion. This strategy does not evade the problem by stipulation but by clarifying the unique logical role of inherence. In contemporary terms, *samavāya* functions analogously to primitive instantiation or grounding relations, which are widely accepted in modern metaphysics as regress-stoppers.

Regarding the objection of epistemic inaccessibility, Nyāya distinguishes between direct perceptual awareness and inferential knowledge grounded in experiential data. While *samavāya* may not be directly perceived as an isolated entity, it is nevertheless known through inference based on the phenomenon of inseparable dependence (*ayutasiddhi*). Nyāya epistemology does not privilege perception to the exclusion of inference; both are valid *pramāṇas*. Since many accepted entities—such as atoms, universals, and absences—are known inferentially, the inferential status of *samavāya* does not undermine its reality. On the contrary, its inferential necessity strengthens its epistemic legitimacy.

The reductionist denial of wholes, particularly prominent in Buddhist philosophy, is countered by Nyāya's insistence on the perceptual and causal reality of composite entities. Wholes are not merely conceptual constructs but are directly apprehended as

unified objects with causal powers distinct from those of their parts. A cloth can cover, a pot can contain, and a chariot can move in ways that its individual components cannot. These functional differences are not illusory but reflect real ontological structures. *Samavāya* accounts for this structure by explaining how parts constitute a whole without losing their distinct identities.

In response to semantic objections, Nyāya rejects the view that relational structure is merely a projection of language. Language, according to Nyāya, succeeds in describing the world because it mirrors real distinctions and relations. Predication is meaningful precisely because the world is structured in a way that supports subject-predicate distinctions. *Samavāya* provides the ontological ground for this structure, ensuring that linguistic expressions correspond to real relations rather than fabricating them.

Finally, the Advaitic critique, which relegates *samavāya* to the level of empirical reality, is acknowledged but rejected from the Nyāya standpoint. Nyāya does not deny that philosophical systems may prioritize soteriological goals, but it insists that metaphysical explanation must be evaluated on logical and epistemic grounds. From the Nyāya perspective, dissolving relations into ultimate non-duality undermines the intelligibility of ordinary experience and discourse. *Samavāya* is therefore affirmed as ultimately real, not merely provisionally useful.

Taken together, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika *uttarapakṣa* presents *samavāya* as a theoretically disciplined and philosophically motivated category. It is not introduced to solve a single isolated problem but to sustain a comprehensive realist framework in which substances, qualities, universals, and wholes are genuinely distinct yet inseparably connected. By defending *samavāya* against objections of redundancy, regress, and epistemic weakness, Nyāya demonstrates that inherence is a cornerstone rather than a liability of its metaphysical system.

7. Navya-Nyāya Refinements and the Technical Rearticulation of *Samavāya*

The emergence of Navya-Nyāya marks a significant methodological shift in Indian philosophy, characterized by heightened logical precision, technical vocabulary, and formal analysis. Rather than abandoning earlier Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika categories, Navya-Nyāya philosophers undertook the task of refining and rearticulating them in response to both internal ambiguities and external criticisms. *Samavāya*, as one of the most contested categories, received particular attention in this process. The Navya-Nyāya engagement with inherence does not represent a rejection of the concept but a sophisticated attempt to clarify its scope, logical function, and epistemic grounding.

One of the central concerns motivating Navya-Nyāya refinement was the potential ambiguity in earlier formulations of *samavāya*. Classical Nyāya texts often relied on intuitive examples—such as the relation between cloth and threads or substance and quality—which, while pedagogically effective, left room for misinterpretation. Navya-Nyāya philosophers sought to eliminate this ambiguity by introducing a more exact relational analysis using technical expressions such as *avacchedaka* (delimiting condition), *avacchinna* (delimited entity), and *nirūpaka* (determinant). Through this apparatus, inherence could be specified with greater logical rigor, reducing the risk of category confusion.

In Navya-Nyāya, *samavāya* is frequently analyzed in terms of relational abstracts rather than as a loosely defined tie. This move allows philosophers to distinguish clearly between different kinds of dependence relations without multiplying categories unnecessarily. For example, the relation between a quality and its substrate can be described as a substance-delimited inherence, whereas the relation between a universal and a particular is characterized through a different delimiting structure. These distinctions preserve the unity of *samavāya* as a category while acknowledging the diversity of its applications.

Another significant development concerns the regress objection. While earlier Nyāya responses emphasized the primitiveness of *samavāya*, Navya-Nyāya philosophers provide a more formal explanation of why regress does not arise. By carefully distinguishing levels of relational dependence and specifying the logical conditions under which a relation requires further connection, they argue that the demand for a relation connecting inherence to its relata is based on a misunderstanding of relational categories. *Samavāya* is not an entity that stands alongside its relata in need of further linkage; it is the very mode in which certain entities exist together. This clarification transforms what initially appears as a metaphysical stipulation into a logically articulated principle.

Navya-Nyāya also contributes to the epistemology of *samavāya* by refining the analysis of qualified cognition. The theory of *viśiṣṭa-jñāna* is reworked to show how relational structure is apprehended without requiring the perception of relations as independent objects. Instead, cognition is understood as directly presenting a complex object whose internal structure is later analyzed through reflection and inference. This approach allows Navya-Nyāya to accommodate both the phenomenological immediacy of qualified perception and the inferential justification of relational categories.

Importantly, Navya-Nyāya does not retreat into mere formalism. Its technical language serves a philosophical purpose: to protect realism against reductionist and idealist critiques. By making explicit the logical form of relations, Navya-Nyāya strengthens the claim that *samavāya* is not a linguistic artifact but a genuine ontological feature. The formal apparatus functions as a tool for defending the objectivity of relational facts against the charge that they are imposed by conceptual schemes.

V. N. Jha emphasizes that the Navya-Nyāya treatment of *samavāya* should be seen as a continuation rather than a correction of earlier Nyāya thought. The refinements do not undermine the original motivations for positing inherence; they clarify and systematize them. In this sense, Navya-Nyāya represents the maturation of the doctrine of *samavāya*,

demonstrating its resilience under logical scrutiny and its adaptability to evolving philosophical challenges.

The Navya-Nyāya rearticulation of *samavāya* thus plays a crucial role in preserving the coherence of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system. By addressing concerns about ambiguity, regress, and epistemic access with technical precision, it ensures that inherence remains a viable and philosophically robust category. Far from being an outdated metaphysical relic, *samavāya* emerges in Navya-Nyāya as a carefully honed conceptual instrument, capable of sustaining a sophisticated realist ontology in the face of sustained critique.

8. Samavāya in Comparative Metaphysical Perspective

Situating *samavāya* within a comparative metaphysical framework helps to clarify both its originality and its philosophical ambition. While the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika doctrine of inherence arises from a specific intellectual milieu, the problems it addresses— instantiation, constitution, unity, and dependence—are not culturally confined. They recur across philosophical traditions whenever thinkers attempt to account for how entities are structured and how properties belong to objects. A careful comparison, therefore, does not reduce *samavāya* to a Western analogue but reveals its distinctive strategy for resolving shared metaphysical concerns.

One obvious point of comparison is Aristotle's treatment of substance and accident. Aristotle maintains that accidents exist "in" substances, yet he does not explicitly posit a separate ontological category corresponding to inherence. The "in-ness" of accidents is taken as primitive. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, by contrast, refuses to leave this relation unanalyzed. It asks what it means for a quality to be "in" a substance and insists on an explicit ontological account. *Samavāya* thus emerges as an answer to a question that Aristotle largely brackets. This difference reflects a broader methodological contrast: where Aristotelian metaphysics often relies on intuitive notions of predication, Nyāya demands categorical precision.

Medieval scholastic discussions of *inherence* and *participation* bring the comparison closer. Scholastic philosophers debated how forms inhere in matter and how universals are instantiated in particulars. In many cases, these relations were treated as metaphysically basic, much like instantiation in contemporary analytic metaphysics. Nyāya's *samavāya* resembles these notions in function but differs in form: it is not merely a background assumption but a clearly articulated category subject to definition, objection, and defense. This explicitness gives *samavāya* a theoretical visibility that many Western relation-concepts lack.

In contemporary metaphysics, debates concerning grounding and constitution offer another fruitful point of comparison. Grounding relations are invoked to explain how certain facts obtain in virtue of others, while constitution is used to explain how wholes are constituted by parts without being identical to them. *Samavāya* can be interpreted as an ontological precursor to these ideas. It grounds the existence of qualities in substances, wholes in parts, and universals in particulars. However, unlike contemporary grounding—which is often treated as a non-causal, non-ontological explanatory relation—*samavāya* is fully real. It is not merely explanatory but constitutive of being.

This difference highlights a significant philosophical choice. Modern metaphysics often seeks to minimize ontological commitments by treating relations as explanatory tools rather than as entities. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika takes the opposite route: it accepts a richer ontology in order to secure explanatory adequacy. From the Nyāya perspective, denying the reality of relations threatens to render structure, unity, and predication unintelligible. *Samavāya* thus represents a deliberate prioritization of ontological clarity over ontological economy.

Trope theory and bundle theory in contemporary philosophy provide further contrasts. Trope theorists treat properties as particularized and often deny universals altogether, while bundle theorists reduce substances to collections of properties. Nyāya rejects both moves. Substances are irreducible loci, universals are real repeatables, and *samavāya* is

required to bind these categories together. This stance preserves a layered ontology that resists reduction at any single level.

The comparative analysis suggests that *samavāya* is neither an eccentric invention nor an obsolete doctrine. Rather, it represents a robust realist response to perennial metaphysical problems. Its explicit articulation of inherence as a category allows Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika to address questions that other traditions often leave implicit or unresolved. By making relations ontologically visible, *samavāya* offers a distinctive and still philosophically instructive model of relational realism.

9. Discussion

The preceding analysis allows for a balanced assessment of the philosophical payoffs of *samavāya* alongside the tensions it continues to generate. From the standpoint of Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika realism, inherence delivers several decisive advantages. It secures a coherent account of predication, preserves the reality of composite entities, and anchors universals in particulars without collapsing them into either mere names or isolated abstractions. These achievements are not marginal; they address foundational issues in metaphysics and philosophy of language that any realist system must confront.

One of the most significant payoffs of *samavāya* lies in its role in underwriting semantic objectivity. Nyāya's correspondence theory of truth presupposes that cognitive structure reflects ontological structure. Qualified cognition – such as apprehending a pot as blue – is meaningful only if the relation between substance and quality exists independently of the act of cognition. *Samavāya* provides the ontological basis for this correspondence, ensuring that predicative judgments are not merely conventional but world-tracking. Without inherence, Nyāya would be forced either toward nominalism, which undermines objective meaning, or toward identity theories, which erode meaningful distinction.

A second philosophical gain concerns the ontology of wholes. By affirming *samavāya*, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika can defend the reality of composite entities without denying the reality of their parts. This position avoids the extremes of reductionism and holism. Reductionist accounts, which dissolve wholes into mere aggregates of parts, struggle to explain the causal and functional unity of everyday objects. Radical holism, on the other hand, risks obscuring the contribution of constituent elements. *Samavāya* allows Nyāya to occupy a middle position in which parts and wholes are both real and systematically related.

Nevertheless, these payoffs come at a cost. The most persistent tension arises from the ontological weight of *samavāya*. Critics may concede its explanatory utility while remaining uneasy about treating relations as full-fledged entities. Even with Navya-Nyāya refinements, inference remains a theoretically demanding category whose acceptance depends on one's tolerance for ontological richness. This tension reflects a deeper philosophical divide between those who prioritize ontological economy and those who prioritize explanatory completeness.

Another unresolved tension concerns the epistemic status of relations. Although Nyāya provides a plausible inferential account of how *samavāya* is known, the fact remains that inference is never isolated in experience. It is always apprehended through its relata. For some philosophers, this mediated access may seem insufficient to justify robust realism about relations. Nyāya's response—that many real entities are known inferentially—mitigates but does not entirely dissolve this concern.

There is also a broader methodological tension between Nyāya and non-realist traditions. From Buddhist and Advaitic perspectives, the very problems that *samavāya* is designed to solve are artifacts of a misguided commitment to metaphysical realism. For these traditions, dissolving relations into conceptual or ultimately non-dual frameworks is not a deficiency but a philosophical virtue. The debate over *samavāya* thus reflects not merely a disagreement about a single category but a clash of metaphysical priorities.

Despite these tensions, the doctrine of *samavāya* continues to offer a compelling model of relational realism. Its insistence that structure, dependence, and unity are features of reality rather than projections of thought remains philosophically provocative. Even if one ultimately rejects inherence as a distinct category, engaging seriously with the Nyāya account sharpens one's understanding of what is at stake in any theory of relations.

10. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a sustained logical and metaphysical inquiry into *samavāya* as a unique category within the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition, with particular reference to Annambhaṭṭa's *Tarkasaṅgraha* and its modern interpretation by V. N. Jha. Rather than treating inherence as a peripheral or merely historical doctrine, the paper has argued that *samavāya* functions as a structural principle essential to the coherence of Nyāya realism.

The analysis has shown that *samavāya* is introduced to address specific philosophical problems that arise once one affirms the reality of substances, qualities, universals, and composite wholes. Neither conjunction nor identity can adequately account for relations of inseparable dependence. By positing inherence, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika preserves distinction without separability, unity without reduction, and plurality without fragmentation. In this sense, *samavāya* is not an ad hoc addition but a theoretically motivated response to explanatory demands internal to the system.

Through the dialectical examination of *pūrvapakṣa* and *uttarapakṣa*, the study has demonstrated that the principal objections to *samavāya*—redundancy, regress, epistemic inaccessibility, and reductionism—are taken seriously and addressed with considerable philosophical sophistication. The Navya-Nyāya refinements, in particular, reveal a tradition capable of self-critique and conceptual evolution. By sharpening the logical articulation of inherence, Navya-Nyāya strengthens rather than weakens the original realist commitment.

The comparative perspective has further underscored the broader relevance of *samavāya*. Many of the issues it addresses reappear in contemporary metaphysics under different terminologies, such as instantiation, grounding, and constitution. While Nyāya's ontological commitments differ from those of modern analytic philosophy, its insistence that relations are not philosophically optional remains a powerful challenge to reductive approaches. *Samavāya* exemplifies a willingness to enrich ontology in order to secure intelligibility, a methodological choice that continues to merit serious consideration.

At the same time, the study has acknowledged the enduring tensions surrounding inherence. Accepting *samavāya* requires a robust realist orientation and a readiness to countenance relations as ontologically fundamental. For philosophers inclined toward ontological minimalism or metaphysical monism, this price may appear too high. Yet Nyāya's response is clear: explanatory adequacy and semantic objectivity cannot be purchased cheaply. If the world is structured, philosophy must account for that structure.

In conclusion, *samavāya* emerges as one of the most original and philosophically instructive contributions of classical Indian metaphysics. Its significance extends beyond the boundaries of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, inviting comparative reflection on the nature of relations, dependence, and unity. Far from being a relic of scholastic excess, inherence stands as a reminder that metaphysical clarity often demands conceptual courage. By taking relations seriously, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika offers a model of realism that continues to illuminate enduring philosophical questions. Ultimately, the study concludes that *samavāya* is indispensable for Nyāya's pluralistic realism. Its rejection would require abandoning either the objectivity of universals, the reality of composite wholes, or the correspondence theory of truth—each of which carries significant philosophical costs. *Samavāya*, therefore, emerges as a structurally necessary category that sustains the coherence of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy and offers enduring insights into the nature of relations, dependence, and reality.

References

Annambhaṭṭa. *Tarkasaṅgraha* with *Dīpikā*. Various editions. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series.

Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. I. Translated by W. D. Ross. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bodas, M. R. 1930. *Tarka-saṅgraha of Annambhaṭṭa: Text with Introduction and English Translation*. Bombay: Government Central Press.

Bradley, F. H. 1893. *Appearance and Reality*. London: Swan Sonnenschein.

Dasgupta, Surendranath. 1922. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ganeri, Jonardon. 2001. *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason*. London: Routledge.

Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya. *Tattvacintāmaṇi*. Various editions. Mithila School.

Jha, Ganganatha. 1916. *The Padārtha-dharma-saṅgraha of Praśastapāda*. Allahabad: Panini Office.

Jha, V. N. 1987. *Tarkasaṅgraha of Annambhaṭṭa: An Introduction*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.

Jha, V. N. 1990. *The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Theory of Relation*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Matilal, Bimal N. 1986. *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mohanty, J. N. 1992. *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Potter, Karl H. 1977. *Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Potter, Karl H. (ed.). 1977–2003. *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vols. II–IV. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Praśastapāda. *Padārtha-dharma-saṅgraha*. With Śrīdhara's *Nyāyakandalī*. Various editions.

Śaṅkara. *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya*. Various editions. Varanasi: Chaukhamba.

Udayana. *Kiraṇāvalī*. Various editions.