



CONCEPT OF PURUṢA (SELF) IN SĀMĀKHYA PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Sāmkhya Philosophy is the oldest and one of the most prominent orthodox schools in Indian Philosophy. The founder of this school is sage Kapila, who has written the script Sāmkhya Sutra, widely known as Sāmkhya Philosophy. This school is regarded as dualistic realism because it advocates two ultimate realities, i.e. Prakṛti (nature) and Puruṣa (self). It is due to their own necessities both Puruṣa and Prakṛti come in contact with each other and as a result the process of evolution takes place. Moreover, it maintains the plurality of selves and so is called pluralistic. In Sāmkhya Philosophy, since Prakṛti is unconscious it cannot evolve by itself. The reality of the Puruṣa (self) cannot be denied and to deny self is to refuse one's own existence. Puruṣa is inactive, pure consciousness, indifferent, solitary, passive spectator which is beyond the perceptual experience. It is beyond change and beyond mind, body, intellect and the senses. It has also neither beginning nor an end. For explaining the world adequately, we always need the self. This Puruṣa (self) and Prakṛti (non-self) are radically different from each other like subject and object. In this paper, a humble attempt is made to analyse the concept of 'self' in Sāmkhya Philosophy.

Keywords: Puruṣa, Prakṛti, Nature of Puruṣa, Plurality of Selves, Bondage and Liberation.

INTRODUCTION

Sāmkhya Philosophy is undoubtedly the oldest orthodox school of Indian Philosophy. The Sāmkhya school possesses an advantage as against other systems on account of its antiquity as its origin reaches far back into the period of oral tradition.¹ Sage Kapila is regarded as the profounder of this school.² His work was originally known as Sāmkhya Sutras containing six chapters and 526 sutras. A brilliant commentary was written on Sāmkhya system by Vijnānbhikṣu named Sāmkhyapravacanabhāṣya, further sustained and spread by Kapila's disciple Āsuri and his follower Pañcaśikha. Sāmkhyakārikā by Īśvarakṛṣṇa is the only reliable source on Sāmkhya. There are many commentaries written on it like Sāmkhyakārikābhāṣya of Gauḍapāda (A.D.700) and Sākhyaatattvakaumadi of Vācaspati (A.D.840).³ Sāmkhya philosophy combines the doctrines of Sāmkhya and Yoga. References to the Sāmkhya-Yoga doctrines are found in some of the Upanishads, e.g. in the Chhāndogya, the Prashna, the Kaṭha and particularly in the Shvestāshvatara in the Mahābhārata and in the Gita. Though nothing can be said with absolute certainty, it seems highly probable that the Sāmkhya in the beginning was based on the Upanishads and had accepted the theistic Absolute, but later on, under the influence of the

Jaina and the Buddhist thought, it rejected theistic monism and was content with spiritualistic pluralism and atheistic realism. The system is predominantly intellectual and theoretical.⁴

The word 'Sāṁkhya' is derived from the word 'sāṁkhyā' which means right knowledge as well as number.⁵ Sāṁkhya Philosophy is the philosophy of right knowledge and the right knowledge means the knowledge of the separation of the Puruṣa from the Prakṛti. Yoga (action or practice), being the counterpart of Sāṁkhya helps us to realize the theoretical metaphysical teachings in actual practice. This school is also known as the philosophy of numbers as it specifies the number and nature of the ultimate constituents of the universe and thereby imparts knowledge of reality. The Upanisadic teaching of Brahman is the background of Sāṁkhya thought. In Upanishads, two types of descriptions about Brahman can be found. On one hand, Brahman is described as Kūṭastha (unchangeable and immutable entity). For instance, in the Gita, the self or Brahman is described as eternal principle which the fire cannot burn, wind cannot dry, the sword cannot cut and the water cannot wet. On the other hand, Brahman becomes world. To explain this, an example of spider is presented. It is the spider that spins its web from own resources. Thus, Brahman is also the only reality from which all things come. There seems to be a contradiction in the description of Brahman as changing and unchanging in Brahman. So, in order to solve this logical problem, Sāṁkhya proposed two ultimate principles, i.e. Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

Therefore, Sāṁkhya is dualistic realism advocating two ultimate realities. It is considered as realism because it regards both matter and spirit to be equally really real. Moreover, it is considered as pluralistic because of its teaching about Puruṣa (self) as many, not one. Sāṁkhya holds that the world evolves when Prakṛti comes into relation with the Puruṣa (self). The creation or evolution of the world begins with samyoga or effective contact of Puruṣa (consciousness) and Prakṛti (matter). The totality of the karmas of the Puruṣas disturbs the balance of gunas in Prakṛti and starts the process of evolution. The evolution of the world cannot be due to Puruṣa alone because Puruṣa is inactive. Nor the evolution of the world is due to Prakṛti alone because Prakṛti is unconscious. For the evolution of the world, the activity of Prakṛti must be guided by the consciousness or intelligence of Puruṣa or self.⁶

Nature of Purusa (self)

The Sāṁkhya system maintains that this world is full of three kinds of pain. It is only by the direct knowledge of Vyakta, Avyakta and Jñā three kinds of pain can be removed which are recognized by the Sankhya as spiritual or Ādhyātmika, Ādhidaivika and Ādyhibhautika. Jñā is the self or Puruṣa. The Sāṁkhya advocates the dualism of Puruṣa (self) and Prakṛti, the ultimate reality. Puruṣa or the individual souls are not composed of Prakṛti. Puruṣa is the principle of pure consciousness. It is the soul, the self, the spirit, the subject, the knower. It is neither body nor senses nor body nor mind. It is not a substance which possesses the quality of consciousness. Consciousness is its essence. It is itself pure and transcendental consciousness. It is the ultimate knower which is the foundation of all knowledge. It is the pure subject and as such can never become an object of knowledge. It is silent witness, the emancipated alone, the neutral seer and the peaceful eternal. It is beyond time and space, beyond change and activity.

It is self-luminous and self-proved. It is uncaused, eternal and all-pervading. It is the indubitable real, the postulate of knowledge, and all doubts and denials pre-suppose its existence. It is called nistraiguṇya, udāsīnā, akartā, kevala, madhyastha, sāksī, draṣṭā, sadāprakāśhasvarūpa and jñāta.⁷ Sāṃkhya philosophy has maintained that the self or Puruṣa is neither Prakṛti or Pradhāna nor Vikṛti or distortions of anything but is beyond them. It is neither the cause nor the effect of anything. It does not produce anything and is not produced by anything else.⁸ Puruṣa, the opposite of Prakṛti is also called pumān. Puruṣa is indeterminate (Nirguṇa), indifferent (Viveki), not enjoyable (Avisēya), conscious (Chetana) and non-transferable (Aparinami).⁹ The self is the enjoyer (Bhoktā). It is beyond three Guṇas. The self or Puruṣa is the Ahetumat or uncaused. It is permanent and all-pervading. The Puruṣa is opposite of vyakta and avyakta. The Sāṃkhya also maintains that there are many selves. The world is full of many things. Being unconscious, these things have no idea of them and cannot satisfy their own needs or needs of another. The things in the world are for the enjoyment of the Puruṣa (self), the conscious being and satisfy the needs of a conscious being.

Puruṣa is totally different from three guṇas: sattva, rajas and tamas. Thus, the non-availability of three guṇas in Puruṣa makes it totally different from Prakṛti. The jivas of this world always try to attain liberation to be free from bondage of three guṇas. Therefore, it is clear that there is a conscious being which is the enjoyer, i.e. the self or Puruṣa. Puruṣa is the seer and all the material objects of this world are seen by the seer. The seer is conscious but the objects are unconscious. Prakṛti evolves the world when it comes into relation with the Puruṣa. At the unmanifest stage, Prakṛti remains in a state of equilibrium and the Puruṣa is born free with a sense of freedom. But at this stage, Puruṣa does not wrongly identify itself with the Prakṛti.

Prakṛti acquires the property of Vyakta when it becomes active. Indeterminate Prakṛti becomes determinate. Avakta becomes Vyakta. Inactive becomes active. But Puruṣa (self) or Jñā is changeless and remains as it is. Though there seems to be a progressive unfolding of the universe from the primordial Prakṛti-Puruṣa as such, remains the same. The only change that takes place is that through the instrumentality of 'manas' emerged out of Prakṛti, Puruṣa wrongly identifies itself with its material bodies etc. Under such circumstances, Puruṣa could be called the root spirit or the life principle of the universe.¹⁰ Moreover, Puruṣa is primordial and elementary principle. By analysis, Puruṣa can never reduce to any simpler elements and remaining as it is forever. The essence of Puruṣa cannot be modified. Puruṣa also has a marvellous attribute and the attributes serve as a sort of cosmic mirror in which the whole of the universe is reflected and revealed in this mirror.

Characteristics of Puruṣas are reflected in itself. All the changes that take place in the process of evolution are in Prakṛti and Puruṣa becomes a guiding force in response to the change taking place in Prakṛti. Besides that, Puruṣa is such a principle which breathes life into matter. It is obscure in the world of plants and resplendent in the superior order of beings. It is pure consciousness and an entity other than buddhi. There are five characteristics of Puruṣa which are as follow¹¹

1. Puruṣa has the feeling of witness. It is desireless (Udasina). It never involves itself in anything and is non-relational. So the self is not desired by the bodies and the three gunas. It is only the seer and does not act.

2. Puruṣa has the feeling of liberation (Kaivalyam). It is solitary and has the feeling of solitariness. The stage in which the self is free from bondage of three gunas is liberation. Since Puruṣa is beyond the three gunas it is pure and free.

3. It has the feeling of middle man (Madhyastham)- Puruṣa acts as a middle man and does not involve itself in any quarrel . Puruṣa is beyond the three gunas and so it is never affected by this world which is full of pleasure and pain.

4. It has the feeling of seer. There is no real distinction between the seer and witness. Since Puruṣa is conscious principle, it is the seer and witness. It becomes seer when unconscious Prakṛti comes in front of the Puruṣa. Vijñānabhikṣu maintains that the Puruṣa is the witness of Buddhi and the seer of other sense organs. Whereas in the words of Vāśhaṣpati Puruṣa is the seer and also the witness.¹²

5. It has the feeling of non-doer. Since Puruṣa is non-doer, it cannot produce anything nor do anything. It is inactive because Puruṣa is Avyakta. According to the Sāṃkhya Philosophy, what is Avyakta must be inactive. We have no free will. Man can never understand this without having distinct knowledge of self and should not believe that we have free will. Puruṣa's nature is opposite to the nature of Prakṛti. Prakṛti is seen and Puruṣa is the seer. All visible things are composed of three gunas and since Puruṣa is beyond the three gunas, it is inactive and non-doer.

Several arguments have been adduced in the Sāṃkhya Kārika to prove the existence of Puruṣa. These are given in the Samkhya Kārika, No.17, which are as follow:

1.Sanghat Pratha tivāt- All compound objects are meant for someone else. All these substances are for the Puruṣa or self since the unconscious element can never make use of them. The body, the senses, the mind and the intellect are all means to realize the end of the Puruṣa.¹³ The three gunas, Prakṛti, subtle body serve the purpose of the self.¹⁴ The evolution is teleological and Prakṛti evolves itself to serve the Puruṣa's end. This proof is teleological.

2. Trigunadi Viparyāyāt- All substances are said to be composed of three gunas logically presupposing the existence of the Puruṣa (self). Puruṣa is the witness of these gunas and is himself beyond them. The gunas are Sattva, Rajas and Tamas and these gunas imply the conception of a conscious principle (nistraigunya) which is beyond them. This proof is logical.¹⁵

3. Adhithānāt Puruṣa is pure consciousness and is capable of synthesizing to create harmony among all the experiences.¹⁶ All knowledge necessarily presupposes the existence of the self (the knower) who is the substratum of all practical knowledge. All affirmations and negations presuppose the existence of Puruṣa and

therefore there cannot be experience without him. There must be a transcendental synthetic unity of pure consciousness to co-ordinate all experiences.¹⁷

4. Bhoktrbhāvāt- Unconscious Prakṛti can never make use of its creation. So, there must be an intelligent principle to make use of them.¹⁸ Prakṛti is the enjoyed and so there has to exist an enjoyer to enjoy it. It is understood that all material objects of the world exist for the sake of Puruṣa, who is the foundation of all material objects. All the objects of this world produce either pain or pleasure or indifference, so there has to be some conscious principle to experience them.¹⁹ Hence, there must be a Puruṣa or self. This argument is ethical.

5. Kaivalyārtha Pravṛtti- In this world, there are many persons who endeavour to attain release from the sufferings of the world. Kaivalya means the attainment of pure self. It is liberation or emancipation. The desire for liberation or emancipation implies the existence of a person who wishes for salvation or mokṣa and to make an effort for it to attain it. Aspiration presupposes the aspirant. Thus, it seems necessary to accept the existence of Puruṣas. This proof is religious or mystical.²⁰

Plurality of selves Sāṃkhya tries to prove the plurality of selves in the Sāṃkhya Kārika section 18. The arguments are as follow:

1. Janma marana Karananām Pratinīyamāt- All individual beings have different births, deaths and sensory activities. Had there been just one Puruṣa (self), there would be no difference between the blind man and a person with two eyes. Moreover, the birth or death of one would have meant the birth and death of all. Besides that, pleasure, pain or indifference should have been equally shared by all. The difference is possible only when there is more than one self and hence there must be plurality of selves.²¹

2. Ayuagpat Prvṛttescha- According to the Sāṃkhya system, all individuals are not possessed of the same tendencies. One individual is different from another and all individuals have different tendencies. In an individual one may find a positive tendency at one moment and different tendency in another person at different moment. This failure to find a concurrence of tendencies leads to the conclusion that there is not only one self, but many. Had there been only one Puruṣa every individual would have possessed the same tendency at one time.²²

3. Traigunyahaviparyāt- All the things in the world are composed of three gunas-sattva, rajas and tamas and all the individuals are influenced by these three gunas. In all the individuals, one finds different combinations of three gunas. Otherwise, every object in the world would have equally contained the three gunas. One individual is influenced by sattva, another by rajas and yet another by tamas. Those who are sattvic have peace, light and pleasure. Those who are rajasic have pain, anger and disturbance and the tamasic are ignorant and prone to attachment. If the self were one all individuals would have possessed the three gunas equally. Hence, there are many selves.²³

CRITICISM

There are references in the Sruti regarding the monistic conception of the self that the self is one and only one (Ekamevaditiam). It may therefore seem that the Sāṁkhya theory of plurality of selves is opposed to the scriptures. But the Sāṁkhya takes great pain to establish that its views are not opposed to Upanisadic scriptures. Though Sāṁkhya advocates plurality of selves yet different selves are said to possess the same generic character. All the selves belong to the one and same class of 'self' (Puruṣa). The passages of the scriptures which support monism are interpreted as referring to the non-difference of the essential properties. They imply non-difference in kind and do not imply homogeneity. The selves present in the several individuals have the common property of being the silent and indifferent spectator of the proceedings of the products of Prakṛti with which they are temporarily connected. From this standpoint of genus (jati), the self is one.

In this sense, the Sāṁkhya holds that scriptures have said that there is one self. In spite of the Sāṁkhya efforts to establish the theory of many selves, it appears that the Sāṁkhya arguments for the plurality of selves have not established the theory beyond doubt. Birth, death and senses, etc. are the characteristics of the body and not of the selves. The self-according to the Sāṁkhya's own admission is neither agent, nor the enjoyer. The arguments of the Sāṁkhya for the existence of the Bahupurusavada prove only the manyness of the body and not the manyness of the self. The Sāṁkhya description of the nature of the self goes against its manyness. If the self is, in nature, pure consciousness, beyond change and activity, it can never be many.

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

The self, due to its ignorance identifies itself with the mānas, ahm̄kara and mahat, which are the products of Prakṛti and hence, it experiences the pain and suffering of this world. Suffering is unavoidable in this world. It is because the universe is constituted of manifold objects and objects are embedded with gunas and selves and even interrelated among them. According to Sāṁkhya, the world is composed of three gunas and due to presence of these gunas there is suffering. They also held the view that life in heaven is controlled by these gunas. There are also paths leading to liberation, emancipation or salvation. Two sorts of liberation according to Sāṁkhya are Jivanmukti and Videhamukti. In Jivanmukti, the self attains freedom from worldly suffering and realizes truth while living in the earth and possessing physical body. On the other hand, in case of Videhamukti, complete liberation from all kinds of sufferings is attained by the self only after the death. Thus, Videhamukti is known as kaivalya and also it is understood as liberation from the gross body. Liberation in Sāṁkhya theory is also termed as 'apavarga', the purusartha or the summum bonum of life.²⁴

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we can conclude that Sāṁkhya is one of the oldest systems of Indian Philosophy which advocates dualistic realism. The two ultimate realities are Puruṣa and Prakṛti and the process of evolution takes place only when Puruṣa comes in close relation with the Prakṛti. Puruṣa is spiritual and totally different from matter. Puruṣa is pure consciousness. It is the soul, the spirit, the self, the subject, the knower. It attributes less, infinite, unchangeable, unproduced, undying, undecaying, perfect and eternal

substance. It is the emancipated alone, the silent witness, the neutral seer and the peaceful eternal. Moreover, it is beyond time and space, change and activity, self-luminous and self-proved. It is also the indubitable real, postulate of knowledge and its existence is pre-supposed by all doubts and denials.

Puruṣa is the mere spectator of the play of Prakṛti and has nothing to do with the play of Prakṛti. It is the alone, the unseen seer and the transcendental absolute. But Sāṃkhya forgetting its own position and reduces the ultimate Puruṣa to the level of the phenomenal ego. Puruṣa is the enjoyer and Prakṛti enjoyed. Here, question arises like if Puruṣa is a transcendental subject then how can it be an enjoyer? And, if it is indifferent, active and passive then how can it enjoy? However, Sāṃkhya has failed to give reasons to the objections raised against Puruṣa. Sāṃkhya Philosophy is also pluralistic because it advocates plurality of selves in respect of many bodies or empirical jīvas. But they have failed to give a sufficient reason that how many selves (jīvas) are derived or appeared as many jīvas from one non-transformed eternal Puruṣa. Sāṃkhya does not accept the Advaita Vedanta's view that there is one universal self-abiding in all bodies and each body is inhibited by a distinct self. Hence, Sāṃkhya system has also given five arguments to proof the existence of Puruṣa.

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