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FOUNDATION OF SĀṂKHYA DOCTRINE: A THEORETICAL RE-VISITING

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Abstract

Sāṃkhya provides a rational analysis of the truth. Richard Garbe says: 'In Kapila's doctrine, for the first time in the history of the world, the complete independence and freedom of the human mind, its full confidence in its own powers, was exhibited.'The first aphorism in the sāṃkhya Sutra runs thus: 'The supreme goal of life is to put an end completely to the three kinds of suffering.' Thus in common with all Indian schools of thought and indeed in common with all the religions of the world, the complete cessation of suffering is declared to be the goal of life. The 'three kinds of suffering' are adhyātmika, the pain caused by diseases of the body, mental disturbances, and unrest; ādhibhautika, the pain produced by extraneous causes, such as men or beasts; and ādhidaivika, the pain caused by supernatural agencies, by the planets, and by the elements. Every living being is in some way subject to pain, yet not one desires it, and man has the power to rid himself of it. The sāṃkhya system purports to show how he can do this. The usual methods he adopts for this purpose are totally inadequate. Medicine, for instance, may cure a physical ailment but can never get rid of disease permanently, for one may fall ill again. Neither are mere good deeds nor the performance of vedic rites efficacious. Only by right knowledge arising from right discrimination between the Self and the non-Self—between puruṣa and prakṛti—can one destroy pain. sāṃkhya declares that the cause of misery (and by misery is meant the discontent that arises from uncertainty, aimlessness, and a sense of the fleeting nature of all earthly joy) is wrong knowledge, by which one identifies puruṣa with prakṛti. Misery is to be found in prakṛti and not in puruṣa. Our experience of misery is immediate, for our identification of puruṣa with prakṛti is immediate. Whenever, right knowledge dawns, giving immediate experience of puruṣa as separate and detached from prakṛti, and only then, will come complete cessation of misery. The sāṃkhya philosophy is claimed by its followers to be a direct means to the attainment of the immediate experience of the transcendental puruṣa as separate from prakṛti and thus to a complete freedom from all misery.

Keywords: *Sāṃkhya, Puruṣa, Prakṛti, Suffering, Kapila*

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I. Sāṃkhya Doctrine: An Introduction

Sāṃkhya is the practical philosophy transmitted by the sage Kapila. Sāṃkhya gives a clear idea of the *puruṣa* -spirit and of *prakṛti*-manifestation represented by Great Nature. The latter is manifested essentially in a mechanical manner, like all the cosmic Laws which govern us. Nothing exists, in any realm that by deduction does not proceed from a higher Law. There comes a time when one must submit to such a deductive process. This process is pure sāṃkhya; it is the inexorable descent into prakṛti, under pressure from above of the great Will. From that moment onwards everything functions in a mechanical way: the higher intelligence (*buddhi*) the soul, the ego, all the centres of the human being, each one with its natural intelligence. The mechanistic functions starts when connections start between the different levels of the being; its inner organs of perception (*indrya-s*) or senses, its constituent elements (*bhūta-s*) and densities. The sāṃkhya doctrine recognizes the three independent sources and criteria (*pramāṇa-s*) of valid knowledge: perception, inference, and testimony. Sāṃkhya discovers, the self comes to have knowledge through the vehicles of the sense-organs, manas, and mahat. Sensations and impressions arise due to the contacts between the sense-organs and objects. The manas analyzes the sensations and impressions into various forms and passes them on to the mahat. The mahat thus becomes transformed into the form of the particular object. But being a physical entity, the mahat lacks consciousness and so cannot itself generate knowledge. Because of it's predominantly sāttvika nature, however, the mahat reflects the consciousness of the self, the puruṣa. In this manner, the unconscious yet eminently sāttvika mahat becomes conscious of the form into which it has been modified. Thus, ariseperception as a cognitive act. An analogy may illustrate this point further. A mirror in a dark room, although situated in front of an object, cannot reveal the object to us, but needs the light of a lamp for reflecting and revealing the object. Similarly, the mahat, an unconscious, physical entity, needs the light of consciousness of the puruṣa in order to produce cognition and therewith knowledge. It is clear, then, that without the puruṣa as pure consciousness there can be no knowledge.

II. Sāṃkhya-Yoga Confluence

Several studies exist on the histories of sāṃkhya and yoga, some of which are portions of works that set out to cover Indian philosophy in its entirety, and others of which attend more singularly to either sāṃkhya or yoga, or to both of these together. The fundamental metaphysical distinction that sāṃkhya and yoga share is the self or conscious subject and the experienced.

Roughly speaking, we could call these two factors the subjective and objective principles, or simply the subject and object, although it must be remembered that they become subject and object only in relation to one another. Considered independently of that relation, they are merely potentially subject and object. In the sāṃkhyakārikā the two principles are generally referred to as puruṣa and prakṛti (or pradhāna), whereas the yogasūtra more often uses the terms draśṭā ('seer') and drśya ('seen' or 'seeable'), but the basic distinction remains the same. Both darśana regard the second of these principles as having three constituents or properties, or more literally 'strands' (guṇas), and as having a manifest and an unmanifest aspect[1]. The precise nature of the relationship between these two aspects is not made very explicit in either text, although in many instances the analogy of flowing or surging is used to represent how the manifest aspect of prakṛti arises from the unmanifest one[2]. It is, for both systems, the 'conjunction' (saṃyoga) of the two co-fundamental principles – potential subject and potential object – that initiates the transformation of the latter principle into its manifest forms; and again for both systems, it is the dawning of the subject's knowledge of its non-identity with those manifest forms that initiates their dissolution back into their unmanifest ground.[3] The subject's awakening to its self-sufficiency and purity is the envisaged eschatos of both darśanas, and they both refer to this fully awakened state as kaivalya, literally 'aloneness' or 'solitude'. Furthermore, they concur that it is the very purpose (artha) of prakṛti manifestation, and hence of the whole of life and experience, to bring about the conditions in which this awakening can occur. Thus we can see that the metaphysical commonalities between sāṃkhya and yoga are abundant. Now let me point out some differences. There are, for a start, differences of terminology, and in certain instances it is difficult to tell whether these harbor more significant conceptual discrepancies. In the cases so far mentioned – that is, yoga's preference for draśṭā and drśya where sāṃkhya tends to use puruṣa and prakṛti/pradhāna – there is no indication of any conceptual disagreement. In other cases, however, it is less easy to tell. For example, the Yoga term citta (usually translated as 'mind') could be a precise synonym of the sāṃkhya term buddhi ('awareness-of', 'discernment') or, alternatively, it might be intended in yoga to stand for the three mental factors – namely buddhi plus ahaṃkāra and manas – that are brought together by sāṃkhya under the term 'the inner instrument' (antaḥkaraṇa). A third possibility is that yoga is simply less rigorous than is sāṃkhya with respect to its specification of psychological capacities, and that citta is sometimes equivalent to buddhi and at other times more like antaḥkaraṇa. The main reason why it is difficult to be certain in cases such as the one just

[1]Gerald James Larson-Classical Sāṃkhya- An Interpretation of its History and Meaning-Motilal Banarsidass (1998) p.52
[2] ibid
[3] ibid

outlined is that nowhere within the yogasūtra are we given a comprehensive list of metaphysical categories, and hence, there is nothing with which to directly compare the far more systematic exposition of categories that proceeds from sāṃkhyakārikā. The nearest thing we get to a list such as this within the yogasūtra is a fourfold categorization of the 'levels of the strands' (guṇa-parvāṇi)[4], and this is by no means explicit in its wording. The four levels, or divisions, in question are:

1. The specific or particular (viśeṣa),
2. The non-specific or non-particular (aviśeṣa),
3. The mere mark or indicator (liṅgamātra) and
4. The unmarked or unmanifest (aliṅga).

The task of mapping sāṃkhya unmanifest prakṛti plus twenty-three manifest categories onto this fourfold schema is feasible although not straightforward. The last two of the four Yoga divisions are relatively easy to account for: the fourth, aliṅga, is undoubtedly unmanifest prakṛti, which – in addition to just plain prakṛti or pradhāna – Sāṃkhya calls avyakta (the unmanifest, SK 2, 10) and mūla-prakṛti (fundamental productivity or procreation, SK 3); and the third, liṅgamātra, must surely be the equivalent of sāṃkhya's mahat ('the great'), which it also calls buddhi. The first and second divisions are a little more problematic, however. The terms viśesa and aviśesa do occur in the sāṃkhyakārikā, as characterizations of the five elements (bhūtas) and five modes of sensory content (tanmātrā-s)[5] respectively (SK 38); and hence there is some chance that they are being used similarly in the Yogasūtra. However, even if we were able to situate these elements and modes of sense-content within Yoga's fourfold model, this would still leave a further twelve sāṃkhya categories unaccounted for. (sāṃkhyakārikā denoted as SK)

III. Dualistic Realism in Sāṃkhya Metaphysics

Sāṃkhya is dualistic realism. It is dualistic because of its doctrine of two ultimate realities: prakṛti, or matter, and puruṣa, or self (spirit). Sāṃkhya is realism in that it holds that both matter and spirit are equally real. With regard to the self, sāṃkhya is pluralistic because of its teaching that puruṣa is not one but many. Sāṃkhya[6] basically acknowledges two aspects of reality: prakṛti, (the unconscious principle) and puruṣa, (the consciousness). Each body contains a self, but the self is

[4] Yogasūtra 2.19
[5] Gerald James Larson-Classical Sāṃkhya- An Interpretation of its History and Meaning-Motilal Banarsidass (1998) p.53
[6] Swami Prabhavananda,, *The Spiritual Heritage Of India*, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York, 1963, p.209-210

different from the body, senses, mind, and intellect. It is a conscious spirit, at once both the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge. It is pure consciousness, self-illumined, unchanging, uncaused, all-pervading and eternal reality. Whatever is produced or is subject to change, death, and decay belongs to prakṛti or its evolutes, not to the self. puruṣa is identified as male and prakṛti as female. All manifestations in the universe are the outcome of these two realities[7].

Sāṃkhya held that there was no difference between cause and effect, except that the former was only the earlier stage which when transformed through certain changes became the effect[8]. There is no permanent reality which undergoes the change, but one change is determined by another and this determination is nothing more than "that happening, this happened" On the relation of parts to whole, Buddhism does not believe in the existence of wholes[9]. According to it, it is the parts which illusorily appear as the whole, the individual atoms rise into being and die the next moment and thus there is no such thing as whole.[10]

Sāṃkhya distinguishes between two kinds of perception, which may be described as pure sensation and perception. In pure sensation one is aware of the presence of something, although there is no knowledge of what that something is. That is, in pure sensation there is neither categorization nor analysis nor synthesis of the sense. Pure sensation is thus wholly devoid of any conceptual components. To put it differently, in sensation there can only be cognition but no recognition, for recognition means to identify that which is being sensed as such and such; such identification necessarily involves categorization, analysis, synthesis, and interpretation of that which in sensation is given as merely present. Thus, a baby's experience of the world is, to use William James phrase, a booming and buzzing confusion. The baby has no concepts by which to label the various sense-data and thereby to generate the notion of identity and with it objects and individuals. On the other hand, with the acquisition of language one learns to label one's sensations and identify them as this or that object — for example, this is a red flower and that is an elephant. In sāṃkhya literature, sensation and perception are also referred to as indeterminate and determinate perceptions,[11] respectively.

We shall now present an outline of the sāṃkhya theory of inference. Inference is needed only when we do not know everything about the world. It is the process by which we assert, on the basis

[7] R. Muthamil and S.Veerapandian *A Brief Study on the Philosophy of Sāṃkhya* Golden Research Thoughts, Volume 2, Issue. 5, Nov. 2012, ISSN:-2231-5063 *Page 4*

[8] Dasgupta, Surendranath (1957). *A History of Indian Philosophy Volume I.* London. Cambridge University Press. p.165

[9] Ibid, p.165

[10] Avayavinirdkarana, Six Buddhist Nyāya tracts, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1910.

[11] The sāṃkhya distinction between indeterminate and determinate perceptions is parallel to Bertrand Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. See "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description", in The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, ed. by Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Dennon (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), pp. 217-24.

of what we perceive or know, something that we have not yet perceived or known.[12] The connection between what is perceived and what is asserted is one of invariable relation. Thus, having observed that smoke and fire invariably and unfailingly occur together, one infers from the perception of smoke the existence of fire. It should be emphasized, however, that the relation between what is perceived and what is inferred must be universal and grounded in experience; that is, mere coincidental (or isolated instances of conjoint) occurrence of phenomena cannot serve as the basis of inference from the perception of one to the existence of the other,

Broadly speaking, sāṃkhya divides all inferences into two classes, vita (affirmative) and *avita* (negative). The first consists of inferences based on universal affirmative propositions, and the second of those based on universal negative propositions. The first class is further divided into two groups, one group consisting of inferences based on universal affirmative propositions that are granted in empirical experience, and the other of inferences based on universal propositions not so grounded. Let us illustrate each of these three kinds of inference.[13] The smoke-fire example given above belongs to the first group of the first class; the following is an example of inferences of the second group of the first class. Consider the question, how do we know that we have sense organs'. According to the sāṃkhya, it would be absurd to say that we know we have sense-organs because we perceive them, for the sense-organs are those by which we perceive all objects but not the sense-organs themselves: the eye cannot see itself. Nevertheless, says the sāṃkhya, we can infer the existence of the sense-organs by the following argument: Every action requires for its performance some instrument or device. Perceiving is an action. Therefore, since we do perceive, we must possess instruments or means of perception, namely, the sense-organs. According to the sāṃkhya this inference is justified, not because we have observed our sense-organs to be invariably related to perceptual acts, but because of our general conception of action as something that requires an

[12] The sāṃkhya conception of inference may be expressed as follows: "Liṅga-liṅga [mark-marked] relation means the relation of sign and signification, or meaning and symbol. It is a connection of meaning or logical connection. Of this two varieties may be noticed. They are (1) the causal relation and (2) the relation of kind and instance of sāmānya and viśeṣa. Inference may thus be denned as the systematic construction or explanation of the objective world of perception by the disimplication of the connection of meaning hidden from sense-perception. It is distinguishable but not separable from perception. Perception and inference are continuous. SK 5, in Banerji, sāṃkhya Philosophy. It is interesting to note that in conformity with the general Indian conception of logic; sāṃkhya holds that perception and inference are not separable but continuous. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Ch. VIII on Nyāya.

[13] Broadly speaking, sāṃkhya accepts with slight modification the Nyāya classification of inference. Accounts of the sāṃkhya classification differ depending upon whether or not one ignores the modification. Thus our account differs from Banerji's, according to which sāṃkhya classifies inference into (1) śeṣavat, reasoning from effect to cause; (2) Pūrvavat, reasoning from cause to effect; and (3) sāmānyatodraṣṭā, reasoning from analogy. An example of the first is reasoning from the rise of a river that it has rained; of the second, reasoning from a cloudy sky that it will rain; and of the third, reasoning from the general observation that actions require instruments to the proposition that seeing, an action, requires an instrument, namely, the eye (from Banerji, sāṃkhya Philosophy, 34 f). It is to be noted that Banerji's account ignores the sāṃkhya modification of the Nyaya classification of inference. The root of these differences is to be found in the sāṃkhya texts themselves; thus Vācaśpati Miśra's treatment of inference is somewhat different from Īśvara Kṛṣṇa's, on which is based Banerji's exposition.

instrument. (One might question the sāṃkhya conception of perception as action, but we shall not pursue this objection here.) We shall now illustrate inference based on universal negative propositions. It consists in progressive elimination of all but one of the possible alternatives. Thus one infers that something is a substance by showing that it is neither a quality nor a relation nor an activity nor anything else. We may mention that the sāṃkhya accepts the five-member syllogism of the nyāya as the most adequate pattern of inference. This pattern we shall discuss in detail in the chapter on nyāya.

The sāṃkhya recognizes testimony as appropriate where neither perception nor inference can serve as means to knowledge.[14] Testimony is of two kinds, namely, laukika and vaidika: that which in principle is open to confirmation by perception and inference, and that which is not so open, respectively. The former kind pertains to knowledge of objects constituting the world of ordinary experience, whereas the latter pertains to knowledge of super sensuous, transcendental reality, Thus when the geographer makes the claim that there is a continent called 'Australia', we accept it as true because we ourselves can in principle certify it on the basis of perception and inference. Similarly, when the microbiologist asserts that there exist certain minute organisms, aided with the appropriate theory and instruments we ourselves can in principle determine the truth or falsity of this assertion. On the other hand, in matters beyond perception and inference, the sāṃkhya accepts the testimony of the Vedas. The reason for this is that the sāṃkhya regards the Vedic seers as men who, by freeing themselves from all the imperfections of mundane existence, had gained insight into ultimate reality. Their utterances are expressions of their direct intuitive knowledge of ultimate reality; consequently, the Vedas constitute the most authoritative and infallible[15] source of knowledge of the transcendental reality. It should be kept in mind, however, that the sāṃkhya does not regard the Vedas as eternal, since they are founded in the transcendental experiences of men who lived and died at certain times

[14] "Perception, Inference and Authoritative Statement [testimony, āptavacana] are the three kinds of approved proof, for they comprise every mode of demonstration. The complete determination of the demonstrable is verily by proof." SK 4.

[15] It is extremely important to distinguish the sāṃkhya conception of authoritative statement (āptavacana), also known as "true revelation", from those of other doctrines, in particular the Christian. A statement is "authoritative not because somebody has said it but because it has survived the test of reason". J.N. Mukerji, sāṃkhya or the Theory of Reality (Calcutta, 1930), p. 24; further, though there is nothing prescribed, yet what is unreasonable cannot be accepted, else we should sink to the level of children, lunatics and the like. Sāṃkhya Sutras i. 26, in Banerji, sāṃkhya Philosophy, p. 47. "What is called 'revelation' by writers on sāṃkhya turns out to be considerably different from 'revelation' as understood by Tertullian [ca.ADl55-222] or St. Thomas Aquinas. . . . Tertullian['s], . . .famous sentence in De Came Christi, 5, unqualifiedly places revelation above reason. It reads: 'It is believable, because it is absurd; it is certain, because it is impossible. This was written at about the same time as the sāṃkhyākarikā .... sāṃkhya revelation is authoritative statement. It is authoritative because it squares with the evidence of perception and inference. There is no split between what is known by faith and what is known by reason, or between faiths without evidence as opposed to faith with evidence. It is not correct, then, to say that Sāṃkhya's āptavacana is superrational or dependent ultimately on external authority or authority of sruti [revelation] Even if the Vedas are not of personal authorship, yet they must be communicated by āptas to disciples. The truth of āptas is established by experience and by reason, which is to say that they must agree with what is accepted in other branches of knowledge such as treatises on medicine. Riepe, Naturalistic Tradition in Indian. Thought, pp. 190-91.

and places. Thus the Vedas are infallible, not because they are eternal, but because they are the intuitive insights of perfect men. Nevertheless, the sāṃkhya considers Vedic knowledge timeless in the sense that it is not the exclusive possession of this or that group of men living in a certain place at a certain time, but instead is grounded in the universal, unchanging spiritual experience of all men in all times and places.

IV. Conclusion

In final submission we can say, the sāṃkhya metaphysics and epistemology is dualistic realism, since according to it there are two ultimate principles, prakṛti and Puruṣa, which are equally real. Consequently, the sāṃkhya rejects monism, whether materialistic or idealistic. The reason for this rejection is explains that materialistic monism commits the error of affirming the reality of prakṛti (matter) and denying the reality of puruṣa (spirit); on the other hand, idealistic monism is guilty of the reverse error of affirming the reality of puruṣa and denying the reality of prakṛti. The sāṃkhya points out that neither of these monisms can do justice to the incontrovertible fact of our experience as constituted of the two poles, the subject and the object. For the sāṃkhya, knowledge arises out of the coming together of prakṛti and puruṣa. Both of them complement each other. The former provides the object of knowledge, and the latter explains the principle of consciousness. Both prakṛti and puruṣa are not capable of producing knowledge. The sāṃkhya epistemology as realist holds that external objects actually possess the properties and relations that we apprehend in our perceptions. Nevertheless, the sāṃkhya maintains that the knowing subject is not a passive spectator of the world but plays an active role in the production of knowledge. This does not means that our knowledge is purely subjective and lacks any objective basis. The sāṃkhya holds that the active role of the knowing subject is that, of the innumerable aspects, properties, and relations of the objects constituting the world; the subject selects and concentrates on some and ignores the others. This results in a perspectival theory of knowledge, according to which different persons perceive reality differently because of the differences in their perspectives. What is more, the same person experiences the world differently at different times. How a certain person experiences the world at a certain time depends upon a number of factors, the most important of which include the dispositions of the person as deriving from the karma of his past existence. The point of all these observations is that the sāṃkhya considers reality much richer and more complex than can be grasped from any single perspective. The sāṃkhya reminds us, however, that this does not mean that perspectives are merely subjective and hence do not reveal the real. Quite the contrary, each perspective reveals to us

a certain aspect of the world. In defense of this claim the sāṃkhya points, out that different perspectives overlap, and that this cannot be the case unless there is in reality an objective basis for the perspectives.[16] True, the sāṃkhya admits, more often than not perspectives disagree; but he quickly points out a truth that we are prone to overlook: there can be no disagreement unless there is some agreement; the agreement is due to the fact that the sense-organs, manas, ahamkāra, and buddhi of different persons have evolved from the single prakṛti. The disagreement is to be accounted for in terms of the differences in the degree and nature of the ignorance that afflicts different individuals.

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[16] SK, 5. 11.