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Concept of *Puruṣa* in *Sāṃkhya*

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Abstract

Sāṃkhya is one among the six philosophical schools (*saddarśhanas*) of ancient India. This school of philosophy offers the knowledge of self through right discrimination. Even though this is a study of 25 entities of evolution, *Sāṃkhya* reduced all these to two important entities of evolution, such as *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. *Sāṃkhya* has divided these 25 entities as *vyakta* (the manifest), *avyakta* (the unmanifest) and *jñā* (the spirit). *Puruṣa* is represented as '*Jñā*' which is the spirit or self. According to *Sāṃkhya*, *puruṣa* is a conscious spirit who is different and detached from all other entities of evolution. *Puruṣa* is self-illuminated, unchanging, uncaused, all pervading, eternal reality. Along with these qualities, *Puruṣa* also possesses the properties such as without the three *gunas*, nondistinguish ability, non-objectivity, uncommonness, sentiency and non-productivity. Hence *puruṣa* is considered as the supreme who is not a composite product. *Sāṃkhya* states that *prakṛti* is the entity which undergoes through all worldly experience such as change, death and decay and *puruṣa* or self is free from all of these experiences. *Sāṃkhya* presents the five arguments to prove the existence of *puruṣa* and also provides the basis for the existence of many selves (multiplicity of *puruṣa*). *Sāṃkhya* philosophy believes that the discriminative knowledge of the *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is the means for liberation. Hence it becomes very important to understand *puruṣa* or *jna* who is eternal and superior.

Keywords: - *Sāṃkhya*, *Puruṣa*, *Vyakta*, *Avyakta*.

Introduction

Sāṃkhya is considered as one of the very important pillars constituting the six systems (*ṣaḍdarśana*) of Indian philosophy. This is a means of wisdom contributes to the knowledge of reality and the world is influential. Even though this is a study of twenty five entities of evolution, *sāṃkhya* has reduced all these to two entities of evolution such as *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. The whole world is filled with threefold pain such as *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidaivika* dukha. Because of this sufferings each and every being on this world are in seek of permanent solution to overcome these pains. According to *sāṃkhya* school one can get rid of this dukhas from the total isolation of the *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*.

The term *sāṃkhya* is derived from the word '*sāṃkhya*' which means a sense of thinking or counting. In the context of philosophy *sāṃkhya* can be defined as the knowledge of self through right discrimination. Kapila is considered as a founder of *sāṃkhya* philosophy. *Sāṃkhya* sutra, *tattva samasa* and *sāṃkhya* *karika* are considered as the available standard works on *sāṃkhya*.

➤ Evolution according to *Sāṃkhya*

Very first *karika* of *sāṃkhya* states the term *Jijñāsā* (a desire for inquiry) into means of terminating the three-fold pain. If this *Jijñāsā* flows in the direction to understand the 25

tatvas or entities of evolution then one can overcome the threefold pain eternally. This philosophy has divided these 25 entities as vyakta (the manifest), avyakta (the unmanifest) and *jñā* (the spirit).

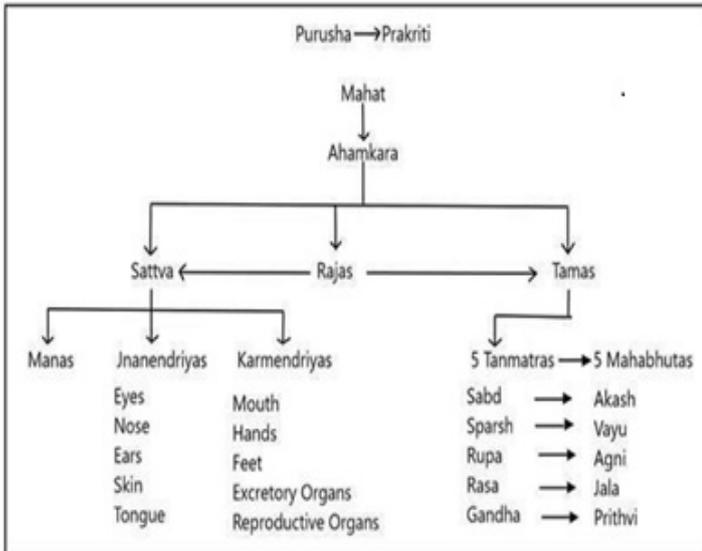
दृष्टवदानुश्रवकः स ह्यववशुद्धिक्षयाविशययुक्तः ।

विपरीः श्रेयान् व्यक्तान्यक्तज्ञववज्ञान् ॥ २॥

The scriptural means is like the obvious means since it is linked with impurity, decay and excess. The means contrary to both and proceeding from the discriminative knowledge of the Manifest, the unmanifest and the spirit, is superior. This *karika* suggests the two means which are capable of removing pain. First is vedic methods, as said in veda these are good in alleviating pain to a certain extent but it also involves impurity (most particularly, animal sacrifice) which hence makes their relief impermanent. Second is the discriminative knowledge of *puruṣa* as separate from the matter.

Among this two means the discriminative knowledge of *puruṣa* or *jñā* is considered as superior. मूलप्रकृ विरववकृ विममहदाद्ः प्रकृ विववकृयः सप्त । षोडशकस्तु ववकारो न प्रकृ विनम ववकृ विः पुरुषः ॥ ३॥

The primal nature is non-evolvent. The group of seven beginning with the Great principle (Buddhi) and the rest are both evolvents and evolutes. But the sixteen (five organs of sense, five of action, the mind and the five gross elements) are only evolutes. The spirit is neither the Evolvent nor the evolute.



Sāṃkhya philosophy has categorized the entities of evolution briefly into four kinds;

- *Prakṛti* – the root evolvent.
- *Avikṛti* – non-evolute.
- *Prakṛtivilkṛti* - both evolvents and evolutes.
- *Naprakṛtinavikṛti* – neither the evolvents nor the evolute.

Sāṃkhya states that the universe evolves from the interaction of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Here the *prakṛti*, also called as *pradhana* is the root evolvent because it is the root of all other evolutes. But it has no root of its own. Evolvent and evolutes are seven in number beginning with buddhi or mahat which is the product of *pradhana* and cause of *ahankara*. Then from *ahankara* there evolves five *tanmatras* and a set of eleven, which include five sense organs, five motor organs and *manas*.

The spirit is neither an evolute nor an evolvent.

Puruṣa

Sāṃkhya philosophy is the dualistic approach where it presents the two aspects of reality that is *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is represented as '*Jñā*' which is neither an evolute nor an evolvent. *Puruṣa* is also referred as self or the spirit. *Puruṣa* is a conscious spirit which is different and detached from all other entities of evolution. The self resides in all the beings but is different from the body, intellect and other visible elements. *Puruṣa* is the one entity of the evolution which is not subject to change, death, decay and all other worldly experiences.

त्रिगुणमत्रिं त्रिषयः सामान्यमचेतनं प्रसिधत्रमि ।

व्यक्तं तथा प्रधानं तत्रिपरीतस्तथा च पुमान् ॥ ११॥

The manifest is constituted of the three attributes (of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*), in nondistinguishable (*aviveki*), objective (*visaya*), common (*samana*), non-intelligent (*acetana*), and prolific (*prasavadharma*). So also is the Primordial Nature. The Spirit is the reverse of both of them and yet is similar in some respects. *Puruṣa* possess the qualities such as without the three *gunas* (*atraigunya*), non-distinguish ability (*viveki*), non-objectivity (*avisaya*), uncommonness (*asamana*), sentiency (*cetana*) and non-productivity (*aprasavadharma*). Hence *puruṣa* is considered as the supreme who is not a composite product.

● Proofs for the existence of *puruṣa*

Sāṃkhya offers five arguments to prove the existence of *puruṣa*.

सङ्घापरामर्त्वा विगुणावदवपयमयादविज्ञाना ।

पुरुषोऽद्धस्त भोक्तृभावा कै वल्यार्ं प्रवृत्तेश्च ॥ १७॥

The spirit exists because (a) the aggregate is for another's sake; (b) of the absence of three *gunas* and other properties; (c) there must be some controller; (d) there must be some experience; and (e) of the tendency of activities towards final beatitude.

Puruṣa or the knower is subtle like unmanifest, hence the five proves are inferred;

- *Saṅghātaparārthatvāt* – it means the other entities of evolution like unmanifest and manifest exists and functions

- for the sake of another or for another entity. That entity is
- because they are influenced by trigunas and constituted of its attributes like pleasure, pain and delusion.
- *Triguṇādi-viparyayāt* – it means the spirit is without three gunas and other properties. As *prakṛti* which is the root cause of all other entities constitute *triguna* and its attributes. Hence it cannot be the enjoyer of itself. There must be someone who is not aggregate, who is not of the same essence, who is devoid of *triguna* and also cannot be the object of experience. That transcendent reality is *puruṣa*.
- *Adhiṣṭhānāt* – there must be a controlling agency. As the evolutes constituted of the three gunas are always controlled by someone else who is beyond the three gunas, just like the chariot being controlled by the charioteer. This proves that *puruṣa* is the controller of all other composites.
- *Bhokṛbhāvāt* – the term *bhoga* means the objects of enjoyment as pleasure and pain. This proof states that there must be an enjoyer. The *buddhi* and the rest are themselves are constituted of pleasure and pain, hence they cannot enjoy their own feelings. Therefore, the entity which is free from pleasure and pain can only have either like or dislike feelings and that is *puruṣa* or the spirit.
- *Kaivalyārtham pravṛtteḥ* – each and every being in this world urges to get permanent freedom from threefold pain and to get liberation. According to many sages and scriptures, the realization or liberation is characterized by absolute but this cannot take place in *buddhi* and the rest because they are constituted of pleasure and pain and never be separated from their component element. Hence, there must be some conscious principle which is beyond these composites and strives for liberation. That is *puruṣa*.

● Multiplicity of *Puruṣa*

जननश्च मरणिरणानां प्रवृत्तत्रयमादयुगपत् त्रित्तेश्च ।

पुरुषबहुत्वं त्रसद्धैगुण्यं त्रिपयियाञ्चै ॥ १८॥

The multiplicity of the spirit is verily established (1) from the individual allotment of birth, death and instruments, (2) from the non-simultaneity of activities, and (3) from the diverse modifications due to the three gunas.

After understanding the five proofs for the existence of *puruṣa*, the question comes that is there only one *puruṣa* who is residing in all beings like the thread passes through the gems of a necklace or there are many *puruṣa* or spirits which are in all individual bodies?

To this *sāṃkhya* philosophy states that *puruṣa* are multiple in number because of this major three reasons, such as

(1) *Janma-maraṇa-karaṇānām pratiniyamāt*

puruṣa or the spirit. The *prakṛti* and rest all are composites. Here *janma-maraṇa-karaṇānām* means birth, death and instruments of action and *pratiniyamāt* means individual allotment. Birth means a connection of the *puruṣa* with the *prakṛti* which is a special aggregate or group of entities. This *prakṛti* is subject to all worldly experiences like change, death and decay. So, birth is not a modification of *puruṣa* because *puruṣa* is not a subject of any modification or change. As *puruṣa* is considered as eternal and immutable death cannot destruct the *puruṣa*, only the aggregate can be destroyed. Instrument of action and cognition are thirteen in number such as *buddhi*, *ahankara*, five sensory organs and five motor organs which function differently in each individual. For example, if one is born then all would be born, if one died then all would be dead and if one is having bodily impairment like blindness, deafness or dumbness etc, all else too would have that. Hence multiplicity of the *puruṣa* exists.

(2) *Pravṛtteḥ ayugapat*

Plurality of *puruṣa* is evident because of non-simultaneity of activities.

Each and every being will act on its own phase, speed and time. If *puruṣa* were accepted as one in all the beings then if one body is active then all other body would be active or if one body moves then all other bodies would move simultaneously. This view is convincing the point that *puruṣa* is not only one but multiple.

(3) *Traiguṇyaviparyayāt*

Triguna means three attributes such as *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Viparyayat* means differentiation of these three attributes. Each individual abounds in specific gunas or attributes. For example, the individual whose body composition excels in *sattva guna* will be ascetic, happy and divine. Some abound in *rajo guna*, like ordinary population and some abound in *tamo guna* which is filled with delusion like animals etc. If the *puruṣa* were to be only one then these differentiation in the distribution of three gunas could not exist. ➤ **Characteristics of *Puruṣa* / Properties of *Puruṣa***

After discussing the plurality of the spirit, *sāṃkhya* further explains the properties of *puruṣa* where the understanding of these qualities will lead to discriminative wisdom (*viveka jnana*).

तस्माच्च त्रिपयासात् त्रसद्धं सात्रित्वमस्य पुरुषस्य ।

कौटिल्यं माध्यस्थ्यं द्रष्टृत्वमित्भाश्च ॥ १९॥

And from that contrast it is established that the spirit is the pure witness. He is solitary, neutral, spectator, and non-agent.

Here the term *tasmāt ca viparyasat* means 'from this contrast' which can be related to the reference to the differentiation due to the three gunas which is discussed in 18th *karika* of *sāṃkhya* *karika*. This *karika* is discussing the properties of spirit which is opposite of *triguna* because *puruṣa* is void of three attributes but he is discriminative and enjoyer. *Puruṣa* is a passive witness of the activities of agents that is three gunas. The properties of being sentient and non-objective indicate the characteristics being a witness and a seer. The properties of *puruṣa* are:

- (1) *Kaivalyam* – which means solitary. Solitariness means isolation which is the state of absence of three gunas. As *puruṣa* is isolated from three gunas by its very nature, there will be the absence of pleasure, pain and delusion. Solitariness is the final and considered as the absolute cessation of three kinds of pain. This proves the solitary nature of *puruṣa*.
- (2) *Mādhyasthyam* - which means neutral. *Puruṣa* is neutral because of the absence of three attributes hence *puruṣa* indifferent towards pain and pleasure.
- (3) *Draṣṭṛtvam* – which means a seer. *Puruṣa* is sentient being that's why he can only be a seer. And one becomes a witness only when objects are shown to him and he is a witness to whom objects are exhibited.
- (4) *Akartṛbhāvaḥ-puruṣaisanon* – Agent. It is because of the qualities of *puruṣa* like being discriminative and non-producing.

पुरुषस्य दनर्थिल्याथं तथा प्रधानस्य ।

पङ्ग्वन्धिदुभयोरत्रप संयोगस्तत्कृ तः सगिः॥ २१॥

Therefore, through this union, the insentient evolute appears as if it is intelligent, and similarly, also from agency belonging to the gunas, the neutral spirit appears as if it were the agent.

By nature, itself *puruṣa* is intelligent (*cetana*) but the *mahat* and rest appears as intelligent because of its proximity with *puruṣa*. Because of the conjunction of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, the volition exercised by the attributes are mistaken as the *puruṣa* is an agent even though the spirit is indifferent and non-agent.

➤ **Mutual expectancy between the *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*.**

पुरुषस्य दनर्थिल्याथं तथा प्रधानस्य ।

पङ्ग्वन्धिदुभयोरत्रप संयोगस्तत्कृ तः सगिः ॥ २१॥

For the exhibition of nature to the spirit and for the emancipation of the spirit, (there is conjunction between the spirit and nature) like the between the lame and the blind; from this conjunction proceeds creation.

Initially the *sāṃkhya* philosophy address because *pradhana* or *prakṛti* needs *puruṣa*. *Pradhana* which is

having three attributes is an object of enjoyment that's why could not be without an enjoyer. Hence; *pradhana* needs an enjoyer and that is *puruṣa*. Now the philosophy explains why the *puruṣa* needs *prakṛti*. It is for the sake of isolation of the spirit. *Puruṣa* is ignorant of its distinction from *prakṛti*. So; this discriminative knowledge cannot be attained without *prakṛti* with a litsevolutes. Hence for its own liberation *puruṣa* needs *prakṛti*. Here the author has used a metaphor to explain the mutual need of conjunction as a need between the lame and blind. For example, lame who can show the way but cannot walk, blind can walk but not able to see anything like this *puruṣa* has a power to see but not possessing the power to act, whereas the *prakṛti* can walk but no power to see or contemplate. Once the purpose the lame and blind are served then they become separate from each other, like this when *puruṣa* attain the knowledge of its distinction from *pradhana* and gets liberation then all activities of the nature or *prakṛti* will completely cease.

• Conclusion

Sāṃkhya philosophy is considered as a dualistic theory. The uniqueness of *sāṃkhya* lies in its aggregating or summing up all the concept of reality into two categories such as *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* there by introducing the dualistic philosophy. This philosophy mainly has given the great importance to understanding of the entities of evolution, the theory of causation, the theory of knowledge and the concept of liberation. *Sāṃkhya* has given the great account on the spirit which resides in each and every being, the plurality of the spirit and also the qualities of the spirit.

According to *sāṃkhya* the whole world evolves because of the conjunction of *puruṣa* with *prakṛti* and to liberate from this world the *puruṣa* need to gain the knowledge about its distinction from *pradhana*. This discriminative knowledge can only attain after gaining the clear and whole knowledge of entities. Ultimately *sāṃkhya* philosophy states that self-knowledge rather than any external concept or agent leads to the liberation or emancipation.

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