



THE SPIRIT AND MATTER IN THE SAMKHYA SYSTEM

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Abstract

Sankhya is an ancient dualistic philosophy that declares the universe is a product of two eternal, distinct principles; Purusa – Spirit and Prakrti – matter. This Philosophy founded by Sage Kapila, serves as the theoretical foundation for self knowledge and the distinction between spirit and matter lead to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The Samkhya is an atheistic Philosophy which is built on two principles Prakrti and Purusa. , Some modern scholars have pointed out that the classical Samkhya is not atheistic in character. The atheistic Samkhya loses its chances of argument by depicting prakrti and purusa as independent and ultimate realities. The dualism of the Samkhya, it may be more appropriate against a monistic background. The Samkhya Philosophy may not be free from the many problems therein, as for the concept of prakrti is concerned, from the logical point of view.

Keywords: Vedas – Upanisads – Samkhya – Purusa(Spirit) - Prakrti(Matter) – Isvarakrsna – Gunas – Equilibrium – Satva – Rajas – Tamas – Atman – Satkryavada – Vijnanabhiksu – Mudumbi Narasimhacharya – Mahabhuta – Dualism – Monism – Aesthetic - Logic

The Samkhya system is one of the oldest branches of Indian Philosophy and the Samkhya Karika of Isvarakrsna is the most authoritative text on it now available. Though Kapila is Universally accepted as the founder of the Samkhya system, the system owes its origin to a variety of traditions and cultures and hence it cannot be attributed to anyone in particular. The cosmological speculations in the Vedas, the Upanisads the Brahmanas could be considered one such source. The Vedas and the Upanisads contain elements of monism and dualism, realism and idealism in their different shades and colours and it is to be admitted from the evidence of Rgveda, Upanisads, Mahabharate etc. that the Samkhya somehow enjoyed and unquestionable Philosophical eminence; Eventhough the main tendency of the Upanisads seems radically opposed to dualism, there is some justification for the samkhyas claim to be a system based on the Upanisads since some of the Upanisads throw suggestions capable of being worked, into the Samkhya system. It is sometimes claimed as the first of the Six schools of Indian Philosophy well founded on the bed-rock of the Upanisads.

The Samkhya is an atheistic Philosophy. It is built on the two principles prakrti and purusa. The Samkhya system depicts prakrti and purusa as absolute and independent entities, of these purusa is beyond the perceptual experience. The term purusa has been used in the vedic literature to denote both the atman which means the embodied being or personality and the supreme creator.

The Samkhya envisages the existence of innumerable souls. And there are arguments for the plurality of purusas put forth in the Samkhya k

* जननमरणकरणानां प्रतिनिययादयुगपत् प्रवृत्तेश्च ।
पुरुषबहुत्वं सिद्धत्रैगुण्य - विपर्ययाश्चैव ॥

is absolutely indeterminate, undifferentiated and homogeneous and it exists only as the possible source of energy of the whole world. Just as a forest, is nothing but an assemblage of the three ultimate reals set in a state of avyakta. Non-manifestation. This state of equilibrium is absolutely indeterminate and indefinite and it is called prakrti.



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Once the equilibrium of the three gunas disturbed the evolution takes place. It is the first and the ultimate state from which this world originates and to which it resolves. The gunas which are dissimilar and diverse in character function for the sake of pursua and not for themselves as in the case of a lamp with its three components jointly causing it to burn. It is clear that mere oil cannot produce light, mere wick also fails to illumine a pot and fire cannot burn without a medium. Though these three may be reunion to each other in their inherent qualities, in union, they give rise to the burning lamp. Similarly satva, rajas and tamas though possessing contradictory characteristics jointly work for the good of purusa .

In the search of the cause of creation we have to follow the chain of cause and effect. Samkhya follow the theory of Satkryavada. According to this, the cause and the effect are indetical and the effect is only the developed cause. In this way Samkhya argues for the acceptance or prakrti as the cause of the world.

From the existence of the world it has to be assumed that there should have been a contact between purusa and prakrti at the beginning to start evolution. It is said that evaluation proceeds from the disturbance of the equilibrium of the gunas and it results in the predominance of one of the constitutions over the other. If the prakrti were not disturbed from the original state of equipoise there would not have been any chance of having an evolution of the matter. What is the cause of the disturbance? Any one

* Samkhyakarika – 18

familiar with the Samkhya pilosophy can answer that it is purusa and purusa alone. This theory is questioned by some and they have tried to interpret Samkya theistically by possessing a God above the purusas, or a God representing all the purusas to disturb the equilibrium of the gunas. Because of the ‘desire of the God the evolution takes place. Such a view is held by Vijnanabhiksu. In his Samkya sutras and Mudumbi Narasimhacrya in his commentary on the Samkhya kaarika.

Though the Smkhya is widely accepted as an atheistic school of Indian Philosophy. Some modern scholars have pointed out that the classical Samkhya is not atheistic in character. What the Samkhya denies according to them, is not the existence of an eternal God as such, but the causality and agency of such a god. Iswara is not the direct cause of the word. The disproof of casuality does not imply in any way the disproof of is existence. He may not be a cause, but that does not necessarily imply that he does not exist also. He may exist, though he may not be a cause, thus he may exist in another form, for instance as an indifferent spectator.

The Universe is a system of different grades of pursuas in which Isvara or God is the super pursue, or the person of persons, according to them, he the super purusa, is the ultimate source of all activity.

Before we discuss the relationship between the inanimate prakrti and purusa the sentiment being, we have to see what are the reasons which affirm the existence of prakrti. The Samkhya karika gives five reasons.

1. Finite nature of specific objects.
Any manifested thing has a measure or dimension and the finite nature of specific objects need an infinite object as origin to be shaped later. The finite cannot be the cause of the universe. The manifested pot is nothing but clay before such manifestation. The infinite threads give form to finite cloth. The evolved things mentioned above show that an infinite, unlimited and eternal one was existent, and that was prakrti of Samkhya
2. Homogeneity: All wordly things possess certain common characteristics by which they are capable of producing pleasure, pain and indifference. Hence there must be a common source composed of three gunas from which all worldly things arise. Thus the need for a common source is met and prakrti is assumed as the primary source.
3. Effect produced through energy : All effects arise from the activity of the potent cause. A potter is able to make a pot, and a weaver is able to make the cloth, and not vice versa. The potter is never found able to make the cloth



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and weaver can never make a pot and this is because of the absence of energy that they should possess for making the cloth and pot respectively. Thus there must be something inherent in the world cause. And this cause is prakrti.

4. Cause and effect are separate : The difference between cause and effects are visible in the fold. The cause and effects are related and the effect remains in its unmanifested stage in the cause. For example oil is there in sesame and not in sand. A jar is competent to hold water or honey whereas the clay is incapable of that, though the jar and clay are effect and cause respectively. And there is nothing wrong to assume prakrti as the cause of the world, though the effect and cause differ as said.

5. Unity of the Universe: The Unity of the universe points to a single cause and this cause is prakrti.

We have to admit that there is not direct proof for the existence of prakrti. Prakrti is not non-being in the sense that it is ever changeful and is the principle of change and differentiation. In the world of ours we take many objects as existent even if their existence were not proved directly. For instance we do not take an object as invalid just because it is seen only through lenses. If one fails to get real cognition through perception one may obtain it through some other means, say inference or valid testimony. The weight of the Himalayas is unknown; nevertheless one cannot say that it has no weight. It is the same regarding the existence of prakrti.

We have stated earlier that prakrti and purusa are two realities in Samkhya. Prakrti is the predominant substance from which all the forms and energies evolve with the association of purusa. What is the aim of prakrti once it gives rise to evolution? The only aim of prakrti is to secure freedom for purusa, by showing him here real form in one way or other. It is said that the company of both purusa and prakrti has neither a beginning nor an end. Even before the evolution the purusa was existing.

Prakrti is eternal, it can never perish and so it could never have been created. The twenty-three principles viz mahatattva, ahamkara, manas panca paramendriyas, panca jnanendriyas and theirtanmatras are the products of prakrti. The products are caused as they are dependent on prakrti which is independent though without purusa it is inactive. The products are limited in number in space and time, while prakrti is one all providing and eternal. Prakrti is not a product yet it brings every manifest thing into existence. It is the support of all things. Yet it is unsupported; it absorbs all things, and yet it is not absorbed by anything else. It is unanimate unintelligent immobile etc. The whole creation of the universe the modification from mahat to mahabhuta is brought out by prakrti which works for the emancipation of purusa though not for its own ends. The duty of prakrti ends when she completes the work for the emancipation of purusa. The relationship between the non-sentient prakrti and sentient purusa is interesting. The Samkhya karika gives a few examples to this effect.

* पुरुषस्यदर्शनार्थकैवल्यार्थतथाप्रधानस्य।
पङ्गवबन्धवदुभयोरपिसंयोगस्तत्कृतः सर्गः॥

* Samkhyakarika - 21

The association of the two, prakrti and purusa, is like that of a lame man and a blind one, for the purpose of a journey. Purusa is pictured as a lame man having only eyesight and prakrti as a person having the power of movement but lacking in vision. A chance combination of the lame and blind in co-operation, helps them to reach their destination. Similarly prakrti with the help of the sentient purusa works for their common goal the liberation of purusa.

A question likely to be asked is how an insentient prakrti can work for the purusa. Samkhya answers in the Karika

* वत्सविवृद्धिनिमित्तदुग्धस्य प्रकृतिरज्ञस्य।
पुरुषविमोक्षनिमित्ततथाप्रकृतिप्रधानस्य॥

There are instances in the universe where the insentient objects are working for the sake of sentient objects. It is found that milk flows from the udder of the cow for the nourishment of the calf. Then prakrti becomes useful to purusa to get



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emanicipation just, in the same way as the insentient milk becomes useful to the calf as nourishment, prakriti works for the purusa and feels satisfied by that. Her act is not selfish. She never sets for herself, everything is for others and the only aim of hers is to liberate pursue from workly life. Just as a person who after fulfilling his mission gets interested in another mission, the act of prakrti also ceases to be for the liberated pursue though her work is a continued process, is as much as, she acts for other purusas who are yet to be liberated. Prkrti is found compared to a dancing girl in the Samkhya Karika

*रङ्गस्यदर्शयित्वा निवर्ततेनर्तकीयथानृत्यात्।
पुरुषस्यतथात्मानं प्रकाशयविनिवर्तते प्रकृति॥

* Samkhyakarika 57 &59

A dancing girl dances for the spectators. After having shown her talents and ability she gets away from the stage and comes back to the stage only if summoned by the audience again. Prakrti is one who has extreme delicacy. After exhibiting herself to a spirit or purusa and realising that she is seen, prakrti does not show herself any more to that spirit. In this matter prakrti resembles a woman who does not like to expose herself to the man devoted to her, once she has been seen by him, committing adultery.

We have seen some of the classical example with which samkhya tries to establish the association of prakrti and purusa and maintain dualism as well. The example of the lame and the blind is in appropriate because both the lame and the blind are having consciousness, where as prakrti is acetana. Flowing of milk from the udder of the cow for the nourishment of the calf is not logical and is not helpful in explaining clearly the association of the two. Once we keep in our mind that these are only similes and need not give much importance to them, there will be no difficulty.

Speaking logically, the atheistic Samkhya loses its chances of argument by depicting prakrti and purusa as independent and ultimate realities. The dualism of the Samkhya, it may be more appropriate against a monistic background.

The Samkhya Philosophy may not be free from the many problems therein, as for the concept of prakrti is concerned, from the logical point of view. It may have defects which could not be explained by logic while explaining the transcendental truth, since that truth, itself beyond the reach of human mind. Considering all the drawbacks in the system. It may not be wrong to say that if this system is studied and commented on the basis of common sense there will be little difficulty in explaining the principles of this system.

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