

THE THEORY OF CAUSATION AND TELEOLOGY IN THE SĀNKHYA PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT. Indian philosophy, from its origin, believed in the essential relation existing among the things of the universe. Sāṅkhya philosophical system very clearly articulated it. According to them the world and worldly things were evolved from primeval matter and the process was guided and enjoyed by self (the plurality of souls). Thus, both the spiritual realm and material realm can be considered as the complementary principles. The inner force generated by the activities of the constituents of primeval matter and the subtle to the gross evolutes further produce force for more activities. Though the attempt to Sāṅkhya was to justify the presence of selves in the universe, it also argued the existence of a self regulated universe and its interlinked parts. They claimed that the worldly events are a cycle of cause-effect relations. But it is not affirming fatalism, but argues that the present can transform the future as the past conditioned the present. Therefore the future of the universe is in our hand.

KEYWORDS: Purusha= Self, Prakriti= Primeval matter, trigunas= three constituents of Prakriti, sattva= intelligibility, rajas= activity, tamas= inertia, purushārtha= the end of/ for the sake of Purusha, Satkaryavada= the argument that the effect is the manifestation of the latent cause, Parinamavada= theory of real transformation/ evolution, karma samsāra sāgara/karmaphala= enjoyment/ bearing of fruits of the action, niskāma karma= selfless service/desire less action

Introduction

There are many philosophical systems and schools in India. These philosophical traditions are classified into two general headings such as Orthodox and Heterodox. Those systems that accept Vedas as the infallible scriptural source of their teachings are categorized under Orthodox systems. Vedas, a collection of Sanskrit hymns, is the first Hindu literature, which the believers consider as consisted of eternal truths that were handed over to great sages. Indologists identified six major schools as belonging to orthodox. Thus they are known as *shad darsanas* or six philosophical systems. They are *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeshika*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. Heterodox systems like Jainism and Buddhism derived their philosophical and spiritual inspirations from the teachings of great masters like Mahavira and Gautama Buddha. Though they did not accept the authority of Vedas, some of their teachings were influenced by Vedic concepts. The scriptural sources of *Charvaka* materialism,

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another extreme heterodox school, were destroyed in the melee of philosophical disputes. *Charvaka* propagated anti-Vedic and anti-spiritual teachings.

Sāṅkhya system is one of the most ancient and prominent orthodox systems. Kapila, an ancient sage whose period of existence is not known, is considered to be the founder. The authorship of two texts, *Sāṅkhya sūtra* and *Sāṅkhya pravācana sūtra* which are not available now, is attributed to Kapila. The earliest available text is *Sāṅkhya kārika* of Isvarakrishna which was composed around 5th century AD. Many wrote commentaries on it.¹ Though the system is inspired by Vedic verses and teachings, it is independent in promulgating and interpreting its philosophy. It advocated a system of interdependent pluralistic realism. This paper is an enquiry on the teleological interrelatedness of the universe of realities in the philosophy of *Sāṅkhya*. The holistic existence of realities in and through cosmic interrelatedness is established and stabilized through the implied force within each and every reality. *Sāṅkhya* metaphysics can be summarized as pluralistic realism emerged out of ultimate dualism. There are two ultimate principles: pluralistic souls/ selves (*Puruṣa*) and primeval matter (*Prakṛiti*). All the things of the world are evolved from primeval matter due to the assistance of the soul.

1. *Sāṅkhya* Metaphysics

Puruṣa (soul) is translated as the self. *Puruṣa* is a conscious spirit having pure consciousness. Consciousness is not an attribute or quality of the soul but the very essence of it. Self is the subject of knowledge. In Indian philosophy, mind (*manas*) is different from self. Mind is a product of matter and is considered as the sixth sense organ which has the power of reflecting consciousness. Though self is inactive and undergoes no change, due to its association with matter, it enjoys the fruits of the activities of the matter and its products. Thus the metaphysical dualism could not justifiably be maintained by the system. In the absolute sense, *Puruṣa* or self is free from all attachment and unaffected by pain and pleasure of the activities of body, mind and intellect which are evolutes of matter. But its inclination to be associated with *Prakṛiti* and its products confuses itself with any of these things and their activities and thinks as if it is the enjoyer of all activities and suffers *karma samsāra sāgara* (enjoyment of the fruits of action such as pleasure, pain, birth, growth, death and rebirth). The passive *Puruṣa*'s participation with active *Prakṛiti* stimulates the constituent elements (*triguṇas*) of *Prakṛiti* to be vibrant and leads to dynamic origin of evolutes. (The concept of *triguṇas* is described below.) Isvarakrishna summarizes the metaphysical position of the *Sāṅkhya* in the following aphorism.

“Primal Nature is not an evolute; Mahat, etc., the seven, are evolvents and evolutes; the group of sixteen is evolute; the Spirit is neither an evolute nor an evolvent.” *Kārika III*

¹ (Hiriyanna 2009: 267-69)

According to *Sāṅkhya*, in total, twenty five principles are there of which one is *Purusha* and the rest are *Prakriti* and its twenty three evolutes. Mental and physical things and force are evolved from *Prakriti*. These twenty three evolutes in turn combine to make the things of this world which undergo change whereas the fundamental twenty three evolutes remain relatively permanent until they merge in *Prakriti* during dissolution. Thus there is a fundamental difference between the evolved principles and combined things of this world. *Prakriti* or primeval matter is the first uncaused cause of the universe. Seven of the evolutes are the material causes of the evolution of other principles. Thus they are evolutes as well as evolvents. The intellect is the first evolute of *Prakriti* and is called *mahat* or the great one. It causes the evolution of ego-sense or self-consciousness. Five sense organs (*Jñānendriyas*) and five organs of action (*Karmendriyas*) are evolved from intellect and ego sense by the play of *sattva guna*. The status of mind is kept somewhere between the first two evolved evolvents and five senses and treated as the sixth sense organ. Thus mind plays an ambiguous role of being in both. Due to the dominant influence of *tamo guna* five subtle elements such as sound, touch color, taste and smell are born from intellect and ego sense. They become the evolvents of the evolution of gross elements (*Panchabhutas*) such as earth, water, air, fire, and sky.

All things of the world, including body and mind, senses and intellect, are limited and dependent. The series of effects should come at first from unlimited and independent cause. *Purusha* cannot be the cause of them as it is heterogeneous in nature. There are many Indian philosophical systems like *Charvakas*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeshika*, etc who think that the objects of the world are made out of the combination of atoms or elements of earth, water, air and fire. But *Sāṅkhya* denied it by claiming that the atoms or elements fail to explain the origin of subtle products such as the mind, the intellect, and the ego. The evolution takes place from subtle to gross or from small to big like a tree from seed. Thus *Prakriti* can be considered as the ultimate cause of the world which is uncaused, eternal and all pervading, subtle and ready for creative action. Though *Prakriti* is unconscious, it is subtler than its very fine products like mind and intellect. “*Prakriti* is a very subtle, mysterious and tremendous power which evolves and dissolves the world in a cyclic order.”¹ *Sāṅkhya* system developed many arguments to prove the existence of *Prakriti* as the ultimate subtle cause of the world. Two of the prominent arguments can be summarized. The first one is that the unlimited and independent ultimate cause is necessary for the existence of the limited and the dependent things. Another argument is based on the homogeneity between cause and effect and also the common characters seen in the objects of the world. All living things experience three statuses like pleasure, pain and indifference. These three attitudes should have a common cause and *Sāṅkhya* attributes it to the *trigunas* or three constituent components of *Prakriti*. They are *sattva* (intelligibility), *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (inertia).

¹ (Chatterjee and Datta 2007: 242)

Sattva elements are of the nature of consciousness, pleasure and luminosity. “The manifestation of objects in consciousness..., the luminosity of light, and the power of reflection in a mirror or the crystal are all due to the operation of the element of *sattva* in constitution of things... So also pleasure in its various forms, such as satisfaction, joy, happiness, bliss, contentment, etc. is produced by things in our minds through the operation of the power of *sattva* inhering in them both.”¹

Rajas element is the principle of activity in the *Prakriti* as well as in the worldly objects. It makes everything including *sattva* and *tamas gunas* move. “It is on account of *rajas* that fire spreads, the wind blows, the senses follow their objects and the mind becomes restless. On the affective side of our life, *rajas* is the cause of all painful experiences and is itself of the nature of pain.”² It is of the nature of pain, and is mobile and stimulating.

Tamas is the principle of passivity and negativity. It is opposite to the features of *sattva* in many ways. While *sattva* reveals the object of its existence, *tamas* conceals the objects and its qualities. It is unintelligent and opaque. Its presence paves way for ignorance, confusion and illusion. Being passive *tamas* restricts the activities of *rajas* in the things.

The *gunas* are in the state of both conflict and co-operation with one another. *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* together reduce the extremity in the evolved things of the world and create balance and order in the universe. The cosmic balance is the manifestation of the initial equilibrium of the *gunas* within the primeval *Prakriti*. The *gunas* always go together and can never be separated from one another. Nor can any one of them produce anything without the help of other two. “Just as the oil, the wick and the flame, which are relatively opposed to one another, co-operate to produce the light of a lamp, so the *gunas* co-operate to produce the objects of the world, although they possess different and opposed qualities. So all the three *gunas* are present in everything of the world, great or small, fine or gross.”³ But the relation is not a mutually agreeable relation. Each *guna* tries to domineer over the other two. The presence of predominant *guna* determines the nature of the things. The three components of *Prakriti* are almost like the tripartite division of soul in Plato. In effect Platonian societal classification had been established and stabilized in India based on the predominance of *guna* or quality in person which is known as caste system. Similarly, the nature of objects into good, bad and indifferent, or into pure, impure and neutral is determined by prevalence of *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas* respectively.

Whether in equilibrium or in evolution, *gunas* undergo constant change. While these constituent qualities are in equilibrium in the primeval matter during dissolution, each *guna* changes within. During dissolution, one is not disturbing the other but it moves within itself. When *gunas* move against the other, they affect on one another and create manifold things of the world as the product of the evolution of

¹ (Chatterjee and Datta 2007: 244)

² (Ibid: 244-45)

³ (Chatterjee and Datta 2007: 245)

Prakriti. This is known as *Prakriti parinama* or the evolution of primeval matter. When the *Purusha* or Soul comes into association with the *rajo guna*, the principle of activity within *Prakriti*, it will be vibrated and in turn disturb the original equilibrium existing among *gunas*, and they entangle among themselves, and burst out into the subtle to the gross particles and things of the universe as described in the big bang theory. “Because of the all-pervasive co presence of the two ultimate principles, the three constituent processes of primordial materiality undergo a continuing transformation (*parinama*) and combination (*samghata*) for the sake of consciousness (*purusārtha*)”¹ The conflict within the infinite bosom of *Prakriti* to domineer over the others results into the new combination in different proportions. The first three products of *Prakriti* in evolution are the intellect, the ego and mind. They are psychical in appearance and physical in reality. *Purusha* or pure consciousness is different from them, but due to illusory proximity with *Purusha*, they appear conscious and reflective. And then all elements, senses and activities are born. And their different combinations make all other living and non living objects in the processes of evolution. Thus the whole process of the origin of the universe and its parts could be explained in a materialist pattern. Yet *Sāṅkhya* brought the spiritual principle above all the activities and changes. The *Sāṅkhya* claims that the process of evolution is for the liberation of selves. The ongoing evolution and dissolution is a continuous cyclic process of *Purusha*’s association with *Prakriti* and dissociation and liberation from it. “That is, there are periods of evolution and dissolution alternating so that it is not a process of continuous progress in one direction only. It would seem also that dissolution is the normal state, for there is a persistent tendency in prakriti when in evolution, to revert to that state.”² The process happens cyclically and periodically.

2. Theory of Causation

The fundamental metaphysical relation existing between cause and effect is explained by the *Sāṅkhya* through its theory of causation known as *satkaryavada*. According to *satkaryavada* the effect (*karya*) is implicitly pre-existent in its cause prior to its production. Isvarakrishna substantiates it in the following aphorism. “The effect is existent (in its cause), since, non-existent cannot be produced, since the material (cause) is selected, since everything cannot be produced (from anything), since a potent (cause) produce that of which it is capable and since (effect is) of the same nature as the cause.” *Karika-IX*.

Isvarakrishna argues that the effect before it became an effect, existed in its material cause, otherwise no effort could bring it out. For ‘from nothing, nothing comes’. There is necessary relationship between material cause and effect. The desired effect is possible only from the assigned cause. For example, oil exists in the seed not in the sand. We select the raw material that can produce the desired effect.

¹ (Potter 1987: 23)

² (Hiriyanna 2009: 273)

For making curd, no one chooses water but only milk. The effect is not a new creation. Production is only the manifestation of what is hidden. Since a nonexistent thing cannot be produced, an effect exists in its cause in an un-manifested form. Similarly, destruction of an object also is only the change of form. Another implication of *Sāṅkhya* concept is that a potent thing can produce its capability. All accessories and efficient cause can produce pot if the clay is available. Clay has the potency to become earthen pot. Based on the *satkaryavada* principles, *Sāṅkhya* developed its *parinamavada*.

In Indian philosophical systems, theory of causation is discussed mainly in two metaphysical domains. One is on the origin and sustenance or maintenance of the universe and its destruction or decay. The second one is on the birth of living beings as the bound souls and continuation of bondage through a series of transmigrations and finally their liberation. In it, we discuss the initial association of the self with matter, continuous enjoyment of the fruits of the activities of the matter and final liberation by detaching from the activities of the matter. The former is the discussion on the cause-effect relations in the macro-cosmic sphere and the latter in the micro-cosmic level. With regard to *Sāṅkhya* system, we have seen the origin of macrocosm as due to the association of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. All the twenty three evolutes fall under the macrocosmic explanation. All these evolutes in turn form the living and non living objects through different combinations. The microcosmic realm is the experience of individual soul as if it is living in the body and possesses the body as itself and enjoys the fruits of all the activities of body. This paves way for the continuous presence of the spiritual reality in all the living organisms of the universe. As the traditional Indian philosophy was pessimistic about the living in the world, it found the life of spirit in the world as bondage. Yogic practices were suggested as the path for liberation. The cause for macrocosm and microcosm was attributed to primeval matter. But *Sāṅkhya* overcame its materialistic inclination by bringing spirit into the evolutionary process. Thus homogeneity between cause and effect is established, and at the same time the presence of heterogeneous reality is not denied in the universe. Though *Sāṅkhya* could not philosophically justify the heterogeneity, it successfully argued the sameness between cause and effect.

Satkaryavada has got an important place in Indian philosophy. According to it the cause is understood as a potency of the material to manifest as the effect when the condition of the manifestation is mature. The causal process involves a modification of material cause. The effect is not produced as a reality that is distinct from its underlying cause. The effect lies latent in the cause which in turn brings into being the following effect. It maintains that effect is real. Before its manifestation it is present cause in a potential form. According to it world is a series of effects.

In opposition to this position, systems like *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika* hold *asatkaryavada* or the doctrine of non-existent effect. It means the effect is not pre-existent in its cause prior to its production. The effect, once non-existent, comes into being afterwards signifies that new things can be added to those already in existence. Thus it is known as *arambhavada* or doctrine of new creation. Anything that has a

beginning ends at some stage. "... the *asat-karya-vada* signifies not only that the non-existent comes to be, but that an existent product sooner or later also ceases to be."¹ Thus these systems, in a way accept the possibility of the origin and destruction. On the contrary *Sāṅkhya satkaryavada* implies the cyclic eternal existence of all comprehensive reality.

Sāṅkhya system developed the following arguments in favor of *satkaryavada*. If the effect were not in the material cause, no effort could bring it into existence. If the oil was not there in the seed, no crushing can bring it out. For example, from sand no oil can be produced. Under favorable conditions, the cause manifests into effect like seed becomes tree. This example is cited to claim that there is an invariable relation between the effect and its material cause. We see that only certain effects can be produced from certain causes only. Curd can be made from milk not from water. This, in another way, states that the effect is potentially contained in the cause. The effect is the manifestation of the cause or actualization of the cause. *Satkaryavada* clearly asserts the homogeneity between cause and effect. Everything in the nature is made out of material nature due to the association of self. Thus spirit is present in the universe. The manifested is the combination of matter and spirit. The psychic elements in nature are inclined to climb to the realm of pure spirit. If the presence of spirit was removed, *Sāṅkhya* system would have become materialism.

3. Parinamavada

Sāṅkhya theory of *satkaryavada* is generally known as *parinamavada* or theory of real transformation. It means the effect is a real evolution from cause. In other words, the effect is the cause in a new form. For example, the gold and gold ornaments are essentially identical concerned with matter and different with regard to form. "Between the two, cause and effect, there is a relation of identity-and-difference- identity of stuff but difference of form. Both identity and difference are real."² Thus all objects of the world are the transformation of primeval matter. It is the self-emanating subtle hidden seed of the universe, simultaneously being the efficient cause as well. Self is the guiding principle and the enjoyer of the *Prakriti parinama* (transformation).

4. The Law of Karma

The law of karma is a philosophical and religious concept that is accepted by all systems of Indian philosophy except *Charvaka*. Karma is the great law of cause and effect, of action and reaction, which controls the destiny of all living entities. The law of karma states that every action performed in life creates another reaction which in turn produces a new counter action. Thus an endless chain of actions and reactions is produced which binds the living entity to his good or bad deeds and better or worse rebirth and finally liberation through continuous birth. "Among the most prominent

¹ (Hiriyanna 2009: 239)

² (Mohanty 2002:76)

philosophical problems which engaged the minds of Indian thinkers, the problem of causal order was observed to have direct import on the theory of the bound human existence.”¹This is known as the transmigration of the soul through different bodies not only of human but also of other living organisms. The spiritual principle present in every organism links everything as part of a related whole.

Everything originates due to the prior conditions or causes. Similarly, every action bears fruit which is known as *karmaphala* or fruits of the action. *Karmaphala* or bearing fruits of action is considered to be something negative in Indian philosophy, because it is a binding force. We act, because we are attached to the desired goal and we cannot act without desiring for fruits or gain. Most of the time we desire trivial and worldly gain, and for the sake of attaining them we lose ourselves. “Different is the good, and different, indeed, is the pleasing... One who is wise considers the two all round and discriminates them. He chooses the good in preference to the pleasing. One who is stupid chooses the pleasing for the sake of acquisition and prosperity... go round and round, staggering to and fro, like blind men led by one who too is blind.” *Katha Upanisad*, I, 2, 1-6.² Our action with the attachment to the worldly pleasure binds the self, the enjoyer of action, to the fruits of action and it obstructs the process of liberation. *Prakriti* by nature is active and *Purusha* enjoys the fruits of action and thus *Purusha* is bound to the world. Action bears fruits and fruits, in turn, stimulate action. According to the law of karma, the fruits of the past actions were accumulated in us and they create the present and the present can form the future. Thus the causal circle is within, and the teleology is self determined. The *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text of Hinduism, which is very much influenced by *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, converted the negative karma theory into a positive *niskāma karma* or selfless service as a means for liberation. According to it one has to renounce the attachment for the fruits action for oneself by dedicating them for the wellbeing of all. “As the unlearned act from attachment to their work, so should the learned also act,..., but without any attachment, with the desire to maintain the world-order.” (*Bhagavad Gita* III. 25.) Therefore, *karmaphala* or fruits of action is not binding the actor but bears as blessings in the society. Thus the action of a karma yogi or selfless servant is altruistic, functioning for the wellbeing of the world. A renounced person realizes that everything emerges from *Prakriti* and happens within *Prakriti*. The material cause and the efficient cause of evolution and dissolution is *Prakriti*. And they happen in a cyclic manner. Similarly, the love and hatred relationship between *Prakriti* and *Purusha* is an eternal dialectical mystery in which one has to participate in a constructive manner.

Conclusion

Sāṅkhya advocated dualism: the belief in two independent ultimate substances. They are *Purusha* or Self and *Prakriti* or Prime matter. But in the process of

¹ (Sinari 1984:37)

² (Mahadevan 2000:60)

elaboration of the philosophy, we find that it could not logically hold its metaphysical dualism, because its cosmology was based on the fundamental relationship between the two ultimate principles. Isolation is stable and uncreative and relation is creative and productively enjoyable. The process of evolution and dissolution is the outcome of the association and dissociation of the ultimate principles. In reality, *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are mutually complementary, supporting each other. One is inclined to the other and this predisposition leads to evolution. And the process of creation is for the self realization and liberation. Self negation or the denial of identity generates life and diversity. Interdependence is the principle of life and the reason for the order of the universe. The universe moves when the components of *Prakriti* and its evolutes do their role. The whole of the universe is consisted of the interdependence and interaction of all. Well structured and dynamic material reality provides vehicle for the static selves to move in the universe to reinvent their original nature. The psychic realm, the first three subtlest material evolutes, is the carrier of force of modification through their desire for fruits and the initiation for action. The psychic evolutes are highly volatile, not satisfied in remaining in the material realm, cross to the spiritual boundaries with their assumed spiritual powers, to which the selves themselves surrender and behave as if they are mundane. Thus the world is blessed with the spiritual experience. The interaction of different principles makes the universe dynamic, corrective and all encompassing. *Sāṅkhya* system in a way claims that the self affirmation against the existence of the other is self destruction.

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