

Problem of Plurality of Selves in the Sāṃkhya Philosophy

Sukanta Das

Department of Philosophy and the Life-world, Vidyasagar University, Midnapur, West Bengal, India

Abstract

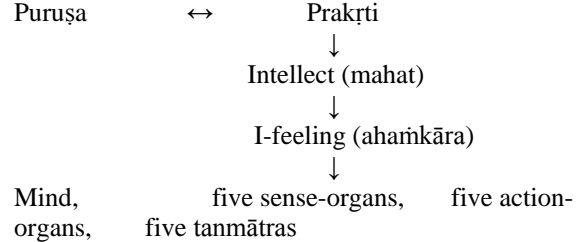
It is known to all that the Sāṃkhya Philosophy is a dualistic system. They have admitted two main realities puruṣa (sentient) and prakṛti (insentient). Both puruṣa and prakṛti are individual and contradictory entities. Due to their own necessities become connected with each other. As a result, evolution becomes started. Their total admitted realities are twenty-five in respect of number. They have established that selves are many in respect of many bodies or empirical jīvas. But, they are failed to give sufficient reason that how many selves (jīvas) are derived or appeared as many jīvas from one non-transformed eternal puruṣa. The main aim of this paper is to show the problem of plurality of selves and how the Sāṃkhya have protected other's objections against them and tried to establish their concept.

Keywords: Puruṣa, prakṛti, self, plurality, jīva,

INTRODUCTION

The concept of self is a very important, interesting and favourite in Indian Philosophy. It is too difficult to know the nature of self or what it is. Hence, the God of death (Yama) told Naciketa in the 'Kaṭa Upaniṣad': "Devairatrāpi vicikitsitaṃ purā na hi suvijñeya maṇuṣeṣa dharmah". Verse No. 1/1/21. In this regard, every system has given different views. Of course, all the systems are agreed to admit that it is consciousness which is contrary of unconsciousness or matter. We find some contradictory arguments regarding the nature and number of self among all the systems of Indian Philosophy viz. Vedanta admits that self is one where others (Sāṃkhya, Jaina, Nyāya etc.) admit plurality of selves. Again, according to the Cārvāka and Bauddha, self is non-eternal where other systems assert that self is eternal. However, here our aim is to discuss regarding the self in the Sāṃkhya Philosophy.

The main aim of the Sāṃkhya is mokṣa of bound soul. But bondage of puruṣa is initial, not final. Two main realities i. e. puruṣa and prakṛti have been admitted in the Sāṃkhya system. After contacting with the puruṣa, prakṛti is able to create evolution. The form of evolution is shown in the following:



↓

Five gross elements.

This picture indicates that mahat, ahaṃkāra etc. have been derived from the root prakṛti. Here, prakṛti becomes transformed with the help of sentient puruṣa. The Sāṃkhya divides these twenty five realities in four parts viz. prakṛti, vikṛti, prakṛti-vikṛti and puruṣa or jīva. Prakṛti is that which derives other only. Vikṛti is that which are derived only, have not power to create. Prakṛti-vikṛti is that which are derives and also derive others. Puruṣa is neither prakṛti nor vikṛti nor prakṛti-vikṛti. In this context, we may quote a verse of Īśvarakṛṣṇa from his 'Sāṃkhyakārikā':

"Mūlaprakṛtiravikṛtirmahadādyāḥ prakṛtīvikṛtayaḥ sapta,

Soḍaṣkasttu vikāro na prakṛtirna vikṛtiḥ puruṣaḥ".¹

Again, it has been stated that self or puruṣa is contrary of three ingredients (prakṛti) and revealed (vyakta). We can know both puruṣa and prakṛti by inference through their activities. The nature of puruṣa is consciousness; it is ever pure, ever free, indifferent, seer, inactive etc.

We know that there is two realities viz. seer or knower and seen or knowable object and these are contradictory to each other. Everything, which is seen or knowable object, must be insentient. The term 'knower' or 'seer' means that 'who see or knows'. One, who knows anything, must be sentient. When anybody says that 'I know, I enjoy, I am happy etc.'- this type of knowing, feeling etc. are related with which subject that is puruṣa or self. There may be raised a question- when we say that 'I know' and here the term 'I' indicates to 'self' but is it real form for knowing puruṣa? Because, we know that 'I-feeling' is the form of ahaṃkāra. Ahaṃkāra is a form of avyakta or prakṛti that is to say, it is insentient and related with three ingredients. In reply, we have to say here that puruṣa is that where there will be no 'mind', 'I-feeling' and 'intellect'. Hence, Vacaspati Misra says,

‘Na me, nāhasmi, nāham’ is the form of puruṣa. Let us see how the Sāṃkhya proves the existence of puruṣa.

We know that *puruṣa* is seer, enjoyer etc. and *prakṛti* is enjoyed. But the question is –how shall we believe that *puruṣa* is existed and enjoyed? In reply, Īśvarakṛṣṇa has mentioned a verse which is quoted here:

“Saṃghātaparārthatvāt triguṇādiviparyayād
adhiṣṭānāt,

Puruṣohasti bhokṛṭrbhāvāt kaivalyārtham
pravṛtteśca”.²

That is to say, there must be a consumer, sentient entity by which seen or enjoyable thing is enjoyed. That is puruṣa. We know that puruṣa is inactive, nothing is derived from it. So, how can we say that it enjoys or seer or tries to become free from bondage? In reply, it may be pointed out that though all the objections against puruṣa are true yet without contact of puruṣa, prakṛti has no power to create or become active. If there was no puruṣa, evolution by prakṛti would not be possible. Hence, it may be observed that puruṣa is chief and the root cause of every creativity. For example, as a car cannot move without help of conscious driver, prakṛti has no feeling, creation, activity etc. without help of conscious puruṣa.

Till now, we know that puruṣa is one and only sentient reality and there is no doubt for its existence. But the question is- is that puruṣa one in many bodies or various in different bodies? Īśvarakṛṣṇa says here that as there we find many bodies; puruṣa also will be many in number. In this context, we may mention a quotation from the ‘Sāṃkhyakārikā’:

“Jananamarāṇakaraṇānām pratiniyamād ayugapat
pravṛtteśca,

Puruṣavahutvaṃ siddhvaṃ traiguṇyaviparyayāt ca
eva”.³

This verse is indicating that as we find various antaḥkaraṇas, minds etc. in different bodies and there is no single body where self is not existed. If puruṣa would become one in many bodies then all men would be born, perceive, died after one’s death. But, it is not possible. Here, a question may be raised that we know that puruṣa is essentially without accompanied (asaṅga), eternal, ever free, indifferent etc., so how can we say that puruṣa has birth, death, antaḥkaraṇa? Here, the term ‘birth’ refers to ‘attachment with the gross body, organs, mind, ahaṃkāra, intellect etc. of puruṣa’. Similarly, ‘death’ means ‘detachment from these’. Again, though puruṣa is asaṅga, yet due to reflection or ascription of prakṛti it becomes attached with the body. The Sāṃkhya has given an argument in favour of plurality of selves, that is- we find different kinds of varieties in the three ingredients viz. some living being are pervaded by sattva (deities), some are rajas (men),

and some are tamas (beast, birds etc.). If puruṣa becomes one in many bodies, then we cannot separate them (deity, men and beast etc.) from each other.⁴ In this manner, the Sāṃkhya has tried to prove the plurality of selves by various arguments. But, the question is- are their arguments fully satisfied? Let us see the objections against the Sāṃkhya plurality of selves.

We know that the Sāṃkhya has admitted two main realities viz. puruṣa and prakṛti. Among them creation belongs to the prakṛti and after attainment of kaivalya through the vivekakyāti that particular puruṣa remains in its own essence. But, the objection is- firstly, the Sāṃkhya admits at first that there is only one transcendental puruṣa which is sentient, eternal etc. then they argue that there are many selves but how those many selves have appeared from one eternal transcendental self? Actually, they have given arguments for the existence of puruṣa and many empirical egos (jīvas) but not for transcendental self.

Secondly, the Sāṃkhya says that puruṣa is called enjoyer and prakṛti enjoyed. But, puruṣa is the transcendental subject, how can it be enjoyer? Puruṣa is inactive and indifferent, how can it enjoy? In reply, the Sāṃkhya says that when prakṛti becomes connected with the transcendental self, becomes active like prakṛti.

Thirdly, According to the Sāṃkhya, after contact with prakṛti transcendental puruṣa appeared as many jīvas. But how the transcendental realities become divided into the many selves? How can there be a plurality of transcendental subjects as puruṣas? The Sāṃkhya gives answer against this question that though the upādhis (body) are many yet pure consciousnesses (upahitacaitanya) is one.⁵ But, here, another question will be raised: if the oneself becomes many for the contact with the body; it has to say that same self is partly free and partly bound. In this manner, there we find some confusion against the Sāṃkhya theory of plurality of selves. Though they have tried to establish their concept yet avoid the main problem i.e. how the transcendental self appears as many empirical jīvas which are the modifications of prakṛti.

The sāṃkhya has given another argument for establishment of plurality of selves. Pradhāna is one and the seer is completely different from the pradhāna. Hence, it is many. If seer is one and seen (prakṛti) would be one, there would be found only one jīva. But, as we find many jīvas in the world so buddhi also should be many in respect of puruṣas. If we say that one puruṣa is the cause of many selves, then that ‘oneself’ will be summation of many buddhis, not non-separable one. Again, at the time of liberation, liberated soul remains in its own essence.

At that time, it does not feel like ‘I have become the self of all jīvas’, because, at that time, it gives up all the feeling of dualities viz. ‘all’, ‘jīva’ etc.

In reply to the objection of Advaita Vedanta, the Sāṃkhya says that as the fire takes different forms after penetrating the land similarly one self who exists in all the jīvas appears as many.

At last, we may opine in conclusion that the Sāṃkhya plurality of selves cannot give satisfied answer. It is very true that according to them, both puruṣa and prakṛti are individual realities. The transformation of prakṛti is possible due to contact with puruṣa, because, transformation is the common feature prakṛti, not puruṣa. So, non-transformed puruṣa cannot be split into many. The Sāṃkhya has forgotten that puruṣa is not subject to birth, death, bondage or liberation or any type of feeling of pleasure, pain etc. Realizing this problem, the later commentators like Vacaspati Misra, Gaudapada, Vijñānabhikṣu have admitted the reality of one puruṣa only in their commentaries.⁶ Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan himself says in his book, “Throughout the Sāṃkhya there is confusion between the puruṣa and the jīva”.⁷ Dr. C.D. Sharma also says, “Numerical pluralism is sheer nonsense”.⁸

REFERENCES

- [1] Īśvarakṛṣṇa, “Sāṃkhyakārikā”, Verse No. 3.
- [2] Īśvarakṛṣṇa, “Sāṃkhyakārikā”, Verse No. 17.
- [3] Īśvarakṛṣṇa, “Sāṃkhyakārikā”, Verse No. 18.
- [4] Misra, Vacaspati. “Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī”, “*Kecit khalu sattvanikāyāḥ sattvavahulāḥ yathordhvasrotasaḥ, kecit rajovahulāḥ yathā maṇuṣyāḥ, kecit tamovahulāḥ yathā tiryagyonayah*”. Verse No. 18.
- [5] Maharsi, Kapila. “Sāṃkhyapravacanasūtra”, “Upādhibhedehapyekasya nānāyoga ākāśasyeva ghatādibhiḥ”. Verse No. 1/150 and “Upādhibhidyate na tu tadvān”. Verse No. 1/151.
- [6] Radhakrishnan, Dr. Sarvapalli. “Indian Philosophy”, Vol. No. 2 Oxford University Press, Delhi, P.322.
- [7] Radhakrishnan, Dr. Sarvapalli. “Indian Philosophy”, Vol. No. 2 Oxford University Press, Delhi, P.323.
- [8] Sharma, Dr. C.D. “A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy”, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, P. 168.