

Role of Prakṛti in Bondage and Liberation: A Sāṃkhya Approach

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Abstracts: We know that except the Cārvāka system, all the systems of Indian Philosophy have admitted mokṣa as the highest aim of every human being. Among them the Sāṃkhya is ancient. The Sāṃkhya has admitted two main realities i.e. puruṣa and prakṛti. Generally we know that puruṣa or self becomes bound and free. In this regard, the Sāṃkhya system is different from others. Firstly, it shows that puruṣa or self becomes bound due to contact with prakṛti (aviveka jñāna) and then through the study of Sāṃkhya scripture and śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsana puruṣa attains different knowledge between prakṛti and it (vivekakhyāti). But, here this paper has tried to present that actually both bondage and liberation are of prakṛti, not of puruṣa and how prakṛti plays a role for own necessity i.e. enjoyment or bondage and liberation. According to the Sāṃkhya, all the activities are of prakṛti but ascribes on puruṣa. As a result, puruṣa feels itself as bound and free.

Keywords: Prakṛti, puruṣa, bondage, liberation, vivekakhyāti, avivekajñāna.

INTRODUCTION

There are two contradictory entities i.e. conscious and unconscious or matter in the world. If conscious comes to near the unconscious, unconscious becomes active otherwise not; such as a car does not move if there is no driver. Similarly, our body is unconscious and it moves or can change the place through the help of conscious (soul). We find two main realities (conscious (self or *puruṣa*) and unconscious (*prakṛti*)) in the Sāṃkhya system. Though these are essentially contradictory to each other yet both are also complementary to each other for their own necessities.

The great wise Indian sage Kapila is the founder of the Sāṃkhya Philosophy. He wrote “*Sāṃkhyasūtra*” which does not exist now. The book of Iśvarakṛṣṇa “*Sāṃkhyakārikā*” is considering as authentic and dependable book of Sāṃkhya system. We find the existence of Sāṃkhya in various Upaniṣads, the Gītā, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas etc. which indicates its antiquity. The great sage Kapila has pointed out his disciple Āsuri the theory of Sāṃkhya. The Sāṃkhya system believes in transcendental entities like the other spiritual systems of Indian Philosophy. But the main characteristic of this system is that it does not admit the existence and activity of God. It admits two main realities i.e. *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* by which this world has been manifested. Of course, the manifestation is not mechanical. It has an objective and that is liberation after enjoyment of each bound soul. If they follow the way of Sāṃkhya, they can be free from bondage. Now, we shall try to see here that how the Sāṃkhya system can free us from any kind of bondage eternally.

I

Prakṛti is an insentient and eternal reality of the Sāṃkhya. Only *puruṣa* or self is sentient thing but it has no activity for manifestation. Before the explanation of the role of *prakṛti* we should know what the *prakṛti* is. It has been stated in the ‘*Sāṃkhyapravacanasūtra*’ that *prakṛti* is the summation of three ingredients (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*)¹. These three ingredients are the primary and eternal matter of the world. When these are remained in a balanced state without any disturbance, is called *prakṛti*. On the other perspective, *prakṛti* is that which creates and the root cause or matter of anything (*mūle mūlābhābād amūlam mūlam*). Everything of this world is made with three ingredients *prakṛti*. Every ingredient has different characteristics viz. *sattva* is light and illuminate everything (*prakāśak*), *raja* is restless and

distracts everything and tama is heavy and covers everything (*āvaraṅkāṛī*). The Sāṁkhya has admitted twenty-five realities. Among these, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are the root. The other twenty three are viz. intellect (*mahat*), I-feeling (*ahaṁkāra*), mind, five sense-organs, five action organs, five *tanmātras* and five gross elements are derived from *prakṛti*. We saw here that *prakṛti* manifests other twenty three but it has no derivation. Hence, it is called as unrevealed (*avyakta*). But the question is- *Prakṛti* is insentient, so how can it create or derive anything? In reply, it may be stated that though *prakṛti* is insentient, yet due to contact and reflection of sentient *puruṣa* it becomes sentient like *puruṣa*. We can know *prakṛti* by the inference of its activities.

II

We know that there are four kinds of *puruṣārthas* (desire of men) have been admitted in Indian Philosophy viz. *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire) and *mokṣa* (liberation). The term '*puruṣārtha*' means the object of desire of living being. In this regard we can say here that every living being wants that which is pleasurable. But, there is nothing without sorrow. Hence, as a rational being men want that 'I shall be happy' but this type of desire is a fallacy. They should want that 'We shall be free from any kind of sorrow' - this is the original form of *parama puruṣārtha*.

The Sāṁkhya Philosophy divides all kinds of sorrows in three parts viz. *ādhyātmika*, *ādhidaivika* and *ādhibhautika*. They say that we may be free from these three kinds of sufferings eternally through the means of Sāṁkhya. According to them, all selves are associated with the *prakṛti* from many previous births due to their actions or fruits of actions. If they are able to detach themselves from the association with *prakṛti*, they must be free (*mukta*). Anybody may suspect that we are living in the highly developed science and technological era where we have no dissatisfaction in any cases. So, why shall we take the difficulty way of Sāṁkhya for long days? Again, is there any certainty that the means of Sāṁkhya will be able to free us from any kind of suffering of life? It may be answered here that of course it is very true that we are living in the highly developed era, yet there is no scientific or technological invention which can free us from the suffering of birth, old-age, disease and death etc. Again, it may be pointed out that if anybody sincerely follows the means of Sāṁkhya, he must be free from any kind of suffering of life and it is said by those great sages who had got rid of.

III

Till now, we knew that anyone who is bound want to be free. But the question is- who is bound and who is free in the Sāṁkhya Philosophy? In general sense, we know that self is bound and wants to be free. But, the nature of the self in Sāṁkhya system that *puruṣa* is ever free, how can we say that the self is bound and wants to be free? In reply, it may be pointed out that essentially self of Sāṁkhya is ever pure, ever free etc. but due to ignorance (*aviveka*) it cannot understand its own nature. As a result, it feels that 'I am knower, I am doer, and I am enjoyer' etc. Actually, all the activities are of *prakṛti*. Here, another question may be raised: essentially *prakṛti* is insentient, so how can it is able to create? The Sāṁkhya gives answered that as a crystal takes red colour of a china-rose similarly when *prakṛti* contacts with *puruṣa*, becomes sentient like *puruṣa* and at that time it starts to create.

We know that no living being wants to say in a cave. So, why does ever free soul contact with *prakṛti*? According to the Sāṁkhya Philosophy, 'bondage' means 'the connection between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*'. Hence, 'bondage of *puruṣa*' means contacts with the *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* should not contact with *prakṛti*. The Sāṁkhya says here that *puruṣa* is indifferent and inactive. *Puruṣa* cannot understand that it and *prakṛti* are different from eternal time (*anādikāla*). *Prakṛti* takes a role for *puruṣa* that is it lures *puruṣa* for enjoyment and after enjoyment when *prakṛti* becomes desisted from that particular *puruṣa* becomes free or remains in its own essence. *Prakṛti* is an enjoyable thing, if enjoyer *puruṣa* does not enjoy, *prakṛti* will not be satisfied. Hence, Vācaspati Miśra says, "Pradhānasya sarvakāraṇasya yaddarśanam puruṣeṇa tadartham. Tadanena bhogyatā pradhānasya darśitā. Tataśca bhogyam pradhānam bhoktāramantareṇa na sambhavatīti yuktāhasya bhoktrapekṣā. Puruṣasyāpekṣām darśayati- "Puruṣasya kaivalyartham iti".² In this context, *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* says, "Puruṣasya vimokṣārtham pravarttatadvadavyaktam".³ Though the Sāṁkhya has admitted many selves in number, yet one bound self becomes free from one and eternal *prakṛti*. Hence, we understand that both *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* waits for each other and becomes satisfied. *Puruṣa* wants *kaivalya* and *prakṛti* wants enjoyment. *Kaivalya* is not possible without enjoyment. *Prakṛti* gives suffering to *puruṣa* more than pleasure. As a result, *puruṣa* wants *vivekakhyāti* or *kaivalya*.

IV

We know that the Sāṁkhya has admitted *prakṛti* as an individual eternal entity. When *prakṛti* becomes connected with *puruṣa*, becomes transformed as intellect, *ahaṁkāra*, mind etc. *Puruṣa* becomes free through the grace of *prakṛti*. It

means that if *puruṣa* is able to understand once that it is completely different from *prakṛti*, *puruṣa* becomes bound or free? *Puruṣa* is essentially non-ingredient, ever free, so how can it depend for liberation on the grace of *prakṛti*? If we profoundly analysis the theory, we must find that actually bondage and freedom is of *prakṛti*, not *puruṣa*. The bondage of *puruṣa* is ascribed from *prakṛti*. Hence, Iśvarakṛṣṇa says,

“*Tasmānna vadhyatehaddhā na mucyate nāhapi saṃsarati kaścit,*

Saṃsarati vadhyate mucyate ca nānāśrayā prakṛtiḥ”.⁴

In this context, we may mention a quotation from ‘*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*’:

“*Vandham ca mokṣam ca mṛṣaiva mūdā buddherguṇam vasttuni kalpayanti,*

Ḍṛgāvṛtiṃ meghakṛtaṃ yathā ravou yatohadvayāsaṅga cidekamakṣasram”.⁵

He also has mentioned some statements regarding the bondage and freedom from *buddhi* or *māyā* or *prakṛti*.⁶ According to Saṃkarācārya, *māyā* or *prakṛti* or *buddhi* is not individual eternal entity like Sāṃkhya, it is a part of Brahman. Here, we find some similarities and dissimilarities between Sāṃkhya self, *prakṛti* and Brahman and *māyā* of Saṃkara Vedanta. Like sāṃkhya, Saṃkara says that Brahman is essentially ever pure, ever free, sentient, doer, enjoyer, and knower etc. due to effect of ignorance. However, here our aim is not to discuss it in details. We want to see that actually *prakṛti* takes chief role for enjoyment or bondage and emancipation. As a result, *puruṣa* remains in its own nature. It is called the attainment of *kaivalya* of *puruṣa* in the Sāṃkhya Philosophy.

V

At last, we may conclude that the Sāṃkhya opines that the evolution is possible through the contact between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. In this course, *puruṣa* is inactive, indifferent and seer. *Prakṛti* becomes transformed and *mahat*, *ahamkāra* etc. are derived from it. *Prakṛti* becomes evolutes for the enjoyment and freedom for *puruṣa*. But, as *puruṣa* is ever free, it has no enjoyment or freedom. *Puruṣa* feels itself as enjoyer, doer etc. due to *aviveka*. When it is able to attain the different knowledge between it and *prakṛti* (*vivekakhyaṭi*), becomes free. We have known before that the bondage of *puruṣa* is false or ascription; that is to say, *puruṣa* was already free but when it contacts with *prakṛti*, feels itself as bound and when *prakṛti* becomes desisted from that particular *puruṣa*, *puruṣa* feels itself as free. It is called in the Vedanta as it is attainment of that which was already attained and it is devoid of that which is already devoided.⁷

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] “*Sattvarajastamasām sāmyāvasthāḥ prakṛtiḥ*”, *Sāṃkhyapravacanasūtra* of Kapila, Verse No. 1/61.
- [2] Miśra Vācaspati, “*Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī*”, Verse No. 21.
- [3] Iśvarakṛṣṇa, “*Sāṃkhyakārikā*”, Verse No. 58.
- [4] Iśvarakṛṣṇa, “*Sāṃkhyakārikā*”, Verse No. 62.
- [5] Saṃkarācārya, “*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*”, Verse No. 572.
- [6] Saṃkarācārya, “*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*”, Verse No. 574 and 575.
- [7] Dharmarājadhvarīndra, “*Vedanta Paribhāṣā*”, “*Lokehapi prāptaprāpti- pariḥṭapariḥārayoḥ prayojanatvam dṛṣṭameva*”. (Translator in Bengali, Sarat Chandra Ghosal), Sanskrita Pustaka Bhandar, Kolkata-6, P. 127.