

CHAPTER IV

The Concept of Puruṣa in Sāṃkhya

If it is admitted that all movements of Prakṛti are for the sake of experience and liberation of Puruṣa. As such the nature of Puruṣa and its relation to Prakṛti await discussion.

Prakṛti is an unconscious dynamic principle that is capable of being changed and transformed for the creation of the empirical world. On the other hand, there is a consciousness, the contents of which always change and differ. But one conscious principle which can illumine and reveal other objects remains always the same. Though there are a lot of changes and transformations in the universe, there remains a permanent principle of consciousness capable manifesting everything in the phenomenal world. This eternal conscious principle is called Puruṣa in Sāṃkhya philosophy. The world full of happiness and miseries cannot be produced by an unconscious principle. Hence, the existence of a conscious principle called Puruṣa is to be admitted. This Puruṣa may influence the unconscious principle in creation and evolution. Apart from this Prakṛti by virtue of its unconscious nature cannot synthesise the contents of experience or can not organise them into one meaningful object due to not having effort. The unity among different bits of experience can be accounted for if there is a spiritual principle called Puruṣa. Puruṣa is to be admitted in order to justify the creation of this cosmic universe and meaningful

knowledge of its objects. Puruṣa is said to be pure consciousness and hence it is changeless and infinite. As Puruṣa is a transcendental principle, its nature is unknowable by experience. Puruṣa is the logical presupposition of all knowledge. Behind the forms of epistemic knowledge there is a principle which is changeless capable of revealing all mental states and processes by its own power of illumination. This conscious principle is distinct from the ideas and images of knowledge, always pure and its nature is intelligence and non-activity. Īśvarakṛṣṇa in his *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* gives an account of Puruṣa as *atriguṇa* (having no attributes of three types), *vivekī* (having knowledge of discrimination), *cetana* (conscious), *aprasava-dharmī* (having the property of non-extension), *Kevalī* (isolated from Prakṛti), *draṣṭā* (seer), *akartā* (non-doer) etc. All these characteristic features show that Puruṣa is diametrically opposite to Prakṛti. Prakṛti is capable of being changed while Puruṣa is changeless. Both are, however, equally free and fundamental and both lie at the root of the world and its experience.¹

Puruṣa stands for the second of the two ultimate reals acknowledged in Sāṃkhya philosophy. Puruṣa is opposed to Prakṛti as it is conscious and non-material. It has been said that Prakṛti transforms itself into the world and creates objects for the enjoyment and liberation of some reality, which is opposed to it. This reality is Puruṣa. (*Puruṣasya daśanārtham kaivalyārtham tathā pradhānasya*).²

The Sāṃkhya philosophers describe the unconscious matter as something which is capable of serving the need of Puruṣa. The entire world being inanimate thus proves the existence of a conscious reality which is Puruṣa. We have said that the world has been created for satisfying the need of a reality other than itself. Need can be felt only by a conscious principle. If there is no consciousness, there is no question of need. If again, there is no need, no creation is required answering to it. Hence, the principle which feels need and for whom the world is created must be conscious.

Puruṣa is devoid of all sensible properties and for this reason it is not amenable to sense-perception. If Puruṣa were object of perception it would be inanimate and unconscious. It means that since Puruṣa is devoid of all sensible properties, it must be conscious. This, again, is the reason why the existence of Puruṣa cannot be established by perceptual evidence. Hence, the existence of Puruṣa is established by inference.

Here a problem should be solved. In an inference, the *hetu* must be present in the *Pakṣa* so that the *sādhya* can be established with the help of *hetu*. In the inference the existence of Puruṣa must be the *Pakṣa* or the subject of the inference and existence would be the *sādhya* which must be present in the said *Pakṣa*. But the trouble is that the *hetu* intended to prove existence may be present in the *Pakṣa* Puruṣa, because Puruṣa has been described as *asanga* or unrelated and *nirdharmika* that is devoid of all properties. If Puruṣa

is possessed of any property then it must be considered as subject to transformation (*Parināmi*); and that which is subject to transformation is found to be inanimate. Puruṣa being different from what is inanimate has been described as *apariṇāmi*. That which is not subject to transformation must be devoid of properties. In this situation no inference is possible with Puruṣa as the subject which means the existence of Puruṣa cannot be proved with the help of inference. Sāṃkhya philosophers, consequently hold that if no inference is possible with Puruṣa as the subject. One can prove the existence of Puruṣa by an inference having inanimate objects as the subject. The *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* infers the existence of Puruṣa with the help of five *hetus*.

The twenty-five reals admitted by Sāṃkhya philosophers are divided into two kinds – the manifest which are twenty-four in number and unmanifest. These reals are all devoid of consciousness and material. They are constituted by the three *guṇa*-s. As a matter of fact, the reals proceeding from Prakṛti to the five elements are all constituted by the three *guṇa*-s which are present in all matters collectively. In view of this collection, all material things have been characterised as *samghātā* or composite. The reason is essential maniness in every material thing. Literally, the term *samghātā* means collected together. The Sāṃkhya philosophers infer the existence of Puruṣa with this collection or compound as the *hetu*. The inference is of the following form. The unmanifested and the twenty-four manifest entities exist for the sake of something else – such being the nature of a compound substance. It can not really

be denied that everything which is unconscious but a compound exist for something other than itself. Table, chair are examples of such compounds which exist for the sake of others. Such other must be opposite in characteristics to the unconscious compound which means that such entities for which inanimate object exists must be conscious.

The idea is that conscious entities which are of the nature of compounds serve the need of some other substance. Such need is a natural property of whatever is conscious. Such a conscious substance collect materials and assemble them so that a thing is made which is suited to its need. If we analyse a compound, we find that it is necessarily brought into existence for serving the purpose of what is conscious. The first inference thus intends to prove that there must be a conscious substance or Puruṣa which is different from unconscious Prakṛti which is a compound.

Of course, there may be some misgivings regarding the validity of the above inference. It has been argued that everything that is unconscious must exist for the sake of something other than itself, tables, chairs, bed and house are mentioned as examples. The contention is that whatever substance is to be proved as other than the unconscious compound must itself be conscious. It may be suspected that whatever is mentioned as examples is not congruous with the probance of the inference. It is true that the bed or the chair exists for serving the requirement of some other entity (i.e. an embodied in itself). It is really the body of a person which is the

enjoyer of bed and chair. The suggestion is that the self which is the nature of consciousness is not the real enjoyer. It shows clearly that the entity which is other than unconscious material substances is itself unconscious. But the intention of the inference is to prove consciousness as substance other than a compound. It is clear that the example of bed and chair does not serve the purpose of the inference. In Indian logic this defect is known as '*Sādhyavikaladoṣa*', that is to say the example in question does not prove a conscious principle. Bed etc. are said to be *saṁghāta* or compound. This compound is meant for serving the need of the physical body which again is a *saṁghāta* or compound. If this be so than whatever is other than a compound must itself be a compound composed of the three *guṇa*-s. Such a compound must be unconscious. The inference consequently does not prove the existence of Puruṣa as a conscious principle. In reply to this objection it should be said that the example and what it stands for may not be completely similar. In fact, if two things are similar in all respects then they must be practically identical. But there must be some difference between an example and what it is an example of, when two things are qualitatively dissimilar inspite of their differences, one may be used as an example of the other. The face is like the moon. The moon may be referred to as an example of such things as the face but the moon and the face are not completely similar. The face is not dissimilar to moon, though the sweetness, brightness of the face is very much comparable to similar properties of the moon. Hence, it is wrong to say that the example of bed etc given in the first inference fails on account of dissimilarity.

If this is granted then one can infer the existence of something other than the compound, since, a compound necessarily exists for the sake of something else.

One may suspect that this inference partially proves what it is intended to prove. The inference in question simply prove the existence of some entity other than itself. But does it really prove that such substance other than the compound is conscious?

The second inference is intended to prove that whatever entity is other than the compound must be conscious. The second inference says that the substance which must exist as the enjoyer of a compound must be conscious. If the compound exists for the sake of another compound the later compound will also exist for the sake of another compound and this will lead to *infinite regress or anavasthā*. This regress can be avoided only if the substance for which the compound exists is not a compound. If it is not a compound then it may be conscious. The *hetu* used in the second inference proving the existence of Puruṣa is '*traiguṇyādiviparyayāt*'. The term '*Viparyaya*' means absence. So, the absence of the three *guṇa-s* has been used here as the *hetu* of the inference. The inference suggests that Puruṣa is not a compound since there is the absence of three *guṇa-s*. Everything that is composed of the three *guṇa-s* is of the nature of a compound. Puruṣa not being composed of the three *guṇa-s* cannot be a compound, and whatever is not a compound is not material. Puruṣa thus is conscious.

The third inference used by the Sāṃkhya philosophers mention *adhiṣṭhānāt* as the *hetu*. It is said that an unconscious material stuff can not act without being guided by a conscious principle. The unconscious Prakṛti creates this universe not by itself but by the assistance of a conscious principle. According to Sāṃkhya philosophy the proximity of conscious Puruṣa generates all sorts of impact in unconscious Prakṛti. Just as the chariot cannot move without the conscious charioteer similarly Prakṛti can not create or move into action without being assisted by a conscious principle like Puruṣa.

The fourth *hetu* intended to prove the existence of Puruṣa is '*bhokṭṛbhāvāt*'. It means that all the manifest and unmanifest are composed of three *guṇa*-s – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. It means that all material things are of the nature of pleasure, pain and dullness. Pleasure or pain are things to be enjoyed. The manifest and the unmanifest can not be described as things to be enjoyed unless there is a *bhokta* or enjoyer. Pleasure or pain is nothing if there is no subject who enjoys it. This enjoyer or *bhoktā* cannot be unconscious. The simple reason in that *bhoga* or enjoyment is the experience of what is conscious. The Sāṃkhya philosophers argue that the assembly of the three *guṇa*-s in a compound proves it to be an object of enjoyment which in its turn proves the existence of a conscious enjoyer or *bhoktā*. This conscious enjoyer is Puruṣa.

Although Puruṣa is conceived as a *bhoktā* or enjoyer this enjoyment is not genuine. The world is perceived by the Puruṣa not actually in the form of *vṛttis*. It only seems that the world is imaged

in the *vr̥tti* of Puruṣa, which is not actually the case. Vācaspati explains this phenomenon of the enjoyment of Puruṣa with his concept of *cicchāyā*. The term '*cicchāyā*' refers to the reflection of consciousness in *buddhi*. It is said by Vācaspati that due to proximity consciousness is reflected in *buddhi* and *buddhi vr̥ttis* change into consciousness. As a consequence there arises a sense of false identity between Puruṣa and *buddhi*. This sense of false identity generates in Puruṣa the feeling that if owns the *buddhivr̥ttis* whereby Puruṣa takes itself as the *bhoktā*, Puruṣa takes itself to be non-different from *buddhi*. This feeling of oneness is false but it is responsible for the *bhoktr̥bhāvā* of Puruṣa. In reality it is simply a case of false appropriation. But how to explain the *sannidhāna* or proximity of Puruṣa and *buddhi*? Vācaspati explains it as the *yogyatā* or capability of Puruṣa to enlighten the states of *buddhi*. This enlightenment gives rise to a false sense of possession. Puruṣa feels that it possess that states of *buddhi*. The spirit appears as the enjoyer or *bhoktā*.

The utility of the concept of *yogyatā* has been questioned by Vijñānabhikṣu. His most important objection is that if *yogyatā* is taken to be in the very nature of Puruṣa then this property will never cease to belong to it and Puruṣa will never be liberated. With this inalienable property of *yogyatā* Puruṣa will continue to have experience.

Vijñānabhikṣu offers his hypothesis of double reflection in place of what Vācaspati said. In the opinion of Vijñānabhikṣu *buddhi*

first of all reflects consciousness of Puruṣa whereby the ahaṁkāra of buddhi is falsely appropriated by Puruṣa. In the second place *parināma* or modification of *buddhi* is reflected back to Puruṣa whereby objects are revealed. Vācaspati explains the whole thing with the help of his theory of single reflection which says that consciousness is reflected in *buddhi* whereby the objects are revealed. Vijñānabhikṣu replaces it with his own account of double reflection.

Puruṣa is fundamentally different from Prakṛti and it evolves. But when the *buddhivṛtti* is reflected in Puruṣa a close relation is established between *buddhi* and Puruṣa. Puruṣa seems to enjoy in the form of various psychological changes. But the enjoyment is not real. Real enjoyment is the prerogative of *buddhi* and not of Puruṣa. *Buddhi* changes according to the various forms of external object. But Puruṣa or consciousness is immutable. Since it is illuminating by its very nature, it can only reflect the modifications of *buddhi*.

The very concept of *bhoktr̥bhāva* involves difficulty. Vācaspati explains it with reference to the capacity or *yogyatā* of Puruṣa. Puruṣa has the *yogyatā* for manifestation and appropriation. Puruṣa manifests and appropriates the modifications of *buddhi*. The problem is how does the self or Puruṣa take the benefits of *buddhi*.

Let us remember that Puruṣa is an enjoyer because it has the false idea of ownership. This false idea grows because of *aviveka* or

non-difference. This is at the root of all the experience the self has. It generates in Puruṣa the false sense of ownership referred to above. So long as the Puruṣa is under the spell of beginningless nescience, it becomes the enjoyer of the objects and the experience of pleasure and pain. *Bhoktrbhāva* means for Vācaspati the false idea of ownership which is generated in Puruṣa under the spell of ignorance.

Let us now turn to Vijñānabhikṣu. He holds that his hypothesis of double reflection is better than Vācaspati's account by means of the twin concepts of *Sannidhi* on proximity and *yogyatā* or capacity. In the opinion of Vijñānabhikṣu simply reflection of consciousness or *cichāyā* is not enough explanation of the world-experience of Puruṣa. The enlightened *buddhivṛtti* should be reflected back in Puruṣa. Only then can arise the false sense of ownership in Puruṣa. In the state of liberation Puruṣa does not differ from the feeling of *aviveka* and there is no *buddhivṛtti*. The false sense of ownership that characterised Puruṣa automatically lapses. The difference between Vācaspati and Vijñānabhikṣu is that the former explains this sense of ownership by the concept of *aviveka*, the later explains the same by the hypothesis of double reflection.

Why this difference in explanation? Dr. Anima Sengupta's comment in this regard is highly interesting. She tells us that Vācaspati due to his advaitic bent of mind has explained bondage, liberation and the relation between the soul and the world as

being due solely to ignorance or *aviveka* (just as in the Advaita-Vedānta of Śaṅkara, all these are explained as being due solely to the operation of *māyā*), but Vijñānabhikṣu, by admitting the relation of double reflection between Puruṣa and *buddhi* in addition to ignorance has succeeded more in providing us with a truly realistic explanation of the bondage and liberation of Puruṣa. Otherwise, for simple understanding of the true meaning of self's enjoyment, both the theories are equally helpful to the readers.³

The fifth *hetu* proving the existence of a conscious Puruṣa '*Kaivalyārthaṁ pravṛtteśca*'⁴ which means that there are people who has a tendency to terminate suffering and attain liberation. In fact, it has been taught by the sages that human beings who are distressed by three kinds of suffering should try to liberate themselves. Now, this is well known that all entities which are constituted by *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* must be of the nature of pleasure, pain and dullness. It indicates that such entities from Prakṛti to five mahābhūtas can not have their suffering terminated for good. The point is that if the existence of a conscious Puruṣa besides the material entities is not acknowledged then the advice of the sages for the termination of the threefold suffering becomes absolutely pointless or futile. The advice of the sages cannot be false because we have seen people having ultimate knowledge of the distinction between self and not self attaining salvation. They stand as examples inspiring other people for the attainment of liberation.

The argument is that if there is no conscious principle besides unconscious matter then the endeavour for the removal of suffering would have no agent. It is simply because there is a conscious principle which is aware of suffering that the termination of suffering and attainment of liberation can be explained.

The five *hetus* mentioned above prove that there is a conscious Puruṣa besides everything that is material and unconscious. One may ask that the *hetus* proving a principle besides matter do not actually prove that such a principle is conscious. This suspicion can not be sustained. It is known that things which are not self-manifesting are unconscious material stuffs. For the Sāṃkhya philosophers everything that is composed of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are unconscious matter. The reason is that such things are not self-manifesting. It is only manifested to a conscious principle. It shows conclusively that a conscious principle besides all the material entities must be postulated which is conscious of things which are material. Such principle by which material entities are revealed must be conscious or self-manifesting. If the principle is in itself unconscious, it would not reveal material things. Darkness, it is said, does not reveal darkness. Darkness is revealed by light, which in fact dispels it. Hence, for the manifestation of material entities, a conscious principle must be admitted and that is Puruṣa.

In Sāṃkhya philosophy Puruṣa is the reality which is opposed to Prakṛti and is of the nature of consciousness. The Sāṃkhya

philosophers proved the existence of Puruṣa with the help of an inference. The question which has drawn attention of the Sāṃkhya philosophers is regarding the number of selves. Is the self one or many? Opinions differ in this respect. The Upaniṣadas describe self in many places as one. The Vedānta also speaks of a unitary self. But the Naiyāyikas believe in its multiplicity – the self is different on account of its relation with bodies which are many. It appears that there is radical difference of opinion regarding the number of selves. The Sāṃkhya philosophers, however, believe in the multiplicity of self. They have presented an argument to prove it which takes the form of an inference. The inference is as follows:-

“Jananamaraṇakaraṇāṇām pratiniyamād ayugapat-pravṛtteśca
Puruṣabahutvam siddham, traiguṇyaviparyāccaiva”⁵

It means that birth and death are connected with particular individuals, there is absence of endeavor of all beings towards all things and there is difference in the nature of human beings – some are *sāttvīka*, some *rājasika* and others are *tāmasika*. These prove that Puruṣa-s must be many. Let us explain the *hetus* employed in this inference which proves the plurality of Puruṣas.

The inference in question contains three *hetus*. The first *hetu* is that people are born at different points of time. They also die not simultaneously but at different point of time. We see that somebody is born at the time when someone is dying. It shows clearly that a person who is born and the person who is dead are different Puruṣas. If we imagine that a person who is yet to be born and the

person who is already born are the same person then the old man must be believed to be a child who is newly born.

What is clear is that birth and death are actually relations of selves with the body, the senses, mind or *manas*, *buddhi* and sense-organs. The suggestion is that self is eternal and is beyond birth and death. This is accepted by all the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. The self being eternal, there is no real relation between the self and the body. But it must be granted that the body is the means for our experience of the self. The self is understood as the ego and consequently experience of the self depends on the consideration of the body. Ordinarily the self is not experienced without the help of the body, the senses etc.

It is true that in the state of *Asamprajñāta Samādhi* when all *vṛttis* are arrested then the self is manifested in its pure form. But such state cannot be described as the experience of the self. The reason is that experience depends on the *vṛtti* of the antahakaraṇa. Since there is no *vṛtti* in the state of *asamprajñāta samādhi* the question of having experience does not arise. When a *vṛtti* becomes subdued and in the aspect of *sattva* the self is reflected. As a result there is experience in which self is known as aham or ego. Consequently, when I know myself as the ahaṃ, I know it as the consciousness reflected in the *vṛtti*. In the ultimate analysis this experience requires a body with the senses. In the absence of antahakaraṇa there is no *vṛtti* and no experience of the reflected consciousness or the ego. For this reason birth is explained as birth of the body and death is a dissociation of the body with the self.

The first *hetu* of the inference must be understood in the light of the conception of birth and death.

It is understood that birth is the relation of the self with a body and death is the dissociation of the body with a self. If Puruṣa is one then the birth and death of different individuals at different points of time cannot be explained. For the Sāṅkhya philosophers self is all-pervasive and eternal. Since self is all-pervasive, each self will be in proximity with each antaḥkaraṇa. But the antaḥkaraṇa which is the locus of the enjoyment of the Puruṣa. If Puruṣa is one then through the relation between the Puruṣa and the different antaḥkaraṇas would lead to its enjoyment.

Since every Puruṣa is in proximity with every antaḥkaraṇa, the antaḥkaraṇa in connection with which a Puruṣa has his enjoyment, that very antaḥkaraṇa will be the determinant of the enjoyment of that Puruṣa. Hence, if Puruṣa were one, then this single Puruṣa would enjoy simultaneously everything because it would have relation with all antaḥkaraṇas. It will also follow that when the subtle body will be dissociated from a gross body, all Puruṣa-s enjoying through all antaḥkaraṇas will be destroyed. The Puruṣa and the sum of antaḥkaraṇas being related the destruction of one relata, viz. relation with the sum of relata will mean the destruction of the Puruṣa. Between two relata the destruction of the one would destroy the other. Further, when one antaḥkaraṇa dissolves at the dawn of the knowledge of reality, there will be no collection of antaḥkaraṇas; and the liberation of one Puruṣa would amount to the liberation of all Puruṣa-s.

This is the reason why Puruṣa-s are said to be multiple. If this is not admitted then the birth and death of one Puruṣa would mean birth and death of all. What after all is birth? When the subtle body is related with an antaḥkaraṇa which is conducive to enjoyment or *bhoga* enters into a gross body, then the Puruṣa will be born in a gross body, which will be conducive to its enjoyment. Death will be reverse process. The process however, proves that Puruṣa cannot be one; it must be many.

The same argument applies to the case of the sense-organs. When any body moves, everybody does not; when one is immobile it is not the case that others are also immobile. If Puruṣa were many then the movement or immobility of one Puruṣa would amount to the movement or immobility of all Puruṣa. This will lead to clear absurdity and for this reason Sāṃkhya philosophy admits of the multiplicity of Puruṣa.

The second *hetu* proving the plurality of Puruṣa is that all Puruṣa-s do not have identical activity. We see that when a person is engaged in having his dinner, another person may be engaged in sleep. Clearly two persons are not the same. If all the physical bodies are related to the same Puruṣa then when the body connected with the self is engaged with some actions all bodies will have the same engagement. For example, movement is an action for which the endeavor of an embodied self is needed. No action is possible without some kind of endeavor. The Sāṃkhya philosophers believed that conscious Puruṣa has the physical body as its locus. If

Puruṣa is one then when that Puruṣa endeavors to move then all physical bodies will have the movement. But this is plainly false. Different physical bodies are found to be engaged in different actions at different times. It shows that the Puruṣa which resides in the physical body must be different in different bodies.

The third reason for proving plurality of Puruṣa is '*Traiguṇyaviparyayāt*' which means difference in the predominance of a *guṇa* is each Puruṣa. Human beings have different natures, some soft, some hard, some active, some enthusiastic, others not. No two individuals are identical in nature. The reason for this variation is the predominance of either *sattva* or *rajas* or *tamas*. This explains why some men are *sattvika*, *rājasika* and some *tamosika*. If different antaḥkaraṇas are connected with the same Puruṣa then there would not be variation in the nature of human beings. If Puruṣa were one then the conduct of the *sattvika* person would not be different from the conduct of individuals having a different nature.

The Sāṃkhya philosopher thus prove the plurality of Puruṣa-s with the help of the above *hetus*. One may suspect that this contention of the Sāṃkhya philosophers runs counter to the thesis of the scriptures that the self is one. This admission of the plurality of Puruṣa-s is in clear contradiction with what is delivered in the scripture.

This misgiving will be removed if we notice that just as there are scriptures which maintain the oneness of self, similarly, there are others suggesting its plurality. The oneness of non-duality of the self has been interpreted by the Sāṃkhya philosophers in such a way that a multiplicity of entities having the same nature may be described as one. Selves are many, but since they are of the same nature they may be described as one just as we refer to the paddies in a heap as simply 'paddy' Puruṣa is many; but all of them are eternal, changeless, free and pure, so all Puruṣa-s are of the same nature. There is no Puruṣa which is not free, eternal and changeless. So if the Sāṃkhya philosophers admit of the multiplicity of Puruṣa it will not go against the scripture.

REFERENCES :-

1. *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* - 17
2. *Sāṃkha Kārikā* - 21. Bhattacharya, Bidhubhusan : Samkhyādarśaner vivaraṇ, WBSBB, 1984, p. 240.
3. *Ibid* Pp. 240-242, 247-248.
4. Sengupta, Anima : *Classical Sāṃkhya; A critical study*, Munshiram Monoharlal, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 89-95.
5. *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* - 17
6. *Ibid*, 18