

# The *Sāṃkhya* Term *Puruṣa* (Self): An Analytical Assessment

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## ABSTRACT

In the *Sāṃkhya*, *Puruṣa* (self) is free, inactive and it is the nature of consciousness (*cetanā*). It is beyond time and space, and it has both merit and demerit, attachment and detachment. It is real form which is not bounded. All actions, pleasure and suffering, change and feeling, etc. are the distortions of the body. *Puruṣa* (self) is beyond the bodily and mental suffering (*duḥkhaḥ*). *Puruṣa* (self) is neither the cause nor the effect. *Puruṣa* (self) is not material, and it is also not known by direct perception. Ācharya Śaṅkara critiques the *Sāṃkhya* view and says, If *Puruṣa* (self) is inactive then how can it possibly influence the others? Śaṅkara also questions the relation of the *Puruṣa* (self) with the *Prakṛti* (non-self). This paper elaborates the nature and the existence of *Puruṣa* (self), purpose of the inactive *Puruṣa* (self), the subjectivity of *Puruṣa* (self) from the text "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*". A critical analysis of Śaṅkara's critique of the "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*" is made and by providing an analytical assessment of the self (*Puruṣa*) and its relation with the non-self (*Prakṛti*) the paper attempts at arguing against Śaṅkara's logic.

## 1. Introduction

Concerned on the *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, the exponents of this school reveals the dualism very clearly between matter and non-matter. Because, according to *Sāṃkhya*, matter and non-matter are different entities, they have their own existence. Non-matter is "*cetanā*", which is the nature of consciousness, *Sāṃkhya* schools called it "*puruṣa*" and the matter is called as "*prakṛti*". The relation between these two are very complicated in *Sāṃkhya* philosophy. This paper is mainly focused on these problems. Firstly, discussion will start with the introductory features of *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, including the notion of "*puruṣa*" (*cetanā*) and its relation with "*prakṛti*" from "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*". Secondly, it strives to critique of Ācharya Śaṅkara. Third part of the paper deals with the *Sāṃkhya* response to Śaṅkara. Finally, the conclusion reflects the findings of the paper.

According to Gopinath Kaviraj, *Sāṃkhya* "is not one of the systems of Indian philosophy. *Samkhya* is the philosophy of India<sup>1</sup>". *Sāṃkhya* has not only influenced Indian philosophy, but also every phases of Indian culture and learning. Mythology, theology, law, medicine, art and the various traditions of *Yoga* and *Tantra* have all been touched by the categories and basic notions of the *Samkhya*<sup>2</sup>. Vijñāna Bhikṣu says, *Sāṃkhya* means knowledge of self through right discrimination. Jadhunath Sinha says:

"The *Sāṃkhya* system derives its name from the word '*saṃkhyā*', meaning number, since it enumerates the metaphysical principle of reality. Or word *saṃkhyā* may mean perfect knowledge (*sam+khyā*). The system is called *Sāṃkhya*, since it gives perfect knowledge of the self or *puruṣa* as quite distinct from *prakṛti* and its evolutes, body, sense-

organs, mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and egoism (*ahaṃkāra*), which annihilates all kinds of suffering<sup>3</sup>".

Swami Virupakshananda said that '*Sāṃkhya* forms one of the most important pillars continuing the six systems (*ṣaḍdarśana*) of Indian Philosophy. Its contribution to our knowledge of reality and world are seminal'<sup>4</sup>. According to Acharya Sankara, '*Sāṃkhya* to be the knowledge of the true of self'<sup>5</sup>. Larson says, "The term '*Sāṃkhya*', appears to be derived from the root, *khyā*, together prefix, *sam*, meaning 'reckoning', 'summing up', 'calculations' etc.<sup>6</sup>".

The texts of *Sāṃkhya* propounded by sage Kapila, "*Sāṃkhyapravacanasūtra*" and "*Tattvasamsā*" are not available. The controversy about his date remains unsolved. But, Īswarakṛṣṇa, the pupil of Kapila, wrote in about 200AD in "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*" which is the available authentic text for *Sāṃkhya* philosophy. After Īswarakṛṣṇa, Pāramartha, Gauḍapāda, Vācaspati Misra, Vijñāna Vikṣu wrote excellent commentaries on "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*". Apart from these, Yuktidīpikā, Jayamangalā are also important commentaries on "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*". *Sāṃkhya* philosophy is well known for its doctrine of "*tattvas*" (category). They explain universe with only twenty five *tattvas* (category). These *tattvas* (category) are four types. Īswarakṛṣṇa says:

"*mūlaprakṛtiḥ avikṛtiḥ mahadādyāḥ prakṛtīvikṛtayah sapta, ṣoḍaśakas tu vikāro na prakṛtir na vikṛtiḥ puruṣa*<sup>7</sup>".

Four types of *tattvas* (category) are namely; *prakṛti* (cause in this *kārikā*), second type is *prakṛti-vikṛti* (both cause and effect), third type is *vikṛti* (effect), and *na prakṛti na vikṛti*

<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy (v-IV), p-xi

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Indian philosophy, p-1

<sup>4</sup> *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*, p-ii

<sup>5</sup> Origin and Development of the Samkhya of thought-P.B.Chakravorti, p-1

<sup>6</sup> Classical Samkhya, p-1

<sup>7</sup> III- "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*"

(neither cause nor effect) is the fourth type. Vacaspati Miṣra explains this stanza in his excellent commentary “*Sāmkhyatattvakaumudī*”. He says, *prakṛti* is called *mūlaprakṛti* (primal nature) which is the root cause of every material things. Everything depends on *prakṛti* (primal cause) but *prakṛti* (primal cause) has no cause. *Prakṛti* (primal cause) is the only single one cause in this sense. Second *tattvas* are *prakṛti-vikṛti*, which means some *tattvas* have power of causality and they have their effect also. According to “*Sāmkhakarīkā*” and its commentary *mahat* (the great one or intellectual), *ahamkāra* (I or ego) and five subtle elements (*rūp, ras, gandha, sparṣa* and *sabda*) are both the cause and effect. Again, Vacaspati explain the nature of *vikṛti* (only effect), pañca jñānendriyo-five sense organs viz. *cakṣu* (eye), *kaṇa* (ear), *nāsikā* (nose), *jihvā* (tongue) and *tak* (skin or touch), ii. pañca karmendriya-five motor organs viz. *mukh* (mouth), *pāni* (hand), *pāda* (feet), *pāyu* (rectum or anus) and *upostha* (sex organ), *pañca mahābhuta* viz. *ksiti* (earth), *ap* (water), *tej* (fire), *marut* (air) and *voym* (eather) these fifteen and including *mana* (mind) are the only effect. Another category, which is neither cause nor effect (*na prakṛti na vikṛti*) is *puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* naturally is *jñā* (knowledge). After that, Īśvarakṛṣṇa says “from the primordial matter evolves the great principle (*mahat*); from this evolves the I-principle (*Ahamkāra*); from this evolves the set of sixteen<sup>8</sup>; from the five of the sixteen, evolves the five elements<sup>9</sup>. It happens only when disturbance of equilibrium of *guṇas* occur. After this couplet, we find in “*Sāmkhyakarīkā*” states by Īśvarakṛṣṇa, the functions of *Buddhi, ahamkāra*, and sixteen evolves, but Īśvarakṛṣṇa does not give explanations on how evolves emerge from *Prakṛti*. Although in *Kārikā* IX-XI Īśvarakṛṣṇa states the doctrine of *Satkarya*<sup>10</sup> and accepts that *Prakṛti* is the root cause of everything, where *Buddhi-Ahamkāra-Manas* (internal psychic parts) emerge when *Prakṛti* interacts or associate with *Puruṣa*. Here, interaction or association just help each other according to Īśvarakṛṣṇa. Like lame and blind man help each other to escape from fire or forest. Īśvarakṛṣṇa states emergence and functioning of basic principle from couplet XXII to XXXVIII<sup>11</sup> which are expressed usually psychologically rather than cosmologically. First *Buddhi* evolves, according to *Kārikā* XXIII, which has psychological part, its ascertainment or determination (*adhyāvasāya*<sup>12</sup>), virtue (*dharmā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), non-attachment (*virāga*), and possession of power (*aiśvarya*), are *svattvika* form. Its *tāmāsa* form is the opposite (of the four). The second evolute or emergent which appears because of the presence of *Puruṣa* is *Ahamkāra*. Īśvarakṛṣṇa describes in *Kārikā* XXIV, “self-awareness (*Ahamkāra* or ego) is self-conceit (*abhimāna*<sup>13</sup>). From it a twofold creation emerges, the group of eleven and five subtle elements (*tanmātras*<sup>14</sup>)”. This psychological process ended with generating five gross elements. G.J. Larson says “When we say, however, that the *Kārikā* analyzes the principle or *tattvas* in term of psychology categories, we do not mean experimental investigation or scientific research of the psyche, we mean,

rather, that the world is understood primarily from the point of view the individual, witnessing *Puruṣa*<sup>15</sup>”. Here *Puruṣa*<sup>16</sup> is not a part of *Prakṛti*. It is an independent principle along with *Prakṛti* according to Īśvarakṛṣṇa. A natural outcome from the above discussion is *Parināmavāda* or the theory of transformation. It is the doctrine that, as all effects are contained in their causes in an un-manifested form, the “production” of an effect is merely transformation of the cause<sup>17</sup>.

## 2. Āchārya Śaṅkara’s Critique

Āchārya Śaṅkara attacks *Sāmkhya* in his commentary on “*Vedānta-sūtra*” in the first chapter of the first section (I.1.5-11 and 18); continues to fourth section (I.4.1-28); and proceeds in the second chapter of the first second sections (II.1.1-11; II.2.1-10). *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are explained in “*Vedānta-sūtra*” as:

“*puruṣaśamavaditi cettathapi*<sup>18</sup>”

‘*Puruṣa-aśma-vada*’ Even as a person or a magnet, ‘*iti cet*’ if it be said, ‘*tathapi*’ even then. So, the verse means, if it be said (that *puruṣa* can direct the *pradhāna*) even as a crippled person (can direct a blind man) or a magnet (the iron filings), even then (the difficulty cannot be surmounted)<sup>19</sup>. Next *sūtra* says:

“*agnitvanupapattescā*<sup>20</sup>”

And again (the *pradhāna* cannot be active) because the relation of the principal (and subordinate matter) is impossible (between the three *guṇas*)<sup>21</sup>. Then the final conclusion by *Vedānta* is-

“*vipratishedhācchāsamanjāsama*”

‘*Vipratishedhāt*’ Because of contradictions also ‘*ca asamanjāsama*’ inconsistent. There are various contradictions in the *Sāmkhya* philosophy, as for, sometimes the sense are said to be eleven and again they are said to be seven<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, Śaṅkara says, if *puruṣa* is simply a witness, totally inactive (*akartrbhāva*), indifferent (*audāsīnya*), and constituted as consciousness (*cetanā*); and if *pradhāna* is active (*guṇaparmāna*) and unconsciousness (*acetana*); and if ontologically both are radically distinct; then how can one possibly influence others? If there are two real things then there must be some sort of relation between them, yet *Sāmkhya* denies that the two are related. Moreover, if *puruṣa* is radically distinct from *pradhāna*, then in what sense can one speak of bondage and released? The *puruṣa* is always released, and if that is the case, how can it become bound<sup>23</sup>? Examples, given by *Sāmkhya*, of lame and blind man, dancer

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p-178

<sup>16</sup> It is characterized as being, a witness, possessed of isolation, indifferent, a spectator or one who sees and

Inactive. *Kārikā*- XIX

<sup>17</sup> Sinha, Nandalal. *Samkhya philosophy*. P-iv

<sup>18</sup> II.2.7

<sup>19</sup> Vireswarananda, Swami. *BRAMHA-SUTRA*, p- 178

<sup>20</sup> II.2.8

<sup>21</sup> Sivananda, Swami. *BRAMHA-SUTRA*, p-195

<sup>22</sup> Vireswarananda, Swami. *BRAMHA-SUTRA*, p- 178

<sup>23</sup> Larson, G.J. *Classical Sāmkhya*, p-221

<sup>8</sup> *Manas*, five sense, five organs of action and five subtle elements.

<sup>9</sup> SK-XXII trans by Swami Virupakshananda

<sup>10</sup> *Satkarya* means that effect is existent even before the operation of the cause

<sup>11</sup> Larson, G.J. *Classical Sāmkhya*, p-179-188

<sup>12</sup> Its meaning “to bind”, it can be mean “attempt”, “effort”, “exertion”, “perseverance” and also “intelligence”, “awareness”, “will” etc.

<sup>13</sup> *Aham*=I, *kāra*= making, doing, working. It has usually been translated “ego”, “conception of one’s individuality”

<sup>14</sup> Non-specific, sound, touch, form, taste and smell.

in stage, and lamp are not appropriate with the doctrine. So, *Sāṃkhya* theory is not acceptable.

### 3. Response to Achārya Śaṅkara

Gerald James Larson very carefully explains the *Sāṃkhya* point of view in his text "*Classical Sāṃkhya-An Interpretation of its History and Meaning*". He says, Śaṅkara has overlooked or perhaps misconstrued a fundamental distinction in the *Sāṃkhya* position<sup>24</sup>. He says, *Sāṃkhya* wants to argue that "consciousness" (*cetanā*) has to be distinguished from 'awareness' (*antakarāṇa-vṛtti* or *citta-vṛtti*). *Sāṃkhya*, therefore, would restate Śaṅkara's point that houses and so forth are made by workmen 'endowed with consciousness' to read, rather, by workmen 'endowed with awareness'- that is to say, endowed with intellect, determination, ego or self-awareness and mind. Again, Larson mentions, whereas 'awareness' is intellectual, emotional and conative reflection of *pradhāna*, consciousness is a passive witness, a translucent medium in which and for which *pradhāna* functions. 'Consciousness' as a translucent witness without content cannot function, therefore, as a material cause or as an operative cause. Whereas 'awareness' is both 'creative' and 'created' (*prakṛti* and *vikṛti*), neither is "consciousness" (*na prakṛtir na vikṛtiḥ puruṣaḥ*, *Kārikā-III*). Thus, this theory easily meets the critiques of Śaṅkara and Larson said that, actually, Śaṅkara's critique misses the mark<sup>25</sup>.

Now I move to *Sāṃkhyan* arguments in favor of *Puruṣa*. Iṣwarakṛṣṇa states in "*Sāṃkhyakārikā*":

"*saṃghātaparāthavāt triguṇādiviparyayād  
adhiṣṭhānāt,  
puruṣo'stibhokṛbhāvāt kaivalyārtham pravṛtteś ca*"<sup>26</sup>

This stanza gives five arguments for postulating the existence of *puruṣa*. They are as follows:

1. Because aggregations or combinations exist for another (*aṃghātaparāthavāt*).
2. Because (this order) must be apart or opposite to the three *guṇas* etc. (*triguṇādiviparyayād*).
3. Because (this order) must be a superintending power or control (*adhiṣṭhānāt*).
4. Because of the existence or need of an enjoyer (*bhokṛbhāvāt*).
5. Because there is functioning or activity for sake of freedom or isolation (*kaivalyārtham pravṛtteś ca*).

Generally, we can infer the existence of *puruṣa*, the *puruṣa* must exist because of the fact that consciousness exists in the world. Without *puruṣa* there would only be an undifferentiated mass. The logic does not seem to hold. If do not accept the existence of the *puruṣa* then there is no value for freedom and release. *Puruṣa* is not the cause of anything, even not the effect. Iṣwarakṛṣṇa states:

"*na prakṛtir na vikṛtiḥ puruṣaḥ*"<sup>27</sup>

Here, '*prakṛti*' refers to cause, and '*vikṛti*' refers to effect; *puruṣa* is neither the cause of anything nor the effect. *Puruṣa* is *jñā*<sup>28</sup> (knowledge). *Puruṣa* is the knowing one (or knower). *Kārikā XIX* describes *puruṣa* as witness, indifferent, a spectator, inactive etc. *Kārikā XXXI* describes the motive of the thirteen (internal and external) organs. These twelve organs (*ahamkāra*, *mana* and ten sense) are different from each other's, but like a lamp they illuminate the *buddhi*.

### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, we can get some questions which arise after discussion of the above aspects.

- Is *prakṛti* really associate with *puruṣa*?
- Is *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* separate or distinct from each other?
- If they independently exist, then why do we need discriminative knowledge?
- Who are really bounded and released?

We are reminded in *Kārikās LV-LXIX* about the response to above this questions. In *Kārikā LV*, we are provided the basic fact of suffering in human life due to the presence of *puruṣa* which appears as what it is not. In next *Kārikā*, we are reminded that, the creation and function of the creation is just only for the sake of each *puruṣa*. In *Kārikās LVII-LIX*, we are also reminded of the notions of *puruṣārtha*. Here, it is that, explained, how *prakṛti* functions for the sake of the release of the *puruṣa* which is given by the examples of milk and calf, dancer on the stage etc. In *Kārikās LXI* and *LXII* Iṣwarakṛṣṇa explained the nature of *puruṣa*, *prakṛti* and why they are separated from each other. Only *prakṛti* is bound and is released by *puruṣa* is not. *Puruṣa* itself is pure, translucent consciousness. The realization of the absolute separation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is called *jñā* (knowledge), which is also called *kaivalya* (liberation). The *Kārikā LXVIII* expresses:

"*prāpte śarirabhede caritārthatvāt pradhānavinivṛtau,  
Aikāntikam āyantikam ubhayaṃ kaivalyam āpnoti*"

With the cessation of *prakṛti* due to its purpose having been accomplished, (the *puruṣa*) on attaining separation from the body, attains isolation or *kaivalya* which is both certain and final. In the next verse we are reminded of this secret (or mysterious) knowledge (*jñā*) for the sake of the *puruṣa*-wherein the existence, origin, and termination of all beings are analyzed- which has been expounded or enumerated greatest sage *Kapila*.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p-222-225

<sup>25</sup> Larson, G.J. *Classical Sāṃkhya*, p-224

<sup>26</sup> SK- XVII

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