

# Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

नाचैतन्यातप्रधानं प्रभवति चलितुं तन्निसर्गक्रियं चेत्  
नित्यं सर्गप्रसङ्गो नियतिरपि यतः सर्गपूर्वा न पूर्वम् ।  
बन्धो निर्हेतुकः स्यात्कथमथ न भवेद्बन्धमोक्षाव्यवस्था  
निःसौख्यं नापि मोक्षं स्पृहयति मतिमान्कापिलं तेन दुष्टम्  
॥ १७ ॥

The *pradhāna* is incapable of creating (this universe) because it is not conscious. If *prakṛti* is (held to be) by nature active, then the process of creation will go on forever (and there will be no dissolution). If the *adr̥ṣṭa* (the invisible effect of actions) is (held to be) the cause of the universe, (that too cannot be) because it is not present before creation. (The *puruṣa*) is free from bondage and it cannot be the cause and how will not there be the absence of liberation? No intelligent person likes such liberation devoid of bliss. (Thus) the stand of Kapila is flawed (and hence cannot be accepted).

**H**ERE THE SANKHYA SCHOOL of Kapila is being quashed. Before entering into the argument for setting aside the conclusions of this school, it will be helpful to go through the basic concepts of *puruṣa*, *prakṛti*, and the three *guṇas*.

## The Soul of Sankhya

Sankhya philosophy is dualistic and posits two principles: *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. *Puruṣas* can be loosely called souls and are many. They do not have any parts and qualities. They may occupy a big or a small body, but remain the same

themselves. The body they occupy does not change their size, they do not expand or contract. They are all-pervasive. Though they occupy a body, they are not limited or contained by it. The experiences of this soul with respect to a body are stored in the mind. Any mental activity taking place in this mind is due to the relation of the body and the soul, *puruṣa*, and is its experience. Had there not been many *puruṣas*, when one took birth, all would have been born, and when one died, all would have died. This does not happen, and so it is only logical that there should be many *puruṣas*. It is very difficult to understand the nature of *puruṣa*, but this should be understood properly to attain the goal envisaged by Sankhya philosophy. *Puruṣa* does not have any qualities. It is of the nature of pure and absolute Consciousness, *cit*. However, it is not of the nature of pure intelligence and bliss. Bliss is just a kind of pleasure in Sankhya and a quality of *prakṛti*, not of *puruṣa*. *Puruṣas* are many and each one of them is real.

According to Sankhya, the knowledge we obtain of things are images or pictures in our mind. The object of knowledge, which is external, is a material thing. This knowledge produces an impression on the mind. This impression is also material because it is limited in its nature, just like the object of which it is an impression. The knowledge or the information

received through sense-perception is the likeness of the respective object, just like a painting or a photograph. The external object is matter and its knowledge is also matter. However, there is a difference in the degree of its grossness. While the external object is gross matter, its likeness produced in the mind out of sense-perception of this object is subtle matter. The images of the external objects appear conscious to us in the mind. They appear so because they are in contact with a principle of Consciousness, which is connected to the entire mind always and causes the experience of the person. However, we are generally unaware of this conscious principle that is behind every act of sense-perception and gives the semblance of Consciousness to all our experiences and their impressions stored in our mind. This conscious principle, often called the 'self' is beyond our grasp. It cannot be found through the impressions in the mind, because it is distinct and separate from these impressions. It is a transcendent principle and its real nature is behind and beyond the subtle matter of knowledge. All our perceptions are different constructs of the subtle substance that the mind is made up of.

What happens in the process of knowledge can be compared to a film projected from the projector-room, which is dark. Individually, one by one, a frame of the film is projected and put in front of light that illuminates it. In rapid succession this gives the semblance of a motion picture and we see objects and persons moving on the screen. They are being generated from stationary films, which are in darkness, moved in front of a light source. The *puruṣa* is like the light source, without which we cannot get any knowledge. All motion and appearances are qualities of matter, and so is their knowledge. How do we perceive them as moving and conscious? There is a principle separated from these

material objects that gives them the semblance of life. This principle is conscious and is so intertwined with matter that it cannot be distinctly perceived. However, we can infer its presence in all our sense-perceptions. This principle of Consciousness does not move, has no form or quality, and is pure. The movement of the external objects or their mental impressions takes place with this principle of Consciousness in the background, and all these objects and the impressions get illuminated. Now, every knowledge or sense-perception can be divided, so to say, into two parts: the part that gives us the idea of something being conscious and the part of the content of the knowledge or the object of the knowledge. So, when we perceive an object, we come to know of the content of the object and also of its life-like consciousness, either externally or internally, in our mind. The content is the material aspect of the object, and the life-like consciousness is the light of the *puruṣa* coming through the object. So, whenever there is a perception of an object, we perceive our self. The difficulty is that we are unable to differentiate or separate this part of consciousness and understand its source, the *puruṣa*.

Just because the 'self' is beyond our grasp, it does not mean that it is not real. It is very much real, but it is also transcendent, and that is why is beyond our reach. The objects we perceive are by themselves, diverse, incoherent, and unintelligent. The principle of Consciousness binds all our perceptions and gives them a unity. So, all the knowledge we acquire is bound and unified in the mind and thus become the coherent, systematic, and seemingly intelligent experience of a person. This coherence and semblance of intelligence is brought about by the contact with the principle of Consciousness, the *puruṣa*. In other words, all our sense-perceptions do not make 'sense' without the principle of Consciousness

in the background. This principle gives sense to all our perception and their sum total becomes experience. According to Sankhya, every individual has a *puruṣa* distinct and separate from that of the other individual. This *puruṣa* is of the nature of pure intelligence.

### **The Triad of Subtle Entities**

There are three types of ultimate subtle entities in Sankhya, and this triad is called *guṇas*. Generally, the Sanskrit word *guṇa* means 'quality'. However, here it has a different meaning. *Guṇas* are substances and not qualities. In Sankhya there is nothing such as a separate quality, and every quality is actually a substance. A subtle substance appears in a particular way, and this appearance is what we generally call quality. So, contrary to the general understanding, things or substances do not possess qualities, but qualities are different reactions of the substance. Whenever we perceive a quality, we actually perceive a particular reaction of a subtle substance. As we saw earlier, the external objects of perception and their impressions on the mind are in essence matter and have many similarities. In the case of qualities too they are similar. So, a quality stored in the mind, or a mental quality, is nothing but a particular reaction of an object stored in the mind. In Sankhya these subtle entities are called *guṇas* because they undergo various modifications and appear as qualities.

The Sanskrit word *guṇa* also means 'rope'. Sankhya's *guṇas* can also be called ropes because they are twines that bind the *puruṣa* to objects and their mental impressions. The other meaning of the word *guṇa* is 'a thing of secondary importance'. This meaning also holds good for Sankhya's *guṇas* because they are constantly modified and changed by various permutations and combinations and are not primary and

constant beyond modification like the *puruṣa*. Also, the *guṇas* are subtle substances that are matter and are definitely secondary to the conscious *puruṣa*. However, *guṇas* are permanent and cannot be destroyed. They are substantive entities or subtle substances and not abstract qualities. They are infinite but are broadly classified into three types, based upon their three main characteristics: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* means 'real' or that which exists and is behind the process of manifestation of objects through Consciousness. It is goodness and causes pleasure. It has the characteristics of luminosity, lightness, buoyancy, and is illuminating. Its colour is white. The luminosity of light, the reflective power, any upward movement, pleasure, happiness, contentment, and bliss are caused by *sattva*. Generally, *sattva* is considered to be the *guṇa* of intelligence. *Rajas* is characterized by activity and is the principle of motion. Its literal meaning is 'foulness'; *rajas* produces pain. It results in restless activity, feverish effort, and wild stimulation. Its colour is red. It is considered to be the *guṇa* of energy. *Tamas* literally means 'darkness' and is the principle of inertia. It causes apathy and indifference. It results in ignorance, sloth, confusion, bewilderment, passivity, and negativity. It is heavy and enveloping and in these respects is the exact opposite of *sattva*. It is opposite to *rajas* in that it stops activity. Its colour is black. It is considered to be the *guṇa* of obstruction, mass, or matter.

These three *guṇas* are constituents of *prakṛti* and are never separate but together in different proportions. Different substances show different qualities because of different proportions of these *guṇas* in them. These *guṇas* have effects among themselves, and thus their proportions keep on changing thereby producing new qualities and substances. There is continuous

compounding of these *guṇas*. They are both in conflict and in cooperation and always are intermingled. They are like the oil, the wick, and the flame of lamp, all of which are necessary to produce the light of lamp, yet all of which differ in their characteristics. The *guṇas* cannot be perceived directly and can only be inferred from their effects. Every object or thing has all of these three *guṇas*, and the differences in objects are caused due to the different proportions of these *guṇas*. The nature of an object is determined by the predominant *guṇa*. There is a state when all these three *guṇas* are not compounded, and each of the *guṇas* are opposed by each of the other *guṇas*, creating thus a state of equilibrium where none of the characteristics of these *guṇas* are manifested. This state is completely devoid of any characteristics and so is incoherent, indeterminate, and indefinite. It is a homogeneous state without any quality. This state of being appears as though it were non-being. This state is called *prakṛti*. This state cannot be said to exist or to not exist. There is apparently no purpose of this state and it is the starting point of the creation of all things. This is the initial point of time or stage. It is only when this stage is disturbed that all modifications of objects take place.

### **The State of Equilibrium**

According to Sankhya, creation starts from a state of complete equilibrium of the three *guṇas*, the state of *prakṛti*. In this state the *guṇas* had disintegrated into a state of dissolution and became disjointed, producing equilibrium by mutual opposition. The first disturbance that arose in this state of equilibrium caused creation. This disturbance caused the disturbance of the separation of the *guṇas*, which once again started compounding among themselves thus producing variety among substances. Thus the

universe that had become indeterminate, became more and more evolved and determinate. The *guṇas* are continuously separating and reuniting. This series of evolution, beginning from the first disturbance of *prakṛti* to the creation of the order in the universe, is governed by a law that cannot be violated. This evolution comprises the development of the differentiated within the undifferentiated, of the determinate within the indeterminate, of the coherent within the incoherent. This evolution is not from the part to the whole; it is not also from the whole to the part. It is from a less differentiated, less determinate, less coherent whole to a more differentiated, more determinate, more coherent whole. So, all the changes in terms of the different combinations of the *guṇas* actually take place within *prakṛti*. The whole of *prakṛti* does not get disturbed. The totality of the *guṇas* does not leave the state of equilibrium. Evolution only means that a large portion of *guṇas* have become disturbed.

Evolution takes place upon the coming together of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is continuously changing, even in the state of dissolution. In the state of dissolution the change is homogeneous. Heterogeneous change brings disturbance in the state of equilibrium and causes evolution. Evolution is cyclic and is followed by dissolution. Evolution serves the purpose of *puruṣa*. It gives objects of enjoyment to the *puruṣa* and also helps in its liberation by discernment between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*.

These are the basic concepts of Sankhya philosophy propounded by Kapila. Here, it is held that *prakṛti* is the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* and falling from this equilibrium state, modifications like *mahat*, cosmic mind, are brought about. This is not possible. Why? Because *prakṛti* is matter and not conscious.

(To be continued)