

A Virtual and Dissentful Dialogue on the Cause of the World- Contentions of Sankara on the Sankhya View

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Dialogue is an important part of verbal communication. Moreover, thoughts and the process of dialogue of human beings are inter-linked. Even great philosophers used these two to put across their views to the people and elite as well.

Dialogue is a pretty well old process in the history of Indian thought. A number of dialogues and hymns can be traceable to the Vedas. Dialogue of *Pururavass* and *Urvasi*, Yama and Yami, Sarama and Pani etc.

Dialogue, to be rightly analysed is a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people, and the theoretical form that depicts such an exchange.

The Versatility of Theoretical Dialogue in Indian Philosophy

Dialogues and debates occupy an important position in Indian philosophy. It is seen that Sankara, Kapila and Yajnavalkya uses this medium to a great extent to establish the supremacy of their thinking process. For Swami Shivananda: Sankara's philosophical conquest is unique in the world. He had triumphant tour all over India. He met leaders of different schools of thought. He convinced them by arguments and established supremacy and truth of his religion that are strongly expounded in his commentaries¹. He had access to all celebrated seats of learning and challenged the learned

ones for discussion, argued with them by overcoming them. And converted them into his opinion and views after conquering them with his arguments. He defeated renowned thinker Bhattabhaskara and coded his Bhasya on the Vedanta Sutra. Through this way astoundingly no one but Sankara who was able to lay the foundation of the philosophy in a better way through the process of dialogue. Due to this, Sankara's Advaita Vedanta Philosophy stands as unchallengeable dialectics for all times.

Refutation of Samkhya Philosophy

Kapila the propounder of Samkhya Philosophy is regarded as the forefather of Sankara in the field of philosophy. This reveals the importance of Kapilas' position in Indian Philosophy. So Sankhya became the prime opponent and biggest challenge for Sankara. May be this is the reason for Sankara to refer them as *Mukhya Malla*.² From the analytical perspective of Sivakumar, Sankara has the distinction of being the chief critic of Sankhya. The criticism of Sankara as offered by other commentators of the *Brahmasutra* does not display any excellence of arguments in comparison with those by Sankara.³

Jerald James also explains, Sankara in *Brahmasutrabhasya* gives more detailed and precise attention to the criticism of Samkhyas than he does in any other system and is influential in the sense that Sankara's criticism not only encompasses most of the important critical issue in Classical Samkhya in its own time but it is considered to be a locus classicus for criticism of Samkhya by the orthodox thinkers down to the present age.⁴

Acceptance and rejection of Samkhya Position

Sankara has no objection in accepting the Samkhya theories such as the important nature of the soul which does not contradict the position of the Advaita. But the Samkhyas accept the plurality of self.

According to Kalla Chenchulaksmi, "though the followers of the Samkhya yoga and also of the Sankara's school of the Advaita Vedanta do subscribe to *Samkhyavada* and differ in their explanation of the production, which involves real change (*parinama*) of the cause into effect, the followers of the Sankara's school of Advaita Vedanta called the view that production in the ultimate analysis is only illusory (*vivarta*) and does not involve real change (*parinama*)."⁵

While both Samkhya and Advaita emphasizes in the removal of Avidya (ignorance) through knowledge as path of liberation, the content of the knowledge is different in Samkhya and Advaita. Samkhya states that identification of *Purusha* with evolutes of *Prakriti* as the cause of ignorance. The knowledge of distinctness of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* bring liberation. In Advaita Vedanta, *Avidya* is defined as ignorance regarding the true nature of the self. The knowledge of sameness of Atman and Brahman brings liberation,. The Advaitins do not accept *Pradhana* as the cause of the universe (*Pradhanakarana vada*).

Pradhana as the cause of the universe

In *Iksatyadhikarana* of Brahmasutra, Sankara primarily aims at contradicting the scriptural basis of the theory of *Pradhana* of *Samkhya*. In that adhikarana, he discusses the following passage of the *Chandogyopanisad*-

"Sadeva Somyedamagra asidekamevadvitiam, tadaiksata bahusyam prajayeya tattejosrjata".⁶

According to Samkya, the word *sat* stands for the cause of the universe, and the term *idam* in this passage denoted modifications of the ultimate cause conditioned by names and forms. The passage implies that the world was existent in the form *sat* before its evolution. Therefore, the *sat* denotes the causal form of the manifold world. This can be explained through the theory put forth by Sankara of the *Samkhyavada* ⁷. According to this theory, the effect is the attainment of another condition by the causal substance. According to Advaitins, *shruti* speaks of *Sat* as the ultimate self. *Sat* is said to be the fundamental entity which enters into objects in the term of *Jivatman*. According to *sruti*, the world originated from *Sat*

"*tasmadva etasmadatmana akasassambhutah*" ⁸.

So the *pradhana* of *samkhya* is not the cause of the world.

The Samkhya argues that the *Pradhana* is all knowingness because it has *Sattva* quality. The *Smriti* also says that *Sattva* brings the knowledge. ⁹.

Sankara refutes this by saying that *Sattva* is not predominant in *Pradhana* because the state of equilibrium of three *gunas* is called *Pradhana*. If we accept that *Pradhana* is capable of producing knowledge, then the two *gunas* (*rajas*, *tamas*) must be equally capable of retarding the knowledge. So, *Sattva* will make it all knowing, and others (*rajas*, *tamas*) will make it partly knowing, which is a contradiction. Besides if the *Sattva* is not illumined by the weakening soul, there is no chance to say that it is knowledge. The *Samkhya's Pradhana* is insentient in nature. The insentient *Pradhana* has no power to illumine. Therefore, the omniscience of the *Pradhana* does not happen ¹⁰. So Sankara does not accept the *pradhanakarana vada* of Samkhya.

For Sankara , the omniscient and the sentient Brahman is the cause of the universe. But Samkhyas have another objection against the causality of Brahman. They say that Brahman is not omniscient in the figurative sense. It is omniscient in the primary sense only. So, the omniscient Brahman is not the cause of the world. Sankara refutes this concept by saying that the knowledge of the Brahman is eternal. It does not depend upon any external thing such as instrument or object of knowledge. For example; the cause of the Sun, the natural heat and light, do not depend upon any external agency¹¹. Therefore the omniscient Brahman is the cause of the world. Sankara says that there is no scope of causality for *Pradhana* in *shruti*. But the Samkhyavadins argue for the *shruti* basis of *Pradhana*. In worldly experience, we can see that qualities of sentient being are figuratively spoken of as belonging to the non-sentient objects like the sentence "kulam pipatisati" (The bank wishes to fall) and *shruti* also says that the qualities of the sentient are figuratively ascribed to fire, water etc.,¹²

Therefore, the *Samkhyas* argue that the *pradhana* is the cause of the world. Sankara rejects the concept by saying that -the *shrutis* attribute the acts of thinking of water, fire etc., because they are dependent upon Brahman. The term *Sat* in a passage of Chandogyopanishad.

"Sadeva Somya" Refers to the intelligent principle, the *jiva* as the insentient *Pradhana* can't refer to an intelligent premise like the *jiva* as the self. The *Samkhyas* try to reject the objection (the cause of the universe is sat) on the ground that the term atman can be used in the secondary sense, as one person is figuratively called as atman of another man while purpose is accomplished by the former. A king calls his servant, who saves his life for the king, as his own

atman. In the same way, Pradhana which execute all the purpose of *purusa* by way of contributing to its enjoyment (*bhoga*) and release (*apovarga*) may be called atman. ¹³

Sankara criticises this opinion of Atman (brahman) as the cause of the universe. It is identical with *jivatman*. Counsels like '*tattvamasi*' ¹⁴ are given to the disciple for attainment of liberation through the idea of non-difference between the disciple and the Brahman. If the position that *sat* represents the *Pradhana* is accepted, then the teachings would be falsely equating the two. i. e, non-sentient *Pradhana* and sentient disciple, which are diametrically opposed to each other in nature. If *Samkhya* view was true, Shruti would be regarded as the teaching that soul is non-sentient, and this would prevent the possibility of release. The term atman can be used in the figurative sense. It can however, not lead to assume that figurative sense of word is applicable everywhere, otherwise it will lead to a general want of confidence. ¹⁵ It is also not possible to say that the same term "atman" denotes sentient as well as the non-sentient objects because the word does not have many meanings. ¹⁶ Hence the term atman primarily denotes sentient objects and is applied to elements by a figurative attribution of sentience to them. If Atman is used in two senses, this applicability in certain contexts can't be ascertained with the same attributive word. The fact that atman is spoken of as the self of '*Svetaketu*' is sufficient to recite that it does not refer to *Pradhana* which is not non-sentient in nature. ¹⁷

Sankara states that the *Samkhyas* inferred cause from common properties of effects. All the outward and inward effects are endowed with common qualities of pleasure, pain and indifference. Hence they should have pleasure, pain and indifference as their cause, just as dishes like pot have clay as their common property. Clay is *upadanakarana* of those things. Pleasure, pain and indifference

constitute the threefold *Pradhana*. The *Pradhana* which is non-sentient and productive spontaneously evolves into its modifications to serve the purpose of *purusa* ¹⁸. Sankara argues that the existence of *Pradhana* can't be established inferentially. It is not conclusive enough to establish non-sentient *Pradhana* as the cause of the universe. For example, the lump of clay cannot transform itself into a pot.

Non-sentient objects cannot exist without being guided by some sentient agent. The manifold but special form of effects accomplishment of the purpose of sentient being. The world with different things, varied objects cannot be created by non-sentient *Pradhana*. The manifold but special orderliness of the universe leads to conclusion contrary to the position of Samkhya ¹⁹.

The cause is twofold- *upadanakarana* and *nimittakarana*. Consequently, the effect has two sets of properties - those derived from *upadanakarana* and those caused by the *nimittakarana* as evident from the case of jar. Samkhya highlights the properties of the *upadanakarana*, and argue in favor of non-sentient nature of the cause. However, we are not bound to rely on the properties of the *upadanakarana* of the world. Relying on properties of *nimittakarana* we argue the sentient nature of the cause ²⁰.

Moreover, the logical arguments put forward by the Samkhyas are not valid. It is not proved that individual objects are of pleasure, pain and indifference. The feeling of pleasure, pain and the like is internal and is occasioned by the objects according to mental disposition of sentient beings. This is why even though the objects like sound remain the same, the particular feeling of pleasure, pain and indifference is experienced differently by different people. ²¹

The theory that all finite objects originate from combination of many materials does not prove the existence of *Pradhana* as the ultimate cause of the universe. It involves the undesired contingency of admitting the cause of *Gunas* as they are separate and finite. The

finiteness of Gunas is admitted to be unlimited in magnitude and consequently omnipresent and then there will be no disturbance in the state of equilibrium. Hence, to explore the possibility of evolution, the finite nature of Gunas must be ascertained. It seems that that alone which is capable to produce the effect is also the sentient nature of the cause because no activity can be found in the non-sentient object. The particular nature of relation of the cause and effect also equally points to the causality of the sentient being of the nature.

According to Sankara, the state of Pradhana is a condition of balance of three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas) which are independent of each other and is in a state of equilibrium before creation. The equilibrium is upset when one Guna becomes predominant than the other two. The equilibrium cannot be upset with the help of external force, there can be no origin of Mahat. Hence, there is no possibility of any state of equilibrium. The Samkhyas contend the above concept that the Gunas are naturally unsteady. From this it follows that even during equilibrium the Gunas exist in a state of potential divergence. Sankara also refutes this, because if we accept the above concept of the Samkhya, there can be no origin of Mahat. In this way Sankara refutes Pradhanakaranavada of Samkhya by saying that sentient objects cannot be produced by non-sentient principle of pradhana.

It can be concluded that Sankara never tried to berate or belittle his opponent's thoughts, any debates or arguments. He found out the logic of the opponent's views and refuted them. This was possible mainly because he never believed anything blindly and he gave due consideration to each thought based solidly on factual situation. He gave importance to experience. For him, experience of the self is much more important than anything else. Basically, srutis are the

experiences of the many divine persons. So it acquires importance. So the experience of one become superior to any philosophy or religion, according to Sankara.

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