

A Comparative study of the Sankhya – yoga of Bhagavadgita and the Traditional Sankhya Philosophy of Rishi Kapila

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Abstract : Sankhya and Yoga are both allied system of Indian Philosophy. As, Sankhya is the oldest system of Indian Philosophy. There are no purely Sankhya schools existing today in Hinduism, but its influence is felt in Yoga and Vedanta schools of Philosophy. In the Second chapter of Bhagavadgita Arjuna accepts the position as a disciple of Lord Krishna after surrendering to Krishna, he requests the Lord to instruct him how to dispel his lamentation and grief. As, we also see Classical Sankhya Philosophy of Kapila in Indian Philosophy. Does both are similar in opinion and aspects? Therefore, through this article I am trying to make out the comparison between the both.

Key words : Hinduism, Lord Krishna, Bhagavadgita, Arjuna

INTRODUCTION:

Sankhya is undoubtedly one of the oldest system of Indian Philosophy. We find many references in Upanisads like in the Chandogya, the Katha, the Prashna, the Gita, the Purana also in Mahabharatas etc. This system goes back to about seven B.C. Kapila the author of Sankhya Sutra is considered to be the originator of this system. Actually, we find no purely sankhya schools existing at present in Hinduism, but its influence is felt in Yoga and Vedanta schools of Indian Philosophy. The Hindu Yoga schools are sometimes referred to as “SANKHYA – YOGA” school.

The second chapter can be classified into four (4) main topics as under :

1st topic : Arjuna saranagadhi (verse 1 to 10)

2nd topic: Gyana Yogaga (verse 11 to 38) or Sankhya yoga

3rd topic : Karma yoga (verse 39 to 53)

4th topic: Chitapragna Lakshanani (verse 54 to 72)

But, here in this article, I would discuss the second of topic of Bhagavadgita

The second chapter in the Bhagavadgita is titled “SANKHYA YOGA”. The word Sankhya can be understood in two ways one as ‘NUMBER’ and the other as the ‘knowledge’. It seems some scholars say that Sankhya is considered with the number of elements. The other meaning of Sankhya is Divine Knowledge. This divine knowledge pertains to the knowledge of body and soul. The word YOGA means the union of numbers. The number are with regard to the number of realities (tattvas) that are present in its existence. Sankhya yoga deals with the combination of the hidden realities which manifest the existential reality.

In our ancient Literature Kapila has been honoured as incarnation of Lord Vishnu, son of Kardam and Deohuti, psychic progeny of Lord Brahma and Incarnation of Agni. The classical or traditional Sankhya system identifies two realities (Sattva) PURUSHA (The individual soul) and PRAKRITI (Nature). Purusha or the individual soul is the spirit without qualities is Languid. In other words, its complete yet unattached. They are eternal, indivisible, indestructible and numerous. On the other side, Prakriti is one, divisible and mutable. However, it is further again divided into multiple, finite realities which combine in various combinations in order to produce the diversity of worlds, beings and objects. Thus, Sankhya yoga basically deals with these finite and infinite realities of existence and tries to explain how this perceptible worlds manifests through effects that are already hidden in their causes. As we see in vedic era sankhya philosophy seems to have its source in the Upanishads. Unlike the upanisadic philosophy, its earlier proponents have taken it in the opposite direction as a non theistic school. The original sankhya system did not believe in a cosmic Being or a creator God. So, according to them creation was an effect that is hidden in prakriti that brought forth the worlds and beings using the individual souls as the incentives (catalysts). In real sense, they primarily followed the similar thought of modern theories of Evolution that which regards the cosmos and life as the products of change. According to them, just as the seed transformed into plant in favourable environment with right conditions presented themselves. It seems that the sankhya system shifted from the upanishadic thought in its earlier days. Later, again the essential doctrine and many of its concepts, beliefs, are seems to be found in vedic tradition and thus united with the theistic beliefs of present day Hinduism.

In Bhagavadgita, also Sankhya system occupies a prominent place and position. It is said that the Bhagavadgita stands trusty to the significance of Sankhya Philosophy in ancient India. Kapila is said to have lived around 500 B.C.E, and tradition has it that Gautama Buddha studied the Sankhya system before his “awakening” putting Kapila’s birth at least before that time. Kapila is also mentioned by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavadgita as the greatest of all perfected beings, which could possibly move the data back further still.

Of all trees I am the banayan tree, and of the sages among the demigods I am Narada. Of the Gandharvas I am Citraratha, and among perfected beings I am the Sage Kapila (Bhagavadgita 10.26)

“My appearance in this world is especially to explain the philosophy of Sankhya , which is highly esteemed for self realization by those desiring freedom from the entanglement of unnecessary material desires. This path of self realization , which is difficult to understand , has now been lost in the course of time. Please know that I have assumed this body of Kapila to introduce and explain society again.”(3.25.16)

“When one is completely cleansed of the impurities of lust and greed produced from the false identification of the body as “I” and bodily possessions as “mine”, one’s mind becomes purified. In that pure state the transcends the stage of so- called material happiness and distress”(3.25.16)

“The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the Supreme Soul , and He has no beginning. He is transcendental to the material modes of nature and beyond the existence of this material world. He is perceivable everywhere because He is Self –effulgent , and by His self –effulgent luster the entire creation is maintained.”(3.26.3)

It was not easy to accept that the name would adore the title of the most important chapter of Bhagavadgita , unless it had wide spread recognition . No doubt , this Sankhya Philosophy is one of the most ancient well known philosophies of ancient India. Its influence has been pervasive in some sectarian traditions of Hinduism. In the second chapter Lord Krishna condenses the teachings of the entire Gita in this chapter. As , the chapter entitled “THE SANKHYA YOGA “. Yoga means union. Yuj means ‘to join’. Thus , in Sanskrit it is referred as ‘Yoga’ and in English it is called as ‘Religion’. Each chapter of the Gita is a yoga which helps us to be united. We are separated from something and we are asked to unite to something that we are separated from. So, if we use our physical body to unite with the self then it is Karma yoga. Again , if we use our intellect to unite with self then it is the jnana yoga. Thus , we can say that the physical body , manas and buddhi are the equipments which we carry along with us.

“The glory of the lord is always worth singing for His glories enhance the glories of His devotees. One should therefore meditate upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead and upon His devotees. One should meditate on the eternal form of the Lord until the mind becomes fixed.”(3.28.18)

The Bhagavadgita has beautifully blended the predominant elements of the classical sankhya yoga of Ishvara Krishna into its own teachings without compromising its theistic inclinations. By analysing the chapter, it is seen that the first ten verses depict the disturbed states of Arjuna’s mind. Moreover, verses eleven to thirty nine contain the elements of sankhya yoga and from forty to seventy two deal with the buddhi (intelligence). Since, we know that Buddhi is an important aspect of Prakriti and thus can be considered as an extended explanation of sankhya yoga. Lord Krishna wanted Arjuna to know the reason for his unstable mind and how could he cultivate equanimity with buddhi.

From the philosophical perspective the Sankhya yoga of the Bhagavadgita points the following tattvas existence - Ishvara , tattva, Atma tattva, body, sense, ego, mind ,and buddhi. Here in the second chapter of Bhagavadgita we also found about the Tri Gunas that determines the Svabhava, Paryaya and karma of beings (man). God is the Ishvara tattva who is the supreme of all and is the Absolute Reality (Param sattva). But, in classical thought we do not find Him as a tattva. Everything arises from Him , dissolves in Him from Gita's Perspective. God is the source of everything. In the second chapter of Gita He is addressed by Arjuna as Madhusudana. He is also regarded as the Lord of the Organs of senses . In verse eighteen one important tattva is mentioned i.e Atma tattva who resides in the body, is eternal and cannot be destroyed. It is pure and Infinite. Similarly verse nineteen depicts that as one who neither kills nor is killed . The soul is Dehi who is Impenetrable, insoluble, incombustible and thus goes and moves on from one birth to the other without undergoing any change. The body or Sarira is abode of the dehi . It is a composite of different tattvas . The later chapter of Gita discusses the chapter of prakriti that is subject to change. Like Atma or the soul . This body is not pure and leads to destruction yet perishable and subject to change and death. Here, Lord Krishna compares it to a piece of cloth that is worn by the soul at birth and discarded at the end . The last one is Buddhi which is regarded as intelligence. In Kapila's philosophy we notice that Buddhi is regarded as the highest of all Tattvas. But, when we come to Bhagavadgita we see a difference lying behind that is Gita does not describe Buddhi or Intelligence as the Highest tattva. Moreover, one similarity we found about the Tri gunas which are discussed in Kapila's philosophy, but though in Gita also there has been mentioned about the Gunas. Still , Gita does not speak much about the same. It had made a passing reference to them in a few verses. Thus, Gita always lay importance to cultivate equanimity and one should therefore transcend himself to overcome the duality of attachments and desires.

From the above discussion regarding the comparison between sankhya yoga of Bhagavadgita and Kapila's Traditional Sankhya , we seen that the Bhagavadgita's Sankhya Yoga has many resemblance with the original traditional sankhya philosophy of Kapila.

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