

Thomas Manickam
DVK, Bangalore

HUMAN PERSON : PERSPECTIVES OF SAMKHYA AND GITA

Introduction

In this paper I am presenting the perspectives on the human person according to Samkhya darsana as interpreted by Iswara Krishna's *Samkya Karika* based on Kapila's aphorisms on *Samkhya darsana*. Also relating this vision to Bhagavadgita as it is referred in the second chapter of Gita I will try to show how these two 'contexts' of Samkhya and Gita are mutually complementary, both theoretically and practically.

While writing the *Karika* on the Samkhya sutras of Kapila, the founding philosopher of the Samkhya darsana, Iswara Krishna, sets the foundational problem of man according to Samkhya as follows:

Assailed as we are by the triple sorrow (internal, external and superhuman), we desire to know if the means exist to counteract it: 'Is this desire futile, since we see that such means do exist? 'No. Those means are neither guaranteed nor absolute: (*S. Karika 1*)

Hence Samkhya proposes its own sure means of liberation for man, because,

The means set forth in Revelation (*sruti*) are common-place ones. They are impure, perishable, and open to improvement. There is a more excellent means, and that is the knowledge of the Evolved, the Unevolved, and the Knower (or Spirit). (*S. Karika 2*).

So Samkhya proposes a theory of liberation on the basis of a more coherent knowledge about the human predicament, that man is suffering from a situation of bondage where his authentic Spirit (*Purusha*) is under the evolutionary charm of the Matter (*Prakrti*) and therefore the central point of Samkhya darsana is to focus our attention on the

bonded state of human person and search for the right means of liberation of the spirit of man from the clutches of the materiality that surrounds him in all directions. In this context *Samkhya* means *sāmyak-khyati* the right knowledge about the various constitutive factors of human person and his predicament, and the means of liberation therefrom.

I

1. The Constitution of the Human Personality

There are two kinds of spirits (*purusha*): the freed (*mukta*) and the bound (*baddha*). The former is pure consciousness and it has no other appendage to identify with. The latter is made up of consciousness (*cit*) which is the inner self of the composite entity known as man. In its composite structure the inner spirit experiences the pain of bondage in a threefold way: internal conflicts, external pressures from other composite beings and from supernatural forces of this universe.

The human body is the binding system, and it is also composed of contrary forces such as subtle bodies (*sukshma sariras*) and gross bodies (*stula sariras*). The subtle bodies are of two levels: (i) *the inner body (linga sarira)* consisting of intellect (*buddhi*) ego (*ahamkara*), senses of knowledge (*jñānendriyas*), and organs of action (*karmendriyas*) and their respective subtle elements (*tanmatras*) (ii) *Outer body (adhishtana śarira)* is situated on the foundation of the gross elements (*mahabhutas*) such as earth (*pruthvi*), water (*apas*), fire (*tejas*), air (*vayu*) and magnetic field (*ākāś*) in their most elementary units corresponding to *tanmatra* - subtle levels. Of these two inner and outer linking bodies, subtle as they are, the former cannot exist without the other. Because they are correlational factors making an entity possibly to exist without having existential contradictions. This seems to be the corporeal structure of man according to Samkhya as stated by Iswara Krishna who says :

There is no painting without a support, no shadow without solid objects like pillars. So also, the subtle body never exists without a support, without the subtle elements that are not objects of experience (*S. Karika 41*).

The core of human personality is the spirit (*purusha*). Although it is in the bonded situation it is the unmanifest and ultimate authentic self of man. Its constitutive nature is self-consciousness (*cit*):

regarded as unchanging and therefore remains as inactive witness to all the changes that take place in the body-system of its concrete existence as an individual person. The purusha of each individual is different from another for obvious reasons. According to S, Karika 11 the following are the reasons that appeal to common-sense logic. Different living beings or persons are found to have different constitutions and capacities of the instruments of knowledge and action. This could not be possible if there were only one purusha for all individuals. Moreover the presence and activity of the three *gunas*—*satva*, *rajas*, *tamas*—are differently experienced by different individuals according to various degrees and proportions of compositions and combinations.

2. The Psychology of Cognition and Self-awareness

The psychology of cognition falls under two heads :

(1) The instruments of knowledge, and (2) their functions.

(i) *The Instruments of knowledge* : They are intellect (*buddhi*), empirical ego (*ahamkara*), *manas* (mind, the interior sense of volition) and the five external senses. Of these the first three are inner instruments (*antahkarana*), because they are situated inside the body, and the rest five, the outer sense, as they are on the surface of the body and are turned outward with a view to collect the sensitive stimuli from the objective world.

(ii) *The Functions (vrittis) of the Instruments* :

The following are the functions of the cognitive instruments of man: (a) The distinctive function of *buddhi* is ascertainment or determination of the true nature of every thing by means of the knowledge called *adhyavasāya* (specification or identification). On the conative side it means resolution or determination to do something. (b) The function of *ahamkara* is self-reference or self-awareness of one's own mode of being and activity, known as *abhimāna*, as for instance in stating, "I am knowing this", or "I am doing this", or "feeling this", etc. Of these, the "I-ness" is experienced by the *antakarana* or *ahamkara*. (c) The function of *manas* is said to be *samkalpa*, phantasy, the integration process of the sensations of the organs. It is the assimilation or synthesis of the various sensations collected through the senses. It is a sorting, identifying and co-ordinating of the data of perceptions of the senses in the internal screen,

called mind. (d) The functions of the *jñānendriyas* are sense experiences which are distributed one for each organ corresponding to the sensation for empirical knowledge of the objective world. In Samkhya this tangibility level of human cognition is initiated at the sense-object-contact level and it is called *alocanamātra*. It is the 'simple apprehension' level of perception generally known in the Aristotelian and Scholastic psychology of perception. It is indeterminate awareness about the mere presence of some object given to the senses for empirical touch. More definite and articulate knowledge of objects, identifying their exactitudes such as name, species, class, quality, etc. is regarded as the function of the *buddhi* and intellect works when *manas* has performed its function of synthesis of the various impressions received into the senses and gathered into the central sensorium of the mind.

3. The Way to Authenticity and Integration

The most important human issue in Samkhya seems to be man's awareness of his existential predicament of being tied down by the instinctive drives of a composite corporeal constitution. As a corrective to the Samkhyan inability to discover man's authentic selfhood, *Yoga darsana*, the complementary darsana of Patanjali offers some appropriate *sadhana*, known as *ashtangayoga* - eightfold path of integration. Yogadarsana is a remedial system for man to recapture his original simplicity, his authenticity and selfhood. This is also known as *Rajayoga*. Without going into all the details of the *sadhana* part of *Rajayoga* which might be well known to all of us, let me here outline the dynamics of the way to authenticity and integration, which forms the main thrust of the perspective on man as gathered from Samkhya and its applied perspectives in Gita. This perspective of man has been already integrated into the various popular religious, moral spiritual and cultural disciplines of Hindu traditions, especially Dharmasastras, Ramayana and Bhagavadgita with reference to the war context of Mahabharata.

However, the most excellent way to self-liberation and authenticity according to Kapila and Iswara Krishna is to attain right knowledge about the nature of the true Self of man and its enslaving association with the material components of *prakriti*, and with this awareness man should strive to be internally free, though his spirit has to be a witness of all the displays and activities and transformations of his

material component, the body composite system, the evolution of *prakriti*. Man has to realize the truth that his spirit is neither matter nor a transformation of *prakriti*. His spirit is the subjectivity as against the objectivity of *prakriti*. This is to be known even on the empirical level of perception (*pratyaksha*), on the rational level of inference (*anumana*) and by means of the testimony of the experienced *rushis* whose *aptopadesha* is given in the source of valid knowledge known as *śabdapramana*.

We will see later that it is this power of the *aptopadesha* of Sri Krishna in the war context of Mahabharata expressed in the second chapter of Bhagavadgita that finally convinces Arjuna to realize his authentic self and its own duty of performing the prescribed action, namely waging the war of righteousness, as *svadharma*. In this connection it may be anticipated here that Sri Krishna uses the categories of Samkhya and the stress on the simplicity of the spirit, that is the very nature of every spirit in every individual, and the attainment of the final liberation of the spirit as the immediate concerns of even waging the war because war causes many individuals to reach the *kaivalya* (simplicity) level by dying as heroes in the battle field, and this itself is the occasion for the final liberation of any warrior either on one's own side or on the enemy's side.

4. Encumbrances to Right Knowledge

According to Samkhya and Gita there are a few obstacles or encumbrances to right knowledge which should lead one to final spiritual liberation. These obstacles are experienced in relation to the means of knowledge (*pramanas*) as well as due to the impact of the attributive adjuncts (*gunas*) on the corporate system of the human individual.

a) *On the level of Perception (pratyaksha)*

Our perception itself is hampered by excessive distance from or nearness to the object of perception, also by damage to organs, wandering attention, subtlety of object, interposition between object and the sense of perception, obliteration of one object by another and confusion with similar objects under view. (S. Karika 7)

b) *Impact of the psychic adjuncts (gunas)*

The three psychic adjuncts known as *gunas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, have the nature of engendering pleasure, pain and insensibility, and they serve to illumine, activate, and deaden the normal process of the evolution of the human individual corresponding to their inner properties. These properties overpower, support, generate and accompany one another (*Karika 12*). The *sattva guna*, the attribute of brightness, is held to be light and luminous, that of *rajas* to be impulsive and mobile, that of *tamas* heavy and obfuscating. They all function together for one purpose as (do oil, wick and flame) in a lamp (*Karika 13*). The real human predicament is a lack of discernment about the various displays of these psychic adjuncts in the growth of an individual for which *prakrti*, the material component, is solely responsible.

5. The Nature and Properties of the Spirit

It is the understanding of Samkhya's interpreters that the aggregate of the components of the object-world and that of the body system of the individual person, exist for something other than themselves, and there is a teleology in the whole process of evolution of the *prakrti*. The purpose of the whole material evolution of the individual potentialities is in view of making the spirit feel or experience his own identity and authority over his body-complex. This is a higher level of self-consciousness observed in every individual person. The most fundamental tendency of the inner spirit of every individual is to transcend his own compositeness to a higher level of simplicity, known as *kevalatva/kaivalya*.

Individually taken the plurality of the spirit (*purusha*) is already an accepted fact in the Samkhya darsana. The reasons are rather simple and Iswara Krishna enunciates them as follows: Birth, death and the faculties are allocated severally, activity of one individual is not the same as that of another, the three *gunas* are severally apportioned in each individual. These reasons prove that a multiplicity of spirits exist in this world, and they continue to exist so, even after their individual realization of the authentic simplicity and isolation from the composite situation of living here in the space time conditions (*S. Karika 18.*)

The characteristic role of the spirit in man is that of a Witness, and this is indicated by the contrariety in the performance of the *gunas* and the tendency of the spirit to be isolated from

the clutches of the gunas and remain neutral to the display of the gunas in the composite structure of the individual in which the spirit is conjoined with *prakrti* resulting in the latter evolution into the complexity of elements, organs, sensations and activities. The spirit remains as an uninvolved observer in the midst of the evolutionary rhythm of the activities of *prakrti* (*S. Karika 19*).

6. The Nature of the Relationship between Spirit and Matter

The nature of the relationship between the spirit and material components in human individual is described as follows: The evolutes of *prakrti* appear as though conscious, and the spirit innately indifferent to any movement of the body appears as an agent because of the internal activities of the gunas (*S. Karika 20*). The purpose and manner of the union of spirit and matter are symbolically expressed in the way a lame and a blind person are mutually associated (*Karika 21*) for the mutual functioning in view of the ultimate liberation of the spirit, who sees everything, though made a lame by the oppressive impact of the *prakrti*, like a "hen-pecked husband."

The oppressive evolution of *prakrti* in an individual due to which the human person feels the loss of identity of his own inner spirit is the main reason for the feeling of sorrow on the part of the person. The pain is something deeply interior, though appears to be exhibited through the bodily sensations, moods, anxieties, loss of memory, enthusiasm, creativity etc. (*Karika 55*). And yet matter being the sole cause of all fluctuations in the interior level of the being of the person it is the same matter and material components that have to be brought under check and control of the spirit.

However, the positive role matter plays in the total process of liberation of the spirit is well described in the Samkhya Karika by Iswara Krishna. We may not overlook that in this connection. The relevant texts are quoted here below:

Matter precipitates this evolution from the level of the first evolute called *mahat* (the great instinct of individuation) down to the specific elements, seemingly for her own benefit, but really meant to promote the liberation of the

spirit. It is like milk which though lacking awareness, acts to nourish the calf. So matter (though unconscious) acts to liberate spirit. Matter's sole objective is the liberation of the Spirit. As people act to satisfy desires, so too matter acts to liberate spirit (S. Karika, 56-58).

But matter ceases her operation like an actress, who desists from dancing when her roles are played on the scene and entertained the audience. So also after liberating the spirit matter disappears herself (S. Karika, 59). It is matter alone that is causing both liberation of the spirit or its opposite consequence, the transmigration into another bondage situation, making provisions for repeating the course of life in another mode and cycle based on the merits or demerits of the actions of the individual performed in one given historical context of time and space.

In this way matter causes her own bondage together with that of the spirit, if she fails to liberate the spirit in one cycle of the evolution process of prakrti, in the conjoining of her association with an individual in the first cycle of individuation. By means of the sevenfold form of virtue, detachment, power, vice, ignorance, attachment and weakness, does matter (*prakrti*) binds herself until she looses herself by the singular form of knowledge which the spirit attains by means of self-awareness of its own identity as distinct from prakrti. (*Karika*, 63).

7. The Essence of Liberation

Through constant study of the principles, an individual obtains the liberative knowledge, such as: "I do not exist, I am not I, nothing is mine, "etc., a knowledge of self-awareness which leaves nothing more to be known, i.e. absolute knowledge (*Karika* 64). Then composed like a spectator, the spirit watches the matter, which has ceased evolution, - her purpose having been served - and now is divested of her seven forms (*Karika*, 65).

The finality of liberation consists in this :

When purusha thinks, " I have seen her," and then loses interest, and prakrti feels, "I have been seen," and refrains from action, even though they are still existing together in one individual, there is no need for further evolution (S. *Karika*, 66).

Perfect knowledge has been attained, and factors like virtue no longer function as causes, yet the embodied spirit, impelled by previous impressions, continue as embodied, like a spinning potter's wheel - which spins awhile from the potter's previous impulse, though the pot is now formed (S. Karika, 67).

The final state of simplicity (*kaivalya*) is this :

On separation from the body, matter, her purpose realized, having stopped functioning - the spirit attains to the state of isolation called *kaivalya* from where no further lapse takes place, and so it is absolute, meaning freed from the bondage of *prakrti* (S. Karika, 68).

II

Application of The Samkhyan Perspective of Man in Bhagavadgita

The application of the perspective of Samkhya on human personality and his final state of a liberated consciousness is done by Sri Krishna in his advise to Arjuna at the war front of Mahabharata. The significant pieces of advice given in view of energizing the dispirited Arjuna, the typical confused individual of the Samkhyan perception, re-appearing in the Mahabharata war context are the following :

Approaching objects with senses free from attachment and aversion, and controlled by the mind, the man who has mastered his mind wins serenity (Gita, II, 64).

Serenity won, sufferings come to an end, the reason of that man, whose mind is serene, soon becomes steadfast. (Gita, II, 65).

The unintegrated mind has no wisdom, nor can such a man have yearning (for Self-knowledge). Without such yearning no peace (is possible). For one lacking peace, how can there be happiness? (Gita, II, 66).

The mind that conforms to the rowing senses robs (one) of perception, just as the wind sweeps the boat off its course at sea (Gita, II, 67).

Therefore, O hero! his wisdom is stable whose senses have been withdrawn on all sides from their (respective) objects (Gita, II, 68).

He wins peace into whose mind objects of desires enter as waters flow into a full and stable sea that is being filled, and not he who yearns after objects of desire. (Gita, II, 70).

The man who, giving up all objects of desires, moves about seeking nothing, and rid of all sense of 'mine' and 'I', wins peace. (Gita, II, 71).

This is the status of Brahman, Arjuna !. Attaining it, none gets deluded (any more). Abiding in it, at least at the hour of death, one gains super-consciousness in Brahman (Gita, II, 72).

In the passages quoted above from the second chapter of Gita where there is a re-statement of the man of renunciation of the Samkhyan school it is clear that Sri Krishna is not contradicting the basic position of Samkhyan theory of *kaivalya*, rather he reinforces the same in order to prepare the mind of Arjuna, the man in a dilemma to be ready to act in the appropriate way not by denouncing action but by doing the right action with right dispositions. In Samkhya apparently there is a note of *nivartimarga*, a way of withdrawal from the field of actions in view of guaranteeing a personal security at the cost of the actions which may lead one to the consequences of ambitions cravings. But in Gita Sri Krishna expands the Samkhyan theory of escapism for personal security into a positive approach *pravrttimarga* in view of achieving one's total liberation in the context of achieving greater goals of life which have social implications too. Doing one's own prescribed duty becomes the means of liberation in the third chapter of Gita, where it is clearly stated by Krishna that he himself is the author of both *Samkhya yoga* and *Karma yoga*, both are equally important with reference to two different contexts. Both ways are to be enlightened by correct knowledge about the nature, motivation and purpose of either doing one's dutiful actions (*svadharma*) or not doing actions which are optional and that can often lead to selfish motivations. Hence in the third chapter of Gita Krishna advises :

O sinless one, two kinds of disciplines in this world were set forth by Me in times of yore - for the Samkhyas the discipline of knowledge, and for the Yogins, that of works. (Gita, III, 3).

Man does not achieve freedom from works by abstention from them. None attains perfection through the mere renunciation of works, either. (Gita, III, 4).

None indeed, even for a moment, remains without doing work. All, being dependent, are made to work by the constituents of Prakṛti (Gita, III, 5).

Controlling the sense organs with the mind, he who commences the yoga of action, with the organs of action, unattached, is held to excel, O Arjuna! (Gita, III, 7.)

Always do prescribed work (*niyata karma*), work is superior to inaction. Indeed, even life in the body is impossible without working. (Gita, III, 8).

Therefore, unattached, always do the work that has to be done. For, doing work with detachment, man attains the Supreme. (Gita, III, 19).

Janaka and others achieved perfection through works alone. At least, to promote the welfare of the world (*lokasamgraha*), you ought to do works. (Gita, III, 20).

If I don't work the worlds will perish. I may cause confusion, and may ruin these living beings. (Gita, III, 24).

Surrendering all works to Me in a spiritual frame of mind that craves naught, and free from all sense of possessions, fight with unconcern (Gita, III, 30).

*Mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasyādhyātma cētasā,
Nirāsti nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vīgatajvarah.*

In the last stanza we have got the correct directive principle, the perspective of doing one's prescribed duties in the right spiritual disposition which will not enslave a man but liberate him totally.

Here the vision of human person and his existential concerns, and the means of acquiring the right knowledge about one's authentic self as against one's association with the mixed situation of the material conditions of life as enunciated in Samkhya, has been meaningfully complemented by Sri Krishna in his Gitopadesha with strong accent on doing one's rightful duty in total surrender to the will of God as the proper *sadhana of karmamarga* which is so essential for the welfare of the world. In Gita, the isolationist and individualistic search for personal perfection and personal liberation as proposed by Samkhya has been correctively toned up substantiating the means of personal perfection with an equal concern for social upliftment and the universal happiness of one's fellow creatures as well. Thus Bhagavadgita supplements what is lacking in the Samkhyan perception of the human person and his ultimate concerns of life.