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## The concept of *Puruṣa* as treated in the Sāṃkhya philosophy

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### Abstract

Sāṃkhya is one of the oldest systems of Indian philosophy, advocates the clear-cut dualism of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*. Sāṃkhya recognizes twenty five principles, among which two are regarded as the ultimate realities viz., *mahat*, *ahamkāra*, *pañcājnānendriya*, *pañcakarmendriya*, *manas*, *pañcatanmātra* and *pañcamahābhūta* are the evolutes of *Prakṛti*. According to Sāṃkhya system, the second ultimate reality *Puruṣa* is as an absolute and independent entity. *Puruṣa* is quite opposite of *Prakṛti* in nature. It is pure, conscious and beyond change and silent spectator. It has neither beginning nor end. By nature, *Puruṣa* is inactive, a mere witness, a solitary, indifferent and a passive spectator which is beyond the perceptual experience. Īśvarakṛṣṇa, in his *Sāṃkhyakārikā* states about the plurality of Self (*Puruṣa*).

**Keywords:** *Puruṣa*, *puruṣabahutvaṃ*, *agunaḥ*, *guṇas* etc.

### Introduction

Sāṃkhya is attributed to the great sage Kapila. This system represents the most interesting and fascinating phases of Indian religion and thought. Sāṃkhya is an exponent of dualistic realism as it advocates the clear-cut dualism of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*. Sāṃkhya recognizes twenty five principles, among which two are regarded as the ultimate realities viz., *mahat*, *ahamkāra*, *pañcājnānendriya*, *pañcakarmendriya*, *manas*, *pañcatanmātra* and *pañcamahābhūta* are the evolutes of *Prakṛti*. According to Sāṃkhya system, the second ultimate reality *Puruṣa* is as an absolute and independent entity. *Puruṣa* is quite opposite of *Prakṛti* in nature.

### Puruṣa In The Sāṃkhya Philosophy

*Puruṣa* is pure, conscious and beyond change and silent spectator. It has neither beginning nor end. By nature, *Puruṣa* is inactive, a mere witness, a solitary, indifferent and a passive spectator which is beyond the perceptual experience. The term *Puruṣa* can be traced in the *Puruṣa sūkta* of *R̥gveda* to denote both the Ātman which signifies the embodied being or personality and the Supreme creator<sup>[1]</sup>. This *sūkta* declares that all beings are only a forth of the Supreme Spirit (*Puruṣa*) has thousand heads, thousand eyes, and thousand feet and that pervading the entire universe, he extends ten digits beyond<sup>[2]</sup>.

In the Upaniṣads also the term *Puruṣa* is used in many senses viz., the Supreme unchangeable reality, absolute, eternal, immortal and unconditional. The central principle of the Upanisadic teaching is involved in the equation of Brahman and Ātman. In the light of Upanisadic teaching, *Puruṣa* is Ātman.

### Nature of Puruṣa

The Sāṃkhya philosophy admits *Puruṣa* as one of the two ultimate principles. It says that *Puruṣa* is an absolute and an independent entity. It is the universal spirit. It is beyond the perceptual experience<sup>[3]</sup>.

The *Puruṣa* in Sāṃkhya philosophy is known as *jñā*, which means 'who knows'. It is the knower. It is the permanent and pure consciousness. The feeling of I, my, mine etc., are the proofs for existence of the self or *Puruṣa*. The philosophy of Sāṃkhya accepts the reality of *Puruṣa* because nobody can deny the existence of his own self. Non-existent of *Puruṣa* also cannot be proved in any way. In Sāṃkhya philosophy, *Puruṣa* is known as *jñānaḥ*<sup>[4]</sup>.

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*Puruṣa* is depicted as the pure conscious entity in the Sāṃkhya philosophy. This philosophy also maintains that the self or *Puruṣa* is neither *Prakṛti* (cause) nor *vikṛti* (effect). It doesn't produce anything and it is not produced by anything else [5]. It is the self-shining, self proved and causeless. "The term *Puruṣa* though in original meaning 'man' or 'person' and used synonymously in prephilosophical contents with the old Upaniṣadic notion of Ātman or self, came to have a peculiar teaching meaning in philosophical Sāṃkhya" [6].

*Puruṣa* is self, subject and the knower. It is changeless, eternal and all pervading. *Gauḍapādabhāṣya* accepts *Puruṣa* as *tathā ca vyāpipumān, sarvagatatvāt* [7]. Sāṃkhya philosophy holds that, it is free from body, senses, mind, brain, *buddhi* or intellect, *ahamkāra* (ego) etc. [8]

*Puruṣa* is also devoid of three guṇas. So it is said *agunaḥ puruṣaḥ* [9]. It is the silent witness (*sākṣī*). *Puruṣa* is beyond time and space, change and activity. It is the infinite, transcendental principle. *Sāṃkhyasūtra* treats *Puruṣa* as eternal, pure bliss, devoid of vice and virtue which is beyond three kālas, and absolutely free from misery [10].

In the *Sāṃkhyasāra*, Vijñānabhikṣu has stated that the soul is not perceived, it is indestructible. It does not get attached. It is also not destroyed [11].

In the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, Īśvarakṛṣṇa has also enumerated the similarities and dissimilarities between *vyakta* and *Puruṣa* as well *Avyakta* and *Puruṣa*. The similarities between both *Avyakta* and *Puruṣa* both are causeless, eternal, all-pervading, inactive, non-mergent, independent, part less etc. [12]

*Avyakta* and *Puruṣa* both are causeless because both are not produced from anything else [13]. There is nothing higher than these.

The *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, which is the earliest authoritative text of Sāṃkhya, describes a clear nature of *Puruṣa*. It discriminates *Puruṣa* from *Prakṛti* and its evolutes by saying *na prakṛtirnavikṛtiḥ puruṣaḥ* [14]. *Puruṣa* is devoid of qualities, consciousness, subject, luminous and non-productive. *Puruṣa* is the conscious reality in the philosophy of Sāṃkhya and it is totally different from *vyaktas*. *Puruṣa* is the neither the cause nor the effect, it is self-shining, self proved [15]. It is mentioned in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* that *Prakṛti* possesses the nature like indiscriminative, objective, etc., and *Puruṣa* is complete reverse of these. *Puruṣa* possesses the complete opposite nature to *Prakṛti* [16]. The first dissimilarity is that, *Prakṛti* or *Pradhāna* or *Avyakta* and *Vaktyas* both are possessed of the three guṇas but the *Puruṣa* is *agunaḥ* because it is devoid of the three guṇas [17]. So *Avyakta* and *vyaktas* are *triguṇātmikā* and *Puruṣa* is *agunaḥ*. *Sāṃkhyasūtra* says *Puruṣa* is devoid of the properties of the three guṇas [18].

*Gauḍapādabhāṣya* states the nature of *Puruṣa* as *agunaḥ puruṣaḥ* [19]. *Jayamaṅgalā* describes *Puruṣa* as devoid of guṇas [20]. *Puruṣa* is devoid of three guṇas; *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

*Puruṣa* is beyond time and space, change and activity. It is unproduced and unproducing [21]. *Puruṣa* is also called *viveki* or discriminative because *Puruṣa* is distinguished from the guṇas [22]. *Puruṣa* is *aviṣayaḥ* or not an object [23]. It is not being an object of enjoyment for others. *Puruṣa* is not common to all [24]. *Puruṣa* is conscious or *cetana*. It is conscious because it is the knower of pleasure, pain and delusion [25]. It is *aprasavadharmi* because nothing is produced from it [26].

Secondly, *vyakta* and *Avyakta* are undistinguishable. Just as *Avyakta*, the cause of the world cannot be separated from itself, in the same way *mahat* also cannot be separated from

*Prakṛti* or *Ayakta*, though *mahat* etc., are the effects of *Avyakta*. So these are undistinguishable from *Avyakta*. *Puruṣa* is distinguishable because it can be separated from others.

Again, *Ayakta* and *vyaktas* both are object. These are accepted as *bhogya* i.e., the object of enjoyment of many persons. But *Puruṣa* is not object but *Puruṣa* is the *bhoktā*, the enjoyer. So *Puruṣa* is not object.

Again, *Puruṣa* is unproductive and the purely conscious, on the other hand, *Avyakta* and *vyaktas* are unconscious and productive. These are always changeable. But *Puruṣa* is not changeable.

A chart of dissimilarities

<i>Vyaktas, Avyakta</i>	<i>Puruṣa</i>
<i>Triguṇam</i>	<i>Agunaḥ</i>
<i>Aviveki</i>	<i>Viveki</i>
<i>Viṣayaḥ</i>	<i>Aviṣayaḥ</i>
<i>Sāmānyam</i>	<i>Asāmānyā</i>
<i>Acetanam</i>	<i>Cetanaḥ</i>
<i>Prasavadharmi</i>	<i>Aprasavadharmi</i>

*Puruṣa* is mere witness, a solitary, indifferent, passive spectator. *Puruṣa* is called *pumān*. It is opposite of *Prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is indeterminate (*nirguṇa*), indifferent (*vivekī*) not enjoyable (*aviṣeya*), conscious (*cetana*) and non transferable (*aparīṇāmi*). *Puruṣa* is the enjoyer (*bhoktā*). It is called as *ahetumat* or uncaused. It is not subjected to modification. The characteristics of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* are opposed in nature.

### Proof for the Existence of Puruṣa

*Puruṣa* is not perceived yet the Sāṃkhya forwards different arguments for proving the existence of *Puruṣa*.

*Sāṃkhyakārikā* advocates several arguments to establish the existence of *Puruṣa* on the some important grounds [27]. Anima Sengupta states that spirit exists as distinct from matter since (a) collection serves the purpose of something other than them; (b) since the other must be the reverse of what is composed of these three constituents (c) since, there must be control of collocations. (d) since, there must be an enjoyer and (e) since, there is activity for the purpose of release from threefold misery [28]

*Sāṃkhyakārikā* advocates several arguments as follows-

#### i) Saṃghātaparārthatvāt

All compound objects exist for the sake of the *Puruṣa*. The body, the senses, the mind and the intellect are all means to realize the end of the *Puruṣa*. The three guṇas, the *Prakṛti*, the subtle body – all are said to serve the purpose of *Puruṣa*. *Prakṛti* evolves itself in order to serve the *Puruṣa*'s end.

From the existence of assemblage things of the world, the existence of *Puruṣa* is inferred. He is the self, must exist, to enjoy or to realize that he is happy or unhappy [29]. The first argument says that any assemblage of material objects which are created on account of the use of some other than itself. Like a bed which is an assemblage of bedding, props, cords, cotton, coverlet and pillows, is for another's use not for its own, and its several component parts render no mutual service. So it can be said that there is person who sleeps upon the bed and for which use it was made. So this body which is an assemblage of the five elements is for another use, or there is *Puruṣa* for whose enjoyment this enjoyable body, consisting of an aggregate of intellect and the rest has been produced [30]. Therefore, there must be an entity in order to enjoy the creations of *Prakṛti*. The body, the sense, the mind and the intellect are all means to realize the end of the soul.

‘The three guṇas, the *Prakṛti*, the subtle body, all are meant to serve the purpose of *Puruṣa*’<sup>[31]</sup> *Prakṛti* is unconscious so cannot make use of compound objects. There must be a conscious principle that is being served by the three guṇas, the *Prakṛti* and the subtle body. Evolution is teleological and purposive. This teleological evolution must help *Puruṣa* to release itself from bondage. So *Puruṣa* must exist.

### ii) Trigūṇādiviparyāyāt

All material objects of the world are composed of three guṇas. These are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. They presuppose the existence of *Puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* is the witness of the three guṇas and is himself beyond them. The three guṇas imply the conception of a *nistraigūṇya* – that which is beyond them. Hence *Puruṣa* must exist.

### iii) Adhiṣṭhānāt

*Puruṣa* is pure conscious and is capable of synthesising and creating a harmony among all our experiences. All material objects of this world are inactive. They are unconscious. These things cannot act without the help of a conscious being. There must be a conscious being by whom unconscious become active. It is impossible to move all worldly objects without the co-ordination of a conscious being. *Puruṣa* is the foundation (*adhiṣṭhāna*), the fundamental postulate of all empirical knowledge. Hence, *Puruṣa* must exist. In the words of Gauḍapāda just as a charioteer guides a chariot drawn by horses similarly the *Puruṣa* guides the body in every step<sup>[32]</sup>.

### iv) Bhoktrbhāvāt

There must be a enjoyer to enjoy the products of *Prakṛti*, because *Prakṛti* is non-intelligent. Non-intelligent *Prakṛti* cannot enjoy its own products. In the words of Vācaspati Miśra the enjoyable great principle and the rest are meaningless without any observer<sup>[33]</sup>.

There must be an intelligent principle to account the enjoyment of the objects of experience in the form of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are felt by each one as agreeable and disagreeable respectively. But feelings can not be agreeable or disagreeable to the *mahat* or *buddhi* and other products, as that would involve the anomaly of things operating upon them, as the *buddhi* etc., are composed of pleasure, pain and delusion. Therefore, there must be something else and that must be the spirit<sup>[34]</sup>. It is understood that all the material objects of the world exist for the sake of *Puruṣa* who is the foundation of all material objects. Hence, *Puruṣa* must exist. Anima Sengupta states that the first four arguments seek to prove the existence of the soul on the ground that as the controller and enjoyer of the world of composite things, same intelligent being must be recognized to exist and that this intelligent being must be the nature of pleasure, pain and indifference. This whole process, therefore, is not moving and developing aimlessly, there is the eternal principle of pure, eternal which through inactive, yet through reflection, co-ordinates, synthesis and gives meaning to our worldly experience. These arguments, therefore, may be regarded as teleological in the sense that they refer to the spirit as the central purpose of this world of change and mutation<sup>[35]</sup>.

### v) Kaivalyārtham Prarvṛtteḥ

The last argument for the existence of *Puruṣa* is ontological and scriptural. All scriptures prescribe the way of release from misery as *kaivalya*. *Kaivalyam* means liberation or emancipation from the bondage of three guṇas. When *jīva*

feels that he is under the influence of the three guṇas and tries to liberate himself from three guṇas, the strive for release presupposes a being which is devoid of pleasure, pain and delusion. This is *Puruṣa*. Hence, there must be *Puruṣa* as the striving force of liberation<sup>[36]</sup>. Anima Sengupta states that the last argument seeks to prove the existence of *Puruṣa* on the basis of the observed facts of the world. In this world, we find that the world of creation is marching towards freedom which seems to be its supreme goal. So, we are led to believe that there must be bond souls which are to be made free and through this process of world creation. In other words, the world is marching towards the freedom of these souls<sup>[37]</sup>.

### Plurality of Puruṣa

According to Sāṃkhya philosophy, *Puruṣa* is not one, there is the multiplicity of *Puruṣas*. Īśvarakṛṣṇa, in his *Sāṃkhyakārikā* states about the plurality of Self (*Puruṣa*). The plurality of Self follows from the distributive nature of the incidence of birth and death and of the endowment of the instruments of cognition, action etc.<sup>[38]</sup> Except the Advaita Vedānta, all other darśanas believe in the plurality of selves.

Vācaspati Miśra supports that the birth of *Puruṣa* consists in its connection with a new set of body, sense organs, mind etc., formed of a composite particular nature. It does not mean modification, since it is essentially unchangeable. In the same way also death consists of the giving up of the body and the rest. It cannot mean destruction as *Puruṣa* is unchangeable and eternal. The sense organs are thirteen, beginning with the great principle. The definite adjustment of their body etc., is connected with only one *Puruṣa*. If the *Puruṣa* were one and the same in all body, then on the birth of one all would be born and on the death of one, all would die<sup>[39]</sup>. Gauḍapāda remarks if there were one soul, then when one were born, all would be born, when one will die, all would die, if there is any defect in the vital instruments of one, such as deafness, blindness, dumbness mutilation, or lameness, then all would be blind, deaf, dumb but this is not seen and therefore multiplicity of soul is demonstrated<sup>[40]</sup>.

Anima Sengupta states that we can not say that there is one spirit only and that this one spirit appeals as many due to the imposition of different upādhis on it. In the case of space, limited by a chair, the chair can be removed and the portion of space can be saved from limitation by such a removal of its *upādhi*. Even then there is the possibility of that this same portions of space may, again, be limited by the imposition of some other thing on it. So if one spirit is recognized, bondage and liberation, limitation and freedom will become absurd and meaningless<sup>[41]</sup>.

The next argument is in support of plurality of selves is related to the activity of the selves. Though activity is a function of the internal organs, yet it is here attributed to the spirit. Hence, it is argued that if the self were one, the activity of man would lead to the same activity in all other men<sup>[42]</sup>.

Again, the Sāṃkhya argues that the self must be many because there is diversity due to the three attributes. Some persons have the abundance of *sattva* e.g., the gods. Others again abound in the *rajas*, e.g., human beings and some others again have *tamas* in abundance, e.g., animals. This diversity due to the distribution of the guṇas in various entities could not be explained if the spirit were one and the same in all<sup>[43]</sup>. So the *Puruṣa* is not one, but many. Hence, different arguments are advocated by Sāṃkhya to show the plurality of *Puruṣa*.

**Conclusion**

Sāṃkhya admits *Puruṣa* is infinite, unchangeable, all pervasive and eternal. *Puruṣa* is different in each body, having their different organs and actions and separate birth and death. *Puruṣa* is the knower. It is the seer and an experienter. It is pure and free. It is wisdom which is pure and absolute. The self is neither the mind, body nor the intellect. It is consciousness itself. It is formless, all pervading and eternal.

**End Note**

1. RV., 10.90.3
2. Ibid., 10.90.1
3. Nair, P.K. Sasidharan, *The Sāṃkhya system*, p. 83
4. Jñānaḥ Puruṣaḥ, GB. on SK., 2
5. Tathā ca pumānahetumānanutpādyatvāt/ GB. on SK., 11
6. Encyclopaedia of Indian philosophies, Vol-IV p.75
7. GB. on SK., 11
8. Sharma, C.D., *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 155-156
9. GB. on SK., 11.
10. Nitya-śuddha-buddha muktasvabhāvasya tadyogaḥ tadyogāhrte/ SS., 1.19
11. Sa eṣa neti netyātmā'grhyo na hi grhyate'śīryo na hi śīryate'saṅgo na hi sajyate'sito na vyathate na riṣyati/ SaS., 2<sup>nd</sup> chap, p. 4.
12. Hetumadanityamavyāpi sakriyamaṅkaṁsāritam liṅgam/ sāvayavaṁ paratantraṁ vyaktaṁ viparītamavyaktaṁ // SK., 10
13. Ahetumat pradhānaṁ, tathā ca pumānahetumān anutpādyatvāt/ GB. on SK., 10.
14. SK., 3 (b).
15. Tathā ca pumānaheumānanutpādyatvāt GB. on Ibid., 11
16. Trigūṇamaviveki viśayaḥ sāmānyamacetaṇaṁ prasavadharmi/ vyaktaṁ tathā pradhānaṁ tadviparītatathā ca pumān// SK., 11
17. GB. on Ibid.
18. Trigūṇādiviparyayāt/ SS., 1.141
19. GB. on SK., 11
20. *Jayamaṅgalā* and *Mātharavṛttī* on Ibid.
21. Na prakṛtirna vikṛtiḥ puruṣaḥ, SK., 3(b)
22. Viveki puruṣaḥ, GB. on Ibid., 11
23. Aviśayaḥ puruṣaḥ, Ibid.
24. Asāmānyāḥ puruṣaḥ, Ibid.
25. Cetanaḥ puruṣaḥ sukaduḥkamohān cetayati samjñānīte tasmācchetanaḥ puruṣa itī/ Ibid.
26. Aprasavadharmi puruṣaḥ na hi puruṣāt kiñcit prasūyate/ Ibid.
27. Saṁghātaparāthavāt trigūṇādiviparyayādhiṣṭhānāt/
28. puruṣo'sti bhoktṛbhāvāt kaivalyārtham pravṛtteśca// SK., 17
29. Sengupta, Dr Anima, *Classical Sāṃkhya: A Critical Study*, p.8
30. Phukan, Radhanath, *Sāṃkhya Darśana*, p. 116  
yathā paryāṅkaḥ pratyekaṁ gātrotpalakapādavaṭatūlipracchādanapaṭopadhānaśaṅghat aḥ parārtho nahi svārthaḥ parīkasya nahi kiñcidapi gātrotpalādyavayavānāṁ parasparaṁ kṛtyamasti/ ato'vagamyate'sti puruṣo yaḥ paryāṅke śete yasyārthe paryāṅkastatparārthamidaṁ śārīraṁ pañcānāṁ mahābhūtānāṁ saṁghāto varttate'sti puruṣo yasyedaṁ bhogyāśārīraṁ bhogyāṁ mahādādisaṁghātarūpaṁ samutpannamiti/ GB. on SK., 17

31. Sarma, C.D., *A Critical Survey of Indian philosophy*, p.109.
32. Adhiṣṭhānādyatheha laṅghanlpavan dhāvanasmarthairśvaiiryukto rathaḥ sārathinā'dhiṣṭhitaḥ pravartatte tathātmā'dhiṣṭhānāccharīrmiti/ GB. on SK., 17
33. STK. on Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Sengupta, Dr Anima, *Classical Sāṃkhya : A Critical Study* p. 81
36. Śāstrānāṁ mahārṣīnāṁ...../ STK. on SK., 17
37. Sengupta, Dr Anima, *Classical Sāṃkhya : A Critical Study*, p. 85
38. Jananamaraṇanakaraṇānāṁ pratiniyamādyugapatpravṛteśca/ puruṣabahutvaṁ siddhaṁ traiguṇyaviparyayāccaiva// SK., 18
39. Teṣāṁ janmamaraṇakaraṇānāṁ pratiniyamo vyavasthā..... mriyamāṇe ca mriyeran. STK. on Ibid.
40. Janma ca maraṇaṁ ca karaṇāni ca janmamaraṇakaraṇāni teṣāṁ prati niyamāt pratyekaniyamādityarthaḥ. yadyekaṁ eva ātmā syāttat ekasya janmani sarva eva jāyeraṇ ekasya maraṇe sarve'pi mriyeran ekasya karaṇavaikalpe bādhiyārndhatvamūkatvakunātvakhaṁja tvalakṣaṇe sarve'pi bādhirāndhakuṇikhaṁjāḥ syurna caiva bhavati tasmājjanmamaraṇakaraṇāṁ pratiniyamāt puruṣabahutvaṁ siddhaṁ/ GB. on Ibid.
41. Sengupta, Dr Anima, *Classical Sāṃkhya : A Critical Study*, p. 86
42. Tathā ca tasminnekatra śārīre prayatamāne.....śārīrāni yugapaccālayet/ STK. on SK., 18
43. Kecitkhalu sattvnikāyāḥ sattvavahulāḥ, yathordhvasrotasaḥ..... puruṣaḥ syāt, puruṣabhede tvayamadoṣa itī/ Ibid.

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