

Samkhya and the Taoism of Ancient China

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Abstract: According to some scholars the one was the primary other, the two refers to the separation of the other into yin and yang constituents, and the three may be interpreted as the production of heaven, earth and man by Yin-Yan: from them, all other things have been produced. The classical samkhya also believes in the process of the gradual and spontaneous unfoldment of different categories from Prakrti in a similar fashion. Both samkhya and the Taoism have discovered order system and pattern in the evolutionary flow of Nature. Nature is non divine but it is not a non-living chaos. The samkhya believes in the operation of the regulative forces of nature which present the currents of evolution from flowing in a chaotic manner. Just as the Tao possesses The in the same manner. Prakrti also possesses niyamakas or the regulative forces to cause matter and energy flow in definite patterns. Both the Taoism and the samkhya between that in the process of evolution, the multifarious potentialities of Nature are getting manifested in diverse ways. The effects are of the same nature as the cause. While the samkhya says that by knowing the effects, we can know the cause, the Taoists assert that if the Tao is known, everything will be understood, "When the mother is found, we know what her children should be". So, using the terminology of Indian philosophy, we can say that the Taoists of ancient China, too, were (in some sense) the supporters of satkaryavada.

Keywords: Taoism, Samkhya, Naturalism, Samkhya Karika, Chinese Philosophy

1. Introduction

Naturalism, as we know, is a type of Philosophical thinking which accepts Nature as the whole of reality. It denies the existence of anything beyond Nature, behind Nature and different from Nature. When according to Naturalism, things in space and time are finally reducible to nothing but minute unconscious dynamic particles, it assumes the form of naturalism as well. In respect of the classical samkhya, however, we can say that although the naturalistic elements are present in this philosophy, still it is not a naturalistic or a materialistic Nature possesses inherent dynamism; even then, the supporters of naturalism or of materialism cannot read in it their favourite doctrines. Had Purusa been supposed merely as a principle of illumination having nothing to do (either directly or indirectly) in the process of evolution of the world, then the category of Purusa might have been regarded as superfluous and the samkhya might have been declared naturalistic or materialistic in spirit. The supporters of the dualistic samkhya however, have repeatedly said that the evolution of the world from Prakrti is not possible without cicchaya, or citśannidhana or puruṣārtha samyoga. The use of all these terms definitely proves that purusa is absolutely necessary for evolution. In the samkhya Karika and also in the samkhya sutra, there is ample evidence to prove the necessity of purusa and the Karikas in which such a necessity is asserted, are admitted as original.

Samkhya philosophy is the oldest philosophical system in India.

The Samkhya philosophy which is, perhaps, the oldest philosophical system in India, contains some characteristic features which give it the semblance of a naturalistic system; but the belief in salvation as the highest goal of life involving consciousness as a principle superior to Nature is very strong and, in a sense, this belief is the primary faith of this school of thought. The naturalistic elements, prominent in the classical samkhya, are as follows:

1. Nature is admitted as the root cause of creation-the material as well as the efficient cause. There is no other cause of the world except Prakrti.
2. The silence of the samkhya-karika on the problem of God and the apparent antitheistic attitude of the samkhya-sutra.
3. Prakrti is the equilibrated State of infinitesimal elements called gunas which are of three kinds and which are the dynamic and unconscious basic stuff of the whole universe.
4. Prakrti is one as these three kinds of gunas always remain together forming a unity.
5. Prakrti acts spontaneously and unconsciously.
6. Prakrti is uncreated, independently active and all pervading.
7. A belief in cosmic evolution, Naturalism and the Philosophy of Samkhya.

2. Research Methods

Research methods were taken into consideration according to the contents shown therein in the article.

Classical Samkhya and Taoism of Nature

It is interesting to find that the Taoism of ancient China bears a close similarity to the classical samkhya in respect of its naturalistic traits. The word Tao is generally interpreted in the sense of the way, the path or the course and the Taoism of Nature, in the sense of the way of Nature. According to many scholars, the Taoism in its original form was a type of Naturalism which had laid full stress on the unity and spontaneity of the operations of Nature. In the book XIV of Chuang Tzu's writing, it has been boldly asserted that the phenomena of heaven and earth and of Nature proceed regularly without and apparent cause. Nature is a distinct entity, a living entity and an independent entity. It acts spontaneously of itself. In the Chapter XII of Tao Feh Ching, Lao Tzu has said "The Tao is simply a spontaneity evolving from itself and not acting from a personal will".

Again, in Part I Chapter XXVI he asserts "Man takes his law from Heaven, Heaven takes its law from the Tao. The law of the Tao is its being what it is".

The Samkhya Karika too has defined Prakrti as out and out productive (prasavadharmi) meaning thereby that Prakrti undergoes changes ceaselessly and spontaneously. When Prakrti evolves evolves of different categories (Tattvantara Parinama) then also it acts by its own inherent nature without being impelled by any personal will.

Just as Nature of the samkhya is invisible (i. e. not an object of perception) in the same manner the Tao of Lao Tzu is also invisible.

Like the Prakrti of the classical samkya, the Tao too is regarded as all-pervading and as the origin and the merging places of all the things of the world. Nothing in this world is uncovered by the Tao.

"All pervading is the Great Tao! It may be found in the left hand and on the right ...All things depend on it for production and also return to it and disappear". (Tao The Ching, Part I XXXV).

Here, we may refer to samkhya-Karika no.15 where it has been stated that the effect arises from the cause during creation and it returns to the same cause during dissolution. (Here main source and the great merging place of all the effects being the same, i.e. Prakrti). Prakrti is also all-pervading (Vyapi) according to the samkhya-Karika no.10. The Tao of the Taoists also 'produces all things, nourishes them, brings them to their full growth, nurses them, completes them, matures them, maintains them and over spreads them".

The order of Nature, according to Taoism is not only spontaneous but also unconscious. The Taoists hold that the Tao produces things but does not make any claim to the possession of them, it brings them to maturity without exercising any control over them. Production is both spontaneous and unconscious. It is only when something is produced by conscious efforts that there is a claim to its possession by the producer. The order of Nature is effortless and unconscious. Nature is operating and creating diverse things by means of its own inherent motion. Its activity is not consciously and illogical. Things are produced by Nature: if some of them are beneficial for others and are used as such, that also is not intended by Nature. Mosquitoes and gnats such the blood of man through his skin and live on that but nobody will assert that human beings are produced for the benefit of the mosquitoes and gnats. The Samkhya Karika, on the other hand believes that the movement of Prakrti is telologically and that the purpose fulfilled by the process of evolution is the purpose of a principle which is other than and different from Prakrti. Prakrti is, no doubt the source of the flow of matter and energy but the evolutionary flow is initiated by the sannidhi of purusa and it is the good of the purusa which is being realized by the process of evolution.

The Taoists, however, do not give us the view at the chaotic movements of Nature: the natural movement is spontaneous; yet orderly. There is no conscious controller of Nature, yet there is harmony in natural creation. The naturalism, thus propounded by the Taoists, may be regarded as a form of organic naturalism. The harmonious operation of the different parts of Nature is due only to the inherent dictates of the natural parts themselves. "All things go right as of their will".

There is again resemblance between the Taoism and the samkhya as both of them hold, that there is no entirely new creation nor any utter destruction. There is only unfolding and folding of Nature, dissipation and condensation of natural energy. The process of transformation, therefore, is a process of gradual evolution whereby one order of being arises from another. "The Tao produced one, one produced Two, Two produced three, three produced All things.

3.Summary

Scholars of Chinese philosophy generally agree in holding that the Taoism was, originally, profoundly naturalistic and scientific in outlook on life and the world. Immortality, that they longed for, was a material one. The Taoism used to believe in the plurality of souls but their belief was in a sense peculiar. In the opinion of the Taoism, different spirits occupy one and the same body. When death comes, "the little troop of spirits" disperse and so they cannot re-assemble into a unity. The body, on the other hand, is a unit and so by means of some special kind of drugs, the body can be preserved and there can be the continuation of a living personality through the medium of an immortal material body. So, there is nothing like the salvation of the soul of the samkhya philosophy: but the atheistic tone of the Taoism nevertheless, get its counterpart in the philosophy of the classical samkhya. The Tao being the supreme concept, supersedes the need for any other concept. In the Tao The Ching (Part I, Chapter IV) Lao Tzu has remarked, "I do not know whose son it (Tao) is. It might appear to have been before God". This proves that according to him, there was nothing before the Tao: the Tao is the highest one. In the classical samkhya too, no spiritual principle, in the form of God, has been admitted. The samkhya Karika is silent on God whereas the samkhya sutra has said that there is no pramana (i. e. means of knowledge) by which the existence of God can be proved.

The assertion of Prakrti as the primary course of the evolution of the world and the denial of the causality of the world to any other principle brings the classical samkhya close to the teachings of Lao Tzu Both the samkhya and the Taoism was very much interested in Nature and its operation and the Tao has also been spoken of as "the female mystery".

"The valley spirit dies not, aye the same;
The female mystery thus do we name,
Its gate, from which at first they issued forth
Is called the root from which grew heaven and earth,
Long and Unbroken does its power remain".

(The valley spirit refers to the activities of the Tao in all the realm of its operation: the female mystery is the Tao which is the mother of all things.)

Thus, we find that the Tao, in Lao Tzu's opinion refers to the root cause that underlies the changing phenomena of the universe and also to the invariables law of its operation. It is eternal, all pervading, inexhaustible source in its use and the great Mother of Heaven, Earth and Man.

The Taoist text "Khing Kang King" or "the classic of purity" is supposed to be the work of Ko Yuan, a Taoist of the third century A. D. In this book, The Tao is not only described as the Material substance out of which all things come but it is also supposed to display-itself in two forms-Pure and Turbid and has Motion and Rest. It is, indeed, true that the real implication of the passage is very difficult to grasp: even then we can say that perhaps the samkhya conception of Prakrti as a substance operating in different way under the influence of the different gunas might have cast its influence on the Taoist thinkers and might have inspired them to think of the Tao too as an unconscious material substance displaying itself in the two forms of purity and turbidity. In fact, according to samkhya also, virtue, which is a disposition of sattvika buddhi helps one to go up: and tamo guna causes stability. The Historical evidence shows that exchange of thoughts and ideas between China and India started as early as the first century A. D. and that a Chinese version of the samkhya Karika was also discovered in China. The same text further, asserts:

"If one is able to send the desires away, when he looks in at his mind, it is no longer his; when he looks out at his body, it is no longer him, and when he looks further of at external things, they are things which he has nothing to do".

This idea that purity results in peace and serenity of being and that this can be attained by differentiating one's being from the external things the body and the mind does remind us of the samkhya view of discriminative knowledge. The discriminative knowledge too is acquired by dissociating serene consciousness from the body, sense organs, ego sense and the intellect. The preliminary stage is the removal of desires for wordly objects.

4.Conclusion

The samkhya philosophers were not missionaries: they never made any attempt to propagate their philosophy in other countries by sending scholars or by establishing monasteries. It was perhaps, due to the absence of the missionary zeal among the samkhya philosopher, that the philosophy of samkhya could not gain so much ground in China as was gained by the Buddhist although the classical samkhya contained many naturalistic elements which could be utilized more effectively by the people of ancient China to build up their own Philosophy of Nature.

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*In writing this article the authoress has made use of the English version of the volume "The Texts of Taoism" by J. Legga.

Language & Style

The Language and style is so simple that it can be understood by common man.

Bibliography

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- [2] Samkhya
- [3] Taoism
- [4] Samkhya Karika
- [5] Chinese Philosophy
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