



The Simultaneity of Cognition by Mind: A Nyāya and Sāṃkhya Controversy Sanjay Sau

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Abstract

In Indian Epistemology mind plays an important role to obtain knowledge. Every Indian system, either orthodox or heterodox, admits mind to explain cognition. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system admits the mind as an eternal substance. It is also an internal sense organ. It is eternal, corporeal, partless, atomic, unconscious and many in number. It is associated with each individual soul due to the will of God. An individual soul experiences pleasure, pain etc. when it is associated with a physical body as well as mind. So, the mind is also an instrument of enjoyment and suffering like the body. According to Sāṃkhya system, mind is a psychical apparatus. It comes out of ahaṃkāra in its sāttvika aspect. It is the central organ which plays both the roles of organ of knowledge and organ of action. It supervises the functions of both kinds of sense organs. They can't perform their functions without the help of mind. Without the supervision of mind there can be no sense perception or action. There is a controversy between the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers and the Sāṃkhya philosophers regarding the function of mind. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers, mind can produce cognition (perceptual cognition) gradually. It can't produce cognition simultaneously. But, according to Īśvarakṛṣṇa, cognition (perceptual cognition) is produced simultaneously as well as gradually. In this paper, I have discussed both the views of Nyāya and Sāṃkhya and tried to show the claim of Sāṃkhya is not justified.

Keywords: Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Mind, Simultaneously and Gradually.

I

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system admits *manas* or mind as an internal organ. It is a substance also. It is eternal, corporeal, part less, atomic, unconscious and many in number. It is associated with each individual soul due to the will of God. An individual soul experiences pleasure, pain etc. when it is associated with a physical body as well as mind. So, mind also is an instrument of enjoyment and suffering-like body. Knowledge, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, volition, merit, demerit and disposition are special qualities of individual souls. Number, magnitude, distinctness, conjunction and disjunction are general qualities of individual souls. These qualities are produced in an individual soul. Soul is their inherent cause and its conjunction with mind, non-inherent cause.

Being a substance, mind must be the substratum of quality and action. Number, magnitude, distinctness, conjunction, spatial-nearness, spatial-remoteness and velocity are the qualities of mind. One mind is different from another mind. So, it has distinctness. Mind is of limited magnitude. As a substance, it is associated with one substance and

disassociated from this. Therefore, conjunction and disjunction also are the qualities of mind. Space is a ubiquitous substance. Mind has conjunction with it. Having conjunction with it, spatial nearness and remoteness subsist in mind. Velocity subsists in a corporeal substance. A corporeal (*mūrta*) substance is that which has limited magnitude. Mind has limited magnitude. So, mind is a corporeal substance. Being a corporeal substance, mind has velocity.

Mind has quality as well as action. The substance which is ubiquitous, can't be the substrate of action, e.g., ether, time, space and soul. But mind is not an ubiquitous substance. It is a corporeal substance because it has limited magnitude. The substance which has limit, is called concrete (*mūrta*) substance. Action does not subsist in a ubiquitous substance. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers have given *lakṣaṇa* of mind. The *lakṣaṇa* is the following: The substance which is devoid of touch but has action is called mind. Earth, water, fire, air and mind have action. Touch subsists in earth, water, fire and air. Mind has action but no touch. The generality of mind is the attribute of all mind. This generality can be said to be the definition of mind. Mind can't be perceived. So, the generality of mind also can't be perceived. Each *manas* has a particularity which distinguishes it from other eternal substances.

What is the reason for admitting mind? Mind can't be perceived. The existence of mind is proved by inference. Perception is possible through any one of the sense organs. There are several types of external sense organs visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory and tactual. External objects are known through these sense organs. An individual soul can perceive external objects as well as internal objects. Knowledge, pleasure, pain etc. are perceived by individual souls. An individual soul knows himself as happy or unhappy. Pleasure, pain etc. are known directly. Perception of any object is not possible without the aid of sense organs. Pleasure, pain etc. also are objects of perception. To perceive these qualities, we have to admit a sense organ. Through external sense organs they can't be known. So, there must have a sense organ which perceives them, and it is mind. Mind is an internal sense organ.

Mind not only perceives pleasure, pain and the other qualities of the self. Mind is also necessary for external perception. External sense organs can't perceive their objects without the aid of mind, because the self-controls the mind and the mind control the external senses to be disjoined from one object and conjoined with another object. External perception is possible when there is conjunction of the self with the mind, of the mind with the external senses and of the senses with the objects. To perceive a table, the self-first comes into conjunction with the mind, the mind with the visual organ and the visual organ with the table. In perception, the self is its inherent cause, the conjunction of the self with the mind, its non-inherent cause. Each and every sense can perceive its object only when it comes into conjunction with the mind. Sometimes we can't perceive an object which is present before the visual organ because at that moment mind is not connected with the visual organ. That is why visual perception is not possible at that moment.

If the conjunction of the mind with the external senses is not admitted to be the inherent cause of perception, then perceptions of different objects would be produced by different senses at the same time. For example, a table remains connected with the visual organ as well as the tactual organ simultaneously. Being ubiquitous, the self has conjunction with the visual organ and the tactual organ as well. Why are the visual and the tactual

perception not produced simultaneously? The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers admit that cognition and the other qualities of the self are produced successively. They are never produced simultaneously. In the above example, either visual perception or tactual perception can be produced successively. In this connection a very pertinent question arises: which perception will take place first? In reply, it is said to be decided by the desire of the individual self. An individual soul's desire is the reason for it.

Two cognitions are never produced simultaneously. Two external senses can have conjunction with their objects at the same time. In spite of that two cognitions are not produced, because one sense organ has conjunction with the mind. Being atomic magnitude, mind can't come into conjunction with the different senses simultaneously. It is part less for it has atomic magnitude. Being part less, *manas* comes into conjunction with one sense organ at a moment. When *manas* comes into conjunction with visual organ, there is visual perception. For the other external perceptions, rules are the same as visual perception.

II

The evolutes of Prakṛti are divided into two groups, viz., psychic and physical. This division is made on the basis of their nature and functions. *Buddhi*, *aharṅkāra*, *manas* and ten organs (organs of knowledge and organs of action) belong to the former group. They are called *karaṇas* (psychical apparatus) because of performing psychological function. Five subtle essences belong to the latter group. They perform the cosmic function. There are thirteen *karaṇas*. They are also classified into two groups: internal and external. *Buddhi*, *aharṅkāra* and *manas* come under the first group. They reside in the body.

According to the Sāṃkhya system, mind is a psychical apparatus. It comes out of *aharṅkāra* in its *sāttvika* aspect. It is the central organ which plays the role of organ of knowledge and organ of action both. It supervises the functions of both kinds of sense organs. They can't perform their functions without the help of mind. Without the supervision of mind there can be no sense perception or action. Mind becomes identical with the organs of knowledge when it comes into contact with them and performs their diverse functions. Mind is not atomic. If it were atomic, it would be eternal. Being an effect of *aharṅkāra*, mind is not eternal; because it is evolved at the time of creation and dissolved at the time of destruction. It has parts, since it can be connected with many sense organs at the same time. Being an effect, it has cause. It is not without a cause. *Aharṅkāra* is its cause. *Manas* is not ubiquitous, since it is an instrument, a sense organ, which is of intermediate dimension. It is the instrument of experience connected with the whole body. This shows that mind is of intermediate magnitude. Further, it is capable of movements. The self-transmigrates from one gross body to another gross body after death with the aid of its adjunct, mind. The self, who is all-pervading, is incapable of movement. Only its adjunct, mind, is capable of movement. So, it is not all-pervading. Thus, mind is neither atomic nor all-pervading, but of intermediate magnitude. Having intermediate magnitude, it possessed of parts. Mind has the function of assimilation and discrimination. It assumes the form of an object apprehended by an external organ, and determines it as 'like this' and 'unlike this', and thus produces determinate perception of it. It knows the object in subject-predicate-relation. The external sense-organs produce indeterminate perception, and mind produces determinate perception. This is the view expressed by *Vācaspati Miśra* in his *Tattvakaumudi*.

According to *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* (verse-32 of *Sāṃkhyakārikā*), cognition is produced simultaneously as well as gradually. The functions of sense organs, *manas*, *ahaṃkāra* and *buddhi* are said to be simultaneous and successive with regard to visible objects. With regard to invisible object, the functions of *manas*, *ahaṃkāra* and *buddhi* are preceded by that. *Vācaspati Miśra* explains this view with the help of an example. According to him, with the regard to simultaneity of visible objects: someone sees in the dark with the aid of a flash of lightning, a tiger facing him, his indeterminate perception (*ālocan*), reflection (*saṃkalpa*), ego consciousness (*abhimān*) and determination (*adhyavasāyo*) are simultaneous and accordingly one runs away from the place at once. There is no sequence between the function of the eye and that of the internal organs. With regard to visible objects gradual: when a person sees vaguely in dim light a certain thing, he has at first only faint cognition of that object. Then he looks at it more steadily and ascertains it as a thief with his bow and arrow aimed at him. Then his *ahaṃkāra* makes himself conscious that he (the thief) is approaching him. Lastly his intellect determines that he should run away immediately from that place. There is a sequence between the hearing of the sound of the bow-arrow and the knowledge that there is a danger.

Conclusion

From the above discussion of the Nyāya and Sāṃkhya views of mind, the question that arises here is: whether cognition is produced through mind gradually or simultaneously? The Nyāya system holds the former view while the Sāṃkhya system holds the latter view. which view is tenable? It is a subject of thorough analysis. Both *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* and *Vācaspati Miśra* have discussed their views to prove the simultaneity of cognition through mind. One of his *kārikas*, *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* has said that indeterminate perception, reflection, self-consciousness and determination take place simultaneously. To support his view, *Vācaspati Miśra* has explained this view with the help of an example.

In verse five of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, perception has been defined as determinate in respect of every individual object. It is simply a relation between a sense-organ and an object. There are of two types of sense-organs, namely, external sense organs and internal sense organs. The senses of eye, ear, taste, smell and touch are external sense organs. Internal organs consist of *manas*, *ahaṃkāra* and *buddhi*. In the process of perception, external senses only produce indeterminate perception (*ālocana*) and internal senses only produce determinate perception. There is no exception of this rule. In indeterminate perception, only the generic character of an object is known while in determinate perception, both the generic and particular characters are known. Each of the internal organs has a specific function. Determinate knowledge is the special function of *buddhi*, self-consciousness, of *ahaṃkāra* and reflection, of *manas*.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers vehemently criticize the views of both *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* and *Vācaspati Miśra*. According to them, even in this example, there has been an interval. But the interval occurs in quick succession that the knower can't apprehend it. The example given by *Vācaspati Miśra* seems to be perceived simultaneously. But the appearance of simultaneous perception is due to rapid succession due to quick movement of the mind and its conjunctions with different senses in quick succession. Hence, it can be said following the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers that mind generates cognition successively. Even this view is also reflected in modern western psychology. Western psychologists have proved it with the help of the form-board and manipulation tests

carried out in the investigation of the process of learning that attention is always singly present and that attending to two or more things at the same time is not usual. Therefore, the *Sāṃkhya* view, cognition can be produced simultaneously, is not tenable at all.

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