Sāṃkhya as Portrayed by Bhāviveka and Haribhadrasūri

Early Buddhist and Jain Criticisms of Sāṃkhya Epistemology and the Theory of Reflection

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Abstract This article consists of a tentative exploration regarding the Buddhist portrayal and critique of Sāṃkhya epistemology and the theory of reflection (pratibimbavāda) as expressed in the Sāṃkhyaatattvāvatāraḥ chapter of Bhāviveka’s 6th century Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā, and its auto-commentary the Tarkajvalā; and the Jain portrayal and critique of Sāṃkhya epistemology and the theory of reflection as expressed in Haribhadrasūri’s 8th century Śāstravārtasamuccaya (ŚVS) and Yogabindu. The article includes a translation of the Yogabindu, verses 444–457.

Keywords Sāṃkhya · Bhāviveka · Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā · Tarkajvalā · Haribhadrasūri · Śāstravārtasamuccaya · Yogabindu · Pratibimba · Sāṃkhyaṣṭikāriya · Yogasūtra(bhāṣya) · Vindhyavāsin · Āsuri · Epistemology · Dvisatya

Introduction

Yajñavalkya said: My dear Maitreyī, for one who attains liberation at death all knowledge ceases to be. Hearing this Maitreyī replied: On this very point, my Lord, I am bewildered. How can it be that there is no knowledge in the liberated state?¹

This widely known passage from the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad is reflective of the age-old philosophical question regarding whether or not the Self is possessed of knowledge in the state of liberation. And Maitreyī is not alone in her bewilderment

¹ The above is more of an interpretive rendition of Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad IV.2.12–13 that illuminates the discourse that follows.

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over the contradictions entailed in Yajñavalkya’s understanding. Indeed between the sixth and eighth century AD, this question was central to the debate on epistemology, and more specifically on the process of knowledge, with adherents of the Sāmkhya perspective on the one side and adherents of the Jain as well as the Buddhist perspectives on the other.

Because of the paucity of sources that directly pertain to this period in the history of Sāmkhya philosophy, the details of the involved arguments remain largely unknown—at least in terms of the Sāmkhya side. With the possible exception of the Yuktidīpiκā, there exists not a single Sāmkhya treatise that addresses either the Buddhist or the Jain critique.² Despite this fact, there remains a possible way by which to examine the various arguments and counterarguments that might have been employed in this debate (if indeed there was one³): the study of doxographical texts belonging to the Buddhist Madhyamaka and Jain Svetāmbara traditions—i.e., texts that introduce, criticize and expound upon the position purportedly taken by their Sāmkhya opponents and that provide us with what appear to be extracts from original sources that are otherwise unavailable.⁴ The study of these texts thus enables us to become acquainted with at least some of the epistemological tenets held by the Sāmkhyaites as well as the Buddhist and Jain response to these. In studying such texts, which claim to provide a comprehensive and impartial presentation of an opponent’s philosophical point of view, it is important to remember that their primary aim was to defeat an opponent’s stance, and that this have affected how that stance was represented.

This article consists of a tentative exploration regarding: (a) the Buddhist portrayal and critique of Sāmkhya epistemology as expressed in the Sāṃkhyaatattvāvatāraḥ chapter of Bhāviveka’s⁵ 6th century Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā (MHK), and its auto-commentary the Tarkajvāla (TJ);⁶ and, (b) the Jain portrayal and critique of Sāmkhya epistemology as expressed in Haribhadraśtri’s 8th century Śāstravārtīsamuccaya (ŚVS) and Yogabindu (YB).⁷

These Jain and Buddhist texts provide us with a series of hypothetical, but in all probability historically anchored, debates concerning the following important elements of Sāmkhya philosophy: the doctrine of primordial matter (prakṛti); the doctrine that the effect [pre-]exists in its cause (satkāryavāda); the notion of a passive, contentless Self (puruṣa/ātman); and, the question of how that contentless Self comes to know. In doing so, they highlight several points of divergence

² Larson (1987, p. 45).
⁴ See Qvarnström (1999).
⁵ Eckel (2008, p. 88, n. 1) suggests Bhāviveka rather than Bhavya or Bhāvaviveka. For further discussion regarding the name, see also Heitmann (2004, xv, n. 2) and Qvarnström (1989, p. 21, n. 2).
⁶ The present author is working on a critical edition and annotated English translation of the Sāṃkhyaatattvāvatāraḥ chapter of Bhāviveka’s MHK and TJ.
⁷ ŚVS 211–237; YB 444–457 (see Appendix for a translation). With regard to the date and authorship of YB, see Granoff (2000, p. 403 with n.4). In the following, we will therefore consider the YB a work of the eighth century Haribhadrasūri, the author of the Anekāntajayapatākā. In a forthcoming article, however, Chris Chapple of Loyola Marymount University attributes the YB to the sixth century Haribhadra Virahāṅkha. On the YB, see also Shastri (1995).