

Meaning of the word Sāṅkhya in ‘Sāṅkhyayogaḥ’ of Bhagavadgītā

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Abstract: This research paper presents the results of the discussion on the meaning of the Sanskrit word ‘Sāṅkhya’ used in the second chapter of the ‘Śrīmadbhagavadgītā’. The title of the second chapter is ‘Sāṅkhyayogaḥ’. Sāṅkhya means counting, or a theory based on the twenty five elements or a theory based on the separation of Prakṛtiḥ and Puruṣaḥ, or a theory based on the three primary constituents of the subtlest form of the material world. The said three primary constituents are Sattvaguṇaḥ, Rajoguṇaḥ and Tamoguṇaḥ. Most of scholars of the ‘Śrīmadbhagavadgītā’, like, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan etc. believe that the word Sāṅkhya in the title of the second chapter means the above said Sāṅkhya philosophy only. But, this belief is not supported by the subject matter of the second chapter. There is no clear evidence of any discussion or description of the Sāṅkhya philosophy in the second chapter. So, there is a need of searching the correct meaning of the word Sāṅkhya in this chapter. Two methods of explanation play crucial role in presenting the correct meaning of this word. They are literary meaning as recorded in dictionary and derivation based on nominal base.

Key Words: Meaning of Sankhya, Sāṅkhyayogaḥ, Correct meaning of Yoga

1. INTRODUCTION:

Generally, it is believed that the Sanskrit word ‘Sāṅkhya’ means counting, or a theory based on the twenty five elements or a theory based on the separation of Prakṛtiḥ and Puruṣaḥ, or a theory based on the three primary constituents of the subtlest form of the material world. The said three primary constituents are Sattvaguṇaḥ, Rajoguṇaḥ and Tamoguṇaḥ. But, it is not easy to accept in the title of second chapter of the said scripture. It is needed to understand the context of the second chapter of the scripture to know the correct meaning of this word, because context is the best tool to decide the meaning of ambiguous usages. The title of the second chapter is read as ‘Sāṅkhyayogaḥ’. It means that the ‘Yoga’ of Sāṅkhya, or ‘Yoga’ about Sāṅkhya, or ‘Yoga’ for Sāṅkhya. This means Yoga or meditation on or about Sāṅkhya philosophy. But there is almost nothing regarding any explanation of any principle of Sāṅkhya philosophy in the second chapter. If the meaning of the word Yoga is taken as argumentation, Sāṅkhyayogaḥ’ shall denote argumentation on or about Sāṅkhya philosophy. But, again there is nothing which deals with any principle of Sāṅkhya philosophy in the said chapter. So, it is necessary to study this in its appropriate context.

Inner study of the chapter: The chapter titled ‘Sāṅkhyayogaḥ’ has 72 verses. First verse is the statement of Sañjayaḥ informing the pathetic position of Arjuna. Next two verses, i.e. 2.2 and 2.3 present Krishna’s advice to Arjuna. Next five verses, i.e. 2.4 to 2.8 present Arjuna’s argumentation about his disturbed mental state. He argues that the achievement of kingdom after victory over his cousins and killing his respectable old persons like Bhīṣma and Droṇa would not produce any happiness. Rather, it would be a war for sensual pleasure. He requested Krishna to guide him. Next two verses, i.e. 2.9 and 2.10 present the statement of Sañjayaḥ about the talk of Arjuna and Krishna. Then, Krishna’s arguments to convince Arjuna are presented in 42 verses, i.e. 2.11 to 2.53. The essence of his argumentation can be as follows.

It is not correct to think that all the people were not there before the present time. They were there in the past and they shall be in the future also. As there are different states in the body like, adolescence, youth and old age, so the soul goes to other body (after death of this body). Feelings of heat, cold, joy and pain are due to the contact between senses and sense-organs. They should be borne. One who does not panic shall achieve nectar. That item can’t be produced which has no existence, and that can’t be destroyed which exists. That which prevails everywhere is free from destruction. Bodies of the eternal die, so, O Arjuna, fight. Soul does not get birth, nor does it die, even when the body is being killed. Whom can that person kill or make killed, who knows that the soul is eternal. If you consider them as

begetting and dying ones also, you should not feel pain, because one who gets birth shall definitely die, and one who dies shall definitely be reborn. So, no need to panic. If you consider the duty fixed for your caste, there is nothing better than a war for a member of warrior caste. Being a member of warrior caste, if you leave this war, you shall leave your caste-duty and fame, and you shall be a sinner. If you die (in the battlefield), you shall go to heaven and if you win, you shall enjoy the land (of kingdom). So, stand up and be resolute for war. Be mentally equal in both feelings like pleasure and pain, achievement and loss, and victory and defeat, and then, be ready for war. In this way, you won't be a sinner. Now, listen the way through which you shall go beyond the bondage of deeds. Vedas are the subject of three aspects of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. So go beyond the Vedas. Vedas are like a small pond. You have right in the deeds and not in the result. So, leave the contact with the result. Leave both types of deeds, i.e. good and bad.

Then, next verse, i.e. 2.54 presents three questions about one who is established in meditation. Next 18 verses, i.e. 2.55 to 2.72 present the response to those questions. It can be seen that there is no mention of any principle of Sāṅkhya philosophy.

2. DISCUSSION:

In this complete chapter, there is no clear mention of any principle of Sāṅkhya philosophy. Of course, the words 'Traiḡuṇya' and 'Nīstraiḡuṇya' are used in one verse, i.e. 2.45. But, in this verse, the comparison between the philosophy of Vedas and philosophy of Upaniṣad is presented. It is not clearly a discussion or description about 'Sāṅkhya' philosophy. The authority of the Vedas is also not questioned in the spirit of Sāṅkhya, because the Upaniṣadic thought considers simply the Vedas as lower, but important knowledge. But, the Sāṅkhya standpoint clearly rejects the Vedas, stating that the Vedic methods for removing sorrow from the life are impure, leading to much destruction and exaggeration of reality (*Sāṅkhyakārikā* 2). So, there is no ground to accept the meaning of Sāṅkhya as Sāṅkhya philosophy. Like Arjuna viśādayogaḥ, argumentation is in the centre of this chapter also, as it is obvious in the above mentioned essence of the argumentation of Krishna to convince Arjuna for fighting. So, in this chapter also, the word Yoga means argumentation. This situation propels to find out other possible meanings of the word 'Sāṅkhya', so that the meaning of the word 'Sāṅkhyayogaḥ' can be understood in its correct context.

Search for the exact meaning of this word

It is noteworthy that the word 'Sāṅkhya' is derived from the nominal base 'Saṅkhyam' by adding secondary suffix 'aṅ' to this nominal base. The word 'Saṅkhyam' is used in the beginning of the same second chapter. In verse 2.4, Arjuna states that how he will fight with arrows against Bhishma and Drona who are worthy of respect in the battle. So, in this verse, the word 'Saṅkhyam' means battle. According to the Sanskrit Dictionary of V.S. Apte, the word 'Saṅkhyam' means 'Battle, War, Fight'. Not only this, Apte presents an evidence of this meaning from a literary text 'Vikramankdevacharitam'. According to V.S. Apte, in *Vikramankadevacharitam* 1.67 also, the word 'Saṅkhyam' is used in the same meaning. When secondary suffix 'aṅ' is added to this nominal base, the word 'Sāṅkhya' is derived. The secondary suffix 'aṅ' occurs to denote 'related to, about, offspring of, scholar of etc.' As a result, the word 'Sāṅkhya' means 'something that is related to or about the war or fight or battle'. Now, there appears a question if there is any possibility of this new meaning in this context. To get the answer of this question, it should be applied in the present context.

Application of the new meaning of the target word in the context

The target word is the title of the second chapter of the 'Śrīmadbhagavadgītā'. The said title is 'Sāṅkhyayogaḥ'. This is a compound word. Sāṅkhya means something "related to war or fighting", and Yoga means argumentation. As a result, meaning of the complete word shall be "Argumentation related to War or Fighting". It means that the title of the second chapter should be based on the central idea of the content of the chapter. The central idea of the second chapter can be decided with the following.

"That which prevails everywhere is free from destruction. Bodies of the eternal die, so, O Arjuna, fight. (2.18) Soul does not get birth, nor does it die, even when the body is being killed. (2.20) Whom can that person kill or make killed, who knows that the soul is eternal. (2.21) If you consider them as begetting and dying ones also, you should not feel pain, because one who gets birth shall definitely die, and one who dies shall definitely be reborn. So, no need to panic. (2.26-28) If you consider the duty fixed for your caste, there is nothing better than a war for a member of warrior caste. (2.31) Being a member of warrior caste, if you leave this war, you shall leave your caste-duty and fame, and you shall be a sinner. (2.33) If you die (in the battlefield), you shall go to heaven and if you win, you shall enjoy the land (of kingdom). So, stand up and be resolute for war. (2.37) Be mentally equal in both, pleasure and pain, achievement and loss, and victory and defeat, and then, be ready for war. In this way, you won't be a sinner. (2.38)"

Reading these verses of the second chapter, there remains no doubt that the central idea of this chapter is to present logics about war or fighting. So, it can safely be concluded that the title is based on the central idea. In the central idea, Krishna presents necessary arguments to prove that it is correct to fight against the opponents. Anyone can disagree with his arguments to justify Arjuna's participation in the war. But, his arguments are only to convince Arjuna that Arjuna's participation in the war was justified on many grounds. So, 'related to the war or fighting' is the correct meaning of 'Sāṅkhya' in the 'Sāṅkhyayogaḥ', the second chapter of the 'Śrīmadbhagavadgītā'. It proves that it is not possible to take only one or popular meaning of the word Yoga everywhere.

3. CONCLUSION:

The word Sāṅkhya can't be explained in only one way all the time. This should be explained according to the context. In the present context, the method of explanation based on the lexical meaning and grammatical derivation plays an important role. The problem occurred due to the unnecessary emphasis of present day scholars on the explanation of this word only from the popular philosophical literature. The derivation of this word from the nominal base 'Sāṅkhyam' meaning war or fight or battle provides correct perspective. It is also important that Apte presents literary evidence also. The same meaning is supported by the context as well. In fact, the central idea of the second chapter of the 'Śrīmadbhagavadgītā' is the argumentation presented by Arjuna for not fighting and the argumentation of Krishna to convince him for fighting. One has right to disagree with them on any of the arguments, but, their argumentation is the central point in this chapter. So, the accurate meaning of 'Sāṅkhya' is something 'about or related to fight or war' in this place.

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