

The Theory of Reality in Sankhya: A Fresh Reading of the Twenty-Five Tattvas

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Abstract: Through a new interpretation of the doctrine of the twenty-five tattvas, this work, in my opinion, provides a critical and interpretive examination of the theory of reality in Sāṅkhya philosophy. One of the most methodical schools of traditional Indian philosophy, Sāṅkhya, offers a dualistic ontology based on the dichotomy between Prakṛti (primordial materiality) and Puruṣa (pure consciousness). The study looks at how the evolutionary process that gives rise to the various categories of existence, such as Mahat, Ahaṅkāra, the indriyas, tanmātras, and mahābhūtas, is based on this ontological dualism. In order to provide a cogent explanation of change and continuity in reality, it delves deeper into the concept of causality in Sāṅkhya, specifically the notion of satkāryavāda, which claims the existence of the result in the cause. The study also emphasizes the epistemological importance of discriminative knowledge (vivekakhyāti), which leads to emancipation (kaivalya) by realizing the difference between Puruṣa and Prakṛti. The framework's ethical ramifications are also explored, showing how knowledge promotes detachment and independence while ignorance leads to servitude. This study makes the case that the Sāṅkhya theory of reality is still conceptually important for issues of consciousness, causation, and human existence by fusing metaphysical analysis with ethical and epistemological considerations. In the end, the research emphasizes that the theory of the twenty-five tattvas is a comprehensive philosophical framework intended to comprehend reality and achieve liberation rather than just an ontological classification.

Keywords: China, Geopolitics, Southeast Asia, Diplomacy, Regional Responses, Economic Relations

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1 | INTRODUCTION

A new interpretation of Sāṅkhya's doctrine of the twenty-five tattvas reveals not only its metaphysical depth but also its ongoing relevance for modern philosophical inquiry. Sāṅkhya's philosophical system provides one of the most systematic and profound accounts of reality in classical Indian thought. Sāṅkhya's theory of reality is based on a dualistic ontology that makes a contrast between Prakṛti (primordial matter) and Puruṣa (pure consciousness), which serves as the foundation for its entire metaphysical framework. "From Prakṛti evolves Mahat, from Mahat the ego, and from the ego the group of sixteen," as Āśvārakṣṣṇa states clearly in the Sāṅkhyakārikā (śvarakṣṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 191), demonstrating the methodical progression of reality. According to what I understand, this evolutionary schema shows that Sāṅkhya views reality as a dynamic interaction of basic principles rather than as static. A thorough ontological framework that aims to explain both the material and experiential aspects of life is represented by the twenty-five tattvas. Puruṣa is the conscious witness, completely separate from material processes, while Prakṛti, the fundamental principle, is defined as the unmanifest and primal cause of the universe. "Sāṅkhya's dualism is not a dualism of two interacting substances, but rather a radical distinction between consciousness and materiality," observes Gerald James Larson (Larson, 1969, p. 91). This distinction, which avoids reductionism and maintains the autonomy of awareness, is, in my opinion, essential to comprehending the Sāṅkhya account of reality.

The development of the remaining tattvas, such as the eleven organs (indriyas), the five subtle elements (tanmātras), the five gross elements (mahābhūtas), Mahat (cosmic intellect), and Ahaṅkāra (ego), also shows a highly structured description of the universe and human experience. "The Sāṅkhya system is remarkable for its attempt to give a complete enumeration of the principles of reality," notes Surendranath Dasgupta (Dasgupta, 1922, p. 213). This list, in my opinion, shows a strong philosophical commitment to comprehending the relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of existence rather than just a predisposition toward classification. The epistemological and soteriological importance of this framework is also revealed by a new interpretation of the twenty-five tattvas. The contrast between Puruṣa and Prakṛti has practical significance for emancipation (kaivalya) and is not only academic. According to the Sāṅkhyakārikā ("śvarakṣṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 255), "liberation emerges through the awareness of the distinction between Puruṣa and Prakṛti." This implies that metaphysics and spiritual praxis are inextricably linked as Sāṅkhya's explanation of reality is ultimately focused on human emancipation. Furthermore, contemporary academics have emphasized Sāṅkhya's metaphysics' logical and analytical character. According to Chandradhar Sharma, Sāṅkhya is "essentially a system of enumeration and analysis" that aims to use a limited number of principles to explain the world's diversity (Sharma, 1960, p. 148). This analytical method, in my opinion, brings Sāṅkhya into line with modern philosophical issues about ontology, classification, and the nature of consciousness.

2 | ONTOLOGICAL DUALISM: PURUṢA AND PRAKṚTI

The core of Sāṅkhya's theory of reality is the idea of ontological dualism, which is expressed through the fundamental dichotomy between Puruṣa (pure consciousness) and Prakṛti (primordial materiality). This theory offers a particularly rigorous framework for comprehending existence. This dualism is a well-reasoned metaphysical stance that aims to explain both the subjective and objective aspects of experience without limiting one to the other, rather than just a theoretical abstraction. "The conjunction of Puruṣa and Prakṛti is for the purpose of the experience and liberation of Puruṣa," according to the Sāṅkhyakārikā of Āśvārakṣṣṇa (śvarakṣṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 203). This remark, in my opinion, emphasizes that the relationship between these two concepts is teleological rather than causal in a straightforward sense, with an emphasis on experience (bhoga) and emancipation (apavarga). According to Sāṅkhya ontology, Puruṣa is a pure, contentless consciousness that is multiple, everlasting,

and unchanging. It is the silent witness (sākṣin) of all mental and physical processes rather than an agent or a result of evolution. "Puruṣa is characterized by pure awareness, devoid of qualities, and entirely distinct from Prakṛti," according to Gerald James Larson (Larson, 1969, p. 75). In my view, Puruṣa's profound transcendence protects consciousness's autonomy and prevents it from being reduced to material or psychological processes. In contrast to many monistic systems, Sāṅkhya insists on the plurality of Puruṣas in order to account for the diversity of conscious subjects and unique experiences.

Prakṛti, on the other hand, is the primordial, unconscious, and dynamic principle that makes up the universe's material foundation. It is made up of the three guṇas (sattva, rajas, and tamas), whose equilibrium and disequilibrium give origin to the cosmic evolution process. "Prakṛti is the ultimate cause of the world, containing within it the potentiality of all forms," according to Surendranath Dasgupta (Dasgupta, 1922, p. 233). This idea of Prakṛti as a dynamic and self-evolving principle, in my opinion, represents a sophisticated understanding of causality in which the cause (satkāryavāda) preexists with the outcome. Thus, by a process of transformation, the entire empirical world—including consciousness and matter—emerges from Prakṛti. The rigorous distinction between consciousness and matter further clarifies Puruṣa and Prakṛti's dualism. According to Sāṅkhya, Puruṣa is passive and non-agentive, whereas Prakṛti is active and productive. "Prakṛti is unconscious but active, while Puruṣa is conscious but inactive," notes Chandradhar Sharma (Sharma, 1960, p. 150). According to my understanding, this seeming paradox is resolved by the concept of proximity (samyoga), in which Puruṣa's very existence causes Prakṛti to evolve, just as a magnet produces movement without changing itself. The non-interactionist yet relational character of Sāṅkhya dualism is highlighted by this metaphorical explanation.

Furthermore, the philosophical significance of this dualism lies in its consequences for soteriology and epistemology. When Puruṣa is mistaken for the evolutes of Prakṛti, especially the intellect (buddhi) and ego (ahaṅkāra), ignorance (avidyā) results. Therefore, discriminative knowledge (vivekakhyāti), which shows the complete difference between the two, is the means by which liberation (kaivalya) is attained. "When the distinction between the seer and the seen is realized, there is cessation of suffering," according to the Sāṅkhyakārikā (śvarakṣṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 255). This realization, in my opinion, shows that Sāṅkhya's ontology and soteriology are inextricably linked as liberation is a direct result of realizing reality. This ontological dualism's applicability to current philosophical discussions, especially in the philosophy of mind, is also revealed by a new interpretation of it. Sāṅkhya foreshadows contemporary debates over the limitations of physicalism and the irreducibility of consciousness by drawing a dividing line between awareness and material processes. Its focus on Puruṣa and Prakṛti's interdependence for empirical experience, however, provides a sophisticated substitute for rigid dualistic or monistic frameworks.

3 | THE DOCTRINE OF THE TWENTY-FIVE TATTVAS:

One of the most methodical and analytically rigorous attempts in classical Indian thinking to formulate a complete theory of reality is the notion of the twenty-five tattvas in Sāṅkhya philosophy. This philosophy is a thoroughly structured framework that explains the creation, nature, and experience of the universe as well as the means to freedom; it is not just a list of metaphysical terms. "Prakṛti, Mahat, Ahaṅkāra, the five subtle elements, the eleven organs, and the five gross elements constitute the twenty-four; the Puruṣa is the twenty-fifth," according to the classical formulation of this doctrine found in the Sāṅkhyakārikā of Śvarakṣṣṇa (Śvarakṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 192). This methodical categorization, in my opinion, illustrates Sāṅkhya's dedication to provide a cohesive ontological framework that explains both the material and experiential aspects of life. The philosophy starts with Prakṛti, the unmanifest and fundamental cause, which is defined by the balance of the three guṇas: tamas, rajas, and sattva. Mahat, also known as cosmic intelligence or buddhi, is the first stage of manifestation and the foundation for thought and judgment. It develops from this fundamental principle. "Mahat or buddhi is the principle of intelligence that mediates between the

unmanifest Prakṛti and the empirical world," according to Gerald James Larson (Larson, 1969, p. 201). This, in my opinion, emphasizes Mahat's crucial function as a link between the potential and the actual, signaling the start of differentiation in the universe. The idea of uniqueness and distinction is introduced by Ahaṅkāra (ego), which emerges from Mahat. The evolution of both the material and cognitive dimensions of existence results from the emergence of the diversity of the actual world through Ahaṅkāra. "Ahaṅkāra is the principle which gives rise to the sense of 'I' and is the source of the manifold categories of experience," according to Surendranath Dasgupta (Dasgupta, 1922, p. 255). This stage, in my opinion, is essential to comprehending the development of subjectivity and the disintegration of Prakṛti's united potential into various forms.

The ensuing evolution of the tattvas follows two parallel paths: the creation of the material world and the advancement of the internal and exterior tools of knowledge. The eleven indriyas—the five organs of perception (jñānendriyas), the five organs of action (karmendriyas), and the mind (manas), which serves as an internal coordinator—emerge from Ahaṅkāra. The five gross elements (mahābhūtas), which are ether, air, fire, water, and earth, are preceded by the five subtle elements (tanmātras), which are sound, touch, form, taste, and scent. "The Sāṅkhya system explains the entire physical universe as the evolution of these subtle and gross elements," according to Chandradhar Sharma (Sharma, 1960, p. 152). This dual path of evolution, in my opinion, highlights the integrative character of Sāṅkhya ontology, in which the physical and psychological aspects are related expressions of Prakṛti. Puruṣa, the twenty-fifth tattva, is the pure, unchanging consciousness that stands aside from this whole evolutionary chain. It is the observer of all occurrences rather than a producer or a product. Puruṣa's inclusion as a separate category completes Sāṅkhya's ontological framework and guarantees that awareness is not reduced to material processes. "The experience and liberation of Puruṣa is the purpose of the evolution of Prakṛti," as the Sāṅkhyakārikā underlines (śvarakṣṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 203). This teleological tendency, in my opinion, shows that the idea of the tattvas is both normative and descriptive, leading the individual toward freedom by realizing the difference between Puruṣa and Prakṛti. Thus, a new interpretation of the twenty-five tattvas demonstrates their importance as a framework for both soteriology and metaphysics. The ideology offers a way to transcend the world while methodically accounting for its diversity. Sāṅkhya facilitates a greater comprehension of the essence of existence and the circumstances of human experience by examining the elements of reality and their interactions. In conclusion, I contend that Sāṅkhya's theory of reality is based on the doctrine of the twenty-five tattvas, which is a significant philosophical accomplishment that combines analysis, explanation, and emancipation into a single cohesive system.

4 | EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS AND CAUSALITY:

One of Sāṅkhya philosophy's most notable and theoretically advanced contributions to the comprehension of reality is the notion of evolutionary process and causality. The theoretical foundation for the development of the twenty-five tattvas is provided by the teaching of satkāryavāda, which holds that the effect preexists in its cause. "The effect exists in the cause because what is non-existent cannot be produced," according to the traditional interpretation found in the Sāṅkhyakārikā (śvarakṣṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 105). This claim, which rejects the idea of creation ex nihilo and affirms that all transformations are manifestations of an underlying potentiality, establishes, in my opinion, a fundamental principle of continuity in the structure of reality. In Sāṅkhya, the equilibrium of the three guṇas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—is contained inside Prakṛti, the primal and unmanifest cause, which initiates the evolutionary process. The remaining tattvas gradually form as a result of the disruption of this equilibrium, which starts the evolutionary process. "Evolution in Sāṅkhya is not a temporal creation but a logical unfolding of what is already implicitly present in Prakṛti," according to Gerald James Larson (Larson, 1969, p. 173). This viewpoint, in my opinion, highlights that the Sāṅkhya model is profoundly ontological, concerned with the intrinsic structure and transformation of reality, rather than just cosmological.

The various facets of empirical existence originate from the first product of this evolutionary process, Mahat (cosmic intellect), which is followed by Ahankāra (ego). A precise causal relationship between the tattvas is shown in the evolution's methodical and hierarchical arrangement. According to Surendranath Dasgupta, "a strict law of causation governs the entire series of evolutes in Sāṅkhya, where each effect is a transformation of its immediate cause" (Dasgupta, 1922, p. 240). This hierarchical structure, in my opinion, illustrates the logical and analytical character of Sāṅkhya philosophy, which aims to explain the world's diversity using a limited and well-organized set of principles. The idea of pariṇāma (true transformation), which sets Sāṅkhya apart from other philosophical systems that support apparent or illusory change, is fundamental to this causal framework. In Sāṅkhya, the cause truly becomes the effect without losing its fundamental essence. According to Chandradhar Sharma, "causation is essentially transformation because the effect is nothing but the cause in a new form" (Sharma, 1960, p. 149). According to my interpretation, this idea of actual metamorphosis supports the view that the world is not an illusion or mere appearance, but rather a dynamic and changing manifestation of Prakṛti.

Puruṣa plays a special and non-causal role in this evolutionary process. Even while Puruṣa does not actively contribute to evolution, its very existence serves as a stimulus for Prakṛti's metamorphosis. This relationship is symbolically described by the Sāṅkhyakārikā, which implies that Prakṛti develops "for the sake of another," namely Puruṣa (ügeśvarakêṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 203). This, in my opinion, emphasizes the teleological aspect of Sāṅkhya causation, according to which the goal of evolution is to give Puruṣa experience (bhoga) and, eventually, release (apavarga). A new interpretation of Sāṅkhya's theory of causation also shows how applicable it is to current philosophical debates about emergence, determinism, and the nature of change. Sāṅkhya foreshadows contemporary concepts of potentiality and transformation by claiming that effects are latent within causes, and its focus on the independence of awareness provides a counterbalance to materialistic explanations of reality. Its philosophical relevance is further enhanced by the interaction between necessity (in the development of Prakṛti) and freedom (in the emancipation of Puruṣa).

5 | EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS:

A deep integration of knowledge and moral transformation is shown by the epistemological and ethical implications of the Sāṅkhya theory of reality, especially as expressed via the doctrine of the twenty-five tattvas. Sāṅkhya places knowledge within a larger existential and ethical framework, where correct understanding (vivekakyāti) becomes the way to liberation (kaivalya), rather than treating epistemology as an abstract investigation into the nature of knowledge alone. According to the traditional interpretation found in the Sāṅkhyakārikā, "there is cessation of suffering through the discriminative knowledge of the difference between Puruṣa and Prakṛti" (Üśvarakêṣṇa, trans. Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987, p. 255). This, in my opinion, emphasizes how Sāṅkhya's epistemology is fundamentally soteriological, where obtaining correct knowledge directly leads to existential and ethical freedom. According to Sāṅkhya, perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), and trustworthy testimony (śabda) are the three main sources of legitimate knowledge (pramāṇas). The individual may distinguish between the conscious self and material processes and comprehend the structure of reality thanks to these epistemic tools. "Sāṅkhya epistemology is pragmatic and liberation-oriented, aiming not merely at knowledge but at the cessation of suffering," according to Gerald James Larson (Larson, 1969, p. 152). This pragmatic approach, in my opinion, emphasizes the useful role of knowledge as a tool to change human experience rather than as a goal unto itself. Since ignorance (avidyā) stems from the mistaken identification of Puruṣa with the evolutes of Prakṛti, Sāṅkhya's ontology and epistemological framework are closely related. This ignorance has ethical repercussions since it causes attachment, desire, and pain. According to Surendranath Dasgupta, "bondage in Sāṅkhya arises from the confusion of the self with the non-self, and liberation is achieved through their discrimination" (Dasgupta, 1922, p. 267). This

analysis, in my opinion, shows that since epistemological error influences human behaviour and experiences, it is moral in character rather than just cognitive.

This epistemic realization has significant ethical ramifications. In Sāṅkhya, ethical living is focused on developing clarity, detachment, and self-awareness because ignorance is the root cause of suffering. A kind of ethical disengagement from worldly attachments results from the understanding that Puruṣa is apart from the body, mind, and ego. According to Chandradhar Sharma, “the ethical ideal of Sāṅkhya is rooted in the knowledge of the distinction between spirit and matter, which results in freedom from desires and suffering” (Sharma, 1960, p. 155). This, in my opinion, does not mean moral indifference but rather a higher level of ethical awareness in which egoistic motivations no longer influence behaviour. Furthermore, in order to achieve discriminative knowledge, the Sāṅkhya framework stresses the development of sattva (purity, clarity, harmony). The correct reflection of Puruṣa depends on the refinement of the intellect (buddhi), which is a product of Prakṛti. True knowledge is made possible by ethical behaviors like self-control, detachment, and introspection, which promote sattva. This link between moral behavior and epistemic clarity, in my opinion, exemplifies the integrative character of Sāṅkhya philosophy, which holds that knowing and being are closely connected. A new interpretation of Sāṅkhya’s ethical and epistemological aspects also demonstrates their applicability to modern philosophical discussion. The premise that ignorance causes pain is similar to contemporary psychology and ethical theories, while the focus on the difference between consciousness and material processes resonates with present philosophical discussions. Additionally, the Sāṅkhya method offers a comprehensive account of human growth by arguing that ethical transformation necessitates both internal insight and exterior regulation.

6 | CONCLUSION:

The doctrine of the twenty-five tattvas, which articulates Sāṅkhya’s theory of reality, provides a philosophically rigorous and surprisingly coherent framework that unifies ontology, epistemology, and soteriology. This research has shown that Sāṅkhya’s dualistic distinction between Puruṣa and Prakṛti offers the fundamental framework for comprehending both the nature of human experience and the organization of the universe. The methodical development of the tattvas is a reflection of a highly analytical view of reality, in which a limited number of interconnected principles based on the theory of causality are used to explain the diversity of the empirical world. When the twenty-five tattvas are read again, it becomes clear that Sāṅkhya is more than just an antiquated metaphysical theory; rather, it is a living philosophical paradigm that still addresses timeless issues related to consciousness, matter, and the nature of existence. While its acknowledgment of the autonomy of awareness foreshadows contemporary discussions in the philosophy of mind, its focus on satkāryavāda and genuine transformation highlights a perspective of reality as continuous and understandable. However, the epistemological focus on discriminative knowledge (vivekakhyāti) emphasizes that the ultimate goal of this framework is emancipation from suffering rather than theoretical conjecture. Furthermore, since the perception of the difference between Puruṣa and Prakṛti results in detachment and freedom, the ethical implications of Sāṅkhya show that knowledge and moral transformation are intertwined. In conclusion, I contend that the Sāṅkhya theory of reality—which offers important insights into the nature of reality and the potential for human liberation—remains a profound and pertinent philosophical system through its doctrine of the twenty-five tattvas.

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