On the Theory of śuddhetarasṛṣṭi
in the Aḥirbudhnyasamhitā

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Introduction

The ideas of Sāṁkhya have not only been developed into the systematized philosophy of the Classical Sāṁkhya, but have also affected the Purāṇas, the Epics, and even the Pāñcarātra texts. Although previous investigations have been conducted on the Aḥirbudhnyasamhitā [ABS],1 the studies focused on the śuddhasṛṣṭi ("pure creation") of the cosmology and not on the śuddhetarasṛṣṭi ("impure creation"). Therefore, this study examines the theory of śuddhetarasṛṣṭi ("impure creation") in chapter 7 of ABS and explores its contents of thought through a comparison with those of the Proto-Sāṁkhya speculations and the Classical Sāṁkhya.

1. Three Principles

According to the creation theory of the material world in ABS, there are only three principles: puruṣa, prakṛti, and kāla.2 As for puruṣa and prakṛti, the former doesn’t evolve, but the latter does, which is similar to the theory of the Classical Sāṁkhya. However, the difference from the Classical Sāṁkhya is the enumeration of kāla as a principle. In fact, kāla divides prakṛti from puruṣa and combines prakṛti with puruṣa.3

It is said that these three principles are "the state of a lump of clay" that is waiting to evolve.4 It seems that this triad indicates a state in which all elements mingle namely a state of non-manifestation. In addition, they are made to move for each result only by Viṣṇu’s disk (sudarśana). By arranging the process in order, we can say that time principle stimulated by Viṣṇu’s disk indicates the Supreme God, the separation of puruṣa and prakṛti happens, and the world is created. It is clear that ABS reinterprets the dualism of the Classical Sāṁkhya into the monism by placing Viṣṇu on the highest seat transcending these principles. Furthermore, in the Classical Sāṁkhya the doctrine of the actual existence of an
effect is only attributed to prakṛti, but in ABS it can be assumed the three principles are already contained in a particular cause before the creation of the phenomenal world.

2. Mahat

2.1. Two Patterns of Mahat

In ABS, the product from avyakta namely prakṛti is known as mahat. Moreover, mahat in ABS is divided into three parts depending on the three guṇa-s. There are two overall patterns in this dividing process, Pattern 1 includes the tāmasa characteristics of kāla, the sāttvika characteristics of buddhi, and the rājas a characteristics of prāṇa. On the other hand Pattern 2 includes the sāttvika characteristics of dharma, jñāna, virāga and aiśvarya as well as the tāmasa characteristics of adharma, ajñāna, avairāgya and anaiśvarya. In this case, Pattern 2 is similar to the eight types of buddhi-bhāva in the Classical Śāmkhya, whereas Pattern 1 is completely different. According to Schrader, two contradicting claims are described in parallel and the former depicts an older idea.

2.2. Interpretation of Mahat in Various Texts

In the Classical Śāmkhya mahat is basically used synonymously with buddhi, but in ABS buddhi is a form of the sāttvika characteristics of mahat. According to Schrader, this relationship between mahat and buddhi is ‘the sign of antiquity.’ However the opinions that differ from the Classical Śāmkhya are also seen in the Mahābhārata [MBh], the Manusmruti [MS], and so on. The primary differences are as follows.

In the Katha Upaniṣad [KathUp], mahat-ātman is regarded as a principle different from buddhi. In this case, the evolution of the principles is puruṣa → avyakta → mahat-ātman → buddhi → manas → artha → indriya.

This mahat-ātman is also depicted in the Epic Śāmkhya. The creation order in the Mokṣadharma-parvan chapter 298 of MBh, vol. 12 is avyakta → mahat-ātman → ahamkāra → manas → five elements. It is thought that mahat-ātman is synonymous with mahat in this order. Moreover, in the Mokṣadharma-parvan chapter 327, eight prakṛti-s beginning with avyakta are regarded as production entities, and mahat-ātman is assumed as an entity that occurs from avyakta and produces ahamkāra. Here the evolution of the principles is puruṣa → avyakta → mahat-ātman → ahamkāra → five elements.

Besides, in MS 12. 12–14, it is depicted that bhūtātman is different from ātman and synonymous with mahat.
We can assume from the above that although mahat-ātman, mahat, bhūtātman and buddhi are different terms, but they are almost similar in concept. Such concepts appear vague, because only two levels (low and high) of ātman are presumed. Regarding the lower level ātman, it could be thought that mahat ātman is the gross ātman and bhūtātman is the material ātman. On the other hand, the high-level ātman could be thought as puruṣa and kṣetra. However, we must focus on the point that the Sāmkhya theories in each particular text are different.

Considering that puruṣa is the only one in ABS, it is difficult to consider that it functions as the ultimate subject of the individual as thought in the Classical Sāmkhya. Moreover, buddhi is organic one, as it is hard to think that it also has that function. Therefore, it can be said that mahat plays a role as the subject of the individual in the sense of the low-level ātman except for the ultimate characteristics.

3. Ahamkāra

3.1. Three Forms of Ahamkāra

In ABS, ahamkṛti (ahamkāra) evolves from mahat. And ahamkāra becomes three forms depending on the three kinds of guṇa, where sāttvika characteristics become ahamkāra of the vaikārika form, rājasa characteristics become ahamkāra of the taijasa form, and tāmasa characteristics become ahamkāra of the bhūtādi form. Based on these three forms, what evolves is different: on the one hand five buddhindriyāṇi and five karmendriyāṇi evolve from vaikārika ahamkāra, on the other five tanmātrāṇi evolve from bhūtādi ahamkāra.

It is unclear whether manas is related to any of these three forms. In addition, a function of taijasa ahamkāra is also unclear. These 3 forms are similar to those of the Classical Sāmkhya on their terms. But it is clear that manas evolves from ahamkāra of the sāttvika characteristics in Sāmkhyakārikā [SK], which differs from ABS. In addition, for the function of taijasa ahamkāra, the property of rajas as efficient cause that evolves into both indriya-s and subtle elements is depicted.

3.2. Correspondence of Ahamkāra to Creation God

In ABS, there are several synonymys of ahamkāra, and one of them corresponds to the creation god Prajāpati. Likewise in the Epic Sāmkhya, ahamkāra corresponds to Prajāpati in Mokṣadharma-parvan chapter 291. However, the correspondence to Brahmā is
also seen in Nārāyaṇiya-parvan of Mokṣadharma-parvan chapter 327.25) In this case, unification is not considered in MBh.

However, ahamkāra, which often functions as the cause of delusion corresponds to the creation god in the Proto-Sāṃkhya speculations, but such a correspondence is not seen in the Classical Sāṃkhya.

3.3. Evolution of Five Mahābhūtāni from Five Tanmātrāni

As for the evolution of gloss elements from subtle elements in ABS, the following pattern is established: śabda → ākāśa, sparśa → vāyu, rūpa → tejas, rasa → ambhas, gandha → mahi.26) Although the Classical Sāṃkhya also resembles this pattern, the interpretation is different in each commentaries.27) Therefore, it is difficult to clarify whether gloss elements evolve from subtle elements in SK.

4. Descent of Manus

The evolution, beginning with the three principles, is performed step-by-step, at the same time, eight Manus appear. They are regarded as figures when puruṣa descends. And it is said that this puruṣa becomes a figure of embryo (garbha). In the evolution of buddhi, ahamkāra and manas they become each the embryo,28) and equip each the organ and the property of buddhi, ahamkāra and manas. Next, they become the embryo of void, and equip the property of this void, the ear (the auditory organ) and the voice organ.29) In this way, they equip everything in order, and finally accomplish a perfect body which has all organs and parts.30) This process builds physical composition into world creation, and at the same time, it includes a mythical element about the descent of Manus. Moreover, it is said that this process is entirely driven by Viṣṇu’s will. Therefore, it can be thought that the function as an efficient cause of rajas is not deeply considered.

5. Concluding Remarks

Based on the above discussion, it would be reliable to say that the theory of “impure creation” preached in ABS, is similar to the Classical Sāṃkhya, but the details are different. The feature of these points is summarized as follows. (1) In ABS, puruṣa is the only one. In addition, and mahat plays a role as the subject of the individual, whereas buddhi is not synonymous with mahat. In this case, it plays a functional part of mahat. (2) The features of Sāṃkhya theory in which the bodily elements are included into cosmogony, and the
mythical element of the descent of Manus are combined. (3) While following the theory of 25 principles of the Classical Sāmkhya, ABS, places Viṣṇu on the highest seat that transcends these principles and reinterprets in monism. In addition, the function as an efficient cause of rajas is much less considered because all of these principles evolve by Supreme God’s will.

1) As an important study of ABS, there is F. Otto Schrader’s Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahirbudhyānasamhitā (Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1916). In addition, for a translation of ABS into English for Chapters 1 to 7, there is Matsubara Mitsunori’s Pāñcarātra Samhitās & Early Vaiṣṇava Theology (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994).

3) ABS 7, 6cd. 4) ABS 7, 4. 5) ABS 7, 8ab. 6) We believe that the kāla explained here is a low-level one compared to that as one of the three principles. Kāla as tāmasa characteristics of mahat is concrete time while kāla as one of the three principles, by contrast, is the creation principle and non-evolution.

7) ABS 7, 9cd; 10–11ab. SK 29 discusses the five prāṇa.

8) ABS 7, 11cd; 12cd. 9) SK 23. 10) Schrader, op. cit., p. 80.


12) He argues that in Katha Upaniṣad I. 3, 10–13 “buddhi and mahat not yet identical, the former, called ‘Knowledge Self’ (jñāna ātman), being a lower principle than the ‘Great Self’ which, in its turn, is inferior to the ‘Quiet Self’ (sānta ātman) which, again, is excelled by the puruṣa.” [Schrader, op. cit., pp. 83–84]

13) KathU 1. 3, 10–11. 14) MBh 12, 298. 16. 15) MBh 12, 327. 25–26. 16) MS 12, 12–14. Moreover, In MS 1, 15 mahat-ātman is preached.

17) Schrader explains “that there are not many puruṣa-s, as in Classical Sāmkhya, but at this stage only the one kūṭastha or samaśṭi (collective) puruṣa.” [Schrader, op. cit., p. 80] Matsubara regards this “samaśṭi” as “the aggregate [of the manus].” [Matsubara, op. cit., p. 229]

18) ABS 7, 15ab. 19) ABS 7, 17. 20) ABS 7, 23–24; 27cd; 31cd–32ab; 35cd–36ab; 40. 21) ABS 7, 21cd; 25cd; 30ab; 34abc; 38cd–39a. 22) SK 25. 23) ABS 7, 16ab. 24) MBh 12, 291. 20. 25) MBh 12, 327. 26; 30. 26) ABS 7, 22ab; 26ab; 30cd; 34cd; 39ab.


28) ABS 7, 13–14; 19; 20–21ab. 29) ABS 7, 23abc; 25ab; 28cd–29; 32cd–33; 36cd–38ab; 41–42ab. 30) ABS 7, 43cd–44ab.

〈Key words〉 Ahirbudhyānasamhitā, Pāñcarātra, sūddhetarasṛṣṭi, Sāmkhya, mahat, ahaṁkāra, Mokṣadharma

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