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The *āstika* (or so-called orthodox) philosophical systems of South Asia are presented in the form of highly condensed utterances called *sūtra*-s or *kārikā*-s upon which interpreters or adherents of a particular system compose *bhāṣya*-s (full, word-by-word commentaries), *īkā*-s (subcommentaries on the commentaries), *ṛtti*-s (partial or short commentaries on the *sūtra*-s or *kārikā*-s), or *vārttika*-s (glosses, corrections or expansions of problematic aspects of a *sūtra* or *kārikā*). Thus, each *āstika* system (namely, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta, and so forth) possesses a set of authoritative *sūtra*-s or *kārikā*-s, a set of *bhāṣya*-s, a set of *īkā*-s, a set of *ṛtti*-s, and sometimes one or more *vārttika*-s. In many instances, unfortunately, the commentaries, subcommentaries, and glosses on the various collections of *sūtra*-s or *kārikā*-s are from periods that postdate the compilation of *sūtra*-s and *kārikā*-s by several centuries, and it is frequently impossible to judge if a given commentator (*bhāṣyakāra*) is a reliable interpreter of the *sūtra* or *kārikā*. Moreover, because of this unusual format for philosophical writing, it is often difficult to sort out what is a legitimate explication of a *sūtra* or *kārikā*, on the one hand, from what is a creative innovation by a commentator, on the other. The commentator is constrained by the format of the genre to pass off his own views as being a traditional reading or interpretation of a given utterance (*sūtra* or *kārikā*). For every system of thought there was presumably an elaborate oral tradition of dialectic, argumentation, and polemic, but only a small percentage of that larger body of content has been retained because of the restricted format for philosophical writing in ancient India.

The task of translating ancient India's philosophical tradition, therefore, is unusually difficult, and the conventional approach is to attempt to reconstruct or piece together the sequence of arguments or series of inferences that were operating in a given system, and then to cast that reconstruction into a format that is suitable for a European or modern reader. The task is conventionally construed to involve not simply finding appropriate equivalents for the concepts being employed, but more than that, recasting a versified, laconic and formulaic shorthand into a discursive, sequential prose that resembles a European-style philosophical treatise. The modern reader sometimes gains the impression, therefore, that Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhyakārikā* or Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* or Bādarāyaṇa's *Vedāntasūtra* are philosophical works analogous with Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* or Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, when in reality these so-called Indian "philosophical treatises" are more analogous with indexes, tables of contents, telephone directories, sets of algebraic equations, lists of linguistic rules, dictionaries, or annotated bibliographies.

Most modern interpreters or translators deal with the problem of the traditional format by simply dismantling or ignoring it. The laconic, formulaic shorthand of traditional Indian philosophizing is explained away as a mnemonic device for preserving the oral tradition. Some effort is made to translate a *sūtra* or *kārikā* into sentence form, usually utilizing parentheses or brackets by which means the translator introduces assertions or propositions that render a *sūtra* intelligible; but the main focus in most translations is then given to an accompanying commentary. The final result of such an approach is some kind of discursive philosophical treatise in sequential prose with the *sūtra*-s or *kārikā*-s interspersed throughout as sentences that function like topic headings—for example, most translations of Bādarāyaṇa's *Vedāntasūtra* with Śāṅkara's *Bhāṣya* or of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* with the commentaries of Vyāsa and Vācaspatiśra.

We know, however, that although the laconic, shorthand method of Indian technical writing was often mnemonic, early along it developed into something much more than that. Pāṇini's *sūtra*-s on Sanskrit grammar, for example, although on one level a set of mnemonic utterances for ease of learning, on another level turn out to be a subtle network of interrelated linguistic rules that must be applied systemically and sequentially and for which an elaborate metalanguage is required. The *sūtra*-s function as a complex network of symbolic notations, and one must grasp the entire *sūtra*-collection *qua sūtra*-collection in order to grasp the subtlety of the grammatical system as a whole. A discursive commentary on the *sūtra*-s, though essential for understanding the semantic significance of the notions and concepts in the system, can never fully communicate the elegance of the system itself. That elegance can be grasped fully only by the student who learns the *sūtra*-s as a whole and then comes to "see" the total functioning of the grammatical system.

I wish to suggest in this short article that *sūtra*-s or *kārikā*-s function in a similar way in technical Indian philosophizing and that the *sūtra*-s provide a network of symbolic notations that permit a systemic "seeing" (*darśana*) of a certain way of interpreting some aspect of human experience or some aspect of the world. I wish to suggest that Indian philosophizing appears to have an important component of a kind of systems-theory in it that is best translated not so much as discursive prose or sequential dialectical argumentation but, rather, as a chart or a diagram or a network of symbolic notations which one can "see" as a whole and upon which one can reflect or meditate.

To support my suggestion I cannot really "argue" discursively, for that would be to employ precisely what I am calling into question, namely that there is an important component in technical Indian philosophizing that is *not discursive* and *argumentative* in our European philosophical sense but, rather, *systemic* and *recursive*. Methodologically, I must support my suggestion by "showing" or "illustrating" a *sūtra*-system, and allowing it to be "seen" and "contemplated."

A text which permits such a "showing" or "illustrating" is one that many

scholars have dismissed as an utterly meaningless and unintelligible collection of utterances, namely, the *Tattvasamāśasūtra*-s of the Sāṃkhya tradition. The text as we now have it is undoubtedly late (somewhere between A.D. 1300–1500), and the five important commentaries on the text (namely, the *Bhāṣya* of Narendra, the *Tattvayāthārthyadīpana* of Bhāvāgaṇeśa, the *Sarvopakāriṇī* possibly of Mahādeva Vedāntin, the *Vivaraṇa* and the *Kramadīpika*) are also late. The text is used mainly in the *paṇḍita*-communities in and around Varanasi, and, although its extant form is late, it may well represent an ancient compendium of the Sāṃkhya system (at least, according to Max Müller and more recently E. Frauwallner). Its title, *Tattvasamāsa*, means simply a “compendium of basic principles.” Some of the commentaries read the text as having twenty-three utterances while others consider the text to have twenty-five utterances. My own preference for a variety of reasons is the latter, and I shall present the text, therefore, as read by Bhāvāgaṇeśa—that is to say, the text read in twenty-five utterances as set forth in Bhāvāgaṇeśa’s *Tattvayāthārthyadīpana* (from the edition *Sāṃkhyasamgraha*, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1969, pp. 33–58).

The text in its entirety is as follows:

- (1) *aṣṭau prakṛtayah*
- (2) *ṣoḍaśa vikārāḥ*
- (3) *puruṣaḥ*
- (4) *traiguṇyam*
- (5) *saṃcaraḥ*
- (6) *pratisaṃcaraḥ*
- (7) *adhyātmam*
- (8) *adhibhūtam*
- (9) *adhidaivatam* (or *adhidaivam*)
- (10) *pañcābhībuddhayaḥ*
- (11) *pañca karmayonayaḥ*
- (12) *pañca vāyavaḥ*
- (13) *pañca karmātmānaḥ*
- (14) *pañcaparvāvidyā*
- (15) *aṣṭāvīmśatidhāśaktiḥ*
- (16) *navadhā tuṣṭiḥ*
- (17) *aṣṭadhā siddhiḥ*
- (18) *daśa mūlikārthāḥ*
- (19) *anugrahaḥ sargaḥ*
- (20) *caturdaśavidho bhūtasargaḥ*
- (21) *trividho bandhaḥ*
- (22) *trividho mokṣaḥ*
- (23) *trividhaṃ pramāṇam*
- (24) *trividhaṃ duḥkham*
- (25) *etat paraṃ yāthātathyam etaj jñātvā kṛtakṛtyaḥ syān na punas trividhaduḥkhena abhibhūyate* (or *yāthārthyam*).

A direct English rendering would be the following:

- (1) Eight creative natures;
- (2) Sixteen derivatives;

- (3) Consciousness (or Soul);
- (4) Tripartiteness;
- (5) Manifestation;
- (6) Dissolution;
- (7) Pertaining to the subjective;
- (8) Pertaining to the objective;
- (9) Pertaining to the divine;
- (10) Five cognitions;
- (11) Five sources of action;
- (12) Five breaths;
- (13) Five initiators of action;
- (14) Fivefold ignorance;
- (15) Twenty-eightfold incapacity;
- (16) Ninefold contentment;
- (17) Eightfold perfection;
- (18) Ten basic categories;
- (19) Spontaneous creation;
- (20) Fourteenfold manifest creation;
- (21) Threefold bondage;
- (22) Threefold release;
- (23) Threefold means of knowing;
- (24) Threefold suffering;
- (25) Understanding the sequence properly one has accomplished all that needs to be done, and one is no longer affected by the threefold suffering.

Quite apart from the content of the Sāṃkhya as systematically presented (which for purposes of the present context I shall simply assume), the interpreter or translator is initially puzzled by the format of the enumerations in the text and, more than that, how the enumerations relate to one another, especially in view of the final verse in which attention becomes focused on the sequence of enumerations.

On one level, of course, the enumerations are just conventional lists of things or principles in the Sāṃkhya that are well known to students of the system. Verses 1, 2 and 3, for example, call attention to the twenty-five basic *tattva*-s or principles of the Sāṃkhya system. Verse 4 refers to the *guṇa*-s, *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*, and so on. On this level the *Tattvasamāsa* is simply a digest of Sāṃkhya lists, and one is tempted to concede the conventional scholarly opinion that the text provides no new information whatsoever concerning the Sāṃkhya.

On another level, however, something more interesting emerges. If one passes through the verses, breaking down the apparent enumerations into their attested components—by attested components I mean other, more basic ways of construing the components for which there is clear evidence in the classical tradition—the following renumbering becomes possible:

- (1) $8 = 1 + 7$
- (2) $16 = 11 + 5$
- (3) 1 (?)
- (4) $3 = 1 + 1 + 1$ (but functioning usually as $2 + 1$)

- (5) 1 }
 (6) 1 } = 2
 (7) 1 }
 (8) 1 } = 3
 (9) 1 }
 (10) 5
 (11) 5
 (12) 5
 (13) 5
 (14) 5
 (15) 28 = 11 + 17
 (16) 9 = 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 5
 (17) 8 = 5 + 3
 (18) 10 = 3 + 3 + 3 + 1
 (19) 1
 (20) 14 = 13 + 1
 (21) 3
 (22) 3
 (23) 3
 (24) 3

If one then puts the more basic (that is to say, renumbered) components (from which the apparent enumerations are derived) into a series, one has the sequence:

- (1) 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17.

This, of course, is the sequence of prime numbers. Moreover, between 1 and 100 there are exactly twenty-five prime numbers, and, according to the classical Sāṃkhya tradition, there are twenty-three basic *tattva*-s or principles that are derived from the copresence of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. All prime numbers (as well as composite numbers) presuppose number 1, and the number 1, therefore, must perforce be the *mūlaprakṛti*, and the sequence of Sāṃkhya *tattva*-s might be construed as follows:

- (1) *mūlaprakṛti* (and implicit in *prakṛti* are the 3 *guṇa*-s in an unmanifest 1 + 1 + 1 which will eventually manifest itself structurally in pairings of 2 + 1);
 (2) *buddhi* (with its twofold *bhāva*-structure);
 (3) *ahaṅkāra* (with its threefold structure as *vaikṛta*, *bhūtādi*, *taijasa*);
 (5) *tanmātra*-s (five subtle elements);
 (7) five *tanmātra*-s + *buddhi* + *ahaṅkāra* referred to as the “seven” in *Sāṃkhyakārikā* III;
 (11) *indriya*-s including the five sense capacities, the five action capacities and *manas* or “mind”;
 (13) *liṅga* or *karāṇa*. the thirteenfold instrument made up of *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra*, *manas* and the ten sense capacities;
 (17) structure of *ahaṅkāra* when fully manifest (namely, the elevenfold *vaikṛta-ahaṅkāra*, the fivefold *bhūtādi-ahaṅkāra*, and the one *taijasa-ahaṅkāra*);
 (19) transmigrating entity empowered by *prakṛti* (namely, the thirteenfold instrument + the five *tanmātra*-s + *prakṛti*); (confer SK. XL)
 (23) the manifest world that emerges because of the co-presence of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* (from “Brahmā down to a blade of grass”, according to SK. LIV).

The twenty-fifth *tattva*, of course, is *puruṣa*, and the Sāṃkhya texts describe the *puruṣa* as contentless consciousness whose presence allows *prakṛti* to become manifest. Given the number sequence that has emerged, there is, of course, only one possibility for *puruṣa*, namely, zero (0), a notion which was not only known to the ancient Hindus but possibly discovered by them. The notion of zero is necessary for all sophisticated calculation, yet it has the peculiar characteristic of not adding anything in any calculation. It is an irreducible principle necessary in any sophisticated theory of numbers, yet it is not clear, even in modern mathematics, if zero itself can be construed as a number.

In any case, from the perspective of this emerging number-theory, the Sāṃkhya on one level may have been dealing with the following kinds of problems:

- (a) What is the nature of 0?
- (b) What is the nature of 1?
- (c) What is the relation between 0 and 1 and what is the relation between 1 and the sequence of prime numbers?
- (d) What is the relation between prime numbers and composite numbers?
- (e) What is the relation between number-theory and the kind of world in which we live?
- (f) Is it possible to correlate prime numbers with the basic principles or "particles" (*tattva*-s) that constitute subjective experience (*adhyātma*) and objective existence (*adhibhūta*)? and so forth.

What appears to emerge, then, is that the Sāṃkhya may have been asking questions on analogy with those of Pythagorean mathematical philosophy or traditions of mathematical Platonism rather than those of Aristotelian naturalism. Or, even more radically, in modern terms the Sāṃkhya may have been dealing with issues that are analogous with reductive materialism, semiotics, systems-theory, or mathematical physics rather than traditional European-style metaphysics.

Returning, however, to the basic point of this short article, there is merit perhaps in attempting to exhibit the ancient philosophizing of India in its own laconic, formulaic shorthand, for only by "seeing" its inherent symbolic notations can one come to see interpretive possibilities that may have been hidden or concealed by conventional, discursive translations.