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An Interpretation of the Human Mind based on the *Sâṅkhya-Darshana*

By

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Abstract: Mysteries and complexities of the human mind are described based on Kapila's *Sâṅkhya-Darshana*. Mind, also called subtle body, is made of matter though of sub-atomic particles. Mind is viewed as a composite of *manas*, *ahaṅkāra* and *mahat*. *Manas* is the interface unit between the organs for knowledge and mind. It picks up the incoming knowledge signals from the five organs for knowledge, called *jñānendriya* – one at a time. The knowledge signal picked up by *manas* is passed on to the second unit, called *ahaṅkāra*. *Ahaṅkāra* stores the incoming knowledge for future reference, and it also passes on the same to the third unit called *mahat*. *Mahat* is structurally the smallest superfine particle in nature, capable of representing the incoming piece of knowledge by way of transforming itself to represent the same in the form of *rūpa*, *śabda*, *rasa*, *gandha* and *spṛśa*, as the case may be. The presiding entity of the human system, the soul then becomes aware of the incoming knowledge, being in the closest proximity to the particle *mahat*.

The soul, being a conscious entity with its own intrinsic consciousness, then feels the result of the incoming knowledge in terms of pleasure or pain. The soul then takes the decision in close consultation with *mahat* – the *mahat* is now called *buddhi* in its role of decision-making. During the decision-making, *buddhi* presents the previous relevant precedents and all other details stored in *ahaṅkāra*. If need arises then further real time knowledge is acquired. Once the decision has been taken it is relayed to *ahaṅkāra* and further on to *manas*. Then *manas* activates one or more of the five organs for action, called *karmendriyas* depending on the nature of action to be taken.

It is emphasized that the Vedic philosopher's view is that the seat of consciousness is the soul and the body and mind are its instruments for it to be able to perform the tasks in the world as *jñāta*, *bhoktā* and *kartā* (knower, enjoyer and doer). Kapila has presented the most comprehensive model for our inner faculties that can explain the human behavior in a very realistic manner. His overall approach is to understand the mind so as to enable us control it to a higher degree. With reasonably good control of the same, one should be able to subdue the functions of the mind – what has been described by Patañjali as the definition of Yoga – *Yogaūcittatirodha*?. Once the mind has been subdued, the soul may now be able to de-link itself from the same, particularly from the *buddhi*. This state is characterized as *vivekakhyaṭi*, self-realization – the ultimate objective of the human life. Vedic philosophers

emphasize that this state is achievable for the human beings only, and that makes us distinctly different from other living species. The state of *vivekakhyaṭi* is necessary for one to succeed in God-realization.

INTRODUCTION:

Sâṅkhya-Darṣana is probably the most ancient treatise written in aphorisms. Its author is Kapila, also called *Brahmarṣi* and *Ādi-Ācārya*. His name appears in some Upaniṣads too, and he must have lived very long ago. By one tradition, he lived about 12,75,000 years ago. The treatise begins with the opening statement:

Atha trividha duḥkhāntanivṛtti atyantapurūṣārtha? (1.1)

i.e. Now begins the treatise to elaborate the greatest human effort (*atyantapurūṣārtha*?) that permits us to get away from the three kinds of pain and suffering (*trividhaduḥkha*) in a permanent manner (*atyantanivṛtti*).

Obviously, the objective of *Sâṅkhya* is widest – to get away from pain and suffering in a permanent way. It requires a great authority for one to claim that he can tell us such a thing. And, that authority is *Maharṣi* Kapila. The greatest human effort (*atyantapurūṣārtha*?) turns out to be his concept of *vivekakhyaṭi*, which can be translated as self-realization. In his view the human life is very unique and precious and must be utilized to realize our own self, an effort that only the human beings are capable of doing and no other species can do.

Let us consider ourselves as a composite of body, mind and soul. The soul is the real "I". In simple terms, self-realization would mean that the soul should know itself. But it happens that the soul is always linked to the mind and gets to know what the mind brings to its attention. Thus, self-realization would mean that the soul should de-link itself from the mind, and having done so, it will become aware of its own true entity.

It is easy to appreciate that the soul can de-link itself from the mind only when it has understood the structure and functions of the mind, and thereby has gained sufficient control on its functions through austere practices that it can subdue all the functions of the mind. Once the functions of the mind are subdued, the soul may be able to de-link itself from the mind. This is where Patañjali's *Yoga-Darṣana* comes into picture, which has the objective of subduing the functions of the mind (*Yogaūcittatirodha*?). This is why, in the study of the Vedic philosophy, *Sâṅkhya* and *Yoga* are paired together.

THE MIND:

The present paper describes the mind and its functions based on the *Sâṅkhya-Darṣana*. What has been hitherto referred to as mind, constitutes three units called *manas*, *ahaṅkāra* and *mahat*. The third unit *mahat* is also called *buddhi*. Structurally speaking, *mahat* is the finest particle and is the unit that is in the closest vicinity of the soul. Outwardly, the soul is linked to the *mahat/buddhi*, which is then connected to the *ahaṅkāra*, and that is connected to the *manas*. The *manas* is then connected to the five organs for knowledge (*jñānendriya*, namely *cakṣu*, *śrotra*, *ghrāṇa*, *rasanā* and *tvak* for sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) and to the five organs for action (*karmendriya*, namely *hastā*, *pāda*, *vāk*, *upastha* and *pāyu* for manipulation, locomotion, speech, gratification and excretion).

**PERCEPTION:**

Our five senses pick up knowledge from the world. The body organs bring the same up to the corresponding organ for knowledge in an intricate manner. For example, the eyes (called *netra*) pick up the light rays falling onto it from an object to be perceived. The eye is an intricate and complex convex lens system, where the image falling on the retina is actually an inverted one. Then the complex electromagnetic waves transmit the signals through a web in the brain region. Ultimately, the signal is in the form that it can be picked up by the first unit of the mind, called *manas*. At this junction, the signal provider is called *cakṣu*, which brings the signal that emanated from the eyeball (called *netra*). *Manas* is the unit where five incoming channels converge, and it picks up one signal at a time. However, it must be scanning the five channels in such a rapid succession that we get an appearance as if, for example, we see and hear together while listening to a speaker who is in front of us.

Then *manas* transmits the signal to the second unit called *ahaṅkāra*. It must be pointed out here that no valid perception takes place if the *manas* has not captured the signal brought in by the gross sense organ. We are aware of the fact that sometimes we happen to have seen something but we didn't quite notice the same. The difference between "noticing" and "seeing" a thing depends on the fact whether the signal registered on the eyes were picked up by the *manas* or not.

Ahaṅkāra is the storage device, which stores the incoming knowledge routinely. Unless retrieved occasionally, the stored knowledge fades away with time. The intensity of its impression depends upon the intensity with which the knowledge was acquired, and how carefully it was preserved. It is known that when we acquire a particular knowledge with immense concentration then it is in memory for a very long time. If the same was acquired casually then the memory doesn't store it for a significant length of time. The second function of *ahaṅkāra* is to further transmit the incoming knowledge to *mahat*.

Mahat is the very first particle (or entity) that is created from the matter in its primordial state. Obviously, it's the smallest material entity, and this constitutes the unit of the mind that is in the closest vicinity of the soul. It picks up the incoming knowledge from the *ahaṅkāra*, and it is the destination as far as the act of perception is concerned – from the object of perception, to the particular sense organ on the body form, to the organ of knowledge that converges to the *manas*, from *manas* to the *ahaṅkāra*, and finally to the *mahat*, which finally displays the same to the presiding entity, the soul. Thus, the soul becomes aware of the incoming piece of knowledge. As *Sāṅkhya* states, *mahat* must be a very fascinating entity that it faithfully reproduces the incoming piece of knowledge instantly whether it be the shape and form of an object seen by the eyes, or the words heard by the ears, or the fragrance inhaled by the nose, or the texture touched by our all-enveloping skin, or the taste of something the tongue is in contact with – *rūpa, cābdā, rasa, gandha and sparśa*. The speeds involved in the innermost domains of ours where the soul is in the vicinity of *mahat*, must be gigantic and even much greater than the speed of light. Furthermore, remarkable is its ability to flick from one kind of knowledge to the other kind – the

five dimensions due to the five sense organs. It must be admired how Kapila could postulate all these complexities, which are so fascinating too. Now we will briefly discuss a very trivial event of, say, meeting a person after a decade or so.

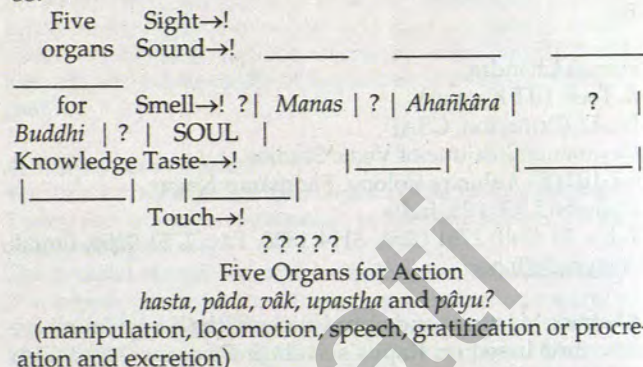


Figure 1: Acquisition of Knowledge, Retrieval of Past Knowledge, Decision Making And Action

A TRIVIAL EVENT IN LIFE:

Every moment we perceive so many things and identify the same. As soon as we see a flower, within moments we are able to say that it's a rose flower. Seeing is immediately followed by identification of the flower and we are able to say with utmost certainty that it's a rose flower. So is true about a friend of ours whom we may meet after about a decade. Let us closely examine such a trivial event and appreciate how fast and swift are the functions of the mind and its constituent units.

Consider seeing a human being. Identifying that this is a human being and not a tree, or a flower, or any other thing is instantaneous. Though it's a very trivial event yet the conclusion that it's a human being and nothing else must have required a number of current knowledge signals to be transmitted up to the *mahat* with simultaneous signals of the stored knowledge coming from the *ahaṅkāra* to the *mahat*, and then comparison being made that the current signals match with the stored knowledge about the human beings.

Now we identify that the human being is a particular person, say Mr. X whom we had last met about 10 years ago. Identifying a human face requires processing millions of visual signals emanating from the face and deriving a conclusion about the aggregate that is called a human face. If a face is seen today and is of the person whom we met yesterday then the conclusion about the identity of the person is simpler than in the present case when we met the person last time was about 10 years ago, because in the intervening period the particular face has undergone significant changes. The point we are trying to appreciate is that the seemingly trivial events we go through every moment of life require the mind to routinely function at a remarkably great speed. In particular, there is a constant travel of the knowledge data back and forth between *manas* and *mahat*, and between *ahaṅkāra* and *mahat*, to conclude the particular perception in a definite form. The amount of data, the speeds of their transfer, their storage and retrieval – all this will be found mind boggling by anybody.



PERCEPTION BECOMING AN EXPERIENCE:

Once the soul becomes aware of the incoming knowledge whether real time from the world or the past one from the *ahañkāra*, the same is felt by the soul because it's a conscious being. It is not merely an inanimate camera or such a thing, which has seen an object and stored the same. On the other hand, it is a conscious entity, which feels the pleasure and pain of the experiences. Thus, any perception, once it reaches the presiding entity, becomes an experience. The soul goes through an experience resulting in a wide range of emotions from pleasure to pain. For example, we may see a human being, and depending on who the person is and what our relationship with him is, and many other factors, we are likely to exhibit a wide range of experience. The fact that the soul experiences every event is reflected in the term that he is 'an enjoyer' too over and above being 'a knower'.

MIND IN ACTION:

Instinctively, we tend to upgrade our level of happiness. Even if we decide to go through a hardship, the objective is that it will upgrade our level of happiness at some other time. With this instinct being the prime mover, man tends to act upon the world through his gross motor organs in the body. The same are activated by the mind through the subtle *karmendriya*, which number five – *hasta, pāda, vāk, upastha* and *pāyū*? (manipulation, locomotion, speech, gratification or procreation and excretion).

Of course, prior to taking an action, the soul must decide the way it would want to act. The complex decision-making is at the *mahat* when the current incoming knowledge and the past knowledge stored in *ahañkāra* constantly traverse to the *mahat*. While *mahat* presents the possible options and their likely consequences, the soul exercises its prerogative of selecting the particular option. Though the decision-maker is the soul yet it is with the help of the mind. *Mahat* in the role of decision-making has been referred to as *buddhi* in the *Sāñkhya-Darśana*. What was hitherto referred to as *mahat* is generally called *buddhi* because of its ability to determine the destiny of a human being. In the literature, the role of *buddhi* has been described as that of a charioteer while the soul is the passenger in the chariot. The path a chariot is going to chart depends on what the charioteer has planned although it's expected generally that the charioteer will follow the passenger's command to take him to the destination. The role of *buddhi* is paramount in determining the manner in which way one would lead his life.

Once the decision is taken, it is communicated by the *buddhi* to *ahañkāra* and then to the *manas*. The *manas* then activates the appropriate *karmendriya*, which results in the body organs functioning in a particular manner. Through such acts, the soul exercises its role of doer (*karttā*) whence he influences the world to some extent.

FURTHER COMPLEXITIES IN BEHAVIOR:

As we saw earlier, the objective of the human beings according to the *Sāñkhya* is *vivekakhyāti* – self-realization. For one to achieve the same, the soul must be de-linked from the *buddhi*. Otherwise, it continues to gain the awareness of what *buddhi* displays to it. The necessary precondition for the soul to de-link from the *buddhi* would be a state of *buddhi* when it has

nothing to display to the soul. In other words, all its functions must be subdued in an absolute sense. That is why the *Yoga-Darśana* has the objective to subdue the functions of the *buddhi*. This in turn would require us to gain great control on the functions of the mind and all its constituent units, which would require a comprehensive understanding of the same. We would like to point out certain issues, which need to be explained in light of the *Sāñkhya-Darśana*.

Conditioning of the mind: One should like to understand conditioning of the mind. When I ride the bicycle for the first time in my life, it absorbs my full attention. After some years of experience, I can leisurely ride on the bicycle utilizing the mind in thinking, observing, singing, and even reading a book. In the second instance, the mind activates the *karmendriya* without much of its attention while in the first instance it was fully engrossed when I was riding the bicycle for the first time. The difference in the two instances is mainly due to the associated practice I have gained when the mind got conditioned repeatedly in so far as the act of riding a bicycle is concerned.

Influencing the nature of the mind: It is said about our personality that all is in our mind. On seeing someone's money purse on the pavement, one person likes to pocket the easy money while another wants to rush it to the original owner. There are many who will even pick someone else's pocket. Though all these people are human beings yet they are different in their behavior. The difference originates from the nature of their *buddhi*. *Sāñkhya* suggests that *buddhi*, as any other material thing, could be broadly classified into three categories of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. It should be our concern how to influence the *buddhi* so as to change its nature from one category to another.

Memory: For students and all others, it is important to store the knowledge for a significant length of time. Improving the memory may be possible through a better understanding of the *ahañkāra* and its functions.

There can be many other facets of the mind that can be unfolded with a better understanding of the *Sāñkhya-Darśana* by Kapila. We know that the mind plays the most crucial role in determining the human destiny. It is rightly said that the biggest wars first occur in a human mind before they are fought in the battlefields.

DISCUSSION:

*Maṭar*ⁱ Kapila has presented a very fascinating model for the human mind though the primary objective of his treatise is to reach the stage of self-realization. The mind has three constituent units called *manas*, *ahañkāra* and *mahat* (or *buddhi*). Typical functions of perception, experience, and action have been described to highlight the role of the soul as *jñātā*, *bhoktā* and *karttā*. It has been pointed out that the description of several other patterns of our behavior needs to be better explained through *Sāñkhya* such as the conditioning of mind, influencing the nature of the *buddhi*, better memory, etc.