CHAPTER – VII

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In the foregoing chapters we have already pointed to some of the distinctive features of Radhanath Phukan’s philosophical thought. In this chapter we propose to discuss in detail two main features of his philosophy which distinguish him from other thinkers of his time. In the first place he has always tried to establish some synthesis among different philosophical systems. In his view, there is no important difference among the basic theories of Saṅkhya and Vedānta. Let us now see how he has shown this similarity between these two rival systems which are regarded as upholding opposite views.

1. SYNTHESIS OF SĀMKHYA AND VEDĀNTA

(i) Advaita Vedānta Philosophy of Saṅkaracārya

The most prominent and important school of Vedānta is the Advaita Vedānta or non-dualistic Vedānta propounded by Saṅkaracārya. Saṅkara’s philosophy is called non-dualism or monism as he maintains that Brahman is the ultimate reality which is one and without a second.¹ The whole philosophy of Sāṅkara can be summarised thus: brahma satyam, jagannitha, jīvo brahmaiva nāparah. (Brahman is real, the world is false, the individual self is not different from Brahman). This supreme reality nirguna (qualityless), nirviṣeṣa (attributeless) and nirvikāra (immutable). Brahman is the only ontological reality. According to Saṅkaracārya,

1. ekamevādvitiyam. CU, 6.2.1
Brahman is one, non-dual, indeterminate, changeless and inactive. It is devoid of all differences: homogeneous (sajatiya) heterogeneous (vijatiya) and internal (svagata). There is nothing similar to it, nor dissimilar also. Further Brahman has no internal variety. As such it is devoid of any type of difference.² Brahman is again described as nityasuddha – buddha – mukta – svabhāva (i.e., eternal, pure, conscious and ever free).³ Moreover, Brahman is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss – saccidānandarūpa.⁴ However, according to Śaṅkara, the nature of Brahman cannot be expressed by any positive definition. As such, Brahman is avanmānasagocara.⁵ Regarding the concept of Brahman of Śaṅkara, Radhakrishnan said, “Brahman has no genus, possesses no qualities, does not act, and is related to nothing else. It is devoid of anything of a like kind or of a different kind, and has no internal variety.”⁶

Though Brahman is in its essential nature nirguna, Brahman appears to be saguna and sakriya when it is endowed with māya, the inexpressible cosmic power.⁷ However, in Śaṅkara’s view, the same Brahman is saguṇa and nirguṇa being viewed from two different standpoints. From the transcendental point of view, Brahman is nirguṇa and nīskriya, while from the empirical view-point it is saguṇa. The saguṇa Brahman is endowed with innumerable good qualities like omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence etc. and is related with the world process.⁸

2. Cf. Anandagiri’s Commentary on Ibid.
3. Śaṅkarabhāṣya on Gīta, Introduction.
4. Cf. VPa, P. 228
5. BSS, 3.2.22
7. BSS, 2.1.14; 3.2.14
8. Ibid., 1.1.12

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The saguna Brahman is Isvara or God who occupies a lower status than Brahman and has a phenomenal character. This Isvara is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe. Now, according to Saṅkara, the world is false, it has no ultimate reality. Hence, the creation of this world also implies that the creator is not ultimately real. That is why Saṅkara has maintained that Isvara is only a phenomenal reality.

Following the upaniṣadic statements Saṅkara regards Brahman as the only cause of the world; it is both the material as well as the efficient cause of the world. However, in Saṅkara’s view, the world is not a real transformation (parināma) of Brahman. It is an apparent manifestation (vivarta) just like the rope which appears as the snake. This implies that the world-cause cannot be anything other than Brahman, and at the same time Brahman is not related with the world in the true sense of the term.

It is already mentioned that according to Saṅkara, the world is false. In his view, real is that which is existent at all times and is never contradicted. The world of multiplicity is not present at all times and is not self-explanatory. In liberation, the world as we perceive it, is transcended. This is what is called the falsity of the world by Saṅkarācārya. The world is false, because it is neither real, nor totally unreal, but indescribable, it is only an appearance.

For explaining the world of appearance Saṅkara has taken the help of māyā or avidyā. According to him, it is māyā that is responsible for the plurality of our perception. It is impossible to explain through logical categories the relation

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9. Ibid., 1.1.2: 1.4.23
10. Ibid., 2.1.14: 1.4.26
11. SBa on TU, 2.1
12. Ibid., 2.1.14

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between Brahman and the world. This is a mystery which cannot be solved by human understanding. This *mâyā* is not real, but inexplicable and has two functions—concealment of real Brahman and projection of the unreal world. *Mâyā* is described as a power of *Īśvara* and as consisting of the three guṇas of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.\(^{13}\) It is with this *mâyā* that the empirical existence of the individual selves and the world is explained by the Advaita Vedāntins.

The central import of the *Advaitavāda* of Śaṅkara is the identity of the *jīva* or the individual self with Brahman. It is only because of the *upādhi*, i.e., the mind-body-complex, which is again the effect of *avidyā* or *mâyā*, that the *jīva* appears as different from Brahman.\(^{14}\) Therefore we can say that ontologically, *jīva* and Brahman are not separate. "As Brahman the *jīva* is of nature of existence, consciousness and bliss and is indeterminate, changeless, and without a second."\(^{15}\) When the *jīva* attains the right knowledge of the self, it attains liberation. It is because of *mâyā* that the *jīva* perceives itself as different from Brahman and as undergoing births and deaths. When this *mâyā* or *avidyā* is destroyed by the knowledge of Brahman as identical with the *jīva*, liberation is attained.\(^{16}\)

2. RADHANATH PHUKAN'S VIEW ON SYNTHESIS

From our foregoing discussion it is clear that there is a vast difference between the views of the Śaṅkhyas and the Advaita Vedāntins. While Advaitins uphold monism, the Śaṅkhyas uphold pluralism. Though both these schools uphold *Satkāryavāda* as the theory of causation, there is difference regarding the ultimate cause. The vedāntins accept the conscious Brahman as the ultimate cause of the

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13. *Vivekacūḍāmani*, 108  
14. BSS, 2.3.30  
15. Sanyal, Jagadiswar, *Guide To Indian Philosophy*, P. 354  
16. BSS, 1.1.4, VPa, Pp. 292-293
world. The Śāṁkhyaśa, on the other hand, maintain that unconscious Prakṛti or Pradhāna is the ultimate cause of the world. The Advaita vedāntins uphold vivartavāda against the parināmanavāda of the Śāṁkhyas. Hence, doubt arises as to how these two systems can be synthesised. Let us now discuss the view of Radhanath Phukan who categorically says that there is no basic difference between these two schools.

First of all Phukan says that the Upaniṣads constitute the basis of all the Indian philosophical systems.\(^{17}\) It is also true that all these systems do not uphold the same view. Similarly there are differences between the Śāṁkhya and Vedānta. But according to Phukan, these differences are only from the point of view. He says, “There is no important difference between the Śāṁkhya and the Vedānta philosophy; what difference there is, is in the angle of vision.”\(^{18}\) According to Radhanath Phukan, only the process of explanation is different between these two systems. In the Vedānta philosophy, the world is seen from the transcendental point of view. But in the Śāṁkhya philosophy, the world is seen from the empirical point of view.\(^{19}\) Phukan said, “In Vedānta, the world is seen from the outside with a subtle philosophical mind; hence in order to understand the reasoning of the Vedānta, it requires a minimum intellectual capacity. In Śāṁkhya, on the other hand, the world is seen broadly from the worldly point of view. It takes one gradually to matters more and more subtle and ultimately leads him to a stage from which he may easily realize all the fundamentals.”\(^{20}\) Phukan shows us that there is no difference between Vedānta and Śāṁkhya from the transcendental point of view.

\(^{17}\) VD, Phukan, Radhanath, (Introduction), P. 203
\(^{18}\) Phukan, Radhanath, SKI, (Introduction), P. 569
\(^{19}\) Ibid., SD, Phukan, Radhanath, P. 329
\(^{20}\) Phukan, Radhanath, SKI, (Introduction), P. 569
A very beautiful example is given by Phukan to make this idea clear. If a one rupee note is regarded to be a piece of paper, it is correct and if it is regarded to be one rupee than also it is correct.\textsuperscript{21} In the same way, Saṁkhya has observed a picture from one side and Vedānta from another side. But the real fact is the same in both the case.

As Upanisads are the source of Vedānta and Saṁkhya, there can not be any important difference between them. This idea finds a support in the words of S.N. Dasgupta also. He says, “Though there were so many differences, it is however easy to see that probably at the time of the origin of the two systems during the Upanisadic period each was built up from very similar ideas which differed only in tendencies that gradually manifested themselves into the present divergences of the two systems.” \textsuperscript{22}

Supporting the view of Phukan, he refers to the opinion of Narasiṁha Svāmin, and Manoranjan Sāstri. According to Narasiṁha Svāmin,”there was fundamentally no difference between the Saṁkhya and Vedānta.” \textsuperscript{23} Again Monoranjan Sāstri says, “In ancient times, the Saṁkhya philosophy and the Vedānta proceed from one system and were interdependent.” \textsuperscript{24}

Radhanath Phukan’s main argument centres round the concept of \textit{Avyakta}. He has tried to synthesise the two concepts viz, \textit{Avyakta} and Brahman. He pointed out that the Saṁkhya’s \textit{Avyakta} corresponds to the brahman of Vedānta.\textsuperscript{25} Regarding the concept of \textit{Avyakta}, Radhanath Phukan’s own view is noteworthy. According

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. VD, Phukan, Radhanath, P. 203
\textsuperscript{22} Dasgupta, S.N., \textit{History of Indian Philosophy}, Vol. 1., P. 493
\textsuperscript{23} Phukan, Radhanath, SKI, P. 581
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} VD, Phukan, Radhanath, P. 213
to him:

(1) *Avyakta* is the ultimate cause which itself is causeless. (2) *Avyakta* is the state before creation. (3) It is the union of both *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*. (4) *Avyakta* is not the *Pradhāna* or *Prakṛti*. (5) *Avyakta* is not unconscious. It is all-pervading. It is also beyond the world. (6) It is beyond space and time. (7) *Avyakta* is all knowing and all-powerful. (8) *Avyakta* is one. (9) *Avyakta* is actionless and the seer.

Already the above mentioned points are extensively discussed in the respective chapter of this dissertation. So, we only mention these points here.

Now let us see why Radhanath Phukan has tried to establish that *Avyakta* is one and all-pervading. He argues that *Avyakta* must be immanent in everything. He said that two different all-pervading entities cannot exist. So, *Avyakta* is one and all-pervading.

Radhanath Phukan also argues that at the stage of *Avyakta* i.e. before creation only indivisible consciousness exists which is beyond time and space, and also beyond the world. It is impossible to accept many all-knowing and all-powerful entities. All these correspond to the concept of Brahman in Advaita Vedānta.

Another basis point of difference between Sāṁkhya and Advaita vedānta refers to the number of self. According to the Sāṁkhya's there are many *Puruṣas* or selves. The Advaita Vedānta, on the other hand, maintains that the self is only one which is non-different from Brahman. On this point also Phukan upholds some exceptional view. He maintains that just like the Vedānta, the Sāṁkhya's *Puruṣa* cannot be many, but one. Phukan opines that in transcendental level the self is one. It is only in the empirical level that there are many selves. One transcendental *Pumān* becomes many *Puruṣas* empirically.²⁶ In this respect Phukan

²⁶ Cf. VSi, Phukan, Radhanath, P. 468
refers to the opinion of Gerald James and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya. “There is no contradiction between Śāmkhya and Vedānta, for the Brahmaśūtra, itself establishes the plurality of īvās. Although the plurality of consciousness, the Śāmkhya is not invalidated there-by, for there is no contradiction in the doctrine of the plurality of empired selves being useful in the discipline of liberation. Thus the relation between the Śāmkhya and the Vedānta is that between the practical view and the transcendental view.” 27 Phukan also shows the view of Vidyāranyamuni. In his work Pañcadasī, Vidyāranyamuni says that if the Śāmkhyas give up the theory of the plurality of the īvās and that of the reality of the world, then there will be no difference between Vedānta and Śāmkhya.28

Again, he has tried to synthesise these two systems from the point of causality also. The main cause of the distinction between the Śāmkhya and the Vedānta is that of consciousness and unconsciousness. But Phukan argues that actually there is no cause of distinction. According to the Phukan the root cause of this world is not called unconscious in the Śāmkhya philosophy. Although all the Vyaktas or wordly objects are produced from the subtle Avyakta, the Avyakta of Śāmkhya and the Brahman of Vedānta are the same. Though Śāmkhya accepts Prakṛti as a separate category yet considering the Avyakta, there is no difference between the two.29 Phukan also said that before creation, at the stage of equilibrium of the guṇas, there was no action in this world, there was not any unconscious thing also. At that stage only indivisible consciousness existed. This is the Avyakta

27. Larson, Gerald James and Bhattacharya, Ram Shankar, Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol. IV (Śāmkhya), P. 579
28. ātmabheda jagat satyaṁśo'nya iti cet trayam /
   tyajate taistadā śāṁkhya-yogavedānta sammatih // Pañcadasī, Citradīp, 6.228
29. VD, Phukan, Radhanath, P. 236
of Samkhya and the Brahman of Vedanta. In the stage of Avyakta, it is accepted that the consciousness and productive capacity of Brahman is inseparable. When the world is manifested then the consciousness and productive capacity and manifested objects are separated. Thus, the Avyakta Prakṛti creates all manifested objects. Radhanath Phukan says that many Purusas are the manifested from of Avyakta Purusa. Therefore, the root cause is not unconscious. Vijnānabhikṣu’s view also gives support to the view of Radhanath Phukan. Vijnānabhikṣu holds that the originally Brahman, the Prakṛti and the Purusas exist in the eternal consciousness and as such are held together as one.

The difference of vivartavāda and parināmavāda can also be solved in the same way. Both the Samkhya and Vedanta systems depend on satkāryavāda according to which the effect exists in a subtle state in the cause. The effect is only a manifestation. The Samkhyas explain this from the empirical point of view and give the examples of oilseed and oil etc. This is parināmavāda. The Vedāntins explain this from the transcendental point of view. No change is possible in Brahman which is immutable. Hence, they forward vivartavāda and give examples of rope and snake etc. Though Phukan has not explained this with so many words we find support of his view in the words of Sarvajñātman, an Advaita Vedantin of 10th century A.D. Sarvajñātman shows that parināmavāda is only a lower step towards the understanding of vivartavāda. He also says that the theory of parināma is useful for the explanation of the empirical activities. “Thus, according to the Advaita Vedāntins, parināmavāda is a starting point for understanding the cause-and-effect

30. SD, Phukan, Radhanath, Pp. 340, 343
31. SSa, 1.61
relation advocated in *vivartavāda* and that the former ultimately ends in the latter.\(^{32}\)

3. SĀMKHYA PHILOSOPHY AND MODERN SCIENCE

Another distinctive characteristic of Phukan is to explain the ancient Indian philosophies with the help of modern science. From his writings we come to know that many problems of philosophy and also of mythology can be solved with the modern scientific theories such as the theory of Relativity and Quantum theory. Here we propose to show the similarities between Sāmkhya philosophy and modern science as mentioned by Phukan. All these things have already been referred to by us in the foregoing chapters. Here we will try to discuss these in some length. Let us now first of all give idea of these theories of modern science.

(i) Quantum Theory

Quantum theory is the theoretical basis of modern physics which is the nature and behavior of matter and radiation (energy) on the atomic and sub-atomic level. Quantum theory is one of the most sophisticated theories of modern science. This theory originates from the radiation of heat energy by a black body in physics.\(^{33}\) Black body radiation is the radiated heat energy by a perfect emitter and absorber in the form of wave.\(^{34}\) According to Quantum theory energy is always emitted or absorbed in discrete manner (energy packets or quanta) and each discrete energy packet never contains energy below a minimum value. It is almost similar to the exchange of coins in our day to day life etc.\(^{35}\) In 1900, Max Planck, who was a physicist, presented his Quantum theory of radiation to the German physical society.

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32. Bhattacharya Purkayastha, Sujata, *Sarvajñātmamuni's Contribution To Advaita Vedānta*, P. 149
34. Cf. *Chemistry*, Choudhury, Dr. Kamalesh and Choudhury, Dr. Satyendra Kumar, P. 324

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Planck assumed that energy existed in individual units in the same way that matter does, rather than just as a continuous electromagnetic wave—as had been formerly assumed and was therefore quantifiable. These individual units of energy are called quanta or protons.

Quantum theory was developed by various scientists such as Albert Einstein (1905), Louis de Broglie (1924), Neils Bohr (1913), Werner Heisenberg (1927) etc.

In 1924 Louis de Broglie discovered the wave nature and the wave length of electrons. This is the beginning of the new Quantum theory. The New Quantum theory unified our view of waves and particles and gave firm principles for applying quantum conditions. Following up the new line of approach professor Schroedinger, in 1925 conceived the electrons not as tiny particles of manner; but as electric charge distributed around the nucleus of the atoms. He pictures this micro-cosmic electrical field as in a state of vibratory motion. On the foundation of that hypothesis he formulated the theory of wave Mechanics. Thus, de Broglie, Schroedinger and other scientists have proved by their discoveries that there is no substance in this universe. The universe is made of waves and particles; this is the universe of wavicles.

(ii) Theory of Relativity

In 1905, Einstein established the special theory of Relativity. This theory is intimately connected with the theory of space and time. Theory of Relativity

36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Introductory Physics, Warren, Mashul, L., P. 525
40. Science and Philosophy, Roy, M.N., P. 96
41. Vide., Kuri Satikar Padarththa Bijan, Chutiya, Dr. Jayanti, P. 5
resembles a building consisting of two separate stories, the special theory and the
general theory. His special theory of relativity and the general theory of relativity
were theorised in 1905 and 1911 respectively. The special theory of relativity
applies to all physical phenomena with the exception of gravitation and the general
relativity provides the law of gravitation and its relations to the other forces of
nature. The special theory of relativity deals with reference frames moving
uniformly along a straight line, called inertial frames and all universal laws of
nature are equally valid in this type of inertial frames (Special Principle of relativity).
The second principle on which the special relativity theory rests, is the principle
of constant velocity of light speed in vacuum. This principle asserts that light in
vacuum always has a definite velocity of propagation independent of the state of
motion of the observer or of the source of light.42 The principles of special theory
of relativity forced Einstein to discard the old concept of absolute space and absolute
time and introduce the concept of relative space and relative time in physics.

Again the concept of Einstein’s theory of general relativity is more
comprehensive where gravity is treated as geometric phenomenon of a curved
space time co-ordinate system, corresponding to an accelerating reference frame.43

(iii) Thermo Dynamics

Thermodynamics is the branch of physical science concerned with heat
and its relation to other forms of energy and work. It defines macrosopic variables
(such as temperature, entropy and pressure) that describe average properties of

42. Einstein, Albert, Ideas And Opinions, Pp. 228-229
43. Ibid.

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material bodies and radiation, and explains how they are related and by what laws they change with time. Thermodynamics does not describe the microscopic constituents of matter and its laws can be derived from statistical mechanics.44

Thermodynamics is contained in its four laws. The first law specifies that energy can be exchanged between physical systems as heat and thermodynamic work. The second law of thermodynamics is an expression of the tendency that over time, differences in temperature, pressure and chemical potential equilibrate in an isolated physical system. From the state of thermodynamic equilibrium, the law deduced the principle of the increase of entropy and explains the phenomenon of irreversibility in nature.45

The Second Law essentially says that it is impossible to obtain a process where the unique effect is the subtraction of a positive heat from a reservoir and the production of a positive work. Energy exhibits entropy. It moves away from its sources. In this sense, energy or heat cannot flow from a colder body to hotter body. The second law is the must powerful and has the most implications. Regarding the second law of thermodynamics, Homer Simpson, who was a scientist said that In this house, we obey the Second Law of Thermodynamics.46

Entropy of a thermodynamics system is a property of the system like its pressure, volume, temperature etc. used to describe the state of the system.47

"Energy can only move forward and never backward, with time, Entropy increases, never does it decrease."48

46. Ibid.
47. *Physics*, Borgohain, Dr. Pabitra, P. 100
48. Phukan, Radhanath, SKI, P. 575

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(iv) Radhanath Phukan’s View

Now let us see how can Phukan synthesise between the Sāṁkhya and modern science. Radhanath Phukan pointed out that the method of analysis is the same in the Sāṁkhya as in the modern science. He has established that as like Sāṁkhya, modern science is also firstly, analysed from gross matter which is carried ultimately to such a subtle stage that one may doubt whether the universe is at all real.

Depending on the theory of Relativity, Radhanath Phukan showed that real time is one and indivisible for all persons living in the same world but the measurement of time is different for a person living in a different world. Sāṁkhya philosophy also accepts that from the transcendental point of view, the real time is one and indivisible.

With the help of the Second Law of Thermo Dynamics, Phukan explains the creation theory of Sāṁkhya philosophy. It is already said that according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, transformation of energy is sustained i.e. this transformation is unending. Because entropy increases, never does it decrease. The Sāṁkhya also maintains that transformation of guna is not ending. In the words of Phukan, “The Universe is, according to scientists, heading towards disorganization from an organized state. There will came a time after which there will be no transformation or change of any sort. Everything will ultimately be transformed into pure energy. There is no power known which can stop this headlong progress towards complete disorganization.”

Again he says, “So also the Sāṁkhya Philosophy says that there is no end to the transformation of the Guṇas and that the said transformation has an object.”

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
Moreover, according to Phukan the three gunas of Sāṁkhya correspond to the three Laws of Motion of Newton. “In classical Physics they are called inertia, acceleration and reaction and in modern physics, mass (or energy), momentum and stress.”\textsuperscript{51} The three gunas, viz., sattāv, rajās and tamās possess the nature as these laws. This has already been discussed by us in chapter dealing with Sāṁkhya Guna. So here we only mention it.

Radhanath said that Sāṁkhya has come to a specific point explaining the view that Avyakta is one and Vyaktas are multiple and there is no plurality in the transcendental level. According to modern science, if there is not any influence of energy on the world then plurality also does not exist.\textsuperscript{52}

From the foregoing discussions we can say that Radhanath Phukan’s thoughts were distinctive in many ways. His treatment of Indian philosophical system from the standpoint of modern scientific discoveries is unique in many senses. It appears that his exposition in this respect is actually pioneering. Of course now-a-days many scholars have come forward to explain the age-old philosophical concepts of India with the help of modern science.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., P. 587
\textsuperscript{52} Cf. VSi, Phukan, Radhanath, Pp. 460-461