

The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra Criticizes the Sāṃkhya Thought

Gishin Tokiwa

I. *The Sāṃkhya thought referred to in the sūtra*

The *Laṅkāvatāra sūtra* (*LS*) refers to the Sāṃkhya doctrine several times. A passage mentions “pralayaḥ” in connection with an interpretation by some tīrthakaras (sacred-way pursuers) of anityatā named “saṃsthāna-vinivṛttiḥ.” The *LS* explicitly defines this as the Sāṃkhya view (Vaidya ed. 84, Nanjo 207)¹.

Another passage mentions “prakṛti-puruṣa-antara-darśanaṃ” and “[prakṛti-] guṇa-pariṇāma-kartṛtvam” in connection with a tīrthakara understanding of nirvāṇa (V 74, N 183)².

Another passage refers to tīrthakaras who wrongly surmise that nirvāṇa can be attained through “pañca-viṃśati-tattva-avabodhaḥ” (V 74, N 184)³.

These references, though not many, may suffice for me to conclude that the Sāṃkhya concepts mentioned in the *LS* show no difference in their contents from that tradition of the system presented in the *Sāṃkhya-kārikāḥ* (*SK*) of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. To say more than this about the period of these and other Sāṃkhya references in the *LS* goes beyond the present stage of my study.

II. *The Laṅkāvatāra sūtra that criticizes the Sāṃkhya view*

(1) The *LS* gives the reason why people come to support the wrong views of tīrthakaras: kathaṃ ca mahāmate tīrthakara-vāda-kudṛṣṭi-sādhāraṇā bhavanti? svacitta-viṣaya-vikalpa-dṛṣṭy-anavabodhanād-vijñānānām (V 19, N 40). By the realization of “svacitta-viṣaya-vikalpa-dṛṣṭiḥ” the *LS* means attaining udadhi-taraṃga-ālayavijñāna-gocaraṃ dharmakāyam (V 20, N 43-4).

This refers to no mere easy identification of two opposing principles but to the full Awakening of ālayavijñāna to its true Self, or ālayavijñāna-svajāti-lakṣaṇam (V 18, N 38). This kind of Awakening “tears asunder the appearance of truthfulness of all the verbal expositions and reasonings” (V 20, N 43). It

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is the “heart of all the Awakened Ones’ proclamations” (ibid.).

The second chapter of the *LS*, *Ṣaṭtriṃśat-sahasra-sarva-dharma-samuccayaḥ*, begins with Mahāmati praising the Awakened One in gāthās. The Awakened One is praised because this very world (lokaḥ) is by Him realized to be free from rise and decay like sky-flowers (*k* 1ab), as free from being eternal-and-perishing, which always resembles a dream (*k* 3ab). Further, Mahāmati says that the true mode of honoring the Awakened One is that everything, that is free from its self-nature, is free from rise (*k* 4).

In the third chapter *Anityatā* the *LS* states,

svacitta-dṛśya-mātrāvabodhād-vikalpasya-apravṛtteḥ svastho loko niṣkriyaḥ.
bālāḥ kriyāvantaṃ kalpayanti, na tv-āryāḥ (V 80, N 199).

The term “svasthaḥ” appears in the *SK* 65, where the term refers to puruṣa which sees prakṛti cease to be productive; it never refers to prakṛti, no matter in what state the latter may be.

In the *SK* 10, the manifested (vyaktam) is said to be active but unstable (sakriyam), whereas the unmanifested (avyaktam), i. e., both puruṣa and prakṛti, are the reverse. When prakṛti is said to be the reverse of “sakriyam,” it cannot help being temporary inactivity, as I will explain later.

The *LS* statement quoted above from the third chapter was given by the Awakened One in answering Mahāmati’s question on whether there is any difference of views between the Awakened One and tīrthakaras. Mahāmati says,
na bhagavatā-anirodhānutpāda-darśanena kiṃcid-viśiṣyate. tat-kasya hetoḥ ?
sarva-tīrthakarāṇām-api bhagavan-kāraṇāny-anutpannāny-aniruddhāni.
aṇu-pradhāna-īśvara-prajāpati-prabhṛtayo nava-dravya-sahitā aniruddhā anut-
pannāḥ (V 80, N 197-8).

(2) In the *LS*, the ālayavijñāna that is awakened to its true Self is also called “tathāgatagarbhaḥ,” “garbhas-tathāgatānām” (6 *Kṣaṇika*), i. e., the matrix-abode of all tathāgatas or that which precedes even tathāgatas. The *Lalitavistara* mentions how a bodhisattva who has already attained Awakening in the Tuṣita heaven chooses life and death in the saha-world and comes to abide in the womb of Lady Māyā (6 *Garbhāvākraṇti*). The basic problem which the *Lalitavistara* (“Sport that is Extensive”) presents to us through this

term “tathāgatagarbhaḥ” is,

What is that which lives and dies ?

The *Lalitavistara* seems to mean that that which lives and dies is the true Self that neither lives nor dies, the Self that has no form of self or no-self, the ālayavijñāna-svajāti-lakṣaṇa. That is why the *LS* states (ibid.),

tathāgatagarbhaḥ punar-mahāmate saṃsarati nirvāṇa-sukha-duḥkha-hetukaḥ
(V 98, N 242).

For the *LS* which speaks of ālayavijñāna-svajāti-lakṣaṇa, it took only a step forward to mention “tathāgatagarbha-śabda-saṃśabdita ālayavijñānam” (V 90, N 221) or “ālayavijñāna-saṃśabditas-tathāgatagarbhaḥ” (V 90, N 222). For those who are unawakened to their true Self, that which lives and dies remains to be that which binds themselves, whereas to the Awakened Ones it manifests its true reality, as the *LS* describes comparing Awakening to an āmalaka fruit in the palm of one’s hand (V 90-1, N 222).

When the two terms, tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna, are used as synonyms, this, here too, does not mean any confusion or conceptual identification between awakening and delusion or uselessness of attaining Awakening. It rather means the urgent necessity to attain, the unfailing prospect of attaining, and the ultimate directness of Awakening. Unless the discriminating basis of our ordinary mode of life is turned over through Awakening, no one can be free from bondage (V 90, N 221).

The *LS* advocates our realization of “svacitta-dṛśya-mātram” (V 19, N 40) as the method of attaining Awakening. Since we do not realize that what is seen is nothing but Me that is formless, we discriminate being from nonbeing, taking the two concepts for ultimate principles. This latter occurs with the Sāṃkhya adherents.

III. *The Laṅkāvatāra sūtra criticizing the Sāṃkhya thought*

(1) As has already been noticed, several terms of the *SK* can be discovered in the *LS* with or without slight alteration. There in the *SK*, prakṛti is compared to a female dancer (nartaki) who ceases to dance (nivartate nṛyāt) after exhibiting herself to the spectators (59). Here in the *LS* tathāgatagarbha or citta dances like a male dancer (naṭavat-nṛtyate. V 91, N 224: k 4a), or

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proceeds with a variety of gaits (*gati-saṃkataḥ*, V 90, N 220). Here *tathāgatagarbha* is said to be the cause of good and evil, the maker of all modes of life. It is also said that *tathāgatagarbha* is free from being me and mine. When this is not realized, the three conditions (*tri-saṃgati-pratyayāḥ*, i. e., *ajñānam*, *trṣṇā*, and *karman*) become active and prevail (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, *prakṛti* is that which produces, that which is never produced (*SK* 3a). She causes the unmanifested to be manifest (*SK* 16a). Unlike *tathāgatagarbha*, *prakṛti* is not possessed of the self-redemptive nature which *puruṣa* has (*SK* 3d), although *puruṣa* lacks the self-redemptive movement by himself. That is why *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* must first associate each other, like a lame person and a blind one, so that *puruṣa*, but not *prakṛti*, may be led to redemption (*SK* 21).

What appears strange at least from the *LS* viewpoint, *prakṛti* never finds redemption in whatever manner. It is *puruṣa* that attains redemption through isolating himself from *prakṛti*, the cause of worldly pain (*SK* 68). This means that the principle of redemption finds itself abiding in itself, whereas what is to be redeemed is eternally forsaken.

Prakṛti manifests herself just as people cannot help occupying themselves with bodily action because they want to get rid of anxiety (*SK* 58). *Prakṛti* does so in order that *puruṣa* may liberate himself from her (*ibid.*). *Prakṛti* may represent the world and history, and *puruṣa* religion. Then all their relationship between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* may mean that essentially world-history has nothing to do with religion, although apparently the former suffers from pain so as to have the latter be reminded of itself and attain freedom from the former. Is this not an Indian version of Platonism?

(2) The *LS* criticizes *tīrthakaras* because they do not rightly realize what appears as external (*viśayaḥ*), stating thus,
tīrthakarāṇām mahāmate ayam vādo yaduta viśaya-grahaṇōparamād-vijñāna-prabandhōparamo bhavati. vijñāna-prabandhōparamād-anādikāla-prabandha-vyucchittiḥ syāt (V 18, N 38-9).

According to this view, when one ceases to attach oneself to the external world, his beginningless discriminative mind ceases to continue worrying him.

But, can this peace be enduring? The external world may have exhausted him so terribly and made him hate it so strongly that he may want eternal retirement from it. He will retire within, leaving the world without. But no one can say that this “within” will never turn out to be “without.” Nowhere will he be free from the incessant and beginningless perfuming force of ālayavijñāna to manifest itself as the external world.

The above-quoted tīrthakara view can be traced in the *SK*. Together with every manifested form, prakṛti serves as the object of perception (viśayaḥ) by puruṣa. When puruṣa loses interest in prakṛti and her manifestation (viśaya-grahaṇōparamāt), prakṛti ceases to be active, and no more attracts puruṣa. That is what the *SK* 66 means.

Because of the association with puruṣa, insentient (acetanam) prakṛti-manifestation appears as if sentient (cetanāvad-iva). At the same time the inactive puruṣa (udāsinaḥ) comes to appear like an active worker (*SK* 20). But once puruṣa becomes indifferent to prakṛti, the latter returns to insentience and inactivity. It seems as if “anādikāla-prabandhaḥ” as well as “vijñāna-prabandhaḥ” were completely cut off. They appear to have lost their resting place because as for prakṛti it is said,

samsarati badhyate mucyate ca nānāśrayā prakṛtiḥ (*SK* 62cd).

But the truth is, prakṛti is never emancipated. She just keeps inactive, at least with puruṣa A, who no more takes interest in her. But then puruṣa B will come to be attracted by her, and then puruṣa C, D, E, and so on. In the Sāṃkhya doctrine puruṣa must be plural (*SK* 18) because there is no real emancipation of prakṛti. Here we know how relevant the *LS* criticism of the Sāṃkhya thought is:

te [sāṃkhya-vādinō] mahāmate samtati-kriyōtpāda-bhaṅga-bhava-nirvāṇa-mārga-karma-phala-satya-vināśōccheda-vādinō bhavanti (V 19, N 40).

1) Cf. the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* 69cd; 45ab “prakṛti-layaḥ.”

2) Cf. the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* 37cd; 68 “kaivalyam”; 20 “guṇa-kartṛtvam”; 27 “guṇa-pariṇāmaḥ”. For the last term, see E. H. Johnston, *Early Sāṃkhya* pp. 32-3, 69.

3) Cf. Gauḍapāda’s commentary to the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* 1.