



CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

Volume: 01 Issue: 01 | Oct 2020

Metaphysical Dualism in Samkhya's Philosophy

Mahendra Singh

Associate Professor, Philosophy, G.D. Govt. College for Women, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

Received 22nd August 2020, Accepted 24th September 2020, Online 30th October 2020

Abstract— Generally, the Samkhya system classifies all objects as falling under one of the two categories: Purusha and Prakriti. Metaphysically, Samkhya maintains a revolutionary duality between spirit/consciousness (Purusha) and matter (Prakriti).

Purusha

Purusha is the Transcendental Self or Pure Consciousness. It is absolute, independent, free, imperceptible, unknowable, above any experience and beyond any words or explanation. It remains pure, "non-attributive consciousness". Purusha is neither produced nor does it produce.

Prakriti

Prakriti is matter. Matter is inert, transient, and unconscious. It is made up of three qualities (gunas) equivalent to creation, sustenance, and destruction. They comprise:

sattva (goodness) - pure, elevating, enlightening

rajas (passion) - incites one to create, acquire and enjoy

tamas (ignorance) - dirty, demeaning, deceiving, and destructive.

All physical events are considered as manifestations of the evolution of Prakriti, or primal Nature (from which every physical body is derived). Each sentient being is a Purusha, and is unbounded and unrestricted by its physical body. Samsara or bondage arises when the Purusha does not have the discriminative knowledge and so is misguided as to its own identity, confusing itself with the physical body - which is in fact an evolute of Prakriti. The spirit is liberated when the discriminative knowledge of the difference between conscious Purusha and unconscious Prakriti is realised.

Ishvara (Creationist God)

The original school of Samkhya was founded by Sage Kapila. There was no philosophical berth for a creationist God in this system. The Samkhyans argue that the existence of Ishvara cannot be testified and hence cannot be admitted to exist. The school also debates that an unchanging Ishvara as the cause cannot be the source of a changing world as the effect.

Later on followers of Samkhya adopted theism and included Ishvara within the system. The concept of Ishvara was contained into the Samkhya viewpoint only after it became associated with the theistic Yoga system of philosophy.

Keywords: samkhya, philosophy, metaphysical, dualism, prakriti, purusha, knowledge, ishvara, theism, concept.

Introduction

In India, philosophy originated as an exploration of the mystery of life and existence. Indian Philosophy refers to a number of philosophical traditions that arose on the Indian subcontinent. Six philosophical systems have evolved to embody India's intellectual quest for truth throughout the ages, these are Vaisheshika, Nyaya, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa, and Vedanta or Uttara Mimamsa. Almost all Indian schools of thought recognized the principle of karma and reincarnation, and the goal of moksha is viewed as an escape

from the cycle of births and deaths. Moksha/liberation is regarded as the greatest aim of human effort.

Samkhya is the oldest of the orthodox philosophical schools, and it holds that everything, in reality, is derived from Purusha (self, soul, or intellect) and Prakriti (matter, creative agency, energy). [1,2]

Important Features of Samkhya Philosophy

- The name 'Samkhya' or 'Sankhya' literally means 'Enumeration'.
- Sage Kapila, who is credited with creating the Samkhya Sutra, developed this earliest philosophical school.
- This school is well-known for its system of scientific inquiry.
- This school of thought adhered to Dvaitavada, or Dualism, which holds that the soul and matter are two different beings.
- This concept serves as the cornerstone for all meaningful knowledge, as man's misery is thought to be caused mostly by a lack of information.
- To get this information, three fundamental concepts can be applied:
 - Pratyaksha is Sanskrit for perception.
 - Anumana means inference.
 - Shabda means hearing.
- According to the ultimate philosophy, Prakriti and Purusha are the absolute and autonomous foundations of reality.
- Prakriti consists of three fundamental characteristics:
 - Thought movement,
 - Transformation
 - Manifestation.

These traits put it closer to the physiognomy of a lady.

- Purusha is associated with awareness and cannot be altered or modified since it reflects male attributes.

Samkhya often written as Sankhya is one of India's six philosophical schools (darshans). Samkhya maintains a coherent dualism between matter (Prakriti) and the eternal spirit (Purusha). Purusha and Prakriti are initially distinct, but over time, Purusha mistakenly connects themselves with parts of Prakriti. Purusha's ability to distinguish itself from Prakriti is defined as the right knowledge. Despite several allusions to the philosophy in earlier writings, Samkhya got its canonical shape and expression, in the 3rd century CE, in Samkhya-karikas ("Stanzas of Samkhya") by Ishvarakrishna, a philosopher. In the 16th century, Vijnanabikshu authored an important book on the system.

The Samkhya school of thought holds that there are two bodies: a temporal body and a body of subtle substance that

survives biological death. When the former body dies, the latter migrates to a different temporal body. The higher functions of buddhi ("awareness"), ahamkara ("I-consciousness"), manas ("mind as the organiser of sensory impressions"), and prana ("breath," the basis of vitality) comprise the body of subtle matter.

According to Samkhya, there are an unlimited number of comparable but distinct Purushas, none of which is superior to the others. The presence of a God is not theorised since Purusha and Prakriti are adequate to explain the cosmos. The Purusha is all-pervasive, all-conscious, unmoving, immutable, immaterial, and devoid of desire. Prakriti is the ubiquitous and delicate nature governed solely by time and space.

Purusha impinges on Prakriti, much like a magnet attracts iron shavings to itself, and the process of development starts. Purusha, which was previously pure consciousness without an object, gets focused on Prakriti, from which buddhi ("spiritual awareness") emerges. The next stage of evolution is individualistic ego consciousness (ahamkara, "I-consciousness"), which instils in the Purusha the mistaken belief that the ego is the source of the Purusha's objective existence.

The ahamkara is further subdivided into five gross elements (space, air, fire, water, earth), five fine elements (sound, touch, sight, taste, smell), five organs of perception (to hear, touch, see, taste, smell), five organs of activity (to talk, grip, move, procreate, expel), and consciousness (as coordinator of sense impressions). The whole universe is the outcome of all these principles, in different combinations, to which the Purusha is added.[3,4]

Prakriti stands is made of three primal qualities called Gunas:

- Tamas ("darkness") is obscurity, ignorance, and inertia;
- Rajas ("passion") is energy, emotion, and expansiveness; and
- Sattva ("goodness") is enlightenment, enlightened knowledge, and lightness.

This school's development was categorised into two: Original Samkhya View and New Samkhya View. Both schools of thought argued that knowledge may lead to salvation.

New Samkhya View	Original Samkhya View
They advocated for a spiritual interpretation of the Universe's creation.	They advocated for a reasonable and scientific perspective of the universe's genesis.
Purusha, or spirit, they claimed, was required for the formation of the Universe, together with the element of nature.	They thought that the presence of a divine agent was not required for the Universe's formation.

This point of view is associated with a more spiritual school of thought.	This viewpoint is seen as belonging to the materialistic school of thought.
During the 4th century AD, modern features blended with the older Samkhya paradigm, resulting in this view.	This viewpoint is regarded as early Samkhya philosophy, and it dates from the 1st century AD.
They asserted that the universe was created by the clash of natural and spiritual elements.	They also held that nature, or Prakriti, was responsible for the existence of the world.

Discussion

Sankhya Philosophy believes that self-knowledge, rather than any external influence or agent, leads to freedom. Samkhya is the philosophical basis of Yoga Philosophy, given by Patanjali. The requirement of God is not perceived in Samkhya for epistemic clarity concerning the interaction between the greater self, the individual self, and the surrounding universe. Rather, Samkhya is a dualistic astika school of Indian philosophy that views reality and human experience as being made up of two separate ultimate principles, Purusha and Prakriti.

While Western philosophical traditions, as exemplified by Descartes, equate mind with the conscious self and theorize on consciousness on the basis of mind/body dualism, some Eastern philosophies provide an alternate viewpoint, intimately related to substance dualism, by drawing a metaphysical line between consciousness and matter — where matter includes both body and mind.

In Samkhya and Yoga, two of the six orthodox (āstika) schools of Hindu philosophy, "there are two irreducible, innate and independent realities: 1) consciousness itself (Purusha), and 2) primordial materiality (Prakriti)". The unconscious primordial materiality, Prakriti, contains 23 components including intellect (buddhi, mahat), ego (ahamkara) and mind (manas). Therefore, the intellect, mind and ego are all seen as forms of unconscious matter. Thought processes and mental events are conscious only to the extent they receive illumination from Purusha. Consciousness is compared to light which illuminates the material configurations or 'shapes' assumed by the mind. So intellect after receiving cognitive structures form the mind and illumination from pure consciousness creates thought structures that appear to be conscious. Ahamkara, the ego or the phenomenal self, appropriates all mental experiences to itself and thus, personalizes the objective activities of mind and intellect by assuming possession of them. But consciousness is itself independent of the thought structures it illuminates.

By including mind in the realm of matter, Samkhya Yoga avoids one of the most serious pitfalls of Cartesian dualism, the violation of physical conservation laws by involving something non-material (Cartesian mind) in human actions. Because in Samkhya Yoga mind is an evolute of matter,

mental events are granted causal efficacy and are therefore able to initiate bodily motions.

Samkhya, also Sankhya, (Sanskrit for "Enumeration") is one of the orthodox or astika schools of Indian philosophy that recognizes the authority of the Vedic scriptures. It is regarded as the oldest of the orthodox philosophical systems in Hinduism, predating Buddhism. Samkhya postulates that the universe consists of two eternal realities: Purusha (souls) and Prakriti (matter or nature). The Purushas are many and conscious but are devoid of all qualities—they are the silent spectators of prakriti. Prakriti is composed of three gunas (dispositions): sattvas, rajas, and tamas (steadiness, activity, and dullness). As a result of the intertwined relationship of purusha and prakriti, when the equilibrium of the gunas is disturbed the world order must evolve. Liberation (kaivalya) consists of the realization that purusha and prakriti are indeed different. Sankhya deeply influenced the Hindu Raja Yoga school of philosophy, and they are sometimes referred together as Samkhya-Yoga school.[5,6] The philosopher Kapila is traditionally considered to be the founder of the Sankhya school, although no historical verification is possible. The definitive text of classical Sankhya is the extant Sankhya Karika, written by Ishvara Krishna, circa 200 C.E. Since its philosophy regards the universe as consisting of two eternal realities: Purusha and Prakriti, it is therefore a strongly dualist philosophy. However, there are differences between the Samkhya and other forms of dualism. In the West the fundamental discussion is about mind/body dualism, whereas in Samkhya it is between the self and matter (the latter incorporates most of what Westerners would normally refer to as "mind"). Samkhya was originally not theistic but, in confluence with its offshoot Yoga, it developed a theistic variant.

The original founder of the Samkhya system of philosophy is Maharishi Kapila but none of his writings have survived. Indeed, very little historical data is known about Kapila's life. He is said to have lived around 500 B.C.E., and tradition has it that Gautama Buddha studied the Samkhya system before his "awakening," putting Kapila's birth at least before that time. Kapila is also mentioned by Krishna in the Bhagavadgita as the greatest of all perfected beings, which could possibly move the date back further still:

Of all trees I am the banyan tree, and of the sages among the demigods I am Narada. Of the Gandharvas I am Citraratha, and among perfected beings I am the sage Kapila. (Bhagavad Gita 10.26)

Kapila's teachings are quoted extensively within the Srimad Bhagavatam especially:

- "My appearance in this world is especially to explain the philosophy of Sankhya, which is highly esteemed for self-realization by those desiring freedom from the entanglement of unnecessary material desires. This path of self-realization, which is difficult to understand, has now been lost in the course of time. Please know that I have assumed this body of Kapila to introduce and explain this philosophy to human society again." (3.24.36-37)
- "When one is completely cleansed of the impurities of lust and greed produced from the false identification of the body as "I" and bodily possessions as "mine," one's mind becomes purified. In that pure state he transcends the stage of so-called material happiness and distress." (3.25.16)
- "The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the Supreme Soul, and He has no beginning. He is transcendental to the material modes of nature and beyond the existence of this material world. He is perceivable everywhere because He is self-effulgent, and by His self-effulgent luster the entire creation is maintained." (3.26.3)
- "The glory of the Lord is always worth singing, for His glories enhance the glories of His devotees. One should therefore meditate upon the Supreme Personality of Godhead and upon His devotees. One should meditate on the eternal form of the Lord until the mind becomes fixed." (3.28.18)

The Sankhya school accepts three pramanas (valid means of knowledge) in its system of epistemology. These pramanas are:

- Pratyaksha - direct sense perception
- Anumana - logical inference
- Sabda - verbal testimony

Sankhya also has a strong cognitive theory built into it; curiously, while consciousness/spirit is considered to be radically different from any physical entities, the mind (manas), ego (ahamkara) and intellect (buddhi) are all considered to be manifestations of Prakrti (physical entity). Sankhya maintains a radical duality between spirit (Purusha) and matter (Prakrti). All physical events are considered to be manifestations of the evolution of Prakrti, or primal Nature (from which all physical bodies are derived). Each sentient being is a Purusha, and is limitless and unrestricted by its

physical body. Samsara or bondage arises when the Purusha does not have the discriminate knowledge and so is misled as to its own identity, confusing itself with the physical body—which is actually an evolute of Prakrti. The spirit is liberated when the discriminate knowledge (viveka) of the difference between conscious Purusha and unconscious Prakrti is realized. [7]

Results

The most notable feature of Sankhya is its unique theory of Cosmic evolution (not connected with Darwin's evolution). Sankhyan cosmology describes how life emerges in the universe. Sankhya theorizes that Prakrti is the source of the world of becoming. It is pure potentiality that evolves itself successively into twenty four tattvas or principles. The evolution itself is possible because Prakrti is always in a state of tension among its constituent strands known as gunas (Sattva (lightness or purity), Rajas (passion or activity), and Tamas (inertia or heaviness). The strands of Sankhyan thought can be traced back to the Vedic speculation of creation. It is also frequently mentioned in the Mahabharata and Yogavasista. The evolution of primal Nature is also considered to be purposeful—Prakrti evolves for the spirit in bondage. The spirit who is always free is only a witness to the evolution, even though due to the absence of discriminate knowledge, Purusha misidentifies with Prakrti.

The evolution obeys causality relationships, with primal Nature itself being the material cause of all physical creation. The cause and effect theory of Sankhya is called Satkaarya-vaada (theory of existent causes), and holds that nothing can really be created from or destroyed into nothingness—all evolution is simply the transformation of primal Nature from one form to another.

The evolution of matter occurs when the relative strengths of the attributes changes. The evolution ceases when the spirit realizes that it is distinct from primal Nature and thus cannot evolve. This destroys the purpose of evolution, thus stopping Prakrti from evolving for Purusha.

The twenty-four principles that evolve are:

- Prakrti - The potentiality that is behind whatever that is created in the physical universe.
- Mahat - first product of evolution from Prakrti, pure potentiality. Mahat is also considered to be the principle responsible for the rise of buddhi or intelligence in living beings.
- Ahamkara or ego-sense - second product of evolution. It is responsible for the self-sense in living beings.
- Manas or instinctive mind - evolves from the sattva aspect of ahamkara.
- Panch jnana indriya or five sense organs - also evolves from the sattva aspect of Ahamkara.

- Panch karma indriya or five organs of action - The organs of action are hands, legs, vocal apparatus, urino-genital organ and anus. They too evolve from the sattva aspect of Ahamkara
- Panch tanmatras or five subtle elements - evolves from the Tamas aspect of Ahamkara. The subtle elements are the root energies of sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell.
- Panch mahabhuta or five great substances - ether, air, fire, water, and earth. This is the revealed aspect of the physical universe.[6,7]

Conclusions

The Samkhya school of Indian Philosophy had a significant impact on Hindu thought for a variety of reasons:

- First, it deeply influenced the practice of Raja Yoga, which absorbed the Samkhyan concepts of Purusha and Prakriti. Indeed, the relationship between Purusha and Prakriti is crucial to Patanjali's yoga system, and the two philosophical schools are closely aligned.
- Second, the Samkhyan idea of three strands (gunas) present in all matter influenced other schools of Hindu thought. Eventually, the gunas found its way into Hinduism's most popular scripture, the Bhagavadgita, thus gaining widespread acceptance among the Hindu masses.
- Third, the Samkhya school is significant because it provided an explanation of how the universe evolved into being, offering a cosmology arising from the interaction of Purusha with prakriti. Curiously enough, the Samkhya school did not provide any detailed methodology concerning how to achieve the discrimination between Purusha and Prakriti, which is one of the reasons that Samkhya became aligned with the techniques of Yoga.
- Fourth, Samkhya challenged the hegemony of the monistic schools of thought by arguing that the ontological ground of being is dualistic. In this way, Samkhya opposed the schools of Vedanta Philosophy that stated Consciousness/Brahman is the cause of this world. Sankhya denies that vehemently as the material

world that is insentient cannot originate from a sentient element. The Samkhya school offers a sharp contrast to the monism of the Upanishads and thereby illustrates that not all of Hindu philosophy is monistic in nature.

- Finally, Samkhya is also notable as an atheist school of Hindu philosophy, which underlines the importance of the Vedas in the Hindu criteria of orthodoxy. There is no philosophical place for a creator God in the Sankhya philosophy; indeed, the concept of God was incorporated into the Sankhya viewpoint only after it became associated with the theistic Yoga system of philosophy.

It should be noted that even though Samkhya is a dualistic philosophy, there are differences between the Samkhya and other forms of dualism. In Western philosophy, dualism usually refers to the distinction between the mind and the body. In Samkhya, however, it is between the self (purusha) and matter (prakriti), and the latter incorporates much of what Western thought would normally refer to as "mind." This means that the Self, in Samkhya, is more transcendent than "mind." It is sometimes defined as 'that which observes' and the mind is the instrument through which this observation occurs.[7]

References

1. Flood, Gavin. An Introduction to Hinduism. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
2. Kapila, Maharshi and Peter Freund (eds.). Samkhya Sutras of Maharshi Kapila. Maharishi University of Management Press, 1998. ISBN 978-0923569235
3. Larson, Gerald James. Classical Samkhya: An interpretation of its History and Meaning. Motilal Banarsidass, 2001. ISBN 978-8120805033
4. Sinha, Nandalal. Samkhya Philosophy. Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003. ISBN 978-8121510974
5. The Sankhya Aphorisms of Kapila 1885 translation by James R. Ballantyne, edited by Fitzedward Hall.
6. Sankhya philosophy (archive) 1999
7. Comparison between Indian and Greek cosmology 2001