

## Sankhya Philosophy

Sankhya Philosophy is best described as a form of substance dualism. This form of substance dualism has a division between consciousness and matter, which is seen as independent from one another and relying on one another at the same time (Schweizer 846). This division is described in several ways, such as: thoughts and feelings versus intellect, nature versus soul, non-eternal versus eternal, non-spiritual versus spiritual, and impure versus pure to name a few (Majumdar 1926a: 255) (Everett 311). The most significant division related to Sankhya Philosophy is between the entity Purusa and the entity Prakriti. The other listed divisions are used to describe or explain Purusa and Prakriti (Majumdar 1926a: 255).

In order to understand Sankhya Philosophy it is necessary to understand that Purusa and Prakriti are two separate elements of consciousness (Everett 314). However, Purusa and Prakriti are not and cannot be independent from one another. "... Purusa has the power of perceiving, but no power of acting, whereas Prakriti has the power of acting, but no power of perceiving" (Majumdar 1925: 52). This quote describes the guidance versus activity relationship that Purusa and Prakriti share. Moreover, this quote demonstrates the point that Purusa needs Prakriti just as Prakriti needs Purusa. The union between Purusa and Prakriti is required to move through one's life (Majumdar 1925: 53).

Although Purusa and Prakriti are united, each has distinct features of their own. Prakriti is in reference to objects, matter, all material that includes the mind and body. *Antahkarana* means inner instrument and refers to the three components of the mind, which is associated with Prakriti. The first component is *manas*, which means mind. *Manas* is described as cognition, perception, and low intellect. The second component is *buddhi*, which means

intellect or reason. *Buddhi* is described as a high level of intellect function that uses intuition, insight, and reflection. The final component is *ahamkara*, which means ego. *Ahamkara* is described as what claims ownership and what makes something personal (Schweizer 848). Prakriti alone is subconscious, but is capable of consciousness through the influence of Purusa. This is clarified through an example; "... fire burns only when in contact with a combustible thing..." Prakriti is the fire and Purusa being what makes fire burn (Majumdar 1926b: 56).

Since Prakriti is mostly in reference to the subconscious it is understandable that Purusa is mostly in reference to consciousness. Each individual is thought to have their own Purusa and each Purusa is unique from the next, but all Purusas have similar characteristics (Majumdar 1925: 61). Purusa is described as awareness, intelligence, the subject, the self, and the soul (Schweizer 849) (Everett 311). A look at the features of both Prakriti and Purusa gives further knowledge in interpreting the Sankhya philosophical view of Prakriti and Purusa's union with each other.

The union between Purusa and Prakriti is additionally explained through the concept of *bandha*, which means bondage. There are three kinds of pain associated with bondage. These pains are intrinsic, extrinsic, and supernatural. The pains arise from Purusa's experience with Prakriti (Majumdar 1926a: 253). Purusa is eternally bound and never separate from Prakriti. Prakriti is emotions, possessions, wants, desires, etc. Purusa is consumed with Prakriti. Purusa is a forgotten self and only identifies itself combined with what Prakriti is. Misery is what results from the delusion of what Purusa identifies itself as (Majumdar 1926a: 254).

According to the Sankhya Philosophy there are different kinds of knowledge. The delusion that Purusa has of what it identifies itself as is due to *avidya*, which means false

knowledge (Majumdar 1926a: 255). The false knowledge that Purusa holds is that it needs to separate itself from Prakriti and identify itself as an individual entity. However, separation of Prakriti and Purusa is not possible. What must happen is a modification of one's view or perspective. This can be achieved through *vidya*, which is discriminative knowledge or the knowledge of distinction. *Vidya* can be found through extensive religious training and practices. When *vidya* is attained it is then possible to see that Prakriti and Purusa are both the same and separate. Furthermore, the relationship between Prakriti and Purusa is relative not absolute (Majumdar 1926a: 266).

The union of Prakriti and Purusa is not perfect. The Sankhya Philosophy comments on the imperfect union by reflecting that things do not begin as perfect, but have the possibility to become perfect (Majumdar 1926b: 63). The goal is to achieve liberation or release. However, liberation or release cannot be achieved through just one life. Liberation and release may be achieved through many lives of true knowledge (Majumdar 1926a: 259).

The union of Prakriti and Purusa in Sankhya Philosophy view is equal to creation (Majumdar 1925: 57). The creation of this union allows one to move through one's life. This is done by means of actions and guidance interacting with one another. Prakriti produces deliberate actions because it has the desire to release Purusa, but this is only made possible because Purusa guides Prakriti to do so. However, this is only workable after Purusa has had complete satisfaction of knowledge and enjoyment by Prakriti. Only then can liberation or release come (Majumdar 1925: 55).

Since Sankhya Philosophy considers the union of Prakriti and Purusa as creation and a beginning that consists of imperfection, Sankhya Philosophy also considers the union of Prakriti

and Purusa as evolution. The perspective of Prakriti and Purusa being referred to as evolution comes from the many experiences Purusa goes through with Prakriti (Majumdar 1926a: 253). As with any other belief system, this philosophy is not different in acknowledging that every experience brings change and growth. The difference, however, is that this philosophy views that change and growth is done through many lives full of many experiences and acquirement of knowledge, not just one life's worth of experiences and knowledge (Majumdar 1926a: 259). Therefore, according to Sankhya Philosophy, the union of Prakriti and Purusa from creation to liberation or release is a system that evolves through time.

### References

- Everett, C. C. (1899) "The Psychology of the Vedanta and Sankhya Philosophies". *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 20, 309-316.
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- Majumdar, A.K. (1926a) "The Doctrine of Bondage and Release in the Sankhya Philosophy". *The Philosophical Review*, 35 (3), 253-266.
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- Schweizer, P. (1993) "Mind/Consciousness Dualism in Sankhya-Yoga Philosophy". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 53 (4), 845-859.

## **Related Topics for Further Investigation**

*Antahkarana*

*Kaivalya*

*Vachaspati*

*Purusartha*

The Sankhya Pravachana Sutram

Yoga Sutram

The Sankhya Karika

*Bhagabatgita*

*Manas*

*Gunas*

*Ahamkara*

*The Ekadasa Indriya*

*Pan-psychism*

## **Noteworthy Websites Relate to the Topic**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samkhya>

<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/philos/samkhyavrg.asp>

<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/24principles.asp>

<http://www.swamij.com/six-schools-indian-philosophy.htm>

<http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Sankhya/id/23117>

<http://www.archive.org/details/thesamkhyaphilos00sinhuoft>

[http://www.indianetzone.com/9/samkhya\\_philosophy.htm](http://www.indianetzone.com/9/samkhya_philosophy.htm)

<http://www.indopedia.org/Samkhya.html>

<http://www.harekrsna.com/philosophy/gss/sadhu/vedanta/kapila.htm>

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