

Themes of Yoga Philosophy

1: *Purusha* (soul) and *Prakriti* (matter)

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The subject and the object

To a searching mind looking around at the enormous world around, the first thing to occur is the basic distinction between the living and the dead. The first is identified by such characteristics as the faculty of sensation, reproduction, growth etc; the second group lacks these characteristics. Further search into these groups has led to the concepts of the subject and the object, or the soul and the matter, or the observer and the observed. Following natural reasoning and on the lines of the Saankhya system, the Yoga system takes the distinction to be dichotomous. What is called life is a union of the two basic elements which are contrary to each other; and the human mind has to struggle hard to find out what made this union possible.

Union and disunion of the two

The Saankhya-Yoga (SY) systems believe that an answer to this question has to be found in the very nature of the two groups: like the magnet which activates iron filings, the mere presence of the soul activates matter. It happens in this way because their characters as observer and observed are complementary; they are not fulfilled without such a union. This complementary relation can be explained on the same lines as of a manufacturer and customer who fulfil each other's needs. Once this hypothetical explanation is accepted, the SY alliance goes further to claim that matter provides for both, worldly experience and liberation, on the part of the soul – the first, when the soul is under the spell of *a-vidyaa*, the wrong conception of its identity with matter, and the second, when the soul discovers its real identity as distinct from matter. Triggered by the grammatical genders of the terms *prakriti* (fem.) and *purusha* (masc.), Saankhya imagination offers a metaphor in explanation of this relation by conceiving of the former as a dancer and the latter as a spectator. The performance of the dancer goes on unhindered as long as the spectator takes the performance as real and experiences the rises and falls of emotions. As soon as he realises the real nature of the dancer, he is released from emotional ups and downs and is no longer subjected to them as the dancer retires to the green room, knowing that her role is over. It is amusing to note how metaphysics and aesthetics join hands in this explanation.

Essential characteristics of the two

The soul in its essential character is pure consciousness untouched by the three 'qualities' – *guna-s* – which constitute the material world: *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*.

Prakriti as the ultimate cause of the material world is composed of these qualities, for, according to SY systems, cause and effect are identical in their essential nature, and the effect exists in its material cause even before it is said to have been produced. This is known as '*sat-kaarya-vaada*'. The claim that the everything in the world is constituted of three 'qualities' is justified on the ground of the threefold response of the observer to all worldly things: attachment, hatred and delusion; pleasure, pain and indifference. The basic character of these qualities is stated to partake of enlightenment, activity and lethargy.

The position of God in Yoga

The only difference between the metaphysical views of the two allied systems is in their attitude towards God. Saankhyas are atheistic; Yogas admit of God. It must however be noted that God in Yoga is not conceived of as a controller or supervisor of the world. He is allowed a place in the Yoga system as faith in Him can be helpful to a practitioner in his efforts to control the mind.

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