

AN OVERVIEW OF EVOLUTION IN SAMKHYA PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Samkhya philosophy, one of the oldest and most influential schools of Indian philosophy, provides a profound understanding of the process of evolution. This detailed essay explores the concept of evolution within the framework of Samkhya philosophy, delving into its fundamental principles, stages of manifestation, and its implications for our understanding of existence. Creation viewed from the Samkhya perspective of two coexisting eternal principles -- indicates that life evolved atheistically. It purports that within Cosmic Mind, every strain of thought and imagination exists. Mahat is the beginning of time and space. It is entirely possible that life exists due to two co-existing eternal, separate principles. By examining the intricate philosophical insights of evolution in Samkhya, we gain a deeper comprehension of the interplay between consciousness and matter and its significance in shaping our perception of the world. This paper addresses the hypothesis that the evolution of the world that is describes in Sankhya thought.

Keywords: Sankhya Philosophy; Evolution, Prakriti, Purusa, World Human Guna.

INTRODUCTION

Samkhya philosophy, a prominent school of Indian philosophy, offers profound insights into the nature of existence and the process of evolution. Rooted in ancient wisdom, Samkhya provides a holistic understanding of reality, encompassing the interplay between consciousness and matter. This essay delves into the foundations of Samkhya philosophy and explores the significance of evolution within its framework. By examining the intricate concepts and principles of Samkhya, we unravel the deep philosophical significance of evolution in shaping our understanding of the world. Evolution is the transformation of Prakriti into physical things and the psychical apparatus for the experience of the bound souls. The theory of evolution is based on the idea that all species are related and gradually change over time. Evolution relies on there being genetic variation in a population which affects the physical characteristics (phenotype) of an organism.

Evolution in Samkhya encompasses the differentiation and individualization of consciousness within the realm of matter. It elucidates how the egoic principle (Ahamkara) arises, leading to the sense of individual identity and the illusion of separateness. Evolution in Samkhya highlights the progressive unfoldment of Prakriti, the creative force of the universe. It elucidates how the un-manifested potentiality of Prakriti gradually expresses itself, giving rise to various stages of manifestation. Evolution is the process of change in all forms of life over generations and evolutionary biology is the process of how evolution occurs. The process of evolution involves a series of natural changes that causes species populations of different organism to arise adapt to the environment and become extinct.

Human evolution is the evolutionary process that led to the emergence of anatomically modern humans, beginning with the evolutionary history of primates in particular genus homo and leading to the emergence of Homo sapiens as a distinct species of the hominid family, the great apes. Sankhya school of Indian philosophy give theory of evolution, according to Sankhya philosophy, the evolution of the world has its starting point in contact between Purusa and Prakriti. For Sankhya Philosophy, Prakriti and Purusa are two ultimate realities. Sankhya philosophy believes, Prakriti is active and Purusa is inactive. For them, the evolution of the world starts with the contact between the purusa or Atma and prakriti or matter (Radhakrishnan and Moore, 1957).¹

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Samkhya philosophy affirms over and over again, that the world comes into existence, exists for some eras of time, and possesses the qualities of self-preservation. Yet, eventually it again breaks down and is destroyed. For an unknown amount of time, there is no creation pralaya. Then again, the 3 energies of Materiality fall out of balance, and the process of creation begins once more. The phenomenon of repeated creation and destruction gives rise to many issues and questions for the human person.

According to Sankhya philosophy, Evolution is regarded as cyclic and not linear. There is no continuous progress in one direction, but alternating periods of evolution and dissolution in acyclic order. Again evolution is said to be teleological and not mechanical or blind of the 24 principles of evolution 23 are evolutes. The process of evolution as given in the Samkhya is one of its most fascinating contributions. The evolution began when the perfect balance of the three gunas in the Mula Prakriti was disturbed, resulting in the evolution of the 23 elements (tattvas) given here. The first evolute that appears as a result of this “vikriti” (mutation) is mahat or buddhi (intellect). From buddhi evolves “ahamkara” (ego), the individual principle. From ahamkara, the dominance of sattva guna results in the evolution of 11 indriyas or sense perceptions (Vidyabhushana, 1921).³

Humankind has the most extensive of potentialities of all creatures. Human persons have the ability to alter thoughts, change intentions, and through a free will, make changes and transform mental and emotional states (Aranya, 1983⁴; Gramann, 2014⁵). The quiescent state of Materiality consists of the 3 gunas in perfect balance. Typically, in Samkhya, this dimension refers to the state of cosmic equilibrium, or the time prior to creation pralaya. In this non-manifested state, the carpet of the world has been rolled up. In a human person, the three gunas come into a state of balance in deep meditation when the body and mind, the psychophysiological, are in pure stillness (Larson, 1969/2014)⁶. Through our human experience and observation, we learn about the manifestation of the world. In the un-manifested state, there is no world, no human life or any form to experience. In deep dreamless sleep, we do not know the world. Deep dreamless sleep is an unknown, unconscious awareness of the state of mental equilibrium (Rao, 2008).⁷

1. FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF SAMKHYA PHILOSOPHY

A. Purusha: The Transcendental Consciousness

Samkhya philosophy posits that the ultimate reality is composed of two fundamental entities: Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha represents the transcendental consciousness, the eternal essence that remains unchanging and unaffected by the material world. The understanding of Purusha is crucial to comprehending the nature of existence and the path to liberation. The Nature of Purusha Purusha, in Samkhya philosophy, is pure consciousness devoid of attributes, qualities, and characteristics. It is the eternal witness, distinct from the fluctuations and transformations of Prakriti. Purusha is neither created nor destroyed, existing beyond time, space, and causality. It is the eternal essence that pervades all beings. Purusha is inherently non-dual, transcending all dualities and divisions. It is beyond the realm of subject-object relationships and is beyond the grasp of the senses and the mind. It is the silent observer, illuminating the activities of Prakriti without any active involvement or identification (Larson G. James, 1998)⁸.

B. The Nature of Prakriti

In Samkhya Prakriti is the ultimate cause of world of objects. Samkhya Theory that causation means a real transformation of the material cause into effect logically leads to the concept of Prakriti as the ultimate cause the world of objects. All objects of the world, including our body and mind, the senses the intellect are limited and the dependent things produced by the combination of certain elements. So, we see that the world is a series of effects and that it must have a have a cause. Now this cause cannot be the Purusha or self since the self is neither a cause nor effect of anything. So, the cause of the world must be the not self. Now it is found that in the evolution of things the Cause is subtler than the effect and that it pervades the effect, as when a seed develops into a tree.⁹ Hence, the ultimate cause if the world must be some unintelligent principle which is eternal and very fine. This is the Prakriti of Samkhya system.

C. Liberation and the Role of Purusha

In Samkhya philosophy, the attainment of liberation (Moksha) is intricately linked to the realization of Purusha's true nature. Liberation involves transcending the identification with Prakriti and recognizing one's true identity as Purusha. It is the liberation from the cycle of birth and death, the realm of transitory existence, and the illusory nature of the material world.

The role of Purusha in the path to liberation is that of witnessing and dispassionate observation. By cultivating a deep understanding of the eternal nature of Purusha and recognizing the impermanent and changing nature of Prakriti, one can detach from the identification with the material realm. Through self-realization, one realizes that the true Self is the eternal consciousness, transcending the limitations of the physical body and the egoic mind.

The liberation process involves disentangling the Purusha from its entrapment in the illusions of the material world. It requires a shift in perspective from identifying with the ever-changing phenomena of Prakriti to recognizing the unchanging and eternal nature of Purusha. This realization brings about a profound sense of freedom, peace, and liberation from the sufferings of the material existence.

In the journey towards liberation, Samkhya philosophy emphasizes the importance of self-inquiry, contemplation, and meditation. By turning inward and exploring the nature of consciousness, one can directly experience the essence of Purusha and attain liberation from the bondage of Prakriti. Purusha represents the transcendental consciousness, pure and unaffected by the material realm. It signifies the eternal witness, devoid of attributes and free from the cycle of birth and death. Prakriti, on the other hand, is the creative matrix, encompassing the material universe and all its manifestations (Chatterjee and Datta, 1984).¹⁰

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF EVOLUTION IN SAMKHYA

Evolution holds immense significance within the framework of Samkhya philosophy, as it illuminates the process through which the material world unfolds and manifests. It sheds light on the dynamic interplay between consciousness and matter, leading to the diversity and complexity of existence. The significance of evolution in Samkhya can be understood in the following ways:

A. Unfolding of Prakriti

Evolution in Samkhya highlights the progressive unfoldment of Prakriti, the creative force of the universe. It elucidates how the un-manifested potentiality of Prakriti gradually expresses itself, giving rise to various stages of manifestation. Through this process, the material world, with its myriad forms and experiences, emerges (Hulin, 1986).¹¹

B. Differentiation and Individualization

Evolution in Samkhya encompasses the differentiation and individualization of consciousness within the realm of matter. It elucidates how the egoic principle (Ahamkara) arises, leading to the sense of individual identity and the illusion of separateness. This process of differentiation enables diverse experiences and perspectives within the fabric of existence.

C. Understanding the Illusion of the Material World

Evolution in Samkhya philosophy deepens our understanding of the illusory nature of the material world. It reveals that the constantly changing and transient nature of material manifestations can obscure the underlying reality of pure consciousness (Purusha). By recognizing the impermanence and interdependence of the material realm, one can transcend the illusions of the physical world and embark on a path of self-realization.

D. Liberation and Transcendence

The concept of evolution in Samkhya philosophy holds the promise of liberation (Moksha). By understanding the intricacies of evolution and the interplay between consciousness and matter, individuals can transcend the limitations of material identification. Through self-realization and detachment from the illusions of Prakriti, one can attain liberation and reunite with the eternal consciousness (Purusha).¹²

CONCLUSION

Within the framework of Samkhya philosophy, evolution unfolds as the interplay between consciousness (Purusha) and matter (Prakriti), leading to the diverse forms and experiences in the manifest world. The stages of manifestation-Avyakta, Mahat, Ahamkara, Tanmatras, and gross elements-provide insights into the progressive unfoldment of existence. By contemplating the philosophical nuances of evolution in Samkhya, we gain a profound understanding of the dynamic relationship between consciousness and matter, and the ultimate quest for self-realization and liberation. Purusha, the transcendental consciousness, stands as a foundational principle in Samkhya philosophy. It represents the eternal essence that is distinct from the material realm. Understanding the nature of Purusha and its role in liberation is central to Samkhya philosophy. By realizing the true nature of Purusha and disentangling it from the identification with Prakriti, individuals can attain liberation and reunite with the eternal consciousness beyond the realm of material existence. The realization of Purusha's unchanging nature brings about profound insights, freedom, and liberation from the illusions of the material world. Evolution in Samkhya philosophy serves as a gateway to understanding the profound dynamics of existence. It unravels the interplay between consciousness and matter, shedding light on the process through which the material world manifests and unfolds. Recognizing the significance of evolution in Samkhya allows us to navigate the illusory nature of the material realm and embark on a journey of self-realization and liberation.

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