

SĀNKHYA PSYCHOLOGY

an excerpt (pp. 328-331) from *Philosophies of India* by H. Zimmer (Princeton, 1951)

Purusa is defined as “pure spirit” (*caitanya*), in token of the fact that it is non-matter, and yet it is far from every Western concept of spirituality -- for all of the conditions of what we term the “soul” are effects of the realm of subtle matter, according to the Sāṅkhya, coming to pass in the subtle body. Such a body is not to be identified, in any sense, with the life-monad. About the life-monad nothing can be said (beyond the statement that it is) except in negative terms: it is without attributes, without qualities, without parts, without motion -- imperishable, inactive and impassive; it is unaffected by pains and by pleasures, devoid of feelings and emotions, completely indifferent to sensations. It abides outside the categories of the world. Purusa is comparable to a seer when he is seeing nothing, or to a mirror in which nothing is reflected. Nothing comes to it in that sphere except itself -- even though all things this side of it are illuminated, activated, and given consciousness by its pure, untroubled, undeluded radiance.

When perfect knowledge of the purusa has been attained, one does not give up one’s gross and subtle body immediately; life lingers on for a considerable time. Just as the potter’s wheel continues to revolve after the completion of the pot, in consequence of the initial impulses, so the body of the kevalin goes on with all its subtle and gross natural processes, even though the Knower himself, aloof from them, is simply watching with sublime indifference; for the present life is a result of works, the fruit of seeds that were planted before the attainment of emancipation, and these must mature to the fullness of their days. On the other hand, the germinal force of all the seeds that have not yet sprouted is broken and consumed. The Knower knows that there can be no future life or lives for him, because he has withdrawn his impulses from the process. The process is running down. Henceforward, therefore, he simply endures the events of his existence without committing himself to anything new, until finally, when the forces of the works already bearing fruit are exhausted, death overtakes him and there can be no return. The gross body dissolves, The subtle body also dissolves. The inner organ, with its samskeras, which have gone on from birth to birth, dissolves. The gunas are released from their agitation in this vortex, and the disturbance of this individual dissolves.

But the life-monad continues to exist -- just as an individual continues to exist when his reflection has disappeared from a shattered glass. Self-consciousness is gone -- because the material basis necessary for the processes of knowledge, feeling, and experience now is missing -- but the life-monad endures, as an individual entity in and for and by itself. Without the apparatus of the gross and the subtle body, purusa is completely out of contact with the sphere of the gunas; it is not to be reached by anything, it is unattainable, absolutely removed.

This is real “isolation.”

Here is apparent the parallel of Sāṅkhya with the Jaina and Ajivika teachings, as well as its contrast with Vedānta. The idea of a pluralism of life-monads belongs, apparently, to the ancient, native Indian, pre-Aryan philosophy; so too, the theory that the sphere of matter (*prakṛti*) is in itself substantial, not a mere reflex, or mirage, or trick of maya. Nevertheless there is one aspect of the Sāṅkhya teaching that seems to differ as much from the Jaina notion of release as from the Vedāntic; for in its final state of separation from the instruments of consciousness, the purusa abides in eternal unconsciousness. During life the same condition was attained temporarily in deep, dreamless sleep, in swoons, and in the state of perfect abstraction that is achieved through disciplined yoga practice. But this is not the state described for the omniscient Jaina Tirthankara. Whereas Vedānta, precisely to stress the idea that the perfect state is one of pure consciousness, speaks of a stage or sphere beyond those of the Gross Body (Waking Consciousness), the Subtle Body (Dream Consciousness), and the Causal Body (Deep Sleep), which it calls the “Fourth” (*turiya*), With this Vedāntic Brahman insight, the psychological Sankhyic-Yogic isolation in unconsciousness becomes as archaic as the physical isolation of the Jaina Tirthankaras.

Compare the basics of Sāṅkhya psychology with:

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/thought/humannature-biblical-religion.htm> ;

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/thought/religious-biblical-religion.htm> ;

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/thought/baptist.htm> ; [“Fundamental Considerations” (Devadutt) was written by the sometime Dean of Theology, Professor of Philosophy and History, Serampore College, Serampore, India]

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/living/philosophy/19.pdf> ;

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/world/hinduism.htm> ;

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/cherbonnier/mystical.htm> ;

<http://www.philosophy-religion.org/world/zaehner.htm> .

A careful comparison will underscore the reality that all world religions are not fundamentally the same, if they are studied empathetically; too often religious traditions are examined through a viewer’s own lenses rather than within the world-views of believers.