

# **Mind, Matter and Consciousness: The Yoga Perspective**

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Our world experience comprises of three major factors viz., mind, matter and Consciousness. The inert matter influences our consciousness through mind. This is life in short, as per the Yoga philosophy. But, this is not acceptable to some other thinkers who explain that the mind itself is consciousness. Such ideology is presented in the Yoga bhashya gloss on the Yoga sutra of Patanjali, itself. Such being the state of things, one doubts whether mind itself is consciousness or is different from it? What is the difference between mind and matter? In this matter, it is attempted here to present the perspective of the Yoga philosophy regarding the mind, matter and consciousness trio.

As we all know the yoga system has its philosophical foundations on the Samkhya system only. But, it should be borne in mind that the Yoga system does not just reproduce all the tenets of the Samkhya system. It rather compliments and strengthens the Samkhya system. Samkhya is the theoretical part of dualistic philosophy and the Yoga is the practical part of it. The contribution of the Yoga system in channelizing the Samkhya stream is very significant. This we shall see in detail now.

**Matter:** On the lines of the Samkhya system, the Yoga system also holds the view that the world is a modification of three primordial forces called

Guna or the prime constituent threads. Therefore matter is nothing but the various modifications of these three Guna only. Modern science explains matter as “that which has some mass and occupies some space”. It is the sum total of electric energy. According to the Yoga philosophy this kind of matter is produced from the three Guns only.

Sir Isaac Newton felt that the *why* question belonged in the domain of theology and the *how* questions belonged in the domain of Science. But, as Prof. Dobson remarked in his preface to the book Vedanta and Science, the *why* questions too belong to the domain of science. If they are not asked within the framework of science then there must be something definitely wrong with the framework itself.

Though many attempts have always been made to know the final building blocks of matter, it was later realized by the scientists that no single particle is the building block of this universe and that the matter is energy. Energy is both corpuscular and wave. It is continuous and discrete. The substratum of energy is field, which is unmanifested to our senses.

Matter can be understood only in a dynamic context as there cannot be any static aspect of matter. Matter is always in a state of flux of movement and, interaction and transformation. There are various fields. The field taking form to be directly or indirectly perceived by our senses is matter. The Samkhya system has got some important outlook to ponder over here.

**1. Guna:** The three Guna viz., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas are the forces contributing mainly to illuminating, activating and restraining the world respectively. Some scholars like Shri Arobindo call these three as essential modes of action of nature; while some other like Shri Phukan

prefer to equate these with the three laws of motion of Newton. Shri Taimni defines the three Gunas as dynamical attractor and explains them in the following manner:

- I. Tamas, inertia which involves relative position of particles, is the fixed point attractor.
- II. Sattva, vibration which involves rhythmic motion of particles, is the limit cycle attractor.
- III. Rajas, mobility which involves non-rhythmic motion of particles with transference of energy, is the chaotic or strange attractor.”

Though at the outset these Guna may appear to be functioning against each other, the Samkhya system understands these as mutually supporting and productive always. These are mutually accompanying and referring too.

We, the observer, are the self i.e. the Consciousness. The vast universe stretched before us is in manifested and unmanifest form. Our senses can know the manifested only. The huge world beyond it is unmanifest. The Samkhya philosophy holds the view that the manifest is not complete by itself but it has an unmanifest entity for its cause.

## **2. The eternal Trio:**

All the world experience is, in short, the play and display of the trio called manifest, unmanifest and the self. The Samkhya-yoga system analyses the world experience as an outcome of these three, though it may appear that only the manifest and the self are responsible for the world experience. Of course, the entire gamut of experience can be ultimately reduced to two factors viz., the observer and the observed. Everybody is easily convinced of the existence of these two entities. But, there is other reality beyond

these. The observed is not any accidental occurrence, says the Samkhya system. It is the product of the unmanifest reality called primordial force. If these three are realized as they are, then the self will no more be under the influence of the matter, which is kaivalyam (Uninfluenced state) for the self and the matter as well.

### **3. Similarity and dissimilarity:**

We observe that the manifested is inert, composed of the three Guna and object of cognition. The self on the other hand is consciousness, devoid of Guna and subject. In some points there is thorough similarity between the unmanifest and the self. Both are beginning-less, imperishable, all pervading, intangible and single.

The Samkhya-yoga system understands that the manifested creation is a modification affected by the *participation* of both the Unmanifest and the self. It lays foundation for the postulation of some unmanifest reality as the basis of entire manifest world. It knows that the human mind has many limitations as it depends on the senses. There is some faculty given to humans to know the world. But, that faculty is also taken back at some period of time. So, one cannot expect to know the reality with the help of the incompetent senses. Human perception is so limited that it cannot get onto the manifest also sometimes.

The Samkhya-yoga system points towards the unmanifest reality as Prakriti, as the basis of entire world experience. Since experience presupposes duality; as the experiencer and the experienced, no single reality can be both the experiencer and the experienced. This system observes that there are two distinct realities as the experiencer and the

experienced. It also observes that the experiencer is not made up of the three Guna, while the experienced is made so.

If we prepare ourselves to look at things from the Samkhya-yoga perspective, we can know that there should be some base for the world appearance. The Samkhya-yoga system explains that the world appearance is modification of three prime forces (called Guna) in a state of inequilibrium.

### **The Nucleus of Three forces:**

Here the Samkhya-yoga system tries to point towards a reality beyond our normal perception conspicuously paving way to scientific thought during those days. In modern science it is felt that the substratum of energy is field which is unmanifested to our senses. The Samkhya system understands this as the Prakrti or Nucleus which is nothing but the state of the three forces. **This nucleus** is the Ultimate material cause of creation. It thus amounts to the theory that all **matter is a modification of the nucleus called Prakrti.** The nucleus in its true form is no cause of anything until it comes into contact with the Consciousness. The Samkhya-yoga system seems to understand the creation as material, being fulfilled by the Consciousness. As long as the Consciousness does not involve in the process of creation, it is not complete. There are some problems before the Samkhya-yoga system in postulating this nucleus as prime cause of creation, discarding the popular cause like the Brhman of the Vedantin or the Atoms of the Vaisheshika. What is the nature of this Nucleus? Is it mere postulation? Or, does it really exist?

As a matter of fact the Classical Samkhya system does not throw much light on this aspect.

It is the classical Yoga system that takes this point for discussion and offers fresh thought regarding the nature of this nucleus.

There are some important points regarding this nucleus of creation in the Samkhya-yoga system. This nucleus is:

1. Devoid of existence and non-existence
2. Neither real or unreal
3. Unmanifest
4. Not any trace to any thing
5. The ultimate principle

The prime cause of creation, the nucleus of three Guna, is by itself not to be marked either as existent or non-existent as both these characteristics apply to a manifested thing only. The Samkhya-yoga system defines existence as the ability to serve purpose. This purposive-ness marks existence. Due to its contact with the self, the nucleus modifies into the manifest world and influences the self. Here the Samkhya-yoga system understands a purpose of creation as 'realization of matter and seclusion of the self'.

In the state of pure nucleus, this purpose cannot be there. So, the nucleus cannot be stated as existent. At the same time, it cannot be stated as non-existent also because it has potential to create. For this reason, the ultimate cause cannot be marked as real or unreal. It is unmanifest because in the state of Nucleus it cannot be comprehended. So, it cannot be a trace of something even. But, the entire process of creation is effected from it therefore it is the ultimate cause of creation. This postulation of a Nucleus

is perhaps the most significant contribution of the Samkhya-yoga system in the matters of scientific relevance.

Another important point of discussion in the Samkhya-yoga system is the topic of Paramanu or Atoms.

In the yoga system, the Paramanu and Tanmatra are not one. They are different, for, the Tanmatra are considered as producing the various Paramanu. The Vyaysabhashya clearly mentions that the Paramanu is a part of Tanmatra.

Material analysis of the Tanmatra is not further elaborated in the Samkhya-yoga system. Modern science, however, has understood the composition of the atoms too. According to it, the atoms are composed of even smaller building blocks called electrons, neutrons and protons. The atoms are composed of a central nucleus surrounded by varying numbers of electrons etc., revolving in circular or elliptical orbits. Similarly the Tanmatra are composed of the Guna only.

The difference of this atomic theory of Yoga system from that of the Vaisheshika, is that- the Vaisheshika system considers four kinds of Paramanu viz. 1. Earth 2. Water 3. Fire and 4. Air. In this system, there is no Paramanu of Akasha. But, the Samkhya system considers the Akasha Paramanu being produced from the lone Shabda-Tanmatra.

What are these Tanmatra? The Tanmatra are Dravya in the yoga system, an obvious difference from the Vaisheshika who consider these as Guna or qualities. The reason for considering the Tanmatra as dravya is that their causes, Guna, are dravya and dravya should produce dravya. Vijnanbhikshu identifies the Paramanu with the Guna and states that there

are Guna of the magnitude of atoms. He says that the Tanmatra are the direct cause of the elements and the Guna are the indirect cause.

In short, the prime forces as Guna modify into matter for the purpose of the self to attain seclusion. This modification of Guna is transformational causation in the Samkhya system of thought.

However, this has been variously criticized by the modern scientists of Quantum physics who maintain that there exists only apparent causation and no transformational causation.

### **Five forms or appearances:**

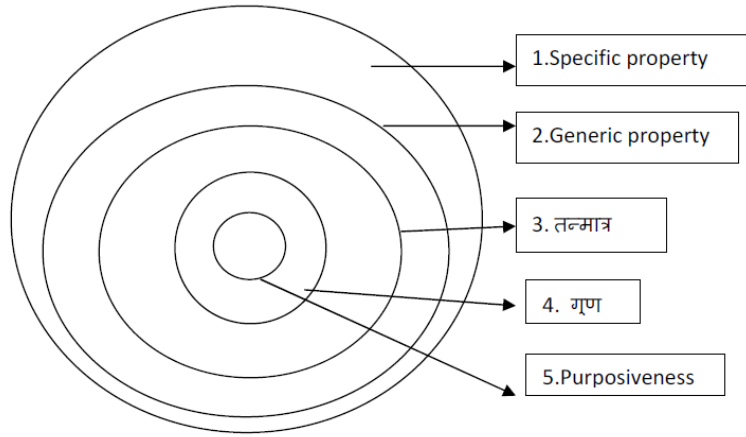
The elements, born of the Tanmatra and composed of Paramanu, manifest at gross level as earth etc. Each element has five forms or appearances.

They are:

1. The specific property of each element cognized by the senses is the first appearance.
2. The generic properties of each element form the second appearance.
3. The Tanmatra of each element is its third appearance.
4. Further insight into the womb of each Tanmatra reveals the fact that the Gunas are the basis of all the Tanmatra. Therefore, the Guna are the fourth appearance.
5. But, when an attempt is made to understand the very purpose of each Guna or combination of three Guna, it will be known that the purposive-ness of each Guna itself is the fifth, the subtlest and the ultimate form of matter.

The five appearances of elements: (From the Grossest to the Subtlest)





The Yoga system espouses the theory of modification of five elements and mind from the inert matter. When there is predominance of any particular constituent in the prime cause the product will exhibit that particular characteristic only. The predominance of rajas element in the prime cause causes the creation of the subtle elements. The Samkhya philosophy is silent about the intricacies of the process of creation. But the Yoga philosophy, as found in the Vyasabhashya and its commentaries, elucidates the theory of modification.

According to Samkhya-yoga system, the elements undergo change every moment and only the consciousness is immutable. The changes in the matter occur at various levels. The five gross-elements like earth etc., do not produce anything further but modify themselves variously. During all this process there must be some Dharmin as the sole substratum of the modification. The Vyasabhashya has strongly supported the theory of a Dharmin as the substratum of the characteristics. While explaining the

various modifications in the universe, the Vyasabhashya states that there is a substance as the base of all the characteristics during various modifications in them. It is constant. It is both generic and specific. That's why when Vyasabhashya states that there is only one modification ultimately; Vachaspatimishra, another commentator, explains that it is the modification in the substance called Dharmi-parinama.

This characteristic is nothing but the potency itself invariably associated with its substratum. Its presence is inferred from different effects. The substance has the characteristics that are dormant, manifest, and inexplicable according to the status of the operation. If the operation is taking place, the potency is said to be present. If the operation has taken place and is absent at present, the potency is said to be quiet (dormant) and with reference to the future operation, the potency is said to be inexplicable.

### **Mind and Consciousness: the Duo**

Mind, body, and spirit create a sacred trinity that allows us to fully experience life on earth. Mind is nothing but a bundle of reaction of endless impressions. In the Yoga system these impressions are believed to have been acquired throughout many births. Thus mind is the product of genes, the potential carrier of many characteristics.

Daivd Bohm, a theoretical Physicist from UK, finds an interesting link between mind and quantum reality. *'What we experience as mind, in its movement through various levels of subtlety, will, in a natural way ultimately move the body by reaching the level of the quantum potential and of the 'dance' of the particles. There is no unbridgeable gap of barrier between any of these levels. Rather, at each stage some kind of*

*information is the bridge. This implies that the quantum potential acting on atomic particles, for example, represents only one stage in the process. At each such level, there will be a 'mental pole' and a 'physical pole'. Thus as we have already implied, even an electron has at least a rudimentary mental pole, represented mathematically by the quantum potential. Vice versa, even subtle mental processes have a physical pole. But the deeper reality is something beyond either mind or matter, both of which are only aspects that serve as terms for analysis. These can contribute to our understanding of what is happening but are in no sense separate substances in interaction. Nor are we reducing one pole to a mere function or aspect of the other (e.g. as is done in materialism and in idealism). The key point is, however, that before the advent of the quantum theory, our knowledge of matter as gained from the study of physics would have led us to deny that it could have a mental pole, which would enable it to participate with mind.*

Quantum Physicist Amit Goswami (The Quantum Activist) says that consciousness is the ground of all being. Consciousness is theorized to not being created from the brain, but rather it is fundamental; it is at the core of all nature.

John Holloway, a Physicist explains in clear terms: *'Quantum mechanics, also known as quantum physics or quantum theory, deals with physical phenomena as microscopic scales. It provides a mathematical description of much of the existing dualism between particles and waves and interactions of energy and matter. It tries to explain the relationship between how our intangible consciousness comes about from particles and energy, or if matter and energies are a product of consciousness'*.

All this bears significance from the point of view that we need to investigate this further to appreciate the theory of the Samkhya-Yoga system that *it is the participation of Consciousness with matter that produces matter.*

Mind is the evolute of matter according to the Samkhya-Yoga system of philosophy. All our thinking and knowing is mind, produced as modification from the prime forces only. To the modern science too this faculty is centered in the brain only. The Samkhya system holds the theory that the mental activities are purely material. There is Consciousness beyond all the mental activities. Therefore I am not what I think. I am distinct from my thoughts and the source of thoughts also. In its pure form the *consciousness is the energy: immutable, imperishable and eternal.* Understood in this sense, the mind has no form other than its functions like perception, inferential knowledge, verbal knowledge, misapprehension, fiction, sleep, memory, cognition etc. If at all any difference is to be sought after between mind and intellect, then it would be appropriate to take manas or citta as the process and Buddhi as the result in the form of affirmation. The Samkhya system explains the manas as 'ubhayatmakam indriyam' referring obviously to the two-fold function of manas viz. 1. As a sense of cognition and 2. As a sense of action because, manas is the force behind the activities of both the senses. Vacaspatimishra's commentary also corroborates the theory that mind functions as both the senses. Prof. Ramshankar Bhattacharya holds the view that the verse of Samkhyakarika defining the nature of manas (27) should be reconstructed so as to mean that 'mind (manas) is samkalpaka

i.e. thinker and also a sense (Indriya) thus mind has been described in two ways' (Jyotishmati commentary on Samkhyatattvakaumudi, p.199)

The various mental states of mind are described in the Vyasabhashya as:

1. **Kshipta:** This is the state of mind when the Rajas running gets predominant and makes mind restless running after many things. (Oscillation of attention).

2. **Vikshipta:** When the Tamas constituent becomes predominant, mind becomes awfully restless but intermittently gets steady. The restlessness in this state can be natural or sometimes due to disease, lethargy etc. (Vacaspatimishra 1-1)

3 **Mudha:** This is the state of mind having the Tamas itself predominant. Since the Tamas blocks the activity of Rajas, there is lethargy or inactiveness in mind.

4 **Ekagra:** The one-pointedness of mind caused by the influence of pure Sattva. In this state, the fickleness of mind is gone and therefore there is no restlessness. Like the flame of a lamp in a place without the force of air, the mind too gets fixed on one point (Vijnanabhikkshu 1-1)

5 **Niruddha:** In this state of mind, all mental operations disappear. The mind ceases to operate. Though the external and internal thought waves subside, the mental impression remains in a very subtle form, due to which the individual wakes up from deep-sleep or perfect absorption in meditation etc.

To the lay man it may appear that the mind is itself the consciousness but a careful analysis into the nature of this duo will reveal that the mind is a product of matter and the consciousness is not matter but a separate entity. Were it not distinct, then the entire system of Yoga would become sheer

waste because the Yoga system propounds the theory that the Seer can remain in his pure form of consciousness only when his mind is calmed. He is beyond his thoughts.

The Yoga system also understands that the ability to know and perceive things is conditional and relative. The consciousness in its pure form is not any seer. It sees through mind or thinking faculty. If this faculty is withdrawn then there will remain only the consciousness. This is the relation between mind and consciousness.

The Samkhya-Yoga system has strong logic behind this theory of distinction between mind and consciousness. If mind itself were consciousness then there would not be any consciousness in the absence of mind. It sees that the mental activities are absent in the state of deep sleep but still there is consciousness. Therefore the Self is not the thoughts but the consciousness existing behind.

Mind is the Guna-force connecting the matter with Consciousness. Yoga system understands this secret. Therefore it recommends the regular practicing of channelizing the mind-force and completely dissolving it in its cause through the practice of Ashtanga Yoga or Eight components of Yoga, thus leading the uninfluenced final state of Consciousness. It believes that this is the final goal of human life.

The Yoga system observes that the mind is by nature both distracted and one-pointed too. It can go after many things, but it can rest on a single thing. For this characteristic, it is conducive to the state of contemplation and final salvation.

The Consciousness, due to the force called *Ignorance*, comes into the contact of matter through mind and gets apparent influence as various

types of experiences. It is apparent because the consciousness cannot be truly influenced says the Yoga system. It remains in conditional form as long as there is the mind's activity. This mental activity can be totally stopped with the regular practice of Yoga. When all the qualms of mind are stopped there will not be any influence on the Consciousness permanently. This permanent absence of matter's influence on Consciousness is Kaivalya or Seclusion to both matter and self.

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