

Key concepts

- Samkhya Philosophy is a way of understanding that there is both spirit (purusha) and matter (prakriti), therefore, it is a strong dualist system. The key point of Samkhya Philosophy is to discriminate between prakriti and purusha then dis-attach oneself from the entrapment of prakriti.
- According to Samkhya Philosophy, Brahman consists of Ishvara, Prakriti and Atman. Ishvara, meaning 'supreme soul' is the spiritual, non-bodily aspect of Brahman. Prakriti is the physical world and links to the cosmic energy of shakti, which is the feminine side of Brahman.
- The three Gunas incorporate the qualities which are in all nature, energy, matter and consciousness within the physical world. The three Gunas are broken into three aspects called tamas, raja and sattva, which are all aspects of who Brahman is. These tendencies or Gunas pervade everything, not just Brahman.
- The Jiva Atman (individual soul), is a part or aspect of Brahman that is also known as the soul. This aspect of Brahman is trapped in prakriti.
- The founder of Samkhya Yoga is Patanjali (400CE), who wanted to give his followers practical guidance on how to escape prakriti. Patanjali developed a yoga – ashtanga - to enable his followers to change the way they saw the world and realise the true identity of the Atman.
- Advaita means 'not two'. Advaita Vedanta believes that the Atman and Brahman are one and the same, making it a non-dualist philosophy.
- The key argument is that Brahman is noncorporeal, having no attributes (Nirguna Brahman) and he is beyond our understanding.
- This tradition's main scholar was Adi Shankara in the 8th century. He wrote the Brahma Sutra.
- According to the Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is real and anything other than Brahman is falsehood or Maya. Shankara decided to state what was reality and what was not reality and therefore developed the three stages of reality – illusory, mundane and ultimate.
- Adhyasa means 'superimposition' or 'falsely thinking one thing is something else'. Until Brahman is sought through jnana yoga then everything will be Adhyasa.

Key quotes

- "The discipline of knowledge begins with 'the discipline of discrimination.'" Samkhya.*
Hopkins, T., 'The Hindu Religious Tradition', (1971), Cengage Learning.
- "By the atman's continued entanglement in the Gunas it becomes subject to karma and is thus trapped in samsara."* **Jamison, I. – Hinduism, (2006), Philip Allan Updates.**
- "The Hindu scriptures insist that there is only one God and that the entire Universe is nothing other than an appearance of this Supreme Spirit."* **Sharma, A., Classical Hindu Thought, (2012), D.K. Printworld Ltd.**
- "There is only one God, who resides deep inside all objects and beings. He is everywhere and the inner self of all."* **(Shvetashvatara Upanishad 6:11).**
- "Thus if I think a rope is a snake, I can continue to believe this till something in my experience contradicts the belief, such as the failure of the rope to move when trodden on."* **McDermott, G.R. 'World Religions', Harper Collins, (2011).**

Key words

Samkhya	illusory	Adi Shankara	mundane	Ishvara	ultimate
Jiva Atman	Adhyasa	jnana yoga	Patanjali	Atman	Nirguna
Brahman	three Gunas	Brahma Sutra	Prakriti	Advaita	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that it is impossible to understand Brahman as Nirguna.

Many Hindus would argue that it is a common misconception that the Hindu concept of God is ultimately impersonal.

Others would argue that Brahman can be understood as Saguna and Nirguna.

Key questions

To what extent can Brahman be understood as Nirguna?

Is Samkhya yoga the best way to reach moksha?

How successful have the Samkhya and Advaita Vedanta philosophies been in explaining the true relationship between God and humanity?