

AN INDO-WESTERN ANATOMY OF INFINITE MANIFESTATIONS OF UNMANIFEST SOUL

by

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PHILOSOPHY ARCHIVES

मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद्यतति सिद्धये ।
यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥

*manuṣyāṇāṃ sahasreṣu
kaścid yatati siddhaye
yatatām api siddhānām
kaścin māṃ veti tattvataḥ*

-From 'Bhagabad-Gita : Knowledge of the Absolute.'

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There are various grades of men ranging from potentially excellent individuals having different personalities and characteristics to a person who has not yet escaped himself from the clutches of the darkness of ignorance. Out of many thousands, one might have ever sufficiently been interested in either transcendental or pragmatic realization to know the absolute truth, the knowledge about oneself. But, what does it mean when I emphasize the words absolute? Don't you think it is a paradoxical one in this transitory world where human beings end up their lives running after unadulterated materialism? Does it refer to the metaphysical battlefield of nature's dualities: self-control

versus sense indulgence, discriminative intelligence contested by mental resistance, and physical restlessness?

The ultimate goal of life is not merely a vibrant life but knowledge too, and the knowledge is not complete as long as he or she is not aware of the knowledge about oneself. Man is not merely a materialistic body ready to be annihilated with the course of time nor mind nor both but a complex of these and much more beyond our imagination. A series of questions can be raised looking at the smoothness of life amidst complexities. Don't you think that there is an activator for all this which is the inner witness and reality in each man? A serious seeker of knowledge won't disagree with me. There is also another way to analyze the whole concept: the activator, the soul. All these things in this mundane world are changeable except the soul. One of the things that greatly influenced human beings from time immemorial and compelled them to question their very existence was the changeability of everything. Assuming this, they asked themselves whether there is a consistent and unvarying essence or whether this changing essence is the absolute reality, or is there anything as the base of everything? Philosophical studies about the existence of the soul and our day to day experiences enlighten the possibility of the existence of mystical inner reality which activates all our life actions and the presence of which is the state of living and its absence from this materialistic body is the state of death.

But, what is the meaning of death and its relation to life? Is there any way to triumph over death? This has always instigated several researchers and philosophers to investigate and philosophize that necessitated items like body, mind, and ever-existing reality, the soul which completes a human being and leads to the perfect epistemology of self through which one can eradicate all the miseries and misfortunes. There occurred several studies and investigations by different philosophers and researchers in many fields. In the present work, I have tried my best to analyze both the western and Indian philosophy, particularly the Heterodox and Orthodox systems of Indian philosophy to explore the function of the soul through scientific theories and Advaita Vedanta.

Philosophy

Precisely, philosophy is the 'love of wisdom'; an attempt to have a world view and a continuous process to arrive at a rational conception of reality as a whole. We may define it

as something which ignites a natural and necessary urge in human beings to know about themselves and the terrestrial world in which they live. Philosophy not only inquires into the nature of the universe but also gives an insight and a new dimension to studying the nature of the human soul in a persistent and logistic way by systematizing our moral and scientific aesthetics and religious experiences. In nutshell, it is a logical and rational approach or method to know about oneself. Anyhow, man is a rational being, and his life and existence take it for granted an unconscious world view. The best way to make him conscious is to philosophize his very existence and purpose of life.

Indian Philosophy:

Philosophical speculation in India sprang from the need for practical realization of truth, a deeper craving for achieving the highest good. A little study on Indian philosophy reveals the base and its shifting from studying the external objective nature to the metaphysical realm of human beings to enquire into the essence of the human mind and human conduct. Spiritual practices for self-realization and annihilation of three kinds of pain: 'Adhyatmika', 'Adhibhautika', and 'Adhidaivika' are the keynotes for all schools of Indian philosophy. 'Sravana', 'Manana', and 'Nididhyasana' are the means for understanding the knowledge of the oneness of Brahma.

The ancient Hindus had an insatiable appetite for acquiring knowledge. They wondered whether there was any transcendental first principle or unending reality, underlines the outside world, and also there was such a thing that underlines human being himself. What is the highest good? What is the end and purpose of life? Is death the ultimate end of life? The ubiquitous presents of transitory life stirred the thought of ancient Indo-Aryans and they began to ponder over the way to win over death, and finally, they directed their attentions to a different world, the inner world within the human being himself. By means of spiritual discipline, severe self-control, and patient search, they discovered the immense potentiality in each and every individual which is the immortal ultimate reality and differentiated the realm of the mind from the realm of the gross physical matter.

The philosophical thought of ancient Indo-Aryans is categorized and summarized in six main orthodox systems known as the Samkhya ascribed

to Kapil, the Purvamimamsa ascribed to Jamini, the Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta ascribed to Badarayana, the Yoga to Patanjali, the Nyaya to Goutam and Vaisesika to Kanada. All these systems not only accept God as creator or annihilator of everything but also derive their authority from Vedas and maintain the existence of Soul or Atman from the body and mind. Opposed to the orthodox systems of philosophies is the heterodox systems of philosophies which comprise the four schools of Buddhism, the system of Jainism, and the materialism of Charvaka.

Characteristics of Soul according to two systems :

Almost all these systems of both Orthodox systems of philosophy and Heterodox systems of philosophy accept the existence of Soul or Atman. Carvaka is the only system that does not believe in the separate existence of God and presupposes the sensual pleasures are the only summum bonum of life. As per Carvaka philosophy, there is no soul surviving death.

Buddha adopted the theory of momentariness and became silent on the metaphysical existence of God and the ultimate reality of the empirical self, though he asserted on the empirical reality. As per him, the Soul, the mind, or ego is unrealistic. He philosophized the Soul simply as an aggregate of the body, the sensations, and ideas, which is ever restless.

Jainism gives a different nature of the Soul and its size ranging from microscopic to macroscopic depending on the shape and size of the bodies. The Soul is above birth and death, and every liberated soul is comparable to God. As long as the Soul's presence is in the body, the body is alive, and its absence is the state of death.

As per Samkhya, the Purusa is the Soul. It is neither body nor mind. It is neither ego nor the intellect too. It is not a material that comprises consciousness, but it is itself transparent and transcendental consciousness, a self-proved and self-luminous entity.

As per Yoga, Purusa is the purest and transcendental consciousness which is free from the limitations of Prakriti, but it wrongly identifies itself in Citta which results in infinite manifestations and undergoing modifications. When Purusa gets the enlightenment of self-realization and makes himself free from the

clutches of the plurality of Prakriti, he ceases to identify itself in Citta. The cycle of undergoing changes and modifications is broken and he completely isolates Prakriti and becomes a passive spectator.

Nyaya philosophy believes that the soul is eternal and omnipresent. It is not located in any part of the body and does not hike with the body, but it exists everywhere in spacetime. Hence, we may call it an all-pervading entity.

The doctrine of soul, in accordance with Vaisesika, is very old and based on ancient popular views. Though its philosophical procedures, ethical conclusions and soteriology became similar with the philosophy of Nyaya with the course of time, it retained its epistemological and metaphysical difference. Some philosophers consider it as a form of atomism in natural philosophy for its insight in naturalism. In accordance with the philosophy of Vaisesika, all the bodies in the physical universe can be reducible to invisible and indivisible particles called 'Paramanu' and one's experience is the result of the interplay and function and aggregation of atoms or paramanu, particularity and inherence. Philosophically, we can add flavor to it. The best way to philosophize it is that it indirectly depicts numerous individual souls as the carriers of life, and it has a seat in heart from where it directs the physical body and mystical mind as a charioteer of a chariot. The life of an individual relies on it and when it departs from the body human beings die.

Kumarila Bhatt and Prabhakar like upholders of Purvamimamsa emphasize on the plurality of individual souls and regard self as all-pervading ubiquitous infinite substance, the substratum of consciousness and the real enjoyer and agent. The self is above the body, the sense and mind, and consciousness can not be considered as the essence of it. Due to the exhaustion of virtuous tendencies and wicked impulsive sense tendencies, one gets liberated, but the self remains as pure as before divested of all qualities of bliss and consciousness.

The doctrine of Ramanuja Vedanta qualifies the self as self-luminous and self-consciousness, and denies it as a 'Jada substance'. The self can identify itself as well as the object. Knowledge is eternally inherited from the unique adjunct of the self. The soul is an eternal, uncreated, indestructible integral part of God. He further categorised the souls into three classes such as ever free, liberated, and bound.

But, the philosophy of Madhava has a slight disagreement with the philosophy of Ramanuja. As per him, the soul is different not only from matter but also from God. Unlike Ramanuja, he advocates both qualitative and quantitative pluralism of Atman or Souls, and beliefs that souls disagree regarding their possession of knowledge and happiness of bliss during the time of salvation too. In no way, a soul can be comparable to the almighty or Brahman irrespective of its excellency.

The philosophy of Nimbarka is very simple and matches with the vedanta of Ramanuja and Madhava. He identifies three realities of this metaphysical world known as God, soul and matter, the latter ones being dependent on the supreme lord. Though the soul is eternal and free from materialism, it suffers births and deaths due to its bodily actions, the karma.

But, the philosophy of Sankara is quite contrasting to Madhava and Nimbarka. As per him, the Atman or Soul is equivalent to Brahman. It is pure consciousness and self-luminous, and the trinity of knowledge, knower and known. It is the omnipresent unqualified absolute and ultimate reality. It is not relative, and therefore self-proved.

It will not be wise if we skip what Upanishads say about Atman or Soul as it is the base of Indian Philosophy. For Sankar, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, and Madhava, Upanishads are considered as the sacred texts. They have interpreted the essence of various Upanishads in order to make them suit their theories. The etymology of the word Atman originated from the pre-Upanishadic era. If we study it in more detail, we will find that it is not initially used in a metaphysical sense when it was acquired in the Upanishads. The word itself means sitting down of a pupil near his preceptor in a devoted manner to enlighten himself from the darkness of ignorance through continuous instruction about the highest reality. Then, what does Atman or Soul mean as mentioned in Upanishads? The doctrine of Upanishads tells that Atman is something that pervades all space which is immortal and the same irrespective of its presence in different objects. We can hear sounds, notice different forms, do different actions, etc. due to the presence of consciousness in respective bodily organs. There is one principle of consciousness that sits in every living creature and manifests itself throughout his entire body. That incorporeal, matterless, and invisible consciousness is the soul.

A brief introduction to western philosophical note on Soul:

Unlike Indian philosophy, western philosophy is modern and originated from **doubts**. The present era is also considered as the age of doubts and perplexity. From today's state of extinction of humanity and the critical condition of morality, we need a true perspective and a true philosophy of human beings that will act as a solvent of the doubts and chaos prevailing at present. Like Indian Philosophy, it comprises the three main parts of philosophy- **Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Axiology**. Epistemology deals with the theory of knowledge while Metaphysics and Axiology are related to the study of reality and theory of values respectively. **Modern Philosophy** is purely based on epistemology and has a dominant place in **contemporary philosophy**. Metaphysics investigates the nature of reality or the first principle of everything, the nature of the world, the nature of life, soul, and God. Axiology studies the values or ideals that are supreme norms of life.

Western Philosophy on soul:

Our study on the immaterial and mystical soul will be incomplete without highlighting the philosophical and theoretical keynotes of western philosophy starting from presocratic thinkers to Descartes and Berkely. The basic concepts of western philosophy on soul were highly influenced and flourished by traditional philosophers like Plato (first in the *Phaedo*, then in the *Republic*), Aristotle (in the '*De Anima*' or the Soul), and later theoretical developments and rationalistic approach to understanding the ultimate reality was carried out by other proponents in the **medieval and modern era**. Plato emphasized the achievement of the pure state by an individual soul. He said that the pure state was only achievable when the soul freed itself from the prison of this physical body. Unlike Plato, Aristotle championed the entanglement of the soul from the body. Opposed to Plato and Aristotle, Rene Descartes emphasized the thinking aspect of the soul and urged to identify it with mind or understanding. There are also other philosophers ranging from the medieval period to Immanuel Kant of the modern era, and to the contemporary of the western philosophy who have philosophised the soul in their own way. But, the best as I do think is proposed and identified by Plato and Aristotle to some extent.

Presocratic thinking on the concept of soul:

It will be wise to start our investigation of the study of western philosophical notes on the soul from the pre-socratic thinking point of view. Pre-socratic philosophers were recognised in antiquity and regarded as the first torchbearers of the western philosophy. Though they were the investigators of nature, mostly concerned with the nature of world and reality, they established the base for inquiring into the self and ignited the spark to understand the underlying first principle of everything. Major philosophical schools that existed during the pre-socratic period are **Ionians, Pythagoreanism, the Eleatics, the Atomists, and the Sophists**. Though each member of the presocratic era contributed in their own way and defined, quantified, shaped and reshaped their ideas on the physical reality and the first principle of everything, the Atomists as I think, gave the foundation of the soul. Democritus believed that all the senses and physical experiences were the results of atoms encountering each other. The atoms are indestructible and invisible. For the explanation of souls, he proposed the role of soul atoms. He did not comment on the immortality of the soul, rather he felt that it was the soul atoms that were smooth, and when humans died, these soul atoms dispersed out into the world and became parts of everything else.

Platonic theory on soul:

Throughout history, human beings are always fascinated and motivated about all the aspects of the unseen. Many questions arose in his mind, but only a few questions were answered. In my short and humble contribution to study the mysterious activator of life, I think Plato, one of the greatest disciples of Socrates had contributed a lot to the concept of the soul by showing the distinction between mind, matter, and the soul. In the dialog titled Phaedo, he gave the affinity argument on the immortality of souls. He mentioned that there were two kinds of things known as composites and intelligible. Composite substances are subject to dissolution and destruction while intelligible things are not perceptible and destructible. That intelligible thing is the mysterious soul. As per his view in the Republic, a person's soul has three important elements: Rational, spirited, and appetite. The rational part is the thinking one where all the intellectual pondering takes place. It has a sense of good and bad. The appetite part of the soul is responsible for hunger,

sensual pleasures, and other bodily activities. The spirited or hot-blotted part stands against the difficulties and motivates to give rise to ambition and self-assertion. It also causes frustration and indignation when the desires are not fulfilled. Plato believes that the soul is eternal and pure, and the union of the soul with a mortal body is a hindrance to the intellectual aspirations of the soul.

Aristotle's biological and platonic vision on soul:

After Plato, if someone had highly influenced western philosophy, he is nothing else than Aristotle, the disciple of Plato. Unlike Plato before him and Descartes after him, his philosophical note on the soul is completely different and scientific. He defined the essence of soul by connecting its relationship with biological or organic structure. As per him, all the living creatures living in this material world have souls, and it is not an interior immaterial agent activating a body. As per Aristotle, the soul and the body are no more distinct from each other, though the parts of the soul called faculties are distinguishable from each other by their operations. The power of feeling and the power of growth can not be the same as we observe in our day to day life. In his famous work 'De Anima', he further emphasizes the distinction of two states of mind called active mind which forms concepts and passive mind which acts as a storehouse of ideas and beliefs. If my interpretation of the two states of mind is right, then Aristotle is here recognizing the section of that human soul which is separable from the physical body and immortal. Don't you think that it contradicts our first pronouncement on Aristotle on soul and body based on biological thoughts? Yes, it is. But, I do think so from the residue of Platonic vision of the soul.

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