

The Samkhya ontologies of Phenomenology and Buddhism

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Page 01 of 01

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Kapil Rishi

Rishi Kapila, founder of Samkhya philosophy, performed severe austerities in Amarkantak where Holy Narmada starts. Visit Kapil Dhara.

Snapshot

- The author shows how phenomenologists from Edmund Husserl to Edith Stein are indebted to Samkhya. He also makes a case for Bhagavan Buddha being a Samkhya Yogi.

Edmund Husserl is credited for effecting the phenomenological turn in Western philosophy. Without Husserl's interventions in the history of Western ideas, they say, we would not have the existentialist thinkers ranging from the widely known atheist --- Jean Paul Sartre and his followers to theist existentialists like Karl Jaspers etc. These observations are just oversimplifications of a complicated topic.

Husserl's importance can be understood from the fact that there would be no Martin Heidegger had there been no Husserl. Yet as this author pointed out in October, 2022 at the International Jesuit Centre for Philosophy at Chennai, where he was invited to deliver the de Nobili Endowment Lecture, that it is impossible that Husserl was not aware of the Upanishads and even the Yoga Vasishtha. Through the German Idealists both Husserl and Edith Stein, certainly knew about the concept of many purushas. Purushas here does not indicate any gender. Each purusha's own terrain --- *swa-varga*, is our world. Purushas are practically gods unto themselves. We, both this writer and the reader of this article, are merely the phenomenological qualia of each of these purushas.

So later when Edith Stein went on to frame her paradigm shifting doctoral work on the Problem of Empathy, she must have been acutely aware of the problems posed by these apparently solipsistic purushas.

Let us consider the problem in a different manner and try to understand this through an Indic analogy.

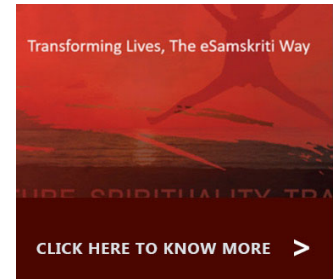
According to Bhagavan Buddha, we are all without exceptions, potential future Buddhas. Now each Buddha, and here we need to consider the pratyekabuddhas; inhabit their own 'lokas' or,



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Buddhaland. These 'lokas' are not physical 'lokas' but phenomenological terrain emanating from each of the millions of Buddhas. But even before Stein began her research, it was well understood within Buddhism that each Buddha is connected to other Buddhas and all sentient beings, through empathy as later mapped and discussed by Stein. [This standpoint of Buddhism is an affirmation of Samkhya philosophy.](#)

Each bodhisattva is a Samkhya Yogi who is at the verge of nirvana, qua mukti, qua moksha and lives absorbed in jhana or solipsistic inwardness. Here the textual register, 'solipsism', is not used in the traditional pejorative manner that Western thinkers use it. Through brief analogies and examples, we have demonstrated how both our Dharma and Buddha Dharma have informed the entire gamut of Western phenomenologists --- from Edmund Husserl to Edith Stein.

Incidentally, Stein is today the patron Saint of Europe: Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Interrogated through this hermeneutics; the problem of empathy had been resolved millennia ago through Samkhya which leads finally to Advaita. Here one has to disagree with those who unfortunately hold that Samkhya is a strictly dualist way of ratiocination. It is certainly rational, anticipating Navya Nyaya, but it is not non dualistic.

Samkhya taken to its logical conclusion is Yoga; the post Yogic part is *Samadhi* where the purusha feels no difference with other purushas and the Problem of Empathy is resolved through non-qualified non-dualism. [It is a pity that Husserl and Stein did not mention Samkhya or the Indic influence which had certainly informed their corpus.](#) This too was pointed out by this author at the De Nobili Endowment Lecture in 2022 at Chennai. It is absolutely erroneous to term Samkhya a godless, atheistic and dualist philosophy. Georg Feuerstein pointed out in his glosses on the Yoga Sutras; how Yoga is actually a disunion rather than a union. To date, there is no better contemporary-academic understanding of yoga than that of the late Feuerstein's glosses on our sacred Scriptures.


Read [George F is a Yogi that India forgot](#)

The basics of Samkhya can be found by reading the Wikipedia article on Samkhya accessed on 12th January, 2024 at 10:31 am, IST. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* gets Samkhya repeatedly wrong by insisting on the duality which inheres in Samkhya according to misreadings of the sources of Samkhya. This is a fallout of studying Samkhya as an Orientalist project. Here the term 'misreading' and the phrase 'Orientalist project' are derived from Harold Bloom and Edward Said respectively.

Personhood in Classical Indian Philosophy by Monima Chadha in *The Stanford Encyclopedia* states that: "The Sāṃkhya and Yoga philosophers disagree with the Advaitic thesis that individual persons (*jīvas*) are only delusions, but agree that the true self, the essence of the person is the soul or consciousness untainted by matter. There is no value to development of persons as such, according to these spiritual philosophies, the only activity worthy of pursuit is the search for the true self" (n.p.). This cannot be further from the reality --- the Advaitin is a Brahmovadin and even by a long shot, is not a Mayavadin. Chadha neither understands Samkhya, nor Advaita.

In this same entry accessed on 11th January, 2024 at 12:13 am IST, Chadha makes absurd claims like: "Among the non-Hindu traditions, we begin with [the] Jaina conception of persons because it is closest to the Hindu conception, specifically that of the Bhaṭṭa Mīmāṃsā and Sāṃkhya schools. Like the Sāṃkhya, the Jainas are essentially dualistic. The universe is constituted by two kinds of things: living (*jīva*) and non-living (*ajīva*) akin to *puruṣa* and *prakṛtī*" (n.p.). Who will make thinkers trained in dualist Abrahamic philosophy extrapolated from dualist Abrahamic theologies understand that Samkhya is not dualistic, and Jainism has little to do with the Samkhya conception of the human person in the here and now?

The Heideggerian *dasein* is more akin to the Jain keval-jnani but Jainism is a na-astika way of life which negates the presence of Brahman in every form. Heidegger following Sri Ramanujacharya whom he never cites, at least makes the *dasein* dependant on God. Though the existence of God in the Abrahamic sense poses problems of theodicy which is beyond the range of this essay. Sri Kundakunda's corpus, for instance, is a good point for neophytes interested in Jain non-creationism.


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And Chadha contradicts herself here --- according to her, Jainism is non-Hindu but at the same time akin to Samkhya. This is a logical error which mars discussions of Samkhya found offline and online.

Samkhya is foundational to our Dharma including the main mode of our Dharma --- Tantra, than it is to Jainism which has not yet been able to resolve the problem of empathy resolved long ago by Samkhya leading to Advaita and later re-presented to the world by Husserl and his disciples.

In summation, [we can certainly call the Buddhists and Bhagavan Buddha, Samkhya Yogis](#). To give an esoteric Buddhist example --- Vajrayana actually reworks the popular Samkhya purusha and prakriti distinctions found in various Buddhist Tantras. Probably Ra Lotsāwa established Sanatana Tantra within the woof of Tibetan life. Tibetan Buddhism would not have been what it is today, had it not been for their accommodation of Sanatana Dharma and its main mode, Tantra. Johannes Bronkhorst is way off the mark when he dates Buddhist praxes before Hindu methods of absorption in his eponymous book. Bronkhorst would do well to read the life of Ra Lotsāwa.

In summation we can say that Continental and European thinkers should have been more careful in their attributions of their sources in formulating their now canonical phenomenological theories which owe their existence to Samkhya. And, Buddhist metaphysicians including powerful Tibetan polemicists should be more forthcoming about their Samkhya origins. We cannot ignore the fact that every Bodhisattwa is a Samkhya Yogi. Constraint of space prevents the elaboration of Samkhya's influence further.

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Author Subhasis Chattopadhyay has a Ph.D. in Patristics and the Problem of Evil in American Horror Literature from the University of Calcutta. His reviews from 2010 to 2021 in *Prabuddha Bharata* have been showcased by Ivy League Presses. He has qualifications in Christian Theology and Hindu Studies and currently teaches English Literature in the PG and UG Department of a College affiliated to the University of Calcutta. He also has qualifications in Behavioural Sciences.

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Former President of India and philosopher, Dr S. Radhakrishnan wrote in *Indian Philosophy* Volume 1, "The 4 noble truths of Buddhism correspond to the 4 truths of Samkhya as put in the Samkhyapravacanabhāṣya: "1. That from which we deliver ourselves in pain. 2. Deliverance is the cessation of pain. 3. The cause of pain is the want to discrimination between prakṛti and puruṣa, which produces the continuous union. 4. The means of deliverance is discerning knowledge." (399). Sage Kapila rejected sacrifices, prayers and ceremonies as much as Buddha did.

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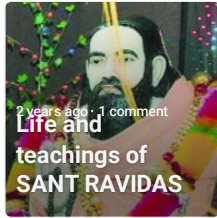
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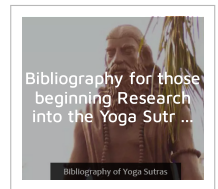
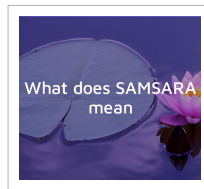
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