

Essay

Evolution & Life

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Abstract

In my latest essays on consciousness, I suggest that, while it is the norm to examine the subject from the perspective of consciousness in the human brain, it might be more relevant to widen that viewpoint. For that reason I chose to use the Vedic theory of Satchitananda to examine how relevant that theory would be in the early cellular forms of life. Using the Vedic Sanskrit terms of Manas and Samskaras, I put forward some thoughts about how and why these terms, usually associated with the human experience, would apply to the simple form of life. To assist the discussion, I introduce the Yoga diagram from U. B. Arya's book, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*.

Keywords: Samskaras, Manas, mind, memory, self-organisation, Yoga diagram, buddhi, atman, soul, Fritjof Capra, self-organising systems.

In my earlier essays, I had put forward a model of how consciousness may arise in the brain, and in particular, how what we call mind is really the moment by moment content of one's memory. This viewpoint relied on an earlier JCER article by Hari, in which that author made the analogy of the mind to the memory in a computer. What I had not addressed was the questions of how are these apparently sequential moments are selected from memory. I had suggested that memory exists at the level of Mahat on that Yoga diagram, and adjacent to Mahat is buddhi, the faculty of discrimination. I also had said that the term, Akasha, was significant because it implied that all of the components of the diagram existed in nonlocal space. The word, nonlocal, is why we can say that what is contained in the Vedic literature is scientific information in the present tense of the word, science.

From quantum theory, we accept that a quantum of matter such as a photon can be in more than one state at the same time. This statement is generally used in terms of a qubit in the case of quantum computers. In the Yoga Sutras this is applied to the whole reality, and specifically to the nonlocal state. In the Yoga Sutras we find that the smallest particle is merely a point without mass, and in today's science that would mean a particle prior to becoming something measurable. The Sutras continue by saying that where there is a conjunction of a number of points without mass, a point with mass can occur. I believe this is similar to the current standard model of physics, albeit expressed in slightly different language. This is reasonable, given that the Vedas were expressed in the Sanskrit language, and later translated into English.

The model of consciousness derived from the Yoga diagram, together with my experience in the state of Samapatti, conforms to the information from the Yoga Sutras which has Mahat as the

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dispassionate observer and buddhi as the faculty of discrimination. These two points on the diagram are aspects of Satchitananda, which is a composite of Existence, Knowing and Bliss. In this instance, specifically the aspect of knowing, which is what is generally called consciousness. Since the whole diagram reflects Satchitananda we can say that at the lower level of the diagram where matter comes into existence, 3-23, that too would have those same characteristics of Satchitananda. This means that mind and living matter does have those characteristics. What is not specified on the diagram is atman, the soul, and in the text by Arya this too extends right across the diagram. It is not specified on the diagram because the diagram assumes to represent the human experience.

The whole diagram represents Akasha, a space unlike physical space which we can say is nonlocal space because it contains points without mass, in other words is it outside of spacetime. From the other source, the Tarka Samgraha², we find that atman is manas, which is mind, and that atman and therefore mind can be modified. This introduces the concept of samskaras, which are the modifications of the mind. For the simple cell, all of these aspects of Satchitananda are present, including the faculties of discrimination knowing and memory, at the level of Mahat and buddhi. All matter will have the space of Akasha within it, and so in exactly the same way that conscious awareness can arise in the brain, the simple cell will have that same conscious awareness to the appropriate degree. Appropriate because in the earliest cells this level of conscious awareness is all that would have evolved up to that point in time.

The question now becomes, how does the cell discriminate without a brain? This is a quite significant question because asking that assumes we believe it is the brain which is doing the discriminating. In *The Web of Life*³, Fritjof Capra talks about self-organising systems, and that may seem what the simple cell employs in navigating its environment. But I would suggest that this self-organising capability would exist as an aspect of Satchitananda within Mahat, or as a combination of the faculties of Mahat and buddhi.

In the Yoga Sutras, Mahat is regarded as the greatest teacher, and in that context I believe it to be reasonable to attribute this capability to Mahat/buddhi. Part of my reason for saying this comes from the Yoga model itself. As a nonlocal state, Akasha holds all of the information the cell has accumulated from its life experience. This moment by moment information is held simultaneously rather than sequentially because in that state there is no time or locality. For the simple cell, all that is required is the appropriate response to an input, and it has created samskaras of the inputs which relates input and response.

In humans the same is true of our memory. We are unaware of the sequential nature of the information because in the moment by moment experience we have there is a moment by moment awareness of the experience. This comes about because our mind has evolved that way; it self-organises the information into a moment by moment record, relating input to output. It most likely employs the self-organising capability when it comes to the decision process. This process has been shown to take a definite gap between the question and the answer. We are unaware of the gap because we are only aware of the answer and assume we have consciously made a decision. I would suggest the gap is the time taken by the self-organising process.

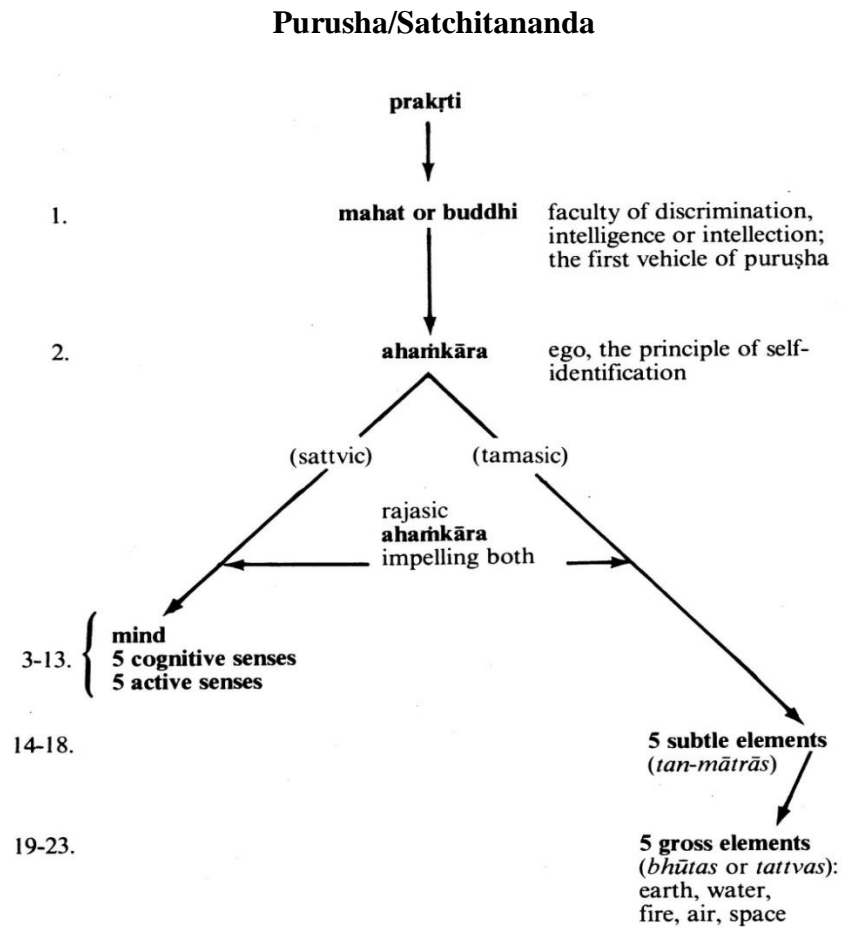


Fig. 1

References

1. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Ushar buddh Arya.
2. Tarka Samgraha, a Primer of Indian Logic by Mahamahopadhyaya Vidyavacaspati, and S. Kuppaswami Sastri. M.A., I.E.S.
3. The Web of Life. Fritjof Capra.