Unit 3  SAMKHYA PHILOSOPHY

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, you will learn the various issues and ideas pertaining to Sāṁkhya Philosophy.

After working through this unit, you should be able to;
- explain the Sāṁkhya theory of causation
- elucidate the distinction between Purusa and Prakṛti
- discuss Sāṁkhya views on evolution
- analyze Sāṁkhya account on pramāṇas (Sources of valid knowledge)
- illustrate Sāṁkhya explanations on bondage and liberation
- discuss the Sāṁkhya views on God

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will find the Sāṁkhya’s theory of causation, distinction between purusa and prakṛti, discussion on the gunas of prakṛti; sattva, rajas and tamaj, and a few more issues.

In the previous unit you had studied Vaisesika Philosophy in an elaborate manner. While studying Vaisesika School of thought you must have gone through the discussions on Vaisesika’s metaphysics and categories, the concept of bondage and liberation, etc. In this unit, you will find how Sāṁkhya Philosophy argues for the cause of evolution of the world, the role of purusa and prakṛti for the creation of the universe, valid sources of knowledge, and on the existence of God.

The Sāṁkhya Philosophy is one among the oldest school in India Philosophy. This is so because the basic tenets of Sāṁkhya can be seen in Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Yoga, Jainism, and Vedānta. The
founder of Sāṁkhya Philosophy is ‘Kapila’ who has written the script ‘Sāṁkhya Sūtra’. This script is widely known as Sāṁkhya Philosophy. It is commented by many scholars, out of those the significant commentary is known as ‘Sāṁkhya Kārika’ by Iśvarakṛṣṇa.

There are two views on the origin of this school. Some are believed that the word Sāṁkhya is derived from the word ‘Saṁkhyā’ which means number as well as right knowledge. Right knowledge is about understanding the reality by specifying the number of ultimate constituents of the universe. Others viewed that Sāṁkhya means ‘perfect knowledge’ and that is about the reality. With these introductions now let us know Sāṁkhya’s metaphysics.

3.2 METAPHYSICS

The Sāṁkhya Philosophy is regarded as dualistic realism. It is dualistic because it holds the doctrine of two ultimate realities; Prakṛti and Purusas. Further, it maintains the plurality of Purusas (self) and the existence of matter, hence, treated as pluralistic. It is realism because they viewed that both matter and spirit are equally real. The Sāṁkhya school expresses that the self (Purusa) and the non-self (Prakriti) are radically different from each other, as like, subject and object. As subject can never be the object, similarly, an object can never be the subject.

In this regard, a few important questions are addressed here. Those are, ‘what is the ultimate cause of an object?’ and, ‘what are the constituents of the universe?’ In other words, what is the ultimate stuff of which the various objects of the world are made?

The Sāṁkhya replies that Prakṛti is the ultimate (first) cause of all objects, including our mind, body and sense organs. It is observed that every effect must have a cause. Cause and effect are two inseparable components stand for all sorts of creation in the cosmos. Hence, all objects of the world are bounded in the chain of cause-effect relation. This relation Sāṁkhya named as ‘satkāryavāda’ and populated as ‘theory of causation’.

3.3 THEORY OF CAUSATION

The Sāṁkhya theory of causation is known as satkāryavāda. It explains the effect exists in its material cause prior to its production. For example, curd was existing in the milk before comes into existence. Hence, the effect is not a real beginning or a new creation. It is also named as ‘parināmavāda’. By refuting this view Nyāyikas said that effect is a new creation, otherwise why we say this is the effect and that was the cause. The detail analysis of Nyaya theory cause-effect relation (asatkāryavāda/ ārabhavāda) is found in this Block, Unit-1: Nyaya Philosophy.

The following arguments uphold by Sāṁkhya to support the theory satkāryavāda.

i) If the effect does not exist in the cause prior to its operation, none can bring into existence out of the cause. For example, blue cannot be turned into yellow even by a thousand artists. The effect is related to its cause. Effect is nothing but the manifestation of the cause, as oil
will be produced from oil seeds only. Thus, effect pre-exists in the material cause in a latent or un-manifest condition.

ii) A particular effect can be produced out of a particular material cause. A mud jar can be produced out of clay only; cloth can be produced out of threads only. Thus, it proves that the effects are existing in the cause in a latent condition.

iii) If the effect is not related to its cause, then every effect would arise from every cause. But this does not happen. Every effect does not arise from every cause. For example, butter cannot be produced from sands, waters, or oils. It is produced from milk only.

iv) The effect pre-exists in the cause since it can be produced by a potent cause only. A potent cause has causal energy to produce a particular effect. The causal energy in this case is inferred from the perception of the effect. If the effect is not existent in the cause, then the causal energy can’t be related to it. If the causal energy is unrelated to the effect, then any effect will arise from any cause. Hence, the effect must be pre-existent in its potent cause only.

v) The effect pre-exists in the cause since it is identical in nature with its cause. The effect is not different from the cause. The cause is existent and therefore, the effect cannot be non-existent. Hence, effect inheres in its cause. This is so because there is no identity between entity and non-entity.

The Sāṁkhya disagrees with Nyāyikas and said that if curd as an effect is a new creation and does not exist in its material cause (milk) prior to its production, then can we produce curd from some other liquids like oil, kerosene, diesel etc. Hence, each effect exists in its material cause prior to its production in a hidden form.

Here, a question may come to your mind, i.e. if every effect must have a cause then what would be the cause of a material cause? By responding to this query Sāṁkhya philosophy expressed that Prakṛti is the first and ultimate cause of all objects of the world both gross and subtle.

**Prakṛti**

Prakṛti is the ultimate cause of the universe. It is regarded as the first cause. All effects of the universe are based upon it. Being the first element of the universe, Prakṛti itself is uncaused, eternal, and all pervading. Hence, it is called “pradhāna”. It can’t be perceived but can be inferred from its effect. Thus, it is known as ‘anumā’. In the form of conscious elements, it is called jada, and in the form of the unmanifested objects, it is called ‘avayakta’.

**Differences between Prakṛti and Objects**

Objects are the effects of Prakṛti. These are dependant, relative, many and non-eternal because they are created and destroyed. But Prakṛti, on the other hand, has neither beginning nor end. It is
unborn, independent, absolute, one, eternal and beyond creation and destruction. Objects are limited within the space-time continuum but Prakṛti is beyond of it. Objects are manifest and composite but Prakṛti is unmanifest and without parts. Thus, Vyāsa says that Prakṛti is both ‘is’ and ‘is-not’.

**Proofs for the existence of Prakṛti**

There are five arguments offered by Isvarakrishna for the existence of Prakṛti. These are as follows;

i) The world is constituted of manifold of objects. The existence of all the objects must have a cause. This is so because they themselves can’t be the cause of their creation. Further, they are limited, dependent, relative and have an end. Hence, the cause which creates them should be unlimited, exists beyond creation and destruction, independent and eternal. Such a cause is the Prakṛti.

ii) The world is an amalgam of all varieties of objects. However, some common qualities are found among all the objects. As a result, pleasure, pain, and indifference subsist among all varieties of objects. This implies that there should be a common cause which possesses these three qualities (pleasure, pain and indifference) and share in all the objects once they created. This cause is Prakṛti.

iii) The activity is generated in the potent cause. All effects arise out of causes in which they were present in an unmanifest form. Evolution means the manifestation of that which is involved. The world of objects which are effect must therefore be implicitly contained in some world cause.

iv) Every cause has its effect. Thus, cause and effect are distinct from each other although the effect exists in its material cause prior to its production (satkāryavāda). By implication therefore, the universe must have a cause. This cause unmanifests the universe in its totality. This cause in nothing but the Prakṛti.

v) Sāṁkhya satkāryavāda accepts the cause-effect relation as an inherence form which implies every effect inheres in its material cause. This holds that if the effect rolls back toward its cause, then it will dissolve in its cause. This helps to maintain the homogeneity in the universe. The balance universe from where everything manifold is regarded as Prakṛti.

**Gunas of Prakṛti**

The Sāṁkhya Philosophy advocates three gunas of Prakṛti. These are; Sattva, rajas and tamas. Prakṛti is a state of equilibrium of these three gunas. The word ‘guna’ is understood here as quality or attribute. Now, let us know about these three gunas.

i) **Sattva**: Sattva is that element of Prakṛti which is of the nature of pleasure, light (laghu) and bright or illuminating (prakāsaka). The tendency towards conscious manifestation in the senses, the mind and the intellect; the luminosity of light and the power of reflection in a mirror or crystal are all due to the operation of the element of Sattva in the constitution of
things. For example, blazing up a fire, upward curse of vapour etc. Sattva is believed to be
white.

ii) **Rajas**: Rajas is the principle of activity in things. Its colour is red. It is active because of
its mobility and stimulation. It is also the nature of pain. For example, on account of rajas,
fire spread; wind blows; the mind becomes restless, etc.

iii) **Tamas**: Tamas is the principle of passivity and negativity in things. Its colour is black. It
is opposed to the Sattva guna because it is heavy, laziness, drowsiness. It produces ignorance
and darkness and leads to confusion and bewilderment.

Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas contradict as well as cooperate among each other to produce an
object. These three gunas are present in all the objects of the world. None of them exist
alone. Among them each guna tries to dominate the other two. Hence, they can’t exist in a
tranquility state. As a result; they can’t remain pure for a single moment. Since they are
changing continuously; distortion is their nature.

There are two types of transformations occur in the gunas. These are, ‘svarupa’ and ‘virupa’.

**Svarupa**

During pralaya or dissolution of the world, the gunas are changing within themselves without
disturbing the others. That is, Sattva changes into Sattva, rajas changes into rajas and tamas
changes into tamas. Such transformation of the gunas is called ‘svarupaparināma’ or change
into the homogenous. In this stage, the gunas can neither create nor produce anything.

**Virupa**

In case of pralaya or dissolution of the world the gunas are in a state of constant flux and
each tries to dominate the others. It is this flux of gunas that results in the formation of
various objects. This kind of transformation is called virupa transformation or change into the
heterogeneous. So, it is the starting point of the world’s evolution.

**Check Your Progress 1**

Notes:  
  a) Space is given below for your answers.
  b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. Briefly explain three gunas of prakṛti.

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**Purusa**

According to the Sāṁkhya Philosophy, Purusa or self is an eternal reality. Purusa is the self, subject and knower. It never be an object because, the existence of objects can be proved in some ways whereas, non-existence can’t be proved in anyways. Purusa is neither the body, nor the mind (mānas), neither ego (ahāṁkāra) nor intellect (buddhi). It is not the substance which has the quality of consciousness. It is itself pure-consciousness. It is the basis of all knowledge and is the supreme knower. It can’t be the object of knowledge. It is the observer, eternally free, the impartial spectator and peaceful. It is beyond the space-time continuum, change, and activity. It is the self enlightened, self-proved and hence, causasui. It is all pervading, formless, and eternal. Its existence can’t be doubted because in its absence, all knowledge even doubt is not possible. It has been described as, devoid of three gunas, negative, inactive, solitary witness, observer, knower and of the nature of illumination. According to Sāṁkhya Philosophy, the purusa is of the nature of pure consciousness and hence beyond the limits of Prakṛti. It is free from distortions. It’s objects changes but it itself never changes. It is above self-arrogance, aversion and attachment.

There are five arguments Sāṁkhya has given for establishing the existence of purusa. These are as follows;

a) All the worldly objects are meant for some one. This is so because the conscious Prakṛti can’t make use of them. Hence, all these substances are for Purusa or self. Prakṛti evolves itself in order to serve the Purusa’s end. The three gunas, Prakṛti, and the subtle body, all are served to the Purusa.

b) Substances of the universe are composed of three gunas. The purusa is the witness of three gunas and he is beyond from these gunas.

c) Purusa is a pure consciousness which is beyond our experience and analysis. It is the substratum of all knowledge both positive and negative. There can be no experience without him. This is so because he is the sole authority of all experiential knowledge.

d) Since Prakṛti is unconscious, it can’t enjoy her creation. Hence, a conscious element is needed to make use of them. Prakṛti is the one to be enjoyed (bhogyā) and so there must be an enjoyer (bhoktā). This argument supports the existence of Purusa.

e) There are persons who try to get relieved from all sorts of sufferings of the world. The desire for liberation and emancipation implies the existence of a person who can try for and obtain liberation. Hence, it is enforced to accept the existence of Purusa.

On the account of Sāṁkhya, there are pluralities of self or purusa. All these Purusas are identical in their essences and they are embedded with consciousness. Hence, consciousness is found in all
the selves. This view is similar to Jainism, and Mimansa because they believe in the plurality of selves.

Check Your Progress II

Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.
   b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. Describe the characteristics of Purusa.

Evolution

The world and worldly objects are created because of the contact between Prakṛti and Purusa. The Prakṛti alone can’t create the world because it is material. In the same manner the Purusa can’t create the world independently because he is inactive. Hence, the contact between Prakṛti and Purusa is necessary for the evolution to start though they are possessing different and opposite natures.

An example can help you to understand the nature of Purusa and Prakṛti in a better way and clear manner. The Prakṛti is like a blind man and the Purusa is like a lame man cooperate each other to reach their destination. The lame man sits on the shoulders of the blind mind and pointing to him the way where to go and in which direction to move. In much the same manner, the inactive-eternal Purusa and the conscious Prakṛti cooperate with each other in order to start the evolution.

Regarding their contact, the Sāṁkhya says, there is no real contact took place between Prakṛti and Purusa. But their mere closeness or nearness with each other disturbs the stability of the gunas of Prakṛti. When these three gunas; sattva, rajas, tamas disturb and disrupt, they are constantly mixing and dissociating. As a consequence, evolution begins.

A sage named Kapila has described the order of creation which is accepted by the Sāṁkhya Philosophy.

The order of creation is as follows.

i) Mahat
Mahat is the first product of evolution. It is cosmic in its nature. Besides this fact, it has psychological aspect in which it is called intellect or buddhi. Here, it is important to mention that buddhi should not be understood as the same as consciousness. The reason is buddhi is material whereas consciousness is eternal. An important function of buddhi is to take decision which is a part of memory act. This helps to distinguish between the known and the knower. Sattva is predominately found as an attribute of buddhi. Buddhi helps to identify the soul or the ātman which differs from all physical objects and their qualities.

**ii) Ahaṁkāra**

Ahaṁkāra is understood as ‘ego’ in English. It is the second product of evolution. Ego is identified as “I” or “mine” feelings of an individual. Every individual has buddhi, and since ahaṁkāra is a practical element of buddhi, it is found in all individuals. Because of ego the purusa looks upon himself as an active agent, desire and strive for ends, and possesses characteristics. An individual perceives an object through sense organs. Then mind reflects on these perceptions and determines their nature. Following this, the attitude of ‘mine’ and ‘for me’ is attributed to these objects. This is nothing but regarded as ‘ego’. In this product (ahaṁkāra), all these three gunas of prakṛuti operates.

**iii) Mānas**

According to the Sāṁkhya Philosophy, mānas or mind is neither eternal nor atomic. It is constituted with parts and thus can come into contact with the different sense organs simultaneously. Mind helps to analyze and synthesize the sense-data into determinate perceptions. Being an internal sense organ, it is aware of objects belonging to the past, present, and the future.

**iv) Jñānendriyas**

Jñānendriyas are known as five sense organs; nose, ears, eyes, skin, and tongue. On Sāṁkhya views, sense is an imperceptible energy or force which exists in the perceived organs and apprehends the object. This implies, the sense is not the ears but their power of hearing. Thus, the senses are not perceptible but can infer. They are informed from the functions that they perform. The five sense organs produce knowledge of touch, colour, smell, heard, and taste. All these are born because of the Purusa and they are the result of ego or ahaṁkāra.

**v) Karmendriyas**

Karmendriyas is understood as the five organs of action which reside in mouth, ears, feet, anus, and the sex organ. They perform the functions respectively as speech, hearing, movement, excretion, and reproduction. The cause of the creation of these organs is the desire of Purusa for his experience.

**vi) Tanmātrās**

There are five tanmātrās; sabda or sound, sparsa or touch, rupa or form, rasa or taste, and gandha or smell. All are very subtle because they are the elements of the objects. Hence, they can’t be perceived but inferred. The Sāṁkhya School viewed that the five elements; earth, water, air, fire, and ether have their origin in the five tanmātrās.
vii) Mahābhutas

There are five mahābhutas found in the cosmos namely:

- Air or Vāyu
- Fire or Agni
- Akāsa or Ether
- Water or Jala
- Prathivi or Earth

Their respective qualities are; touch, colour, sound, taste, and smell. The Sāmkhya theory of evolution is illustrated in the following diagram for your clarity and better understanding.
The Sāṁkhya philosophy recognizes three independent sources of valid knowledge (Pramāna). These are: perception, inference, and verbal testimony (sabda). According to the Sāṁkhya, self possess knowledge. To have knowledge of an object there should be contact between object and sense organs. Again, the connection must found between mind and sense organs. Lastly, mind is related to mahat for cognition. Thus the mahat becomes transformed into the form of particular objects. Mahat being unconscious and physical entity can’t generate knowledge alone. Hence, it requires a conscious and eternal entity like Purusa. Since Purusa is pure consciousness helps Prakṛti to generate knowledge. The Sāṁkhya Philosophy accepts two sorts of perception, savikalpaka and nirvikalpaka as Nyaya advocates. For detail discussion on savikalpaka and nirvikalpaka, please go to the Unit-1: Nyāya Philosophy.

Without deviating from Nyaya Philosophy, the Sāṁkhya holds that vyāpti is found in all sorts of inference. For them, inference are of two sorts; i) affirmative (vita), ii) negative (avita). In case of the former, inferences are constituted of universal affirmative propositions. But in case of the later, it consists of universal negative propositions. The analysis of universal affirmative proposition and universal negative preposition are discussed in the Block.
The Sāṁkhya accepts the five-membered syllogism of the Nyaya as the most adequate pattern of inference. The Sāṁkhya School adores sabda as an independent source of valid knowledge. Sabda or verbal testimony is of two kinds, ‘laukika’ and ‘vaidika’. The analysis of laukika and vaidika are found in Nyaya Philosophy of this Block.

### 3.5 BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

The self, who is eternal, pure conscious, and all pervading, due to its ignorance identifies itself with the mānas, ahaṅkara, and mahat which are the products of Prakṛti. Thus, it experiences the worldly pain and suffering. The universe is constituted of manifold objects, and since objects are embedded with gunas and selves and even interrelated among them, suffering is unavoidable. This is so because the Sāṁkhya claims that wherever there is guna there is suffering. Further, they said that the life in heaven is also controlled by the gunas.

Since there are sufferings and bondage, there are also paths leads to liberation, emancipation or salvation. On Sāṁkhya account, there are two sorts of liberation. These are;

i) Jivanmukti

ii) Videhamukti

The self attains freedom from worldly suffering and realizes truth in one’s life living in the earth is known as jivanmukti. In case of videhamukti, the self attains complete liberation from all sorts of sufferings. This is achieved after death only. Thus, videhamukti is known as kaivalya. This is understood as liberation from the gross body. The Sāṁkhya theory of liberation is termed as ‘apavarga’, the purusartha or the summum bonum of life.

### Check Your Progress IV

**Notes:**

a) Space is given below for your answers.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. Explain the differences between jivanmulti and videhamukti.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

The Sāṁkhya philosophy is the oldest school among all the schools of Indian Philosophy. A sage named Kapila was the founder of this school. This system is dualistic because it accepts two ultimate realities, Purusa and Prakṛti. It advocates satkāryavāda, which expresses effect exists in its material cause prior to its production.

On the account of Samkhya,
Prakṛti - It is eternal, unconscious, and active
Purusa- It is eternal, pure conscious, and inactive

There are three gunas found in Prakṛti. These are sattva, rajas, and tamas.

Nearness between Prakṛti and Purusa causes evolution. The order of creation is as follows:

1) Mahat
2) Āhamkāra
3) Mānas
4) Five sense organs (jñānendriyas)
5) Five organs of action (karmendriyas)
6) Five subtle elements (tanmantrās)
7) Five physical elements. (mahābhutas)

Epistemology

The Sāṁkhya philosophy believes there are three independent sources of valid knowledge. These are; perception, inference, and verbal testimony.

Bondage and Liberation

According to the Sāṁkhya school of thought, bondage is due to the attachment towards worldly objects and liberation is the dissociation from worldly suffering and pain. On Sāṁkhya views, liberation is of two types:

i) Jivanmukti
ii) Videhemukti

One can attain jivanmukti while living in the earth and possessing physical body whereas, videhamukti is attained only after death. Thus, videhamukti is known as kaivalya or the summum bonum of life.

3.7 KEY WORDS

**Guna:** Guṇa means ‘string’ or ‘a single thread or strand of a cord.’ In more abstract uses, it may mean ‘a subdivision, species, kind, quality,’ or an operational principle or tendency.
Evolution: Evolution, in biology, is change in the genetic material of a population of organisms through successive generations. Although the changes produced in a single generation are normally small, the accumulation of these differences over time can cause substantial changes in a population, a process that can result in the emergence of new species.

3.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I
Three gunas of prakruti are sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is white, rajas is red and tamas is black in colour. These three gunas help for the production of objects in the world. In some objects they are found in homogeneous manner and in some cases heterogeneous manner.

Check Your Progress II
Purusa is eternal, inactive but embedded with pure consciousness. It is the enjoyer who enjoys all the products of the prakruti. It helps parakruti to produce objects in the world. The nearness between purusa and prakruti causes the evolution to start.

Check Your Progress III
Mahat is the first product of the prakruti. It has psychological aspect in which it is called intellect or buddhi. Buddhi helps to identify the soul or the atman which differs from all physical objects and their qualities.

Check Your Progress IV
Jivanmukti is attainable while living in the earth. It is the stage where one realizes the causes of suffering and detached from worldly objects. Videhamukti on the other hand, is attained after death only. It is the pure liberation where no sign of suffering and attachment is found. In this stage, the soul will be purely liberated.