
UNIT 11 INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS AND ASCETICISM*

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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will learn about the:

- intellectual developments in the sixth century BCE;
- main features of Upanishadic thought;
- six systems of philosophy;
- philosophy of Buddhism and Jainism; and
- asceticism and how it was incorporated in orthodox and heterodox circles.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Major developments occurred in social, economic and political realms in the sixth century BCE. We will study the processes of ‘Second Urbanization’, emergence of cities and towns, rise of *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas* and the new religions of Buddhism and Jainism, in the subsequent Units. In this Unit, we will be dealing with intellectual developments that took place in the sixth century BCE.

The mid-first millennium BCE in the Indian subcontinent saw the flowering of speculative thought. New ideologies emerged. Though such thought was present in an embryonic form in the *Vedas*, new intellectual ideas developed more fully

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and in different ways within the heterodox sects. In the Brahmanical orthodox tradition the *Upanishads* encapsulated this change. In the heterodox tradition, many ideas emerged which questioned the efficacy of the *yajna* and were against the validity of Vedic learning. We will be learning about these in this Unit.

11.2 CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN SIXTH CENTURY BCE

The sixth century BCE was period of profound change. The old tribal society was breaking up. The feeling of security and comfort that clan solidarity gave was withering away. The deep feeling of disquiet was turning some to asceticism.

The sacrifice or *yajna* was a central feature of the Brahmanical religion. The *Vedas* celebrated great sacrifices which were initiated on behalf of wealthy tribesmen and powerful chiefs. The main purpose of sacrifices was to propitiate the gods and in return obtain boons from them. The aim of the sacrifice was to fulfil one's desires with regard to greater wealth, sons, cattle, success in war and long life. The mediation of the priests ensured this and much more. The priests knew the intricacies of the ritual and sacrificial formulae; they were the ones who alone knew how to bring the gods to sacrifice and hence enjoyed great power.

Many changes can be seen in the religious ideology by the Later Vedic period. The notion of sacrifice became all important. Now the universe was believed to have originated from sacrifice. Regular sacrifices ensured the continuity of the cosmos and prevented chaos. Thus, the gods were secondary, it was the Brahmana who was supreme in terms of his role as a mediator in sacrifice; he could elevate the happiness and social position of his patron or conversely destroy him by his slightest variation of the ritual. However, this was also the beginning of growing dissatisfaction with the excessive ritualism of the Vedic religion. The sacrificial cult was no longer considered valid. Buddhist and Jaina texts at many places speak disparagingly about the Brahmanical sacrifices and rituals and adopt an anti-Brahmanical stance. Besides this, certain changes in the social fabric were proving to be too tumultuous. There was a deep sense of anxiety among the populace. The 'Second Urbanization' had ushered in new towns, coinage, new forms of wealth and new classes of rich *setthis* and *gahapatis* (the immensely wealthy traders and financiers). The new-found prosperity was based on the use of iron which led to the clearing of forests and the availability of more and more land for cultivation. The introduction of plough agriculture and the resultant surplus made possible the emergence of states – monarchies and oligarchies. The kshatriyas became powerful, and land and money were the new criterion of wealth. Cattle were important but receded into the background. Most prominent commercial cities were also the capitals of the *janapadas* such as Kaushambi, Kashi, Ayodhya and Rajagriha. The other features of this vibrant economy were: the use of metallic money, trade, trading networks, usury, social stratification, guilds, and an increasing sense of alienation. These changes coincided with other developments. Clan hierarchy of the earlier period was giving way to territorial identity. *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas* emerged. The *janapadas* were named after the kshatriyas and others constituting the *jana* (tribes), such as Gandhara, Kuru, Pancala, Matsya, Chedi, Kashi, Kosala, Magadha etc. Power came to be exercised by the kshatriyas and the use of force became legitimized. This was a post-tribal society in which kinship ties were breaking away. An increasingly

hierarchical society was hostile to anyone who did not conform to the norms of the society. A new order was coming into existence. A king speaks, thus, in *Maitrayani Upanishad*, “I am like a frog in a dry well”. This is indicative of the growing insecurity. Attempts to find an escape from the difficult times led to the emergence of ‘heterodox sects’.

Apart from this, there was an urgency to find answers to the fundamental questions of human salvation or liberation. Various ideas were forwarded but none were found to be satisfactory. Many believed that asceticism was the answer to the problems of continuous change that the society was going through. Besides this, there was a realization that an individual through meditation could attain self-knowledge which would transcend the stage of even the gods. Asceticism resulted in complete freedom from all social obligations and ties and in turn ensured for the renouncer moral status higher than that of a sacrificing brahmana.

But, was the emergence of speculative thought just a form of ‘life negation’? May be not! The ascetics were not only trying to escape the pessimism of the times but also were in search of True Knowledge. The wisdom in the *Vedas* was not found to be sufficient. With the emergence of questions about creation, cosmos and Man in the *Rigveda* and the Hymn of Creation representing the earliest record of philosophic doubt, the beginnings of abstract thinking had been laid. It was in the sixth century BCE that a bewildering variety of speculations and alternative ideas regarding the origin of the universe, the nature of soul, cosmic energy and consciousness began to emerge. Some of these were accepted by the Brahmanical system and incorporated into the *Upanishads* which represented the orthodox tradition. Others led to the origin of heterodox sects which did not believe in the efficacy of the Brahmanical ritual and repudiated the authority of the *Vedas*.

In the orthodox belief system, the universe had emerged from the primeval sacrifice. Later *tapas* (power derived from asceticism) played an important role in the act of creation. Other more heterodox teachers put forward naturalistic and atheistic cosmogonist theories. According to them, the origin of the universe was ascribed variously to water, fire, wind or ether. For some, the universe emerged without the agency of any god or any impersonal entity but due to fate (*niyati*), time (*kala*), nature (*svabhava*) or chance (*samgati*). It was believed the world had emerged due to internal evolution or ‘ripening’ (*parinama*) and not because of any external force. The Buddha believed that any speculation on first causes was futile. There were others who were pyrrhonists who denied the possibility of any certain knowledge at all. Materialists rejected the existence of soul and all other immaterial entities. Some believed in the atomic theory. Thus, the intellectual life of the sixth century BCE was throbbing with ideas and fundamental questions.

The people who were leading the speculative thought were ascetics. However, the literature of this period mentions some kshatriyas too who were as keen, for example, Janaka of Videha, Ashvapati of Kaikeya, Hiranya-nabha of Kosala, Ajatashatru of Kashi (Varanasi), Pravahana Jaivali of Kuru-Panchala.

11.3 BEGINNINGS OF ASCETICISM

The term ‘ascetic’ refers to a person who has renounced worldly pleasures, opted out of society and has cast himself away. In the mid first millennium BCE, he was struggling to comprehend the Ultimate Reality, discover the ecstasy (*ananda*)

of liberation from all bondage. He was restoring to austerity (*tapa*) and meditation (*dhyana*) in order to achieve the goals, he had set before him.

Asceticism was not something novel. In later hymns of the *Rigveda*, we find references to a class of holy men who were different from the *Brahmanas*. They were called *munis*. They went about naked, maintained ritual silence and dwelt with the demi-gods and birds. They had attained special powers which made them different from ordinary mortals. In the *Atharvaveda* there was a category of men called *vratyas*. It broadly meant an Aryan who did not any longer believe in the sacredness of the *Vedas*. He could also be understood as a priest of non-Vedic fertility cult. Thus, certain alternative ideas which were not based on the sanctity of the *Vedas* were being raised as early as the Later Vedic period. All efforts were made to incorporate them in the Brahmanical set up and these could have been a source for new doctrines and practices.

By the time of the *Upanishads*, ascetics had become quite common and they were the ones who were propounding the new teachings and metaphysical theories. In the mid first millennium BCE, the ascetic either confined himself to isolation from all, or he could join other ascetics as a group and follow a guru or a teacher. Those who joined a sect had to follow certain restrictions on their conduct and behaviour. They could not observe caste rules, followed celibacy, could not own property, broke food taboos, and carried distinctive outward symbols of their order (a robe, or going naked). Ascetic groups referred in the Vedic literature and some texts like the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* were overly concerned with asceticism.

Tapasvin, *sramana*, *sanyasin*, *parivrajaka*, *yogi* are some of the terms that we come across in the texts. They were all renouncers, who having given up on pleasures of life, had taken to a life of austerity. They were given to controlling the functions of the body (breathing mainly) and wandering from place to place in search for the Ultimate Truth. *Parivrajaka* was a young man who had taken to the life of a wanderer for a short while before becoming a *grihastha*. But more often, *parivrajaka* was a state of permanent renunciation.

Most of the ascetics wandered from place to place either alone or as part of groups under the guidance of a teacher. They participated in discussions held in *Kutuhala-shalas* (discussion halls) on philosophical subjects. Some of the brahmana ascetics lived in hermitages in the forests sometimes with their families though conforming to a celibate status. They were sedentary. Meditation and severe penance accorded them magic potency. They acquired hidden powers. They could crumble mountains to dust, turn the rivers dry, burn the opponents if angered, protect a city, and increase its wealth and much more. The power which was earlier ascribed to the sacrifice or the *yajna*, was now transferred to *tapsya* and meditation.

Those who took to asceticism, sooner or later, obtained insight into the nature of reality. They came to understand the cosmic mystery, the nature of the universe and found bliss beyond life and death. With this the realization of being ultimately free dawned upon them. He who attained salvation became a conqueror above conquerors. All sects aspired to attain this experience, but the interpretation differed from sect to sect. The development of asceticism and mysticism soon became a challenge for the brahmanas who were quick to incorporate this element into their ideology. The *Ashrama* theory of the four stages of life was propounded

for the first time in the *Dharmasutras*. In the *Ashrama* theory, the terms used for the four stages in a life-cycle were *brahmachari*, *grihastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sanyasa*. The fourth stage of *sanyasin* was the final stage. It was possible for a person to become a *sanyasin* only subsequent to the performance of social obligations. The fourth category allowed one to opt out of the system only after having fulfilled the social obligations of a *grihastha*. This was strongly emphasized to ensure that the social dissent remained muffled. For the Buddhists and Jainas, however, the *grihastha* stage could be by-passed and one could become a renouncer without having to go through the householder's stage. That is why their doctrines were all the more threatening to the established social order. The discussions and teachings of those mystics who chose to follow the traditional path, were incorporated and added to the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. Thus, we find that the system of *yoga*, which was part of the traditional orthodox Hindu system, developed by this time.

11.4 UPANISHADIC THOUGHT

Upanishads are the earliest recorded discourses on the key philosophical doctrines about the *atman* (self), *brahman* (Ultimate Reality), *karma*, *yoga*, *samsara* (worldly existence), *moksha* (enlightenment), *purusha* (man) and *prakriti* (nature). The major *Upanishads* can be dated to the period between the eighth to sixth century BCE. They represent a transition from the philosophical ideas of the *Vedas* to the development of new ideologies that emerged in the post-Vedic period.

The word '*upanishad*' is made up of three parts: *upa+ni+shad*, which means that it was an instruction which was to be imparted to the student who is 'sitting down near one's teacher'. It also means '*rahasyam*', indicating that it was a secret doctrine to be imparted only to a few, those who were worthy of such an instruction.

The *Upanishads* represented a change in how knowledge was now being sought. There was a shift from the acceptance of the *Vedas* as revealed knowledge to the possibility that knowledge could be gained through intuition, observation and analysis. Earlier, during the Vedic sacrifices, the *yajamana* would initiate the sacrifice with the mediation of a brahmana priest. The *Upanishads*, on the contrary, were a search for the Ultimate Liberation of the soul but without the mediation of a priest or the presence of any intermediaries. The Upanishadic religion saw a smaller role for Vedic deities and the aim was not the attainment of pleasures of heaven with god Indra but release from all bondage i.e. *moksha*. It came to be realized that the Vedic ritual alone could not lead one to the *Brahman* or the Ultimate Reality.

Alternative belief systems were developed which embodied new ideas about the Ultimate Reality and how to attain it. Doubts about the efficacy of the *yajna* in promoting happiness surfaced. The moot questions now were: what is reality? How are the questions of mortality and immortality tied to the notions of the self, rebirth and retribution? How can *moksha* be attained? There was considerable thought behind the development of new techniques of perception which included *dhyana* (meditation) and *yoga*. The natural way of life conducive to achieving this was asceticism (*tapas*). Some form of renunciation was present in the Vedic sacrifices also. For instance, the granting of either fruits or animals as owned by the *yajamana* as offering in the *yajna* amounted to renouncing what one owned.

The aim for him was, however, the pleasures of the heaven of Indra. But now, the aim had changed to that of release or liberation: *moksha*.

We will be discussing the main features of the Upanishadic thought below.

11.4.1 *Atman-Brahman*

The *Upanishads* talk about two concepts—*Atman* and *Brahman*. These two have become the cornerstone of Indian philosophy. *Brahman* is visualized as the Universal Soul. *Atman* is the Individual Soul. The *Atman* is something like an essence which pervades every individual being. It is a life force, a consciousness or the Ultimate Reality. One of the most well-known teachings of *Atman* appears in *Chandogya Upanishad* as the instruction of the brahmana Uddalaka Aruni to his son Shvetaketu. Uddalaka begins his explanation that one can know about the universal of a material substance from a particular object made of that substance. For example, by means of something made of clay, one can know clay; by means of an ornament made of copper, one can know copper. He takes these examples to demonstrate that objects are not created out of nothing. Rather, the creation is a process through which multiplicity of forms get transformed from an original being (*sat*). Such forms characterize our everyday experiences. Just as bees collect nectar from different sources, but when gathered together they form an undifferentiated mass; just as different rivers after flowing into the ocean become one with the ocean, similarly *Atman* resides individually in every being but merges with the *Brahman* and becomes one with it. Uddalaka next asks his son to put some salt in a glass of water. Shvetaketu does so. Upon being asked by his father to fetch the salt, Shvetaketu could not find it as it had dissolved in the water. Next, Aruni asks his son to taste the water. Upon being found salty, Aruni preaches Shvetaketu instruction on the Ultimate Reality. He says, ‘*You don’t perceive that one Reality (sat) exists in your body, my son, but it is truly there. Everything which is has its being in that subtle essence. That is Reality! That is the Soul! And you are that, Shvetaketu!*’ (As cited in Basham, A L. [2004], pp. 253)

The *Upanishads* use a rich imagery to express the difficult meanings of the Self and *Brahman*. Below is a small dialogue between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shvetaketu on the meaning of *Atman*:

- “Fetch me a fruit of the banyan tree”.
- “Here is one, sir”.
- “Break it”.
- “I have broken it, sir”.
- “What do you see?”
- “Very tiny seeds, sir”
- “Break one”.
- “I have broken it, sir”.
- “Now what do you see?”
- “Nothing, sir”
- “My son”, the father said, “What you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists. Believe me, my son, in that essence is the Self of all that is. That is the Truth, that is the Self. And you are that Self, Shvetaketu!”

(*Chandogya Upanishad*, vi, 13. As cited in Basham, A.L., 2004, pp. 252-53)

“*Tat tvam asi*”, you (individual) are that (universal essence), is the leading theme of the *Upanishads*.

Uddalaka’s explanation of creation has influenced the *satkaryavad* theory — that the effect exists within the cause. It was accepted by the *Samkhya*, *Yoga* and *Vedanta darshanas*. Uddalaka’s conceptions about the Self are different from those present in the Early Vedic texts where the emphasis is not on human body or the individual person but on the primordial or the ideal body (Black, Brian. “The Upanishads”. Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

The *Upanishads* believed that the knowledge of the *Atman* leads to liberation or Ultimate Freedom. This freedom is the freedom from death. Yajnavalkya’s teachings in the *Upanishads* believed that the *Atman* dwells within the body; it is because of the *Atman* that the body is alive; when death comes, the *Atman* does not die but finds a new dwelling place in another body.

During the closing part of the *Vedas*, the sages had conceptualized of a single creator or the controller of the universe. They called it Prajapati, Vishvakarman, Purusha, Brahmanaspati, *Brahman*. He was at this stage only a deity. The search for the nature of this deity begins in the *Upanishads*. The sum and substance of the Upanishadic doctrine is represented by the formula *Atman=Brahman*. The *Brahman* comes to mean the Ultimate Essence of the universe. The state of *Brahman* is likened to a state of dreamless sleep. The *Atman* permeates not only man but is present in everything – the sun, the moon, the world. This *Atman* is *Brahman*. Just as from the ingot of iron, all that is made of iron is known, similarly, from this *Atman*, *Brahman* is known, everything else is known. The essence of man and the essence of the universe are one and the same and it is *Brahman*. It is the most active principle in the universe and yet the most passive and unmoved. Thus, it is said in the *Mundaka Upanishad*:

*As a spider ejects and retracts (the threads),
As the plants shoot forth on the earth,
As the hairs on the head and body of the living man,
so, from the imperishable all that is here.
As the sparks from the well-kindled fire,
in nature akin to it, spring forth in their thousands,
So, my dear sir, from the imperishable
living beings of many kinds go forth,
And again, return into him*

(As cited in Dasgupta, Surendranath, 2004, pp. 49-50)

The Universal Essence is sometimes defined in purely negative terms. “The Self can only be described as ‘Not this, not this’. It is incomprehensible, imperishable, ... unattached, ... unfettered, ... it does not suffer, ... it does not fail.”

11.4.2 The Theory of Transmigration

The idea of Transmigration has its beginnings in the later portions of the *Rigveda*. However, it is in the *Upanishads* that is presented in the most advanced form. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* has the first occurrence of this doctrine in a developed form. This doctrine developed in the *Upanishads* in two stages. In

one, the idea of transmigration is treated in combination with the Vedic idea of recompense in the other world, and in another, the idea of transmigration comes to the forefront in supersession of the idea of recompense in the other world. Thus, it is said that those who perform pious and good deeds travel the way of the fathers (*pitryana*) after death. Their soul enters first into smoke, then into night, the dark half of the month, etc., and at last reaches the moon; after a residence there as long as the remnant of his good deeds remain he descends again through ether, wind, smoke, mist, cloud, rain, herbage, food and seed, and through the assimilation of food by man he enters the womb of the mother and is born again. Here, we see that the soul enjoys the recompense in the world of the moon but is re-born again in this world.

The other way is the way of gods (*devayana*), meant for those who cultivate faith and asceticism (*tapas*). These souls at death enter successively into flame, day, bright half of the month, bright half of the year, sun, moon, lightning, and then finally into *Brahman* never to return. Deussen says that “the meaning of the whole is that the soul on the way of the gods reaches regions of ever-increasing light, in which is concentrated all that is bright and radiant as stations on the way to *Brahman* the ‘light of lights’” (as cited in Dasgupta, Surendranath, 2004, p. 54).

The other part of the doctrine of Transmigration does not refer to good deeds or bad or refer to *devyana* or *pitryana*. In this idea the Self itself destroys the body when it becomes weak. It builds a newer and fairer frame by its own activity when it reaches the end of the present. At the time of death, the Self collects within itself all senses and faculties and after death all its previous knowledge, work and experience accompanies him. The falling off of the body at the time of death is only for the building of a newer body either in this world or in the other worlds. The Self which, thus, takes rebirth is regarded as an aggregation of diverse categories. The root of all this is the desire of the Self and the consequent fruition of it through will and act. When the Self continues to desire and act, it reaps the fruit and comes again to this world for performing acts. All the course of these rebirths is affected by the Self itself by its own desires, and if it ceases to desire, it suffers no rebirth and becomes immortal. The most distinctive feature of this doctrine is that it refers to desires as the cause of rebirth and not *karma*. *Karma* only comes as the connecting link between desires and rebirth – for it is said that whatever a man desires he wills, and whatever he wills he acts (Dasgupta, Surendranath, 2004, pp. 55-56).

In whatever way the theory of Transmigration was expounded it linked all life forms into a single system. Even the gods had to undergo transmigration. As one Indra died, another was born. The same law applied to animals, insects and plants.

A closely connected doctrine is that of *karma*. Man’s past actions determine his birth in this world. Bad *karma* leads to birth in lowly dominions and a life of good deeds, asceticism, *dana* leads to higher births. This theory became the cornerstone of all Indian thought. Now, suffering could be easily explained as the result of one’s deeds. Similarly, social inequalities could be justified. To many people the theory of karmic retribution must have held out hope for the possibility of a better life in next birth. This would have held a promise in a situation wrought with fear and tension. However, to others, death was always terrible. A way had to be sought to escape the recurring cycle of birth and death. Pessimistic outlook towards life, never mind how adequate, found its answer in asceticism and meditation.

11.4.3 Doctrine of Emancipation

Emancipation or *mukti* is further developed in the *Upanishads*. We already know the two paths through which the soul travels after death. *Pitryana* allows the soul to enjoy the fruits of his *karma* but the soul takes rebirth again. In *devayana*, those who are faithful and performed asceticism went by the way of gods but never return back and suffer rebirth. *Mukti* is a state of infiniteness that a man attains when he knows his own Self and, thus, becomes *Brahman*. Rebirth is the only option for the ignorant but one who has no desire and has divested himself of all passions becomes one with *Brahman*.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) What were the main features of society and religion in the sixth century BCE which led to the emergence of asceticism?

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- 2) Discuss the *Atman-Brahman* doctrine of the *Upanishads* in 100 words.

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11.5 THE *SADDARSHANA* OR SIX SYSTEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

The Hindu system of philosophy classifies philosophical thought into two classes: *Nastika* and *Astika*. *Nastika* literally means *na asti* (it is not). They do not regard the *Vedas* as supreme knowledge, nor try to establish their own validity on their authority. They are principally three in number: Buddhists, Jainas and *Charvakas*. The *Astika-mata* or the orthodox schools are six in number. These are *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Vedanta*, *Mimamsa*, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika*. They are also called the six systems of philosophy or *Saddarshana*. They have different origin and purpose but later came to be regarded as equally valid ways of salvation. They were divided into three groups of two, which were thought to be related and complementary. These were: *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika*; *Sankhya* and *Yoga*; and *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. A very clear rendition of the chief characteristics of these schools of thought has been presented by Professor A. L. Basham (2004) which are summarized below.

Nyaya

Nyaya means ‘analysis’. It is a school of logic and epistemology rather than theology. Its teacher was Aksapada Gautama. Its *sutras* are dated to the Common

Era. The belief is that clear thinking and logical argument are essential for attaining highest bliss. This is essentially a system of reasoning which was given a religious basis.

Vaisheshika

It was the school of 'individual characteristics. It is older than *Nyaya* but complementary to it. In the medieval period both were merged into one. *Vaisheshika sutras* deal with physics and metaphysics. The founder to whom the earliest *sutras* are attributed is Uluka Kanada. They have some similarities with the Buddhist and Jaina schools of thought. They believe that nature is atomic. The atoms are the instrument of soul. The soul is distinct from the atoms. Salvation depends on realizing the atomic nature of the universe and its difference from the soul. The basic tenet of *Vaisheshika* goes like this: Each element has individual characteristics called *visheshas*. They are to be distinguished from the four non-atomic characteristics called *dravyas* (time, space, soul and mind). The atoms are eternal but at the end of the great dissolution, with the death of Brahma, the atoms become separated from one another. The new Brahma utilizes the old atoms to fashion a new world. Thus, *Vaisheshika* believes in the dualism of matter and soul.

Sankhya

Sankhya means 'count'. It is the oldest of the six systems and occurs in a rudimentary form in the *Upanishads*. Ancient sage, Kapila, was its founder. In matters of rigid dualism and fundamental atheism this school shares a lot with Jainism. It postulates a remarkable doctrine of the evolution of the cosmos in simple terms. Its theory goes like this: there are twenty-five basic principles (*tattva*) of which the first is *prakriti* and the last is *purusha*. Creation or rather evolution does not take place due to any divinity but due to the inherent nature of *prakriti*. *Purusha* is 'the person' or the Soul. *Purusha* is not dependent on *Prakriti* and the same is true of *Prakriti*. A universe is devoid of soul, and yet evolving. Soul becomes involved with matter, and their salvation lies in realizing their difference from it. A very important feature of *Sankhya* metaphysics is the doctrine of the three constituent qualities (*guna*), causing virtue (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*) and dullness (*tamas*). When the cosmic matter is at an undeveloped stage, the three constituent qualities are in equilibrium. As the world evolves, one or the other quality predominates in different objects or beings and the proportions account for the values of the universe. This three-fold classification had a profound effect on subsequent Indian life and thought.

Yoga

It is translated as 'spiritual discipline' or 'application'. It consists of all kinds of religious exercises and acts of self-mortification present in Indian religions. The follower is called a *yogi*. Though *yoga* was part of every school of thought, it represents a distinct system in which psychic training is the chief means of salvation. The *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali is its basic text. Patanjali was a well-known grammarian who lived in about second century BCE. They share a lot in terms of metaphysical ideas with the Sankhya school, but they differed in that they introduce a god into the picture. The god of the *yoga* school is an exalted being who is symbolized in the sacred syllable of *OM* which plays an important role in meditation and giving insight into the sublime purity of the Soul. The course of training is divided into eight stages:

- 1) Self-control (*yama*)
- 2) Observance (*niyama*)
- 3) Posture (*asana*)
- 4) Control of breath (*pranayama*)
- 5) Restraint (*pratyahara*)
- 6) Steadying the mind (*Dharana*)
- 7) Meditation (*Dhyana*)
- 8) Deep Meditation (*Samadhi*)

The method of attaining spiritual strength and salvation is through yogic practices which aim to awaken the *kundalini*. This is how it happens: the chief vein of the body is called *susumna*. It runs through the spinal column. Along its path there are six ‘wheels’ (*chakra*) or concentration of psychic energy. At the top of the vein, inside the skull is *sahasrara* also called as the lotus, which is a very powerful psychic center. In the lowest wheel behind the genitals in a *chakra* called *kundalini*, the ‘serpent power’. It rests generally in a quiescent state. By yogic powers the *kundalini* is awakened and rises up the vein *susumna*, passes through all the six ‘wheels’ of psychic force and unites with the topmost *sahasrara*. When this happens, salvation is reached.

Mimamsa

It is a school of exposition. Its earliest work is the *sutras* of Jaimini (second century BCE). They explain the *Vedas* as eternal, self-existent and wholly authoritative. This led to some development of logic, semantics and dialectics in this school. It developed a full philosophy of salvation in the seventh and eighth centuries. According to it, respect for the *Vedas* and observance of their rules are essential first steps to salvation. Later, this school merged with the *Vedanta*.

Vedanta

Literally meaning “the end of the *Vedas*”, it is also called *Uttara Mimamsa* (later-*Mimamsa*) tradition. The doctrines of the *Vedanta* are based on the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras* of Badarayana. The classical *Vedanta* is that of the great philosopher Shankara (788-820 CE) who had produced extensive commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* and the chief *Upanishads*. The doctrine of Shankara is often called as *advaita* (‘allowing no second’, i.e. monism) or *kevaladvaita* (strict monism). He believed in the idea of ‘double standard of truth’. According to this, on the everyday level of truth, the world is produced by Brahma. It goes through an evolutionary process similar to the one present in the *Sankhya* school from which he borrowed the doctrine of the three *gunas*. However, on the highest level of truth, the whole universe, including the gods, is *maya* – illusion. Ultimately, the only reality is *Brahman*, the World Soul of the *Upanishads* with which the Individual Soul is identical. Once the unity between the two is recognized through meditation, salvation is attained.

11.6 NASTIKA SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

The Upanishadic doctrine was part of the orthodox tradition. However, there were others who did not believe in the Brahmanical religious ideas and expounded their own metaphysics and philosophy. Let us discuss these heterodox sects constituting the *Nastika* school of thought.

11.6.1 Buddhism

It was founded by the Buddha (“the Enlightened one” or “the Awakened”) in the sixth century BCE. The story of Gautama and his quest for enlightenment along with his teachings and precepts will be dealt with in Unit 12. Here, we will be discussing the metaphysical and psychological basis of the Buddhist thought.

The Pali canon was sifted and codified at the three councils of Rajagriha, Vaishali and Pataliputra. It was committed to writing in Ceylon during the reign of King Vattagamani (89-77 BCE). The *Pitakas* along with commentaries, semi-canonical works and verse chronicles form a large body of literature which gives a good enough idea about the Buddhist ethics and philosophy. The basic propositions of this school are as follows: There is *dukha* (suffering) inherent in life. It can only be eliminated by giving up ‘thirst’ (*tanha*, often translated as ‘craving’) which includes personal ambition, desire, longing and selfishness of all kinds. Longing can be stopped, and this can be done by taking a middle course between self-indulgence and extreme asceticism and leading a moral and well-ordered life. The doctrine central to these teachings is called ‘Chain of Dependent Origination’ (*paticca-samuppada*). It is a series of twelve terms or states, one leading to another and finally ending in pain and *dukha*. The mechanics of this doctrine is that *dukha* or pain is due to ignorance – as sort of cosmic ignorance which leads to the delusion of the self-hood. This ignorance is a facet of the universe’s fundamental nature which is: it is full of sorrow (*dukha*); it is transient (*anicca*); and it is soulless (*anatta*).

The universe is transient. Every being or object is transient. A human being is a compound of five psychosomatic elements — body, feelings, perceptions, states of mind, and awareness. They vary from minute to minute and lead to ever newer configurations. For example, the old man is not the same person as the baby in arms seventy years ago. In fact, he is not the same person as a man a minute ago. Every moment man is changing and leading to the coming into being of a new man caused by the first. This is the chain of cause and effect which links one state to another. The universe is in a constant state of flux. All ideas about permanence arise from a state of ignorance out of which sorrow springs.

Buddhism does not believe in soul. The universe is soulless. Even the gods are soulless. In transmigration nothing passes from one life to another. There is only a chain of cause and effect, in which the new includes the old. If nothing passes from life to life, and if transmigration is in force, then how would one explain the Buddhist principle of bad *karma* in one’s life affecting another? According to the Buddhists, the answer is that as a result of chain of cause and effect, evil done by an earlier being affects the present existence of that being, no matter how different from each other they might be.

The only stable entity is *Nirvana* (in Pali, *Nibbana*). This is the state of bliss, reached when one realizes True Knowledge. *Nirvana* is outside the universe and is not part of it. That is how one can explain the paradox that the universe is in a constant state of flux and *Nirvana* is at rest.

11.6.2 Jainism

Vardhamana was the 24th *tirthankara* in Jainism and was known to his followers as Mahavira (‘the Great Hero’). He renounced material life at the age of thirty.

At first he followed the path of *Nirgranthas* ('free from fetters') which had been founded some two hundred years earlier by Parsvanatha. The term *Nirgrantha* was used by the followers of Mahavira.

Jainism, like Buddhism, is primarily atheistic, in the sense that the gods are considered to be present but are not important enough in the universal scheme. The world functions according to the universal law and not according to the wishes of any deity.

The universe functions due to the interaction of living souls (*jivas*, literally 'lives'), and five categories of non-living entities (*ajivas*). All living beings contain soul, but according to Jainism, all inanimate objects like stones, rocks, running water also contain soul. There are an infinite number of souls in the universe. *Karma* is a subtle matter which in a fine atomic form adheres to an individual soul and makes it different from other souls. An activity leads to *karma* of some kind. Deeds of cruel nature produce more *karma*. The *karma* already acquired leads to the acquisition of more *karma*, and thus, the cycle of transmigration continues. Transmigration can only be escaped by dispelling the *karma* already sticking to the soul. One also has to ensure that no further *karma* is acquired. The annihilation (*nirjara*) of *karma* is done through penance, and the prevention (*samvara*) of the influx (*asrava*) and fixation (*bandha*) of *karma* in the soul is ensured by disciplined conduct, as a result of which it does not reach dangerous quantities and is dispersed immediately. When the soul is finally free it rises to the highest heaven to the top of the universe, where it remains in bliss through all eternity. This for the Jainas is *Nirvana*.

For them monastic life is essential for attaining *Nirvana*. One can attain *Nirvana* through fasting, self-mortification and meditation. All additional *karma* can be rid off through strict discipline. Layman cannot do this. Nudity is essential to attain *Nirvana*.

The life of a Jaina monk is governed by five vows: non-violence, non-stealing, truth, abjuring sexual activity and possession of property. The act of killing or injury is the most potent cause of the influx of *karma* and, therefore, to be avoided. Agriculture is prohibited because cultivation and harvesting entails destruction of life in plants and soil. Jainism went much further than other religions in their doctrine of non-violence. They believed that any act, no matter how unintentional, of a man if leads to injury to others, then it is a sin and leads to *karma*.

11.6.3 Scepticism and Materialism

The sixth century BCE saw the active participation in discussion by many teachers including Mahavira, Gautama Buddha, Gosala and others. From this time onwards the materialist school begins to get popular. According to this school, all religious observance and morality were futile. A man should enjoy life to the fullest and make the most of the joys. The frugal virtues of Buddhism and Jainism were rejected. A man should not forsake happiness due to concomitant sorrow. Just as he accepts the corn with the occasional husk, he should accept joys of life with an occasional sorrow.

Many teachers of this period did not believe in the primacy of gods. Gods were, according to them, mere super-natural beings but having limited powers. They believed in the transmigration doctrine though its mechanics were interpreted differently.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) What are the six systems of philosophy? Explain.

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2) Write True or False against the following statements:

- i) The *Upanishads* contain the teachings of the Buddha. ()
- ii) The concept of *Atman* meant the individual soul. ()
- iii) The heterodox sects were against the authority of the *Vedas*. ()
- iv) The *Sankhya* school was the oldest of the six systems of philosophy. ()
- v) The word *Vedanta* means ‘the end of the *Vedas*’. ()
- vi) The Pali canon was committed to writing in China. ()
- vii) The doctrine central to Buddhism is called *paticca-samuppada*. ()
- viii) Jainism is not atheistic in nature. ()

11.7 SUMMARY

The sixth century BCE was a period of intense change. The developments occurring on the social, political and economic front were tearing apart the social fabric. The Vedic religion had become expensive and onerous. Voices of protest against the Vedic ritual and sacrifices led to the emergence of heterodox sects. For them it was not the collective ritual but the individual and his quest for salvation that mattered. Besides, the questions regarding the place of individual in the universe, the meaning of Self, and the origin of consciousness were turning many to asceticism. There was a yearning to achieve the Highest Truth which would end all suffering, uncertainties and doubts. This resulted in the emergence of a multitude of speculative theories. The forest hermits had also opted for asceticism but within the framework of orthodoxy. It was chiefly among them that the literature of the *Upanishads* developed.

11.8 KEY WORDS

<i>Ahimsa</i>	: non-injury, non-violence.
<i>Ashrama</i>	: the four stages of life — <i>brahmacharya</i> (celibate studenthood); <i>grihastha</i> (the householder stage); <i>vanaprastha</i> (partial renunciation); and <i>sanyasa</i> (complete renunciation).
<i>Atman</i>	: the imperishable Ultimate Reality within the Self, according to the <i>Upanishads</i> .
<i>Bhikku</i>	: Pali (skt. <i>Bhikshu</i>), literally one who lives by begging alms; a Buddhist monk.

<i>Brahman</i>	:	the imperishable, ultimate reality in the universe, according to <i>Upanishads</i> .
<i>Charvaka</i>	:	an atheistic materialist philosophical school, also known as <i>Lokayata</i> .
<i>Darshana</i>	:	Literally ‘view’; philosophy.
<i>Karma</i>	:	Doctrine according to which actions have consequences that manifest themselves in present and future lives.
<i>Moksha</i>	:	Liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
<i>Nibbana</i>	:	skt. <i>Nirvana</i> . A term used in the Buddhist philosophy to mean liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
<i>Paribbajaka</i>	:	In Pali. Literally, wanderer, renunciant.
<i>Patichcha-samuppada</i>	:	In Pali. The law of dependent origination; a part of the Buddhist teaching.
<i>Tirthankara</i>	:	Literally, ‘ford builder’; a Jaina saint.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Section 11.2.
- 2) See Sub-section 11.4.1.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Please see Section 11.5
- 2) i) False, ii) True, iii) True, iv) True, v) True, vi) False, vii) True, viii) False

11.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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