UNIT 2  SAMKHYA

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

• Understand the orthodox system of Samkhya
• Interpret the Samkhya theory of causation
• Explain the Samkhya concept of Prakrti
• Discuss the Samkhya concept of Purusa
• Know the Samkhya theory of knowledge
• Elucidate the Samkhya concept of bondage and liberation
• Comprehend the Conception of bondage and liberation

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The sage Kapila is the founder of the Samkhya system. The Samkhya must be a very old system of thought. Its antiquity appears from the fact that the Samkhya tendency of thought pervades all the literature of ancient India including the srutis, smrtis and puranas. According to tradition, the first work of the Samkhya School is the Samkhya-sutra. Next to Kapila, his disciple Asuri, and Asuri’s disciple Pancasikha wrote some books which aimed at a clear and elaborate exposition of the Samkhya system. The Samkhya is a philosophy of dualistic realism. Samkhya admits two ultimate realities namely, Purusa and Prakrti which are independent of each other in respect of their existence. Purusa is an intelligent principle, of which consciousness (caitanya) is not an attribute, but the very essence. It is the self which is quite distinct from the body, the senses and
the mind (manas). It is beyond the whole world of objects, and is the eternal consciousness which
witnesses the changes and activities going on in the world, but does not itself act and change in
any way. Physical things like chairs, beds, etc, exist for the enjoyment of beings other than
themselves. Therefore, there must be the Purusa or the self which is distinct from Prakrti or
primary matter, but is the enjoyer of the products of Prakrti. There are many different selves
related to different bodies, for when some men are happy, others are unhappy, some die but
others live.

Prakrti is the ultimate cause of the world. It is an eternal unconscious principle which is always
changing and has no other end than the satisfaction of the selves. Sattva, rajas and tamas are
three constituents of Prakrti which holds them together in a state of rest or equilibrium. The
three are called gunas. But they are not qualities or attributes in any sense. Rather, they are three
substantial elements which constitute Prakrti like three cords making up a rope. The existence of
the gunas is referred from the qualities of pleasure, pain and indifference which we find in all
things of the world. The same sweet is liked or disliked or treated with indifference by the same
man in different conditions. The same salad is tasteful to one, distasteful to another and insipid to
a third. Now the cause and the effect are essentially identical. The effect is the manifested
condition of the cause, e.g. oil as an effect manifests what is already contained in the seeds. The
things of the world are effects which have the qualities of pleasure, pain and indifference. Therefore, Prakrti which is their ultimate cause must have the three elements of Sattva, rajas and
tamas which respectively possess the natures of pleasure, pain and indifference, and cause
manifestation, activity and passivity.

The evolution of the world has its starting point in the association of the Purusa with Prakrti
which disturbs the original equilibrium of the latter and moves it to action. The Purusa or the self
is neither the cause nor the effect of anything. Prakrti is the uncaused cause of all objects. Once
we realize the distinction between the self and the non-self including the body and the senses, the
mind, the intellect and the ego, our self ceases to be affected by the joys and sorrows, the ups and
downs of life. It rests in itself as the dispassionate observer of the show of events in the world
without being implicated in them.

2.2 THEORY OF CAUSATION

The Samkhya metaphysics, especially its doctrine of Prakrti, rests mainly on its theory of
causation which is known as satkarya-vada. It is a theory as to the relation of an effect to its
material cause. The specific question discussed here is this: Does an effect originally exist in the
material cause prior to its production, i.e. appearance as an effect? The Buddhists and the Nyaya-
Vaisesikas answer this question in the negative. According to them, the effect cannot be said to
exist before it is produced by some cause. If the effect already existed in the material cause prior
to its production, there is no sense in our speaking of it as being caused or produced in any way.
Further, we cannot explain why the activity of any efficient cause is necessary for the production
of the effect. If the pot already existed in the clay, why should the potter exert himself and use
his implements to produce it? Moreover, if the effect were already in its material cause, it would
logically follow that the effect is indistinguishable from the cause, and that we should use the
same name for both the pot and the clay, and also that the same purpose would be served by a
pot and a lump of clay. It cannot be said that there is a distinction of form between the effect and
its material cause, for then we have to admit that there is something in the effect which is not to
be found in its cause and, therefore the effect does not really exist in the cause. This theory that the effect does not exist in the material cause prior to its production is known as *asatkarya-vada* (i.e. the view that the *karya* or the effect is *asat* or non-existent before its production. It is also called *arambhavada*, i.e. the theory of the beginning of the effect anew.

The Samkhyas repudiate this theory of causation and establish their view of *satkarya-vada*, namely, that the effect exists in the material cause even before it is produced. This view is based on the following grounds:

1. If the effect were really non-existent in the material cause, then no amount of effort on the part of any agent could bring it into existence. Can any man turn blue into red, or sugar into salt? Hence, when an effect is produced from some material cause, we are to say that it pre-exists in the cause and is only manifested by certain favorable conditions, as when oil is produced by pressing seeds. The activity of efficient causes like the potter and his tools is necessary to manifest the effect, pot, which exists implicitly in the clay.

2. There is an invariable relation between a material cause and its effect. A material cause can produce only that effect with which it is causally related. It cannot produce an effect which is in no way related to it. But it cannot be related to what does not exist. Hence the effect must exist in the material cause before it is actually produced.

3. We see that only certain effects can be produced from certain causes. Curd can be got only out of milk and a cloth only out of threads. This shows that the effect somehow exists in the cause. Had it not been so, any effect could be produced from any cause; the potter would not have taken clay to produce pots, instead of taking milk or threads or any other thing.

4. The fact that only a potent cause can produce a desired effect goes to show that the effect must be potentially contained in the cause. The potent cause of an effect is that which possesses some power that is definitely related to the effect. But the power cannot be related to the effect, if the latter does not exist in some form. This means that the effect exists in the cause in an unmanifested form before its production or manifestation.

5. If the effect be really non-existent in the cause, then we have to say that, when it is produced, the non-existent comes into existence, i.e. something comes out of nothing, which is absurd.

6. We see that the effect is not different from, but essentially identical with, the material cause. If, therefore, the cause exists, the effect also must exist. In fact, the effect and the cause are the explicit and implicit states of the same substance. A cloth is not really different from the threads, of which it is made; a statue is the same as its material cause, stone, with new shape and form; the weight of a table is the same as that of the pieces of wood used in it. The conclusion drawn by the Samkhya from all this is that the effect exists in the material cause even before its production or appearance. This is the theory of *satkarya-vada* (i.e. the view that the effect is existent before its appearance).

The theory of *satkarya-vada* has got two different forms, namely, *parinama-vada* and *vivarta-vada*. According to the former, when an effect is produced, there is a real transformation (*parinama*) of the cause into the effect, e.g. the production of a pot from clay, or of curd from milk. The Samkhya is in favour of this view as a further specification of the theory of *satkarya-vada*. The *vivarta-vada* which is accepted by the Advaita Vedantins, holds that the change of the cause into the effect is merely apparent. When we see a snake in a rope, it is not the case that the rope is only transformed into a snake; what happens is that the rope only appears
as, but is not really a snake. So also, God or Brahman does not become really transformed into the world produced by him, but remains identically the same, while we may wrongly think that He undergoes change and becomes the world.

2.3 THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The Samkhya theory of knowledge follows in the main its dualistic metaphysics. It accepts only three independent sources of valid knowledge (pramana). These are perception, inference and scriptural testimony (sabda). The other source of knowledge, like comparison, postulation (arthapatti) and non-cognition (anupalabdhi), are included under these, and not recognized as separate sources of knowledge.

Valid knowledge (Prama) is a definite and an unerring cognition of some object through the modification of buddhi or the intellect which reflects the consciousness of the self in it. What we call the mind or the intellect is an unconscious material entity in the Samkhya philosophy. Consciousness or intelligence (caitanya) really belongs to the self. But the self cannot immediately apprehend the objects of the world. If it could, we should always know all objects, since the self in us is not finite and limited, but all pervading. The self knows objects through the intellect, the manas, and the senses. We have a true knowledge of objects when, through the activity of the senses and the manas, their forms are impressed on the intellect which, in its turn, reflects the light or consciousness of the self.

In all valid knowledge there are three factors, namely, the subject (pramata), the object (prameya), and the ground or source of knowledge (pramana). The subject being a conscious principle is no other than the self as pure consciousness (suddha cetana). The modification (vrtti) of the intellect, through which the self knows an object, is called pramana. The object presented to the self through this modification is prameya. Prama or valid knowledge is the reflection of the self in the intellect as modified into the form of the object, because without the self’s consciousness the unconscious intellect cannot cognize anything.

Perception is the direct cognition of an object through its contact with some sense. When an object like the table comes within the range of your vision, there is contact between the table and your eyes. The table produces certain impressions or modifications in the sense organ, which are analyzed and synthesized by manas or the mind. Through the activity of the senses and the mind, buddhi or the intellect becomes modified and transformed into the shape of the table. The intellect, however, being an unconscious material principle, cannot by itself know the object, although the form of the object is present in it. But as the intellect has an excess of Sattva, it reflects, like transparent mirror, the consciousness of the self (Purusa). With the reflection of the self’s consciousness in it, the unconscious modification of the intellect into the form of the table becomes illumined into a conscious state of perception. Just as mirror reflects the light of a lamp and thereby manifests other things, so the material principle of buddhi, being transparent and bright (sattvika), reflects the consciousness of the self and illuminates or cognizes the objects of knowledge.

There are two kinds of perception, namely, nirvikalpaka or the indeterminate and savikalpaka or the determinate. The first arises at the first moment of contact between a sense and its object, and is antecedent to all mental analysis and synthesis of the sense-data. It is accordingly called alocana or a mere sensing of the object. The second kind of perception is the result of the
analysis, synthesis and interpretation of sense-data by manas or the mind. So it is called vivecana or a judgement of the object it is the determinate cognition of an object as a particular kind of thing having certain qualities and standing in certain relations to other things.

Inference is the knowledge of one term of a relation, which is not perceived, through the other which is perceived and known to be invariably related to the first. In it what is perceived leads us on to the knowledge of what is unperceived through the knowledge of a universal relation between two. Inference is first divided into two kinds, namely, *vita* and *avita*. It is called *vita* or affirmative when it is based on a universal affirmative proposition, and *avita* or negative when based on a universal negative proposition. The third *pramana* is *sabda* or testimony. It is constituted by authoritative statements (*aptavacana*), and gives the knowledge of objects which cannot be known by perception and inference.

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<td><strong>Note:</strong> Use the space provided for your answer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1) What is your understanding of the theory of causation?</td>
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<td>2) What is the difference between <em>parinama-vada</em> and <em>vivartha-vada</em>?</td>
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<td>3) Differentiate between valid knowledge and invalid knowledge.</td>
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<td>2.4 PRAKRTI</td>
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The theory that causation means a real transformation of the material cause leads to the concept of Prakrti as the root cause of the world of objects. All worldly effects are latent in this uncaused cause, because infinite regress has to be avoided. It is the potentiality of nature, ‘the receptacle and nurse of all generation’. As the uncaused root-cause it is called Prakrti. As the first principle of this Universe, it is called Pradhana. As the unmanifested state of all effects, it is known as Avyakta. As the extremely subtle and imperceptible thing which is only inferred from its products, it is called Anumana. As the unintelligent and unconscious principle, it is called Jada. As the ever-active unlimited power, it is called shakti. The products are cause-dependent, relative, many and temporary as they are subject to birth and death or to production and destruction; but Prakrti is uncaused, independent, absolute, one and eternal, being beyond production and destruction. The entire world of objects is implicit in the bosom of Prakrti, unintelligent, unmanifest, uncaused, ever-active, imperceptible and eternal. Prakrti alone is the final source of this world of objects which is implicitly and potentially contained in its bosom.

Samkhya gives five proofs for the existence of Prakrti which are as follows:

1. All individual things in this world are limited, dependent, conditional and finite. The finite cannot be the cause of the universe. Logically we have to proceed from the finite to the infinite, from the limited to the unlimited, from the temporary to the permanent, from the many to the one. And it is this infinite, unlimited, eternal and all-pervading Prakrti which is the source of this universe.

2. All worldly things possess certain common characteristics by which they are capable of producing pleasure, pain and indifference. Hence there must be a common source composed of three Gunas, from which all worldly things arise.

3. All effects arise from the activity of the potent cause. Evolution means the manifestation of the hitherto implicit as the explicit. The activity which generates evolution must be inherent in the world-cause. And this cause is Prakrti.

4. The effect differs from the cause and hence the limited effect cannot be regarded as its own cause. The effect is the explicit and the cause is the implicit state of the same process. The effects, therefore, point to a world cause where they are potentially contained.

5. The unity of the universe points to a single cause. And this cause is Prakrti.

Prakrti is said to be the unity of the three Gunas held in equilibrium. The three Gunas are Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. They are the constituents of Prakrti and through it of the worldly objects. Being subtle and imperceptible their existence is inferred from their effects - pleasure, pain and indifference respectively. Sattva literally means real or existent and is responsible for the manifestation of objects in consciousness. It is called goodness and produces pleasure. It is a light and bright, buoyant and illumining. Rajas, which literally means foulness, is the principle of motion. It produces pain. Restless activity, feverish effort and wild stimulation are its results. It is mobile and stimulating. Its color is red. Tamas, which literally means darkness, is the principle of inertia. It produces apathy and indifference. Ignorance, sloth, confusion, bewilderment, passivity and negativity are its results.

2.5 PURUSA
Purusa is the principle of pure consciousness. Purusa is the soul, the self, the spirit, the subject, the knower the brain and not mind or ego or intellect. It is not a substance which possesses the quality of consciousness. Consciousness is its essence. It is itself pure and transcendental consciousness. It is the ultimate knower which is the foundation of all knowledge. It is the pure subject and as such can never become an object of knowledge. It is the silent witness, the emancipated alone, the neutral seer, the peaceful eternal. It is beyond time and space, beyond change and activity. It is self-luminous and self-proved. It is uncaused, eternal and all pervading. It is the indubitable real, the postulate of knowledge, and all doubts and denials pre-suppose its existence.

Samkhya gives the following five proofs for the existence of Purusa:

1. All compound objects exist for the sake of the Purusa. The body, the senses, the mind and the intellect are all means to realize the end of the Purusa. The three gunas, the Prakrti, the subtle body - all are said to serve the purpose of the self. Evolution is teleological or purposive. Prakrti evolves itself in order to serve the Purusa’s end. This proof is teleological.

2. All objects are composed of the three gunas and therefore logically presuppose the existence of the Purusa who is the witness of these gunas and is himself beyond them. The three gunas imply the conception of a nistraigunya - that which is beyond them. This proof is logical.

3. There must be a transcendental synthetic unity of pure consciousness to co-ordinate all experiences. All knowledge necessarily presupposes the existence of the self. The self is the foundation, the fundamental postulate of all empirical knowledge. All affirmations and all negations equally presuppose it. Without it, experience would not become experience. This proof is ontological.

4. Non-intelligent Prakrti cannot experience its products. So there must be an intelligent principle to experience the worldly products of Prakrti. Prakrti is the enjoyed and so there must be an enjoyer. All objects of the world have the characteristics of producing pleasure, pain and bewilderment. But pleasure, pain, bewilderment have meaning only when there is a conscious principle to experience them. Hence Purusa must exist. This argument is ethical.

5. There are persons who try to attain release from the sufferings of the world. The desire for liberation and emancipation implies the existence of a person who can try for and obtain liberation. Aspiration presupposes the aspirant. This proof is mystical or religious.

2.6 THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Prakrti is the fundamental substance out of which the world evolves. Prakrti is regarded as essentially dynamic. It is always changing. Even in dissolution there is homogeneous change. Evolution starts when there is heterogeneous change in the gunas and one predominates over the other two. When rajas, the principle of activity vibrates and makes the other two vibrate, the process of creation begins. There is neither creation nor destruction of gunas. Production is only a manifestation or evolution and destruction is non-manifestation and concealment. Evolution is cyclic — alternative periods of evolution(sarga) and dissolution (pralaya). Prakrti evolves the
world of objects when it comes in contact with the purusa. Even though prakrti and purusa are diametrically opposed to each other in their nature they come together just as a blind man and lame man can co-operate in order to get out of a forest; so the non-intelligent prakrti and the inactive purusa combine and co-operate to serve their respective interests. Prakrti needs the presence of purusa in order to be known or appreciated by someone (darsanartham) and purusa requires the help of prakrti in order to discriminate itself from the latter and thereby attain liberation (kaivalyartham).

Purusa is reflected in the intellect (buddhi) and wrongly identifies himself with his own reflection in the buddhi. It is the reflection of purusa which comes into contact with prakrti and not the purusa himself. Samkhya Karika simply assumes from the beginning that purusa and prakrti are together, and its analysis includes only a description of the mutual interaction of the principles together with the description of the means to attain freedom. The Process of Evolution: As evolution begins there is gradual differentiation and integration of the three gunas; and as a result of their combination in different proportions the various objects of the world originate: Mahat (the great) is the first product of the evolution of prakrti. It is the basis of intelligence (buddhi) of the individual. Buddhi emerges when sattva predominates over rajas and tamas. The special functions of Buddhi are ascertainment and decision-making. Mahat produces ahankara. It is the principle of individuation. It produces the notion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. Ahamkara is bifurcated into the subjective series and the objective series. Ahamkara in its sattva aspect evolves into manas, the five sense organs (organs of perception) and the five motor organs (senses of action). The 5 sense organs (jnanendriyas): functions of sight, smell, taste, touch and sound. The 5 senses of action (karmendriyas): functions of speech, apprehension, movement, excretion and reproduction. Ahamkara in its tamas aspect evolves into the 5 subtle essences (tanmatras): the essences of sight, smell, taste, touch and sound. Ahamkara in its rajasa aspect plays its part in both. The 5 subtle essences evolve into the five gross elements of earth, water, light, air and ether by a predomination of tamas (mahabhutas). Thus the process of evolution of the universe includes the operation of 24 principles, of which prakrti is the first, the 5 gross elements are the last and 10 organs and 5 tanmatras are the intermediate ones. All the same it is not complete in itself because it has a necessary reference to the world of selves as the witness and enjoyers. The evolution is purposive. The evolution of prakrti into the world of objects makes it possible for the selves to enjoy or suffer the consequences of their good or bad actions (merits and demerits). The ultimate end of evolution of prakrti, therefore, is the freedom (mukti) of purusa.

2.7 BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

The earthly life is full of three kinds of pain. The first kind, called adhyamika, is due to intra-organic psychophysical causes and includes all mental, and bodily sufferings. The second adhibhutika, is due to extra-organic natural causes like men, beasts, birds, thorns, etc. The third, adhidaivika, is due to supernatural causes like the planets, elemental agencies, ghosts, demons etc. Wherever there are gunas there are pains. Even the so-called pleasures lead to pain. Even the life in heaven is subject to the gunas. The end of man is to get rid of these three kinds of pain and sufferings. Liberation means complete cessation of all sufferings which is the summum bonum,
the highest end of life. Purusa is free and pure consciousness. It is inactive, indifferent and possesses no attributes. It is above time and space, merit and demerit, bondage and liberation. It is only when it mistakes its reflection in the buddhi for itself and identifies itself wrongly with the internal organ - the intellect, the ego and the mind, that it is said to be bound. It is the ego, and not the Purusa, which is bound. When the Purusa realizes its own pure nature, it gets liberated which in fact it always was. Hence bondage is due to ignorance or non-discrimination between the self and the non-self. Liberation cannot obtain by means of actions. Karma, good or bad or indifferent, is the function of the gunas and leads to bondage and not to liberation. Good actions may lead to heaven and bad actions to hell but heaven and hell alike, like this worldly life, are subject to pain. It is only knowledge which leads to liberation because bondage is due to ignorance or ignorance can be removed only by knowledge. The jiva has to realize itself as the pure Purusa through discrimination between Purusa and Prakrti. Actions and fruits, merits and demerits, pleasure and pain all belong to the non-self. The knowledge that ‘I am not (the non-self), that’ nothing is mine’, that ‘ego is unreal’, when constantly meditated upon, becomes pure, incontrovertible and absolute and leads to liberation. Samkhya believes that bondage and liberation are only phenomenal. The bondage of the Purusa is a fiction. It is only the ego, the product of Prakrti, which is bound. And consequently it is only the ego which is liberated. Purusa, in its complete isolation, is untouched by bondage and liberation. Ishvarakrsna says, that Purusa is really neither bound nor is it liberated nor does it transmigrate; bondage, liberation and transmigration belong to Prakrti in its manifold forms.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is Prakrti and what are the justifications given by Samkhya?

2. What are the arguments for the proofs of Purusa?

3. Explain the Samkhya concept of liberation.
2.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give clear ideas about the central concepts of Samkhya. The Samkhya metaphysics, especially its doctrine of prakrti, rests mainly on its theory of causation, which is known as satkarya vada. It is a theory as to the relation of an effect to its material cause. Prakrti is the ultimate cause of the world of objects. The Purusa is an indubitable reality. Purusa or self is pure, eternal and all pervading consciousness. Samkhya accepts only three independent sources of valid knowledge. These are perception, inference and scriptural testimony. The other sources of knowledge like comparison, postulation and non-cognition are included under these three, and not recognized as separate sources of knowledge. Finally we conclude the unit with the expression that in the Samkhya system, Liberation is just the absolute and complete cessation of all pain without a possibility of return.

2.9 KEYWORDS

Prakrti: Prakrti is the ultimate cause of the world of objects. Prakrti is constituted by three gunas called Sattva, rajas and tamas.

Purusa: Purusa is an indubitable reality. Purusa is pure, eternal and all pervading consciousness.

Bondage: Bondage is non-discrimination between self and non-self. Bondage is ignorance.

Liberation: Liberation is the absolute cessation of all pain.

2.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


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