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Concept of Samkhya Philosophy

The Samkhya system advocates the ontological dualism of prakrti and individual souls (purusas). It believes in the evolution of the cosmos including matter, life, and mind out of the eternal and ubiquitous prakrti to serve the ends of an infinite number of individual souls.

The dualism of prakrti and souls is the fundamental doctrine of the Samkhya system. It recognizes unconscious finality in the evolution of prakrti, vehemently criticizes the Nyaya theism, and strongly advocates atheism.

The Samkhya system derives its name from the word samkhya, meaning number, since it enumerates the metaphysical principles of reality. Or, the word samkhya may mean perfect knowledge. The system is called Samkhya, since it gives perfect knowledge of the self (purusa) as quite distinct from prakrti and its evolutes, body, sense-organs, mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), and egoism (ahamkara), which annihilates all kinds of suffering.

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.

Gunās of Prakṛti

The Sāṃkhya 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 course of vapour etc. Sattva is believed to be white.
- ii) 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) 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. 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 tamaj changes into tamaj. 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.

Purusa

According to the Sāṃkhya 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 (ahaṃkāra) 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 Sāṃkhya Philosophy, the purusa is of the nature of pure consciousness and hence beyond the limits of Prakṛti. It is free from distortions. Its objects changes but it itself never changes. It is above self-arrogance, aversion and attachment.

There are five arguments Sāṃkhya 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 Sāṃkhya, 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 Mimamsa because they believe in the plurality of selves.

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 Sāṃkhya 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 Sāṃkhya 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) **Ahaṃkāra** - Ahankara 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 ahaṃkāra 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 (ahaṃkāra), all these three gunas of prakṛiti operates.

- iii) **Mānas** – Manas According to the Sāṃkhya 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 Sāṃkhya 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 ahaṃkāra.
- 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 Sāṃkhya 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.