
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 Sâmkhya Philosophy.

After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the Sâmkhya theory of causation;
- elucidate the distinction between Purusa and Prakrti;
- discuss Sâmkhya views on evolution;
- analyze Sâmkhya account on pramânas (Sources of valid knowledge);
- illustrate Sâmkhya explanations on bondage and liberation; and
- discuss the Sâmkhya views on God.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will find the Sâmkhya's theory of causation, distinction between purusa and prakrti, discussion on the gunas of prakrti; 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 Sâmkhya Philosophy argues for the cause of evolution of the world, the role of purusa and prakrti for the creation of the universe, valid sources of knowledge, and on the existence of God.

The Sâmkhya Philosophy is one among the oldest school in India Philosophy. This is so because the basic tenets of Sâmkhya can be seen in Nyâya, Vaiúesika, Yoga, Jainism, and Vedânta. The founder of Sâmkhya Philosophy is 'Kapila' who has written the script 'Sâmkhya Sûtra'. This script is widely known as

Sâmkhya Philosophy. It is commented by many scholars, out of those the significant commentary is known as ‘Sâmkhya Kârîka’ by Iúvarak?sna.

There are two views on the origin of this school. Some are believed that the word Sâmkhya is derived from the word ‘Samkhyâ’ 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 Sâmkhya means ‘perfect knowledge’ and that is about the reality. With these introductions now let us know Sâmkhya’s metaphysics.

3.2 METAPHYSICS

The Sâmkhya Philosophy is regarded as dualistic realism. It is dualistic because it holds the doctrine of two ultimate realities; Prakrti 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 Sâmkhya 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 Sâmkhya replies that Prakriti 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 Sâmkhya named as ‘satkâryavâda’ and populated as ‘theory of causation’.

3.3 THEORY OF CAUSATION

The Sâmkhya theory of causation is known as satkâryavâda. 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 ‘parinâ mavâda’. By refuting this view Nyâyikas 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 (asatkâryavâda/ ârambhavâda) is found in this Block, Unit-1: Nyaya Philosophy.

The following arguments uphold by Sâmkhya to support the theory satkâryavâda.

- 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 Sâmkhya disagrees with Nyâyikas 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 Sâmkhya philosophy expressed that Prakriti is the first and ultimate cause of all objects of the world both gross and subtle.

Prakrti

Prakrti 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, Prakrti itself is uncaused, eternal, and all pervading. Hence, it is called "pradhâna". It can't be perceived but can be inferred from its effect. Thus, it is known as 'anumâ'. In the form of conscious elements, it is called jada, and in the form of the unmanifested objects, it is called 'avayakta'.

Differences between Prakrti and Objects

Objects are the effects of Prakrti. These are dependant, relative, many and non-eternal because they are created and destroyed. But Prakrti, 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 Prakrti is beyond of it. Objects are manifest and composite but Prakrti is unmanifest and without parts. Thus, Vyâsa says that Prakrti is both 'is' and 'is-not'.

Proofs for the existence of Prakrti

There are five arguments offered by Isvarakrishna for the existence of Prakrti. 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 Prakrti.
- 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 Prakrti.
- 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 (satkâryavâda). By implication therefore, the universe must have a cause. This cause unmanifests the universe in its totality. This cause in nothing but the Prakrti.
- v) Sâmkhya satkâryavâda 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 Prakrti.

Gunās of Prakrti

The Sâmkhya Philosophy advocates three gunas of Prakrti. These are; Sattva, rajas and tamas. Prakrti 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 Prakrti which is of the nature of pleasure, light (laghu) and bright or illuminating (prakâsaka). 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) **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 tamaj changes into tamaj. Such transformation of the gunas is called 'svarupaparinâma' 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 prakrti.

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According to the Sâmkhya 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 (mânas), neither ego (aha?kâara) 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 Sâmkhya Philosophy, the purusa is of the nature of pure consciousness and hence beyond the limits of Prakrti. 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 Sâmkhya 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 Prakrti can't make use of them. Hence, all these substances are for Purusa or self. Prakrti evolves itself in order to serve the Purusa's end. The three gunas, Prakrti, 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 Prakrti is unconscious, it can't enjoy her creation. Hence, a conscious element is needed to make use of them. Prakrti is the one to be enjoyed (bhogyâ) and so there must be an enjoyer (bhoktâ). 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 Sâmkhya, 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.

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Evolution

The world and worldly objects are created because of the contact between Prakrti and Purusa. The Prakrti 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 Prakrti 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 Prakrti in a better way and clear manner. The Prakrti 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 Prakrti cooperate with each other in order to start the evolution.

Regarding their contact, the Sâmkhya says, there is no real contact took place between Prakrti and Purusa. But their mere closeness or nearness with each other disturbs the stability of the gunas of Prakrti. 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 Sâmkhya 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 âtman which differs from all physical objects and their qualities.

ii) **Ahamkâra**

Ahamkâra 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 ahamkâra 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 (ahamkâra), all these three gunas of prakruti operates.

iii) **Mânas**

According to the Sâmkhya Philosophy, mânas 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) **Jñânendriyas**

Jñânendriyas are known as five sense organs; nose, ears, eyes, skin, and tongue. On Sâmkhya 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 ahamkâra.

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) **Tanmâtrâs**

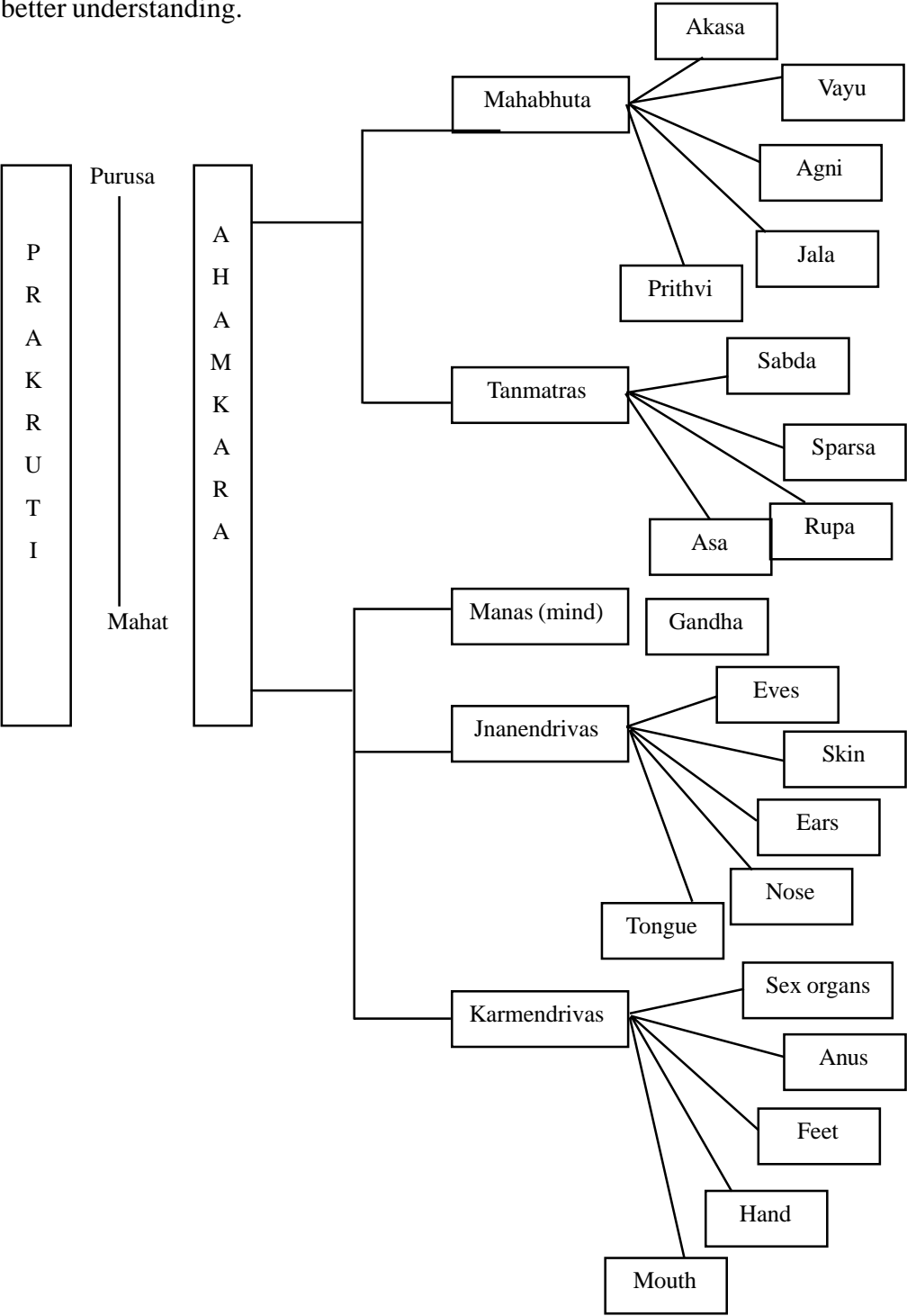
There are five tanmâtrâs; sabda or sound, sparsa or touch, rupa or form, rasa or taste, and gandha or smell. All are very subtle because they are the elements of the objects. Hence, they can't be perceived but inferred. The Sâmkhya School viewed that the five elements; earth, water, air, fire, and ether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

vii) Mahâbhutas

There are five mahâbhutas found in the cosmos namely;

- Air or Vâyû
- Fire or Agni
- Akâsa or Ether
- Water or Jala
- Prathivi or Earth

Their respective qualities are; touch, colour, sound, taste, and smell. The Sâmkhya theory of evolution is illustrated in the following diagram for your clarity and better understanding.



Check Your Progress III

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

1) What is mahat?

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3.4 EPISTEMOLOGY

The Sâmkhya philosophy recognizes three independent sources of valid knowledge (Pramâna). These are; perception, inference, and verbal testimony (sabda). According to the Sâmkhya, 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 Prakrti to generate knowledge. The Sâmkhya Philosophy accepts two sorts of perception, savikalpaka and nirvikalpaka as Nyaya advocates. For detail discussion on savikalka and nirvikalpaka, please go to the Unit-1: Nyâya Philosophy.

Without deviating from Nyaya Philosophy, the Sâmkhya holds that vyâpti 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 Sâmkhya accepts the five-membered syllogism of the Nyaya as the most adequate pattern of inference. The Sâmkhya 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 mânas, ahmkara, and mahat which are the products of Prakrti. 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 Sâmkhya 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 Sâmkhya 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 Sâmkhya 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 Sâmkhya 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 Prakrti. It advocates satkâryavâda, which expresses effect exists in its material cause prior to its production.

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

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

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

- 1) Mahat
- 2) ahamkâra
- 3) Mânas
- 4) Five sense organs (jnânendriyas)
- 5) Five organs of action (karmendriyas)
- 6) Five subtle elements (tanmantrâs)
- 7) Five physical elements. (mahâbhutas)

Epistemology

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

Bondage and Liberation

According to the Sâmkhya school of thought, bondage is due to the attachment towards worldly objects and liberation is the dissociation from worldly suffering and pain. On Sâmkhya 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** : Guna 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

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Keith, A.B. *The Samkhya System*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918.

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.