



## A STUDY OF THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF SAMKHYA PHILOSOPHY

**Dr. R.Vijayakumar**

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Philosophy, Religion and Culture, Poompuhar College (Autonomous), Melaiyur, Sirkali (TK),  
Nagappattinam (DT), Tamilnadu .

### **Abstract**

Samkhya or Sankhya is one of the six Astika schools of Hindu philosophy. It is most related to the Yoga school of Hinduism, and it was influential on other schools of Indian philosophy. Samkhya is an enumerationist philosophy whose epistemology accepts three of six pramanas (proofs) as the only reliable means of gaining knowledge. These include pratyak (perception), Anumana (inference) and Sabda (pravacana, word/testimony of reliable sources). Samkhya philosophy deals about two ultimate realities that which is called by dualistic philosophy. Sometimes described as one of the rationalist school of Indian philosophy.

**Key words:** Samkhya Philosophy, Prakriti, Purusa, Theory of Evolution, Rationalist thoughts.

### **Introduction**

Samkhya is one of the most prominent and one of the oldest of Indian philosophy. An eminent, great sage Kapila was the founder of the Samkhya School. Based on the Upanishads, two schools of philosophy developed in India: The realistic (Samkhya) and The idealistic (Vedanta). The Samkhya philosophy combines the basic doctrines of Samkhya and Yoga. However it should be remembered that the Samkhya represents the theory and Yoga represents the application or the practical aspects. The word Samkhya is based upon the Sanskrit word Samkhya which means 'number'. The school specifies the number and nature of the ultimate constituents of the universe and thereby imparts knowledge of reality. In fact, the term Samkhya also means perfect knowledge. Hence it is a system of perfect knowledge. Samkhya is dualistic realism. It is dualistic because it advocates two ultimate realities: Prakriti, matter and Purusha, self (spirit). Samkhya is realism as it considers that both matter and spirit are equally real. Samkhya is pluralistic also because of its teaching that Purusha is not one but many. Samkhya, to some extent, differs from Nyaya -Vaisheshika and Jainism. While Nyaya-Vaisheshika and Jainism contend that the atoms are the ultimate constituents of the physical world, Samkhya differs on the issue.

### **Theories of Samkhya Philosophy**

According to Samkhya the cause is always subtler than the effect. The Samkhya theory argues: How can so gross atoms of matter can be the cause of such subtle and fine objects as mind and intellect? The Samkhya proposes that some finest and subtlest stuff or principle underlies all physical existence. Samkhya names it as Prakriti. Prakriti is the primordial substance behind the world. It is the material cause of the world. Prakriti is the first and ultimate cause of all gross and subtle objects. Prakriti is the non-self. It is devoid of consciousness Prakriti is unintelligible and gets greatly influenced by the Purusha, the self. It can only manifest itself as the various objects of experience of the Purusha

Prakriti is constituted of three gunas, namely sattva, rajas and tamas. The term guna, in ordinary sense means quality or nature. But here, it is to be understood in the sense of constituent (component) in Samkhya. Sattva is concerned with happiness. While rajas is concerned with action, tamas is associated with ignorance and inaction. Sattva is the guna whose essence is purity, fineness and subtlety. Sattva is the component concerned with lightness, brightness and pleasure. Sattva is associated with ego, mind and intelligence. Its association with the consciousness is the strongest. Though sattva is an essential condition for consciousness, it is not sufficient. It should be remembered that consciousness is exclusively the Purusha .

According to Samkhya, the efficient cause of the world is Purusha and the material cause is the Prakriti. Here Purusha stands for the 'Supreme spirit' and Prakriti stands for 'matter'. Purusha (spirit) is the first principle of Samkhya. Prakriti is the second, the material principle of Samkhya. Purusha (like the Brahman of Vedanta) is the Transcendental Self. It is absolute, independent, free, imperceptible, and unknowable, above any experience and beyond any words or explanation. It remains pure, "nonattributive consciousness". Prakriti is the material cause of the world. Prakriti is dynamic. Its dynamism is attributed to its constituent gunas. The gunas are not only constituents, nor are they simply qualities. The gunas are the very essence of Prakriti. Gunas are constituents not only of Prakriti but also of all world-objects as they are produced by Prakriti. Prakriti is considered homogeneous and its constituent gunas cannot be separated. The gunas are always changing, rendering a dynamic character to Prakriti. Still a balance among three gunas is maintained in Prakriti. The changes in the gunas and in the Prakriti may take two forms: Homogeneous and Heterogeneous. Homogeneous changes do not affect the



state of equilibrium in the Prakriti. As a result, worldly objects are not produced. Heterogeneous changes involve radical interaction among the three gunas. They disturb the state of equilibrium. This is the preliminary phase of the evolution. The evolutionary process is initiated by the rajas, which activates sattva and then the two gunas overpower the inertia of the tamas. An important factor behind the disturbance is Purusha. The relation between Purusha and Prakriti may be compared to that between a magnet and a piece of iron. Purusha itself does not come into contact with Prakriti. But it influences Prakriti. Thus, the Prakriti is prompted to produce. As the gunas undergo more and more changes, Prakriti goes on differentiating into numerous, various world-objects. Thus it becomes more and more determinate. This is what is termed as evolution.

### **The theory of evolution**

In evolution, Prakriti is transformed and differentiated into multiplicity of objects. Evolution is followed by dissolution. In dissolution the physical existence, all the worldly objects mingle back into Prakriti, which now remains as the undifferentiated, primordial substance. This is how the cycles of evolution and dissolution follow each other. The evolution results in 23 different categories of objects. They comprise of three elements of Antahkaranas or the internal organs as well as the ten Bahyakaranas or the external organs. Among all these, the first to evolve is Mahat (the great one). Mahat evolves as a result of preponderance of sattva. Since it is an evolute of Prakriti, it is made of matter. But it has psychological, intellectual aspect known as buddhi or intellect. Mahat or intellect is a unique faculty of human beings. It helps man in judgment and discrimination. Mahat helps to distinguish between the subject and the object. Man comes to understand the self and the non-self, the experiencer and the experienced as distinct entities with Mahat. Mahat, by its inherent association with sattva, possesses qualities like luminosity and reflectivity. Buddhi can reflect Purusha owing to these qualities. The second evolute is ahamkara (ego). It arises out of the cosmic nature of Mahat. Ahamkara is the self-sense. It is concerned with the self-identity and it brings about awareness of “I” and “mine”. According to the Samkhya there emanates two sets of objects from ahamkara. The first set comprises of the manas (mind), the five sense-organs and the five motor organs. The second set consists of the five elements which may exist in two forms, subtle and gross.

The five sense organs are chakshu (to see), sroto (to hear), rasna (to taste), ghrana (to smell) and tvak (to feel). The five motor organs are concerned with the powers of speech, handling, movement, excretion and procreation. These organs, in Sanskrit, are referred to as vak, pani, pada, paya and upastha respectively. All these ten organs together form external organs (bahyakaranas). Mahat, ahamkara and manas form internal organs (antahkaranas.) It should be noted here that the manas or the mind is different from Mahat or the buddhi. Manas or the mind in co-ordination with the sense-organs, receives impressions from the external world, transforms them into determinate perceptions and conveys them to the experiencer or the ego. Thus manas is produced and is capable of producing also. But though Mahat is produced, it cannot produce. .

### **Theory of Knowledge in Samkhya Philosophy**

Samkhya accepts three sources of valid knowledge: Perception, inference and testimony. According to Samkhya, the manas (mind), the Mahat (intellect = buddhi) and the purusha play a role in ‘producing’ knowledge. When the sense-organs come in contact with an object, the sensations and impressions reach the manas. The manas processes these impressions into proper forms and converts them into determinate percepts. These percepts are carried to the Mahat. By its own applications, Mahat gets modified. Mahat takes the form of the particular object. This transformation of Mahat is known as vritti or modification of buddhi. But still the process of knowledge is not completed. Mahat is a physical entity. It lacks consciousness so it can not generate knowledge on its own. However, it can reflect the consciousness of the Purusha (self). Illumined by the consciousness of the reflected self, the unconscious Mahat becomes conscious of the form into which it is modified (i.e. of the form of the object). This is better explained by an illustration. The mirror cannot produce an image on its own. The mirror needs light to reflect and produce the image and thereby reveal the object. Similarly, Mahat needs the ‘light’ of the consciousness of the Purusha to produce knowledge.

### **Samkhya views on of perception:**

Indeterminate (nirvikalpa) perceptions and determinate (savikalpa) perceptions. Indeterminate perceptions are sort of pure sensations or crude impressions. They reveal no knowledge of the form or the name of the object. There is vague awareness about an object. There is cognition, but no recognition. An infant’s initial experiences are full of confusion. There is a lot of sense-data, but there are improper or inadequate means to process them. Hence they can neither be differentiated nor be labeled. Most of them are indeterminate perceptions. Determinate perceptions are the mature state of perceptions which have been processed and differentiated appropriately. Once the sensations have been processed, categorized and interpreted properly, they become determinate perceptions. They can lead to identification and also generate knowledge.



### Samkhya views on God

Kapila, the proponent of the Samkhya School, rules out the existence of God. He asserts that the existence of God cannot be proved and that God does not exist. Samkhya argues that if God exists and if God is eternal and unchanging as is widely claimed, then he can not be the cause of the world. A cause has to be active and changing. However some of the later commentators of Samkhya seem to bend towards theistic interpretation.

### The concepts of Bondage and Salvation

Like other major systems of Indian philosophy, Samkhya regards ignorance as the root cause of bondage and suffering. According to Samkhya, the self is eternal, pure consciousness. Due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with the physical body and its constituents Manas, ahamkara and Mahat, which are products of Prakriti. Once the self becomes free of this false identification and the material bonds, the salvation is possible.

### Conclusion

Finally Samkhya is an analytical approach to Indian Philosophy. Samkhya is strongly dualist. Samkhya philosophy regards the universe as consisting of two realities; puru a (consciousness) and prak ti (matter). Jiva (a living being) is that state in which puru a is bonded to prak ti in some form. This fusion, state the Samkhya scholars, led to the emergence of buddhi ("intellect") and aha k ra (ego consciousness). The universe is described by this school as one created by purusa-prak ti entities infused with various permutations and combinations of variously enumerated elements, senses, feelings, activity and mind. During the state of imbalance, one of more constituents overwhelms the others, creating a form of bondage, particularly of the mind. The end of this imbalance, bondage is called liberation, or kaivalya, by the Samkhya School. It is most essential School of Indian philosophy. Samkhya's philosophical treatises also influenced the development of various theories of Hindu ethics.

### Reference

1. Burley, Mikel (2006), *Classical Samkhya And Yoga: The Metaphysics Of Experience*, Taylor & Francis, ISBN 978-0-415-39448-2.
2. Chattopadhyaya, Debiprasad (1986), *Indian Philosophy: A popular Introduction*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, ISBN 81-7007-023-6.
3. Cowell, E. B.; Gough, A. E. (1882), *The Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha or Review of the Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy: Trubner's Oriental Series*, Taylor & Francis, ISBN 978-0-415-24517-3.
4. Dasgupta, Surendranath (1922), *A history of Indian philosophy*, Volume 1, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, ISBN 978-81-208-0412-8.
5. Eliade, Mircea; Trask, Willard Ropes; White, David Gordon (2009), *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-14203-6.
6. Flood, Gavin (2006), *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*, I.B.Tauris, ISBN 978-1-84511-011-6.
7. Fowler, Jeaneane D (2012), *The Bhagavad Gita: A Text and Commentary for Students*, Eastbourne: Sussex Academy Press, ISBN 978-1-84519-520-5.
8. Haney, William S. (2002), *Culture and Consciousness: Literature Regained*, New Jersey: Bucknell University Press, ISBN 1611481724.
9. Hiriyanna, M. (1993), *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, ISBN 81-208-1099-6
10. Isaac, J. R.; Dangwal, Ritu (1997), *Proceedings. International conference on cognitive systems*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers Ltd, ISBN 81-7023-746-7.
11. Isayeva, N. V. (1993), *Shankara and Indian Philosophy*, SUNY Press, ISBN 978-0-7914-1281-7.
12. Jacobsen, Knut A. (2008), *Theory and Practice of Yoga : 'Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*, Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 978-81-208-3232-9.
13. Karmarkar, A.P. (1962), *Religion and Philosophy of Epics in S. Radhakrishnan ed. The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol.II*, Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, ISBN 81-85843-03-1.
14. King, Richard (1999), *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*, Edinburgh University Press, ISBN 978-0-7486-0954-3.