CHAPTER FOUR

THE ŚĀMKHYA SYSTEM

The legendary sage Kapila, considered as the father of Śāmkhya system, is supposed to have flourished in the seventh century or sixth century B.C.

The Śāmkhya system is believed to be the oldest of the existing systems of Indian Philosophy. In the history of thought the Śāmkhya acquires the unique position for it is the first attempt to harmonise the philosophy of the Vedas through reason. It expounds the first systematic account of the process of cosmic evolution from which we can get the knowledge of twenty-five categories. It is not merely a metaphysical speculation but is a purely logical exposition based on the scientific principles of conservation, transformation and dissipation of energy. It is considered as the most notable attempt in the Indian Philosophy.

The term Śāmkhya is derived from the word Śāmkhya, 'number'. This name is used because the Śāmkhya indicates the principles of cosmic evolution by rational analysis, whereas the term used in philosophy as it teaches discriminative knowledge which enables us to know the difference between spirit and knowledge.  

1. HP, p.66.
Richard Garbe expresses the view that Buddhism had been inspired by the Sāṁkhyā Philosophy and the Kapilavastu (modern Kathmandu in Nepal) was named after Kapila, the founder of the Sāṁkhyā philosophy.

Originally, Sāṁkhyā was not a vedic system. It is independent of the Brahmanical tradition. In course of time, Sāṁkhyā was recognised as an orthodox system. Hence arose a divergence between the original Sāṁkhyā and the Sāṁkhyā which become the part of the orthodox system.

The Sāṁkhyā and the Yoga according to Zimmer, "can be traced back in a partially historical, partially legendary way, through the long series of the Tirthankaras, to a remote, aboriginal, non-vedic antiquity". 2

The basic and the original works of the Sāṁkhyā system are not available to us. The Sāṁkhyā Kāri kā of Isvarakṛṣṇa can be dated earlier than the second century A.D. The Sāṁkhyā-kāri kā has two important commentaries, that of Gauḍapāda (eighth century A.D.) and the Sāṁkhyā-Tatva-Kaumudi of Vācaspati Miśra (ninth century A.D.). But the Sāṁkhyapravacana bhāṣya of Viṣṇānabhikṣu (sixteenth century A.D.) a commentary on the Sāṁkhyapravacana Śūtra, is the most important work of the system. Viṣṇānabhikṣu wrote

another work on Sāṁkhya known as Sāṁkhyaśāra.

The Sāṁkhya system is dualistic, inasmuch as it speaks of Puruṣa (spirit) and Prakṛti (Matter) as the two Ultimate Realities. This system advocates the doctrine of Satkāryavāda. According to this doctrine, nothing can emerge from a void. Creation is only the new manifestation of something that had existed before. Therefore, a thing is not made not of nothing. So it may be said that every effect must have existed previously in its cause.³

Prakṛti has been described to be the nature of equilibrium of the three Guṇas i.e. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.⁴

Puruṣa is defined as pure spirit which is different from Prakṛti. According to Sāṁkhya thinkers, Puruṣa is many in number.

They do not believe in God. The first chapter of the Sāṁkhya-Pravacana-Bhāṣya contains that, as Isvara can be neither free nor bound, nor be anything of a different character, there is no proof of this existence.⁵

To prove the knowables, there are three means of knowledge, viz. Perception, Inference and Verbal Testimony

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3. sattvarajastamasāṁ ūmyāvasthā prakṛtih
4. SK.K.9
5. muktaḥadhonyataramabhāvānnañcī dakṣiṇāḥ. SPB,i. 93
Sāmkhya divides the process of cosmic evolution into twenty-five categories which are classified under two groups.

The first group is called Puruṣa (cosmic spirit) and the second group is called Prakṛti (cosmic substance). The third group consists of seven categories. They are Mahā-Ahaṃkāra and five Tānmatras. The fourth group consists of sixteen categories. They are Manas, five Jñānendriyas, five Karmendriyas and five Mahābhutas.

The Sāmkhya View on Dharma, Artha and Kāma

In the realm of Philosophy, the Sāmkhya represent first with the idea of suffering, which is of three kinds: that is Adhyatmika, Adhībhautika, and Adhīdāivika, which I have already mentioned. Adhyatmika, arising from the psychophysical nature of man; Adhībhautika, arising from the external world and Adhīdāivika, arising from the supernatural agencies.

Every man wants to get relief of pain and suffer but it is impossible as Sāmkhya believes that pain cannot be rooted out by any remedies made by science of medicine...

6. mūlaprakṛtiravikṛtih. ....... na vikṛti puruṣah, Sk.
7. SPS. VII.6-3; YS. 11.15
8. STK under Sk.
Samkhya view about ritual work is a bit different than other philosophy. In the view of Kapila, Moksha is not attainable by the observance of vedic rites. Samkhya strongly opines that when we kill an animal for the Agnistoma sacrifice then the law of Ahimsa set aside. So by the observance of vedic rites there occurs a violation of the great moral principles. Any type of killing is sin, even though it is done for sacrifice. Samkhya has the same opinion with Buddhism and Jainism.

Life in heaven is said to be a temporary one as that life is not also free from the influence of the three Gunas.

By the observance of sacrifice and good deeds we simply try to get rid of pain.

In the words of S. Radhakrsnan, "We cannot escape from evils by death, since the same fate pursues us life after life. If the miseries are natural to the soul, there is no help for us, if they are only accidental and arise from something else, we can escape from suffering by separating ourselves from the source of suffering."^10

9. drṣṭavādānuṣrāvikah sa hi avisuddhiḥ kṣayatisaysayuktah

Bondage occurs due to Prakṛti but it is attributed to Purusa. Purusa is said to be eternally free. Bondage belongs to the citta or the inner organ. Vijnānabhikṣu quotes a verse from Kurma Purāṇa 11 to the effect:

"Were the self by nature impure, unclean, mutable, release would not be possible for it even by hundreds of rebirths". 12 Bondage arises through the accompaniment of Prakṛti with Purusa who is by nature eternal and pure, enlightened and unconfined time, space, embodiment and Karma are not the cause of bondage but it is Aviveka which belongs to Buddhi. So with the end of the Aviveka (non-discrimination) our misery will also go away.

From birth to birth, soul accompanies the Purusa. The Supreme good is to realise the perfection of the Purusa and each and every soul aims at that Supreme good. The three Gunas mingle with or combine in each soul. Predominance of Tamas brings in inertia, ignorance, weakness, incapacity, want of faith and idleness. But when Rajas is predominant man become restless and active. Sattva develops the critical balanced and thoughtful nature of man. These three Gunas play a great role in mind, life and body.

11. KP-ii. 2.12-13

12. yadyatmā malinośvachcho vikārī syāt svabhavatah
na hi tasya bhāven muktir janmāntarasatair api

SPB.i.7, p.13
According to Sāṃkhya, there comes no merit in sacrifices. The world is not the act of a creator God but is the product of the incarnation between the infinite number of spirits and the ever active Prakṛti.

So, we do not find here anything about Dharma and also nothing about Artha.

But though a little yet we can try to present some views of Sāṃkhya regarding Kāma.

The Hindu view of sex is considered as the human counterpart of creation. It is emphasised by the Hindus as a religious symbolism. It is said to be the union of Purusa (matter) and Prakṛti (or energy) symbolised as Śiva and Śakti. Symbol of Śiva is the Lingam where as symbol of Śakti is the Yoni. It is for this reason that every aspect of God head in Hinduism is represented with a female counterpart. The conception of Śiva as Ardhanāriswara can be cited as an example of it.

Everything, in the Hindu view considered as dual aspect, such as, clouds have as their Śakti the lightning, the Sun has the chāyā or shadow which always follows him. In this way, we see that the nature itself is ordained with the male and the female principles.¹³

¹³. KS, p.44.
In the 'Indian thought' of Donald H. Bishop we find some expression about Kāma that the woman, the mystery of her beauty and attraction is the major source of Kāma. Men and women are manifestation of the Eternal male and female, the two all pervasive cosmic forces, which complement each other and constitute the transcendental mystical entity of creation. They operate as the Eternal companions as couples which are humanly divine, like Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Sītā-Rāma and Śiva-Sākti etc.  

The Śāmkhya View of Mokṣa

The system of Śāmkhya contends that desire or enquiry or asking for freedom (Mokṣa) is an essential thing, and this desire or enquiry for Mokṣa (Mokṣa-jijnāsa) arises from the three kinds of sufferings, they are, Ādhyātmika, Ādhibhautika and Ādhidāivika. The sufferings, and sufferings caused by supernatural agencies, planets, ghosts and other animals are called Ādhidāivika. They are the causes of bondage, so cessation of this three fold pain brings liberation or freedom (Parama Purusartha) known as Mokṣa. This freedom is an inherent nature of the Purusa, but yet he falls in the change of bondage coming in contact with the Prakṛti and its products.

14. ITTA, p. 82
15. duḥkhatrayaḥbhiḥghatat jijnāsa. SK. K.1
The school of Sāṃkhya believes that the self or Puruṣa is by nature eternally liberated, enlightened and pure. The self or Puruṣa is devoid of three Gūṇas i.e., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. It is inactive, indifferent and possesses no attributes. Due to non-discrimination between Puruṣa and Prakṛti or its product, the self has a false sense of bondage. Puruṣa is above time and space, merit and demerit, bondage, and liberation. The bondage and liberation of the Puruṣa is phenomenal and not real. It only belongs to Prakṛti.

According to Vācaspati, the false sense of identity of self with the mode of Buddhī is bondage. That is, when Puruṣa mistakes its reflection in the Buddhī for itself and identifies itself wrongly with the interval organ i.e. the intellect, Ahamkāra and the mind, then it is said to be bound. Hence, bondage is due to ignorance i.e., non-discrimination of self and not-self, between Puruṣa and Prakṛti is the cause of bondage. This ignorance can be removed by right knowledge which leads to liberation. Liberation cannot be obtained by means of actions. Because actions good or bad is the function of Gūṇas and lead to bondage. Good actions may lead to heaven and bad actions may lead to hell but heaven and hell though apperantly seems to be the abode of happiness and misery yet both of them like the worldly life and are subject to pain. Even
the so-called pleasures also lead to pain. The aim of man is to get rid of these three kinds of pain and sufferings.

So, it is rightly said, complete cessation of three-fold pain is the highest end of life otherwise called as Apavarga or Purusārtha.

This Mokṣa is somewhat akin to self-attained Mukti (Brahmajñāsa) of non-dualistic vedānta, though it differs in the fact. In vedāntic Mukti, there remains only the Brahmajñāna but in the Sāmkhya Mukti, the liberated soul remains as one of the Prakṛtitina-Purusas as liberated Purusas are many. But Vedanta refutes the Bahu-Purusavada. Sāmkhya maintains that the disturbance of the equilibrium of the Guṇas starts evolution and dissolution in a cyclic order. Evolution takes place for serving the purpose of the Puruṣa which is either worldly experience or liberation.

Mokṣa is attained by means of knowledge of the distinction of Puruṣa and Prakṛti. This discriminative knowledge is known as Vivekajñāna. When this distinction is realised, Puruṣa realises its own pure nature.

So, Mokṣa is a state of absolute negation of pain. Liberation does not consist in the manifestation of bliss (Ānanda) as bliss is an attribute and Puruṣa is free from attributes.
The self being an active, cannot move upward because liberation does not consist in the soul's upward movement to supermundane space. In the state of liberation Purusa assumes its natural form.

Sāṃkhya admits both Jīvanmukti and Videhamukti. Following the words of Dr. C.D. Sharma, we can say that the moment the right knowledge starts, the person becomes liberated here and now, even though he may be embodied due to Prarabdha Karma. By virtue of the force of Prarabdha Karma, the body continues to exist for some times, though no fresh Karma is accumulated; just as the wheel of a potter goes on revolving for some time due to Previous momentum even though the potter has withdrawn his hand from it. From a Jīvanmukta, we learn about the nature of liberation and means to attain it. At death, the Jīvanmukta attains complete liberation or disembodied isolation (Videhakaivalya). In the opinion of Vijnānabhikṣu the self cannot be completely free from the influence of bodily and mental changes so long as it is embodied. So, according to him, the disembodied isolation is the real liberation or Mokṣa.

Sāṃkhya's liberation is a state of complete isolation, complete cessation of pain, Purusa's return to its pure nature as consciousness. It is a state where there is absence of pleasure, happiness and bliss because these attributes gives birth to more pain. These are the products of Sattva Guna and liberation is devoid of all Gunas.