

## **VAIŚEŚIKA PHILOSOPHY**

### **OBJECTIVES**

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

- describe categories of Vaisesika philosophy
- explain the Vaisesika's theory of knowledge
- elucidate the Vaisesika's views on God
- analyze the issues on bondage and liberation

### **INTRODUCTION**

You have learnt in the previous unit Nyāyikas' arguments on valid sources of knowledge (*prāmanas*) and other issues pertaining to Nyāya philosophy. In this unit, you will learn the Vaiśeṣika's arguments on categories (*padārthas*), their views on epistemology, the notion of God, and their concepts on bondage and liberation. The Vaisesika School is younger to Samkhya and contemporary with Jainism and Bhuddhism. A sage named 'Kanada' is the founder of this school. But according to some, its founder is Ulooka, therefore it is called as the aulookya philosophy. The school derives its name from 'visesa' which means particularity of eternal substances. There are five eternal substances. These are ether, space, time, soul, and mind (*manas*). As Nyaya Philosophy is devoted to the study of the criterion of valid knowledge (*pramana*), likewise the Vaisesika philosophy devotes to the study of metaphysical reflections.

## **METAPHYSICS AND THE CATEGORIES**

Vaisesika metaphysics is pluralistic because it claims that variety, diversity, and plurality are the essence of reality. It is also claimed as real for the reason that particulars exist independently of our perceptions. Thus, Vaisesika metaphysics is pluralistic realism. But it is not materialistic pluralism. This is so because its pluralism includes not only material but also non-material entities, for example: time, souls (selves). The vaisesika used the term “padartha” for categories. Padartha literally means “the meaning of a word” or “the thing or object referred to or signified by a word”. It is an object of knowledge, and capable of being named. Thus, it is knowable (jneya) and nameable (abhidheya). According to the Vaisesika system, all objects of valid knowledge come under seven categories.

These are:

- i) Substance (*Dravya*)
- ii) Quality (*Guṇa*)
- iii) Action (*Karma*)
- iv) Generality (*Sāmānya*)
- v) Particularly (*Vaiśeṣa*)
- vi) Inherence (*Samavāya*)
- vii) Non-existence (*abhāva*)

The first six categories are mentioned by Kanada and the last category ‘non existence’ is added later by his commentators. The above categories, with the exemption of abhava are all existence and are included in being. The nature of the categories is elucidated in details in the following subsections.

### **Substance (*Dravya*)**

According to the Vaisesika, substance as an entity possesses qualities and action. It is the inherent or material cause of an effect. The genus of substance (dravyatva) inheres in it. It is not mere conglomeration of qualities and actions. It has a real and objective existence. It differs from qualities and actions because it is their

substrate. They inhere in it. It is their substratum. Thus, it is said that a substance is the substrate of qualities and actions. Qualities and actions can be separated from substance. The reason is, they exist in a substance. A substance is the material cause of its effect. This features states that a substance can have existence without qualities and actions. Qualities and actions in this sense are considered as the non-inherent cause of substance. For example, green colour of threads, which is a quality, is the non-inherent cause of a cloth. In the similar way, an action is also a non-inherent cause, for example, holding a pen. The conjunction relation between fingers and a pen can be separated from each other without losing any significance or identification of fingers and the pen. But this is not possible in case of a substance. Thus, a substance is the inherent cause of an effect. For example, a cloth is made by threads. Without threads a cloth can't exist. Hence, threads are the inherent cause of a cloth. They are the material out of which it is produced. Thus, a substance is an inherent cause of an effect, while quality and action are its non-inherent cause.

The Vaisesika system expresses that a substance is devoid of qualities at the first moment of its production. It possesses qualities at the next moment. Substances, for them, are of two sorts; eternal and non-eternal. The non-eternal substances are;

- i) Earth or Prithivi
- ii) Water or Jal
- iii) Fire or Tej
- iv) Air or Vayu

The eternal substances are;

- i) Time or Kala
- ii) Space or Dik
- iii) Self or Atma
- iv) Mind or Manas

In addition to all these substances, Vaisesika added one more, i.e. ether or akasa. Therefore vaisesika recognizes nine substances. The four non-eternal substances with ether or akasa are called 'panchabhuta'. In each of these substances there is one such specific quality that may be perceived by one of the external sense organs. For example, earth has the quality of smell, water that of taste, fire of colour, air of touch, and ether that of sound. These qualities are perceived by the nose, tongue, eyes, skin, and ears respectively. These sense organs are also believed to have originated in earth, water, fire, air and ether.

According to the vaisesika, anything which is composite and hence has parts and is divisible can't be eternal. But the simple, individual, and non-composite is eternal. With these parameters this system has distinguished eternal substances from non-eternal substances. This distinction entails that Vaisesika advocates ontological dualism. This is so because it recognizes the existence of souls and material substances, which are irreducible to each other.

### **Quality (*Guṇa*)**

According to the Vaisesika philosophy, quality is that category which subsists in substance but in which no other quality or action can inhere. Qualities cannot exist without substance. A quality cannot belong to another quality or action, but only to a substance. Qualities are completely passive and don't produce any objects.

A quality is devoid of quality. For example, colour is a quality of the substance. It is not a quality of its odours, tastes, and other qualities. Hence, qualities have no qualities. A quality is devoid of action. An action is caused by a substance. But the quality of a substance is incapable of doing actions. For example, a bird is flying. Here, fly as a motion is caused by the bird but not by the colours of its feathers. Hence, the colours are devoid of motion. Therefore, a quality has no motion. But it seems to be in motion because its substrate is in motion. In addition to all these

defining features vaishesika expresses that a quality is non-inherent cause of a substance. The reason is a substance can exist without qualities at the first moment of its production. Qualities are added to it later.

Qualities can be either material or mental and are not necessarily eternal. The vaishesika recognizes twenty four qualities. These are; 1) colour, 2) taste, 3) smell, 4) touch, 5) sound, 6) number, 7) magnitude, 8) distinctness, 9) conjunction, 10) disjunction, 11) nearness, 12) remoteness, 13) cognition, 14) pleasure, 15) pain, 16) desire, 17) aversion, 18) effort, 19) heaviness, 20) fluidity, 21) viscosity, 22) tendency, 23) moral merit, and 24) moral demerit.

Further, Vaishesika mentions that these 24 qualities are not counted as an exact number of qualities. This is so because the number would be increased if one wishes to count the subdivisions of qualities. For example, blue, red, yellow, etc. can be recognized as colours subsume under the colour category

### **Action (*Karma*)**

Action is physical motion. It resides in a substance like quality. It is dynamic and transient, and not like quality which is static and passive. An action cannot possess another action or quality. Substances are conjoined and separated because of action. The existence of action is independent of being known. It is expressed by a word because it is known, and therefore nameable. Its existence is independent of its knowledge and expression. It resides in a substance which is its substrate.

Action is unconditional, non-inherent cause of substance. It is non-eternal. Hence, it resides in a non-eternal substance.

There are five kinds of action recognized by Vaishesika.

- i) Upward motion (*Utksepana*)
- ii) Downward motion (*Avaksepana*)
- iii) Contraction (*Akuncana*)
- iv) Expansion (*Prasarana*)
- v) *Gamana* (Locomotion)

Upward motion brings a body into contact with a higher region, e.g. throwing a stone upward. Downward motion brings a body into contact with a lower region, e.g. falling a fruit from the branch of a tree. Contraction brings the parts of a body closer to one another, e.g. clinching fingers of a hand. Expansion makes the part of a body farther from one another, e.g. keeping fingers separate one from the other of a hand. All other kinds of motions are comprised in locomotion. For example, walking, running, swimming, etc. It is important to remember that there are a few actions cannot be perceived. They can only be inferred through our internal perception. For example, the action of mind.

According to the Vaisesika, generality is that category by virtue of which different individuals are grouped together and called by a common name indicating a class, e.g. bird, table, fruit, etc. The members of such groups have some properties in common. They have some general or common qualities which are to be found in the entire class. For example, the term 'bird' is a general name. It does not refer to this or that bird, but bird in general. Thus, objects or individuals possess similarity because they belong to a general class. The Vaisesika emphasizes that universal/general subsists in substances, qualities and actions.

They are non-spatial and non-temporal. They are similar to the platonic doctrine of the reality of the ideas. Thus, it is impossible for one universal to subsist in another. If it were then one and the same thing would have contrary natures.

Vaisesika divides generality into three kinds.

- i) Para
- ii) Aparā
- iii) Parapara

'Para' is the most comprehensive, such as 'animal'. It is the beinghood which has maximal scope. Aparā is the being hood which has minimal scope. It is the name given to the least comprehensive, such as 'men'. 'Parapara' is the generality which

is found between para and apara, such as 'beinghood'. Here the general term 'beinghood' is higher than the general term 'men' and lower than the general term 'animal'. This is so because under animality both beinghood and non-beinghood can be constituted, and under beinghood both 'men', 'women' and other category of general term would be constituted. While considering the generality the Indian Philosophers have subscribed to one or the other of the following three views.

***i) Nominalism***

This school of thought states that generality is not an essential quality of the similar objects of a particular group but merely a name. Similarity of the beings belonging to a class and distinguishes it from other classes is only by virtue of the name. The general has no individual or separate existence. Buddhist philosophy has suggested this view. The Buddhist nominalism is known as 'apohavada'.

***ii) Conceptualism***

This school suggests that the general quality has no existence apart from the individuals. The general quality does not come from outside and enter into the individual. Hence, the universal and particular are identical. They cannot be separated from each other. It is the essential quality or the internal form of individuals in general which is apprehended by our mind or intellect. This view is expressed by Jainism and Advaitva Vedantins.

***iii) Realism***

This school emphasizes that the general/universal is neither a mental thought nor merely a name. But it has its own existence. It is the generality which brings similarity between different individuals of a group. Thus, it is eternal although pervades in each individual or particular object/being. It is because of the general, individuals are called by the same name. This view is subscribed by both Nyaya-Vaisesikas.

## **Particularity (*Vaiśeṣa*)**

Particularity is referred to 'individuality' and understood as the opposite of generality. It indicates to the unique and specific individuality of eternal substances which have no parts. These substances are space, time, mind, ether, sound and the atoms of these elements. Thus, it is ultimate and eternal. It is because of particularity that individuals are differentiated and distinguished from each other. This also causes the atoms of the same substances considered separately. Hence, each particular is unique in its nature. A particular is partless, and therefore cannot be divided further. Since each particular is unique in its nature and distinguishable from other particulars, there are enumerable particulars found. Thus, the particulars are eternal, partless and enumerable. They are invisible because we cannot have perceptual cognition to them.

## **Inherence (*Samavāya*)**

Inherence is an inseparable and intimate relation between two entities, one of which is incapable of existing separately or independently apart from the other. Inherence relation is eternal. It cannot be separated from its substrate. For example, colour of a flower, motion in water, smell of earth, etc. Inherence should not be understood mistaken as 'conjunction'. In conjunction, the relation between two substances can be separated. It is momentary and non-eternal, while inherence is eternal. Conjunction is the relationship resulted by the connection of at least two substances but inherence is not resulted by the connection of substances. Inherence is inherent in substance. Conjunction is an external relation whereas inherence is an internal relation to the substance. Two substances are joined in conjunction are capable of existing apart. But in case of inherence relation, it is not possible to exist separate from substance. For example, appleness of an apple. Appleness can't exist apart from apple. So appleness and apple are related with inherence relation. This sort of relation is not found in case of 'conjunction'. Here, two substances can exist separate from each other. For example, 'A pen is on the table'. Here the pen



is conjoined with table. In this case, the pen can be separated from table and vice versa. Thus, inherence is not conjunction. Inherence is not perceptible. It is only inferred. This is so because there is no distinct perceptual cognition of it. For example, the relation between a flower and its colour is an inherence relation which is not perceived. What we perceive are that, the colour of the flower and the flower. But we are not able to perceive their inherence relation. Thus, inherence is unperceivable/ imperceptible.

### **Non-existence (*Abhāva*)**

Non-existence as the seventh category of vaishesika substance is not mentioned by Kanada. It is added later by his commentators. The Vaishesika upholds that non-existence, like existence is perceivable. Non-existence is the absence of an object. For example, no one can deny the absence of the sun on the dark cloud of a rainy day. Hence, it is a necessary category in Vaishesika system.

Non-existence is broadly divided in two sorts.

- i) Sansargabhava
- ii) Anyonyabhava

Sansargabhava states the absence of one entity in another. This is symbolically expressed as 'X is not in Y'. For example, coolness in fire, squareness in circle, etc.

Sansargabhava is of three kinds. These are;

- i) Pragbhava or antecedent non-existence
- ii) Dhvansabhava or subsequent non-existence
- iii) Atyantabhava or absolute non-existence

### ***Prāgbhāva***

Pragbhava or antecedent non-existence means the absence of the substance prior to its production or creation. For example, the chair does not exist before the carpenter made it, i.e. prior to its making, the non-existence of the chair is in the

wood. Similarly, the absence of the pot in the clay before the clay is made into a pot. Thus, antecedent non-existence has no beginning but it has an end.

### ***Dhvansābhāva***

Dhvansabhava or subsequent non-existence means the absence of the substance after its destruction. For example, the absence of the pot in its pieces after the pot is destroyed. When a pot breaks, we can recreate it from its pieces. Hence, subsequent non-existence has a beginning but it has no end.

### ***Atyantabhāva***

Atyantabhava or absolute non-existence means the absence of one thing in another at all times, past, present, and future. For example, the absence of heat in the moon. The absolute nonexistence has neither a beginning nor an end. In short, it is eternal. The absence of colour in space will continue for all time. In this way, absolute non-existence is neither born nor destroyed.

### ***Anyonyabhāva***

Anyonyabhava is also termed as mutual non-existence. Mutual non-existence means the exclusion of one thing by another. It is the absence of something in some other object. It is symbolically expressed as 'X is not Y'. For example, the table is not a horse. The non-existence of a table in a horse and the non-existence of a horse in a table are mutual non-existence. Anyonyabhava is eternal because two things which are different from each other exclude each other at all times and under all circumstances.

## **GOD**

The Vaisesika School believes in God as He is the authority of the Veda. It also believes in the principle law of karma. On the account of Vaisesika, the Veda is authoritative because it is the word of God. God is the supreme soul, perfect, omniscient, omnipresent and eternal. He is the Lord. He is the guiding principle controlling the motion of atoms. He is guided by the law of karma representing the unseen power of merits and demerits. He creates motion that the living beings may

be rewarded and punishable according to their past deeds. The Vaisesika system holds the view that God creates the universe out of nothing. He is the creator in the sense that he is the designer and architect of the universe. Creation and destruction of the universe takes place in agreement with the wishes of God. In this sense, the Vaisesika atomism is spiritual. This is so because God as the creator imparts motion to atoms which originally lack motion. The creation does not start until God sets the atoms in motion. Thus, God is the efficient cause of the world.

### **BONDAGE AND LIBERATION**

The Vaisesika believes that human beings are in 'bondage' because of their ignorance and they can be liberated from bondage by using and applying their knowledge. In short, bondage is due to ignorance and 'liberation is due to knowledge. Bondage and liberation are caused by our actions. In this regard, Vaisesika expresses that the soul performs actions. Due to ignorance, actions those are performed by soul are judged as good or bad. If actions are in conformity with the Veda's injunctions, then they are treated as good, and if they are prohibited by the Veda's injunction, then they are treated as bad.

Good actions and bad actions are resulted by the soul due to our karmic influx. Karmic influx states that every action has its own fruits or results. Hence, good actions resulted good fruits and bad actions resulted bad fruits. These rules are prescribed in the doctrine law of karma. The principle law of karma is guided by God. He imparts motion to the atoms and leads to creation for the sake of pleasure and pain of the individual soul. As long as the soul performs action, the bondage will remain. Once the soul realizes its true nature as distinct from the mind and body, it can no longer be afflicted by desire and passion. Hence liberation will be achieved and this is possible due to the knowledge of the soul. Liberation is the cessation of all sufferings, passions, inclinations, desires, together with pain, pleasures, and all qualities. It is the stage, where one can acquire freedom from pain, pleasure, sorrow, suffering, enjoyment and joy. It is pure, quality less,

indeterminate, and realizable. In the case of liberation, the liberated soul exists as a substance devoid of all qualities, including consciousness. Thus, the liberated soul is unwarranted.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. List the eternal and non-eternal substances and state the reasons for their differences.
2. Write various types of actions justified with examples.
3. What do you understand by liberated soul?

### **FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES**

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