Vaisesika metaphysics is considered pluralistic because it asserts that the essence of reality lies in variety, diversity, and plurality. It argues that specific entities exist independently of our perceptions, making it a form of realism. However, it is important to note that Vaisesika metaphysics is not limited to materialistic pluralism. It encompasses both material and non-material entities, such as time and souls.

In the Vaisesika system, the term "padartha" is used to refer to categories or aspects of reality. Padartha literally means "the meaning of a word" or "the thing or object denoted by a word." These categories are objects of knowledge that can be named, making them knowable and referable.

According to Vaisesika philosophy, all objects of valid knowledge fall into seven categories:

**Substance (Dravya):**

According to the Vaisesika philosophy, substance is an entity that possesses qualities and actions and serves as the cause of an effect. It has a real and objective existence and differs from qualities and actions because it is their underlying support. A substance is considered the substrate of qualities and actions, which can be separated from it. This means that a substance can exist without qualities and actions, while qualities and actions are seen as the non-inherent cause of substance.

The Vaisesika system recognizes two types of substances: eternal and non-eternal. The non-eternal substances are Earth, Water, Fire, and Air, and they are accompanied by the additional substance of Ether. These five substances together are known as "panchabhuta." Each substance has a specific quality that can be perceived by one of the external sense organs.

On the other hand, the eternal substances recognized by Vaisesika are Time, Space, Self, Mind, and Ether. Vaisesika also emphasizes that anything that is composite and divisible cannot be eternal, while the simple, individual, and non-composite entities are considered eternal. This distinction implies an ontological dualism in Vaisesika, as it acknowledges the existence of both souls and material substances, which are fundamentally different from each other.

**Quality (Guṇa):**

According to the Vaisesika philosophy, qualities are inherent to substances and cannot exist independently. They cannot belong to other qualities or actions but only to substances. Qualities are passive and do not create objects on their own.

A quality does not possess other qualities. For instance, color is a quality of a substance and not of its odors, tastes, or other qualities. Therefore, qualities do not possess qualities themselves. Similarly, a quality does not have the ability to perform actions. Actions are caused by substances, while the qualities of a substance are incapable of initiating actions. For example, a bird flies due to its own motion and not because of the colors of its feathers. Therefore, colors do not possess motion.

However, a quality may appear to be in motion because its underlying substance is in motion. In addition to these defining characteristics, Vaisesika philosophy states that a quality is a non-inherent cause of a substance. This is because a substance can exist without qualities initially and qualities are added to it later.

Qualities can be either material or mental and are not necessarily eternal. The Vaisesika philosophy recognizes twenty-four qualities, such as color, taste, smell, touch, sound, number, magnitude, distinctness, conjunction, disjunction, nearness, remoteness, cognition, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, effort, heaviness, fluidity, viscidity, tendency, moral merit, and moral demerit.

It is important to note that these twenty-four qualities are not an exact count of all qualities, as the number would increase if one considers the subdivisions of qualities. For example, various colors like blue, red, and yellow can be seen as subcategories falling under the main category of color.

**Action (Karma):**

Action is characterized by physical movement and is considered dynamic and temporary, unlike qualities that are static and passive. Actions cannot possess other actions or qualities. Substances interact and separate due to action. There are five recognized types of action in Vaisesika philosophy: upward motion, downward motion, contraction, expansion, and locomotion.

The existence of action is independent of its awareness. Actions are expressed through words because they are known and can be named. Their existence is separate from knowledge and expression, residing in a substrate substance. Action is an unconditional, non-inherent cause of substance and is non-eternal, hence residing in a non-eternal substance.

The Vaisesika philosophy acknowledges that certain actions cannot be directly perceived but can only be inferred through internal perception, such as the actions of the mind.

**Generality (Sāmānya):**

Generality, according to Vaisesika, refers to the categorization of different individuals under a common name representing a class, such as bird, table, or fruit. Members of these groups share common qualities found throughout the class. Generality exists in substances, qualities, and actions and is non-spatial and non-temporal. It aligns with the Platonic concept of the reality of ideas, and one universal cannot subsist in another, as they would contradict each other.

The idea being presented here is that universals or general concepts cannot exist within each other, as they would contradict each other. The Vaisesika school of thought categorizes generality into three types: Para, Apara, and Parapara. Para represents the most comprehensive form of generality, such as the concept of "animal," which encompasses a wide range. Apara, on the other hand, represents the least comprehensive form of generality, such as the concept of "men." Parapara refers to generality that lies between Para and Apara, like the concept of "beinghood." In this case, "beinghood" is more general than "men" but less general than "animal." This is because within animality, both "beinghood" and "non-beinghood" can exist, and within "beinghood," various categories like "men," "women," and others can be included.

Regarding the understanding of generality, Indian philosophers have adhered to one of the following three views.

Nominalism suggests that generality is not an essential quality of similar objects within a particular group but simply a name. The similarity among beings in a class, distinguishing them from other classes, is solely based on the name. The general concept does not have an individual or separate existence. This perspective is associated with Buddhist philosophy, known as "apohavada."

Conceptualism proposes that the general quality does not exist independently of individuals. It does not come from external sources and enter into individuals. Therefore, the universal and particular are inseparable, being the essential quality or internal form of individuals in general, which our mind or intellect apprehends. This view is expressed by Jainism and Advaita Vedantins.

Realism emphasizes that the general or universal is neither a mental thought nor just a name but possesses its own existence. It is the generality that establishes similarity among different individuals within a group. Thus, it is eternal, although it pervades each individual or particular object/being. It is due to the general concept that individuals are called by the same name. Both Nyaya and Vaisesika schools of thought support this view.

**Particularly (Vaiśeṣa):**

Particularity refers to individuality and is the opposite of generality. It represents the distinct and unique characteristics of eternal substances that do not have any parts. These substances include space, time, mind, ether, sound, and the atoms of these elements. Therefore, particularity is ultimate and everlasting.

The concept of particularity is responsible for distinguishing and differentiating individuals from one another. It also applies to the separate atoms of the same substances. As a result, each particular possesses its own unique nature. A particular is indivisible and cannot be further divided. Since each particular is distinct and discernible from others, there are countless particulars in existence. Thus, particulars are eternal, without parts, and enumerable. However, they remain invisible as we lack perceptual cognition to perceive them.

**Inherence (Samavāya):**

Inherence is a close and inseparable connection between two entities, where one cannot exist independently from the other. This relationship is eternal and cannot be severed from its foundation. Examples of inherence include the color of a flower, the motion in water, or the smell of earth. It is important not to confuse inherence with "conjunction." In conjunction, the relationship between two substances can be separated and is temporary, whereas inherence is everlasting. Conjunction occurs when two substances are connected, but inherence is an inherent quality within a substance itself. Unlike conjunction, inherence is an internal relationship within the substance, while conjunction is an external one. Substances that are conjoined can exist separately, but when it comes to inherence, separation from the substance is not possible. For instance, the quality of "appleness" cannot exist apart from the apple itself, demonstrating an inherence relation between "appleness" and the apple. This type of relation does not exist in conjunction, where two substances can exist independently from each other. Hence, inherence should not be confused with conjunction.

Since inherence is not perceptible, it can only be inferred. This is because there is no direct perceptual awareness of it. For example, the relationship between a flower and its color is an inherence relation that is not directly perceived. What we perceive are the flower and its color, but we are unable to directly perceive their inherence relation. Therefore, inherence is considered unperceivable or imperceptible

**Non-existence (abhāva):**

Kanada, the founder of the Vaisesika school of philosophy, did not originally mention non-existence as the seventh category of Vaisesika substance. This concept was later added by his commentators. However, the Vaisesika school argues that non-existence, like existence, can be perceived. Non-existence refers to the absence of an object. For instance, no one can deny the absence of the sun behind a dark cloud on a rainy day. Therefore, non-existence is considered a necessary category in the Vaisesika system.

Non-existence is broadly divided into two types:

Sansargabhava: This refers to the absence of one entity within another. It is expressed as "X is not in Y." Examples include the absence of coolness in fire or squareness in a circle.

Sansargabhava is further classified into three kinds:

Pragbhava or antecedent non-existence: This denotes the absence of a substance before its production or creation. For instance, the chair does not exist before the carpenter constructs it. Similarly, the pot does not exist in the clay before it is shaped into a pot. Antecedent non-existence has no beginning but comes to an end.

Dhvansabhava or subsequent non-existence: This refers to the absence of a substance after its destruction. For example, the pot ceases to exist in its pieces after it is broken. However, it can be recreated from those pieces. Subsequent non-existence has a beginning but no end.

Atyantabhava or absolute non-existence: This signifies the absence of one thing within another at all times—past, present, and future. For instance, there is no heat in the moon. Absolute non-existence has neither a beginning nor an end. It is eternal. The absence of color in space will persist indefinitely. In this way, absolute non-existence is not born nor destroyed.

Anyonyabhava: Also known as mutual non-existence, it refers to 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, a 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 examples of mutual non-existence. Anyonyabhava is eternal because two distinct things always exclude each other under all circumstances.