

THE INDIAN CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of the present article is to determine what is the Indian conception of philosophy. In earlier times two collections of Philosophies were written in India, namely *Sarva Darśana Siddhānta Saṅgraha* and *Sarva Darśana Saṅgraha*. The author of the latter was Madhavācārya and that of the former was Śaṅkarācārya. But there is some controversy as to who was the author of the former. In these two collections there is no chapter on the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* or the *Gītā*. This shows that these two authors distinguished between *Darśana* (Philosophy) and *śruti* (scripture). "Sarva" means all. It is the first word in the captions of both the collections. Therefore, they excluded *prasthāna trayī* (*Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*) from what they took to be all the systems of *Darśana*.

If we want to discover the Indian conception of *Darśana* we have to consider how we use the word *Darśana*. The word occurs in expressions such as "*Cārvāka* or *Lokāyata Darśana*", "*Nyāya Darśana*", "*Vaiśiṣṭyika Darśana*", "*Mādhyaṃika Darśana*", "*Vedānta Darśana*" and so on. This raises the question what is common to all of them, or what constitutes a family resemblance between them, because of which all of them are identified as philosophical systems. No *Dārśanic* (Philosophical) theory is accepted by all of them, and hence none is common to all of them. Therefore, *Darśana* is not to be defined in terms of theories or answers to *Dārśanic* questions. It is to be defined in terms of problems and questions. It is questions and problems that are common to them; hence *Darśana* is to be defined in

terms of them. Ancient Indians discuss problems such as whether matter is ultimately real, whether there is God, whether there is soul as distinguished from body, what is knowledge, what is inference and so on. These are discussed by ancient Indian philosophers. Hence *Darśana* is to be defined in terms of such problems. Problems give us the subject matter. And, in a general way, this is a sound policy on definition. A branch of study should be defined in terms of problems. Theories in a branch of study keep changing, but the concept and definition of that branch remains unchanged. But this can be so if the branch is defined in terms of problems. For example, Newtonian Physics and Einsteinian Physics are systems of Physics in the same sense of "Physics". If Physics is defined in terms of theories and answers, then the very concept of Physics will change whenever theories in it change.

If *Darśana* is defined in terms of problems, then the Indian conception of *Darśana* is the same as the Western conception of Philosophy. There is no *distinctive* Indian conception of *Darśana* (Philosophy). The same problems were discussed in the west as in ancient India.

But philosophical theories are of interest in themselves, and may be considered here briefly. Most of the philosophical theories discussed in the West were discussed in ancient India also, and the theories discussed in ancient India were discussed in the West. Sometimes it is said that the theory of transmigration of soul is distinctive of Indian philosophy. But this is false. Transmigration was accepted in the West by Plato, and was considered to be plausible by Hume and Kant.

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