



India is the sacred land which has given birth to countless sages, rishis, yogis, saints and prophets. India is a spiritual country. Military conquest is not her ambition. She wants her children to have conquest over internal and external nature. She wants them to possess brilliant divine virtues, moral stamina and inner spiritual strength born of the wisdom of the soul.

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

The terms *Indian* and *Hindu* have never been used in India itself and no religion called Hinduism ever existed there. The classical name for India which is used in Sanskrit literature is *Bhararata-Varsha* or *Bharata-Khanda* after the name of the ancient king Bharata. Manu named it *Aryavarta* which means “the abode of the noble ones.” Another name for the whole of India is *Jambu-Dvipa*. The proper names that designate the religious and spiritual culture of the Indian subcontinent are *Sanatana Dharma* (the eternal law) and *Vaidika Dharma* (the religion of the Vedas).

Around 325 B.C., India was invaded by the armies of Alexander the Great. He and his armies crossed the river Sindhu and renamed it Indus. They called the land east of the Sindhu River India. Many centuries later the Muslims that invaded India pronounced the word Sindhu as Hindu and named the whole district between the Punjab and Benares Hindustan. They called the native people Hindus. Western scholars and writers adopted the above terms, and Eastern writers conformed. Thus gradually the terms India and Hinduism replaced the original names.

The religious and philosophical systems of India are based on direct spiritual realizations of ancient seers and sages who lived in the Sindhu valley, the Himalayas and other corners of India. They taught that life is whole and cannot be divided. Therefore there can be no conflict between religion, science and philosophy. Free, independent thinking and personal, direct experience of the truth are the keynotes of Indian spiritual culture. This culture was always holistic in its approach towards life. The aspects of life related to the outside world were regulated by religion and those related to the inner world were regulated by philosophy.

The Foundations of Hindu Philosophy

by Swami Swaroopananda

The Fundamental Issues of Indian Philosophy and Religion

The philosophical teachings of the sages of India deal with the fundamental problems of human life and provide practical solutions to life questions for the benefit of all humanity. They describe religion as the practical aspect of philosophy.

That which binds the soul back to God is religion. Religion shows the way for the attainment of God-realization... The Hindus have received their religion through revelation. The direct intuitional revelations are called the Vedas. They are entirely superhuman and without any particular author. The Vedas are the eternal truths revealed by God to the great ancient Rishis of India. The word Rishi means a seer. The Rishis saw the truths or heard them. They were spiritual discoverers of universal truths. They did not invent the Veda. Thus the Vedas represent the spiritual experiences and discoveries of the Rishis of yore. The truths of the Vedas are revelations. They are themselves the authority as they are eternal, as they are the knowledge of the Lord.

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

The Vedic Rishis received the divine knowledge from Lord Brahma, the Creator, and then disseminated it. They were highly realized persons with a direct perception of absolute truth. *By Vedas no books are meant because they are the words of God and not utterances of persons. They are not the composition of any human mind. They were never written, never created. They are eternal spiritual truths, an embodiment of divine knowledge. The books can be destroyed but the Vedas cannot be destroyed. In this sense, the Vedas are eternal.*

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

Through the ages, the teachings of the Vedas were transmitted orally before they were compiled. Sanskrit, the language of the Veda, is the richest of all the languages of the world and also the most poetic. In it every sound explains its origin through its root form.

The Purposes of Indian Philosophical and Religious Literature

Maharishi Vyasa compiled the Veda and divided it into four great books: the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda and the Atharva-Veda. Each Veda consists of four parts: the Mantra-Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads.

The Mantra-Samhitas are hymns that invoke and praise the Supreme Being in all its aspects. They are powerful Vedic mantras for attaining material prosperity here and happiness hereafter. The Brahmanas guide people in the performance of sacrificial rites and explain how to use the Vedic mantras. The Aranyakas are mystical texts that give philosophical interpretations of the rituals. They provide methods of training the mind and elevating the spiritual heart. Their teachings are meant to be practiced in solitude, usually in the forest. The Upanishads contain the essence or the knowledge portion of the Vedas. They speak of the identity of the individual soul and of the Supreme Soul.

The subject matter of the whole Veda is divided into *Karma Kanda* (action part) that deals with sacrifices and rituals, the *Upasana Kanda* (worship part) which deals with devotional worship and meditation, and the *Jnana Kanda* (knowledge part) which deals with the highest knowledge of the Absolute Reality.

The poetic hymns of the Veda contain great metaphysical and philosophical meanings which are hidden in a highly symbolic language. When they are sung at a specific pitch, their meanings are revealed. The Upanishads are storehouses of profound spiritual truths. They represent the culmination of Vedic wisdom. Many of the Upanishads are written as dialogues between Rishis and their disciples. Through these dialogues, the Rishis reveal gradually to their disciples the innermost secrets of existence. Thus the Upanishads are a systematic

progression of theoretical and practical teachings for disciples at different levels of development.

In India, philosophy is an integral part of religion. It is a rational enquiry into the nature of Truth or Reality. It gives clear solutions for the profound, subtle problems of life. It shows the way to get rid of pain and death and attain immortality and eternal bliss. The seers, sages and Rishis who had direct, intuitive perception of the Truth are the founders of the different philosophical systems of India.

—SWAMI SIVANANDA

The Two Systems and Six Schools of Indian Religious Philosophy

Indian philosophy is divided into two major categories:

- A) The orthodox systems of philosophy that accept the authority of the Vedas, and
- B) The heterodox systems of philosophy that do not believe in the authority of the Vedas.

The six orthodox systems are called **Shad-Darshanas**, and they are all based on the Vedas. The word Darshana means a system of philosophy. It also means sight or vision. Thus a Darshana is a direct way of looking into the truth. It is a direct vision of truth. The six Darshanas are six demonstrations of Truth. Each Darshana has its own Rishi who systematized its doctrines.

The **Shad-Darshanas (the six schools of philosophy)** are: the **Nyaya**, founded by Gautama Rishi, the **Vaisheshika**, founded by Kanada Rishi, the **Sankhya** by Kapila Muni, the **Yoga** by Patanjali Maharishi, the **Purva Mimamsa** by Jaimini, and the **Uttara Mimamsa** by Vyasa. The six Darshanas were written in Sutras which are short aphorisms. The Rishis have condensed their thoughts in the Sutras. The Sutras are meant to explain a big volume of knowledge in short assertions suitable to be kept in memory at all times.

A Sutra or an aphorism is a short for-

mula with the least possible number of letters, written without any ambiguity or doubtful assertion, containing the very essence of the teaching, embracing all meanings (of the knowledge given), without any stop or obstruction and absolutely faultless in nature. —PANINI

It is very difficult to understand the Sutras, which are terse and laconic, without the help of commentaries by great sages or Rishis. Various teachers have written elaborate commentaries on the Sutras which are called Bhashyas. Later on, glosses, notes and sub commentaries were written on the original commentaries.

The six schools of philosophy are divided into three groups:

- A) Nyaya and Vaisheshika
- B) Sankhya and Yoga
- C) Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa

A) **Nyaya** is intended to furnish a correct method of philosophical inquiry into all objects and subjects of human knowledge. It explains the process of reasoning and the laws of thought. It submits the evidence of the senses to critical inquiry. It gives a detailed description of the mechanism of knowledge. It is a school of logic that forms the basis for inquiry and rules of debate used in all the other schools. Its most important topic is Pramana, or the valid means of knowledge. It gives an analysis of the world of experience and forms a theory of the universe. Nyaya also believes in a personal God, a plurality of souls and an atomic universe. The Nyaya is a complex system of epistemology. It deals critically with metaphysical problems. It contains discussions on psychology, logic, metaphysics and theology.

Vaisheshika is a supplement of Nyaya. Its chief objective is the analysis of experience. It concerns itself primarily with logic, the physics and chemistry of the body and the universe and the theory of atomic structure. Its practical teachings emphasize Dharma, the

code of conduct that leads man to happiness here and hereafter, and helps him to attain the ultimate goal of life.

B) Sankhya is a dualistic school of philosophy that divides reality into two primary constituents: *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, or Spirit and Matter. It enumerates the principles of the universe and gives a systematic account of the process of cosmic evolution. The Sankhya system is atheist; it does not accept *Isvara* or God. The purpose of this system of philosophy is to find the means for eradicating the three sorts of suffering or pain. It states that non-discrimination between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is the cause for birth, death and suffering, while discrimination between them gives *Mukti* (salvation). Like the *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika*, Sankhya believes in a plurality of souls who are eternal and of the same essence. The souls are united with the material *Prakriti* which is the basis of all objective existence. All objects are for the enjoyment of the soul and its liberation. *Prakriti* creates only when it comes into union with *Purusha*, and its creation is done for the emancipation of each soul. *Prakriti* consists of the three *gunas*; *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The *gunas* exist in equilibrium. The countless souls exert a force on *Prakriti* which distracts the equipoise and produces a movement within *Prakriti*. The world and its different elements start to evolve when the equilibrium in *Prakriti* is disturbed.

During dissolution of the world, the products return by reverse movement into the preceding stages of development, and ultimately into *Prakriti*. This cycle of evolution and involution has neither a beginning nor an end.

Purusha is eternally free. Union of *Purusha* with *Prakriti* due to non-discrimination is bondage; disunion of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* due to discrimination is emancipation. Thus release, according to Sankhya, is isolation from *Prakriti* or liberation from the fetters

which bind it on account of its union with *Prakriti*. This is done through the knowledge of the constituent principles of creation and rightly discriminating the Self from them.

Yoga is a philosophical system that teaches how to attain the union of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul by restraining the activities of the mind. Unlike Sankhya, Yoga acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being (*Isvara*). The system deals with the nature and aim of *Samadhi* or super consciousness, explains the means of attaining it, gives a description of the supernatural powers or *Siddhis* that are the by-products of Yoga practices and describes the nature of Salvation. *Samadhi* is the goal of Yoga discipline. In *Samadhi*, the Yogi enters into Supreme Silence. The mind ceases to function. When all the mental modifications are controlled, the *Purusha* rests in its own essential nature. This frees the soul from the fetters of *Prakriti*, and the soul attains salvation.

C) Purva Mimamsa is an inquiry into the ritualistic portion of the Vedas that consists of the Mantras and the Brahmanas. The Mimamsa Sutras of Jaimini give a detailed description of the different Vedic sacrifices and their purposes. The whole aim and object of this system is to know Dharma or duty, which according to Jaimini, consists of the performance of the rites and sacrifices prescribed in the Veda. The aim of Purva Mimamsa is to investigate into the nature of Dharma, because Dharma itself bestows the rewards. According to Jaimini, the practice of Vedic Dharma is the key to happiness here and hereafter.

Vedic Dharma consists of unconditional duties and prohibited actions. Jaimini says that by avoiding prohibited actions the person will avoid hell and by performing unconditional duties, he will attain salvation. One of the main subjects of Mimamsa is *Apurva*. *Apurva*, according to Jaimini, is a positive, unseen force created by an act, which leads to the attainment of the fruit of

action. According to Jaimini, the rewards of sacrificing are not dispensed by any beneficent God. It is *Apurva* that bestows the reward on the sacrificer. Jaimini does not believe in *Moksha* or spiritual liberation. He believes in the existence of *Svarga* (heaven) attainable through karma or sacrifice. According to Jaimini, performance of the actions that are enjoined in the Vedas is the *Sadhana* or means for attaining heaven. The cause of bondage is the performance of prohibited actions.

Uttara Mimamsa, or the Vedanta Philosophy, is based on the doctrines found in the closing chapters of the Vedas, the Upanishads. The Sutras of Uttara Mimamsa are called Brahma-Sutras. Sri Vyasa has systematized the principles of Vedanta and removed the apparent contradictions in the doctrines of the Upanishads. The Brahma Sutras explain the doctrine of Brahman or Absolute Reality. The Brahma Sutras give an account of the nature of Brahman and its relation to the world and the individual soul. Rival theories are critically refuted. Suitable answers are given to objections raised by opponents. The means and fruits of attaining Brahma-Vidya (knowledge of Brahman) are given. There is a description of how the individual soul reaches Brahman through the *Devayana* or the path of the *Devas* (the shining ones). The characteristics of the *Jivanmukta*, or the liberated soul, are also discussed.

The six schools of thought are like the six different roads which lead to one city. The methods or ways of approach to the Goal are different to suit people of different temperaments, capacities and mental caliber; but they all have one aim, viz., removal of ignorance and its effects of pain and sufferings and the attainment of freedom, perfection, immortality and eternal bliss by union of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul.

—SWAMI SIVANANDA ॐ