

XIV. How Many Systems Of Indian Philosophy Are There?

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According to the traditional classification system, six orthodox (astika) philosophies (darshanas) are subdivided into three pairs: Nyaya (epistemology and logic) and Vaishesika (categories and atoms), Sankhya (cosmology) and Yoga (mysticism and psychology) and Purva Mimamsa (ritual and epistemology) and Uttara Mimamsa (i.e., Vedanta) (metaphysics). The common factor that interrelates the six darshanas is that they all accept the revealed authority of the Vedas. Their original tenets were expressed in the form of aphorisms (sutras), upon which copious commentaries (bhasyas) have been written. Most of their adherents affirm the doctrines of reincarnation, the law of karma, an eternal soul, samadhi, liberation, the eternity of the universe and world cycles of creation and dissolution.¹

There are also three heterodox (nastika) systems, Buddhism, Jainism and Charvaka Materialism, which deny the authority of the Vedas.² This traditional classification scheme is expressed in a tenth or eleventh century Advaitic textbook. The unknown author added a tenth member, Vedavyasa (primarily the Mahabharata) and divided Buddhism into four and Purva Mimamsa into two subgroupings.³ A more comprehensive and preferred classification structure is provided by the fourteenth century Advaitist, Madhava-Vidyaranya. He lists the nine traditional philosophies, but divides Vedanta into the schools of Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, includes both Kashmir and Shaiva Siddhanta Shaivism and adds Paniniya (i.e., philosophy of grammar) and Raseshvara.⁴

The typology of six orthodox philosophies has achieved wide spread

acceptance in the presentation of Indian doctrines and is generally sanctioned in the contemporary literature. Will Durant found it surprising that heterodoxy was defined by rejection of the *Vedas* and not by the denial of the existence of God.⁵ During the medieval period in Asia and Europe the prevailing view was that infallible revealed scripture (e.g., *Vedas*, Bible, Torah and Quran) represents the highest and most authoritative source of knowledge. It is to be expected that the thinkers of that historical era would draw an inflexible dividing line, between those systems of thought that acknowledge and those that reject the *Vedas*.

Granted the Buddhist hold to some distinct views that are not espoused by the orthodox philosophers, like the doctrines of the non-self and momentariness. Yet, modern analytical research has conclusively demonstrated that belief or disbelief in the *Vedas*, is not a pertinent factor in determining ones position in regards to a significant number of important philosophical issues. Daya Krishna mentioned that the bulk of the tenets of the Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya and Vaishesika philosophies are not based on the teachings of the *Vedas*. Purva Mimamsa recognizes only the command and prohibitive injunctive aspects of the *Vedas* and ignores the theoretical aspects. Most metaphysicians consider the various sutras that form the foundation of the orthodox schools, to be of a higher authority than the non-Upanishadic portions of the *Vedas*.⁶

The orthodox-heterodox distinction often breaks down when the various philosophical groups are evaluated by the principle of similarity. Consider the analytical study of Ninian Smart who examined the beliefs of the nine classical systems, subdividing Vedanta into three components (Advaita, Vishistadvaita and Dvaita) and Buddhism into three groupings (Theravada, Yogacara and Madyamika), combining Nyaya with Vaishesika and adding on the Shaivite's. He

then decided if each of the thirteen philosophical systems accepted or rejected nine essential doctrines. He found that the degrees of similarity between the systems are cross-religious. According to Smart's judgment, Yogacara and Madyamika Buddhism agree with Advaita Vedanta in eight of the nine areas. All three schools accept the doctrines of an Absolute, a Personal God, reincarnation, liberation and meditative knowledge while denying the reality of the world, an eternal individual self and the efficacy of the path of devotion to bring liberation. They disagree in that only Advaita acknowledges a world creator unlike the other two. No other group is in accord with Advaita Vedanta in more than six of the nine beliefs. Jainism corresponds with Sankhya in all nine categories. Yoga and Theravada Buddhism rank next in degree of similarity with Sankhya, agreeing on eight of nine beliefs. Charvaka materialism might be considered to be a genuine heterodox ideology, yet they concur with Purva Mimamsa on six of the nine tenets. They both acknowledge the reality of the world and reject an Absolute, a Personal God, a world creator, meditative knowledge and devotion as a path to liberation. Purva Mimamsa affirms eternal individual selves, reincarnation and release unlike the Charvarka materialists. Qualified Advaita is in concordance with Advaita on only four of nine items.⁷

In a second comparative study, Karl Potter analyzed the degree of correspondence between fifteen philosophical groups using seven variables. Five Vedantic, three Buddhistic and two Mimamsa schools were represented along with Nyaya-Vaishesika, Sankhya, Jainism, Charvaka and Ajivika. Briefly summarized, the variables are: a progress (continuous) vs., a leap (discontinuous) path to liberation; the effect does or does not exist in the cause; the relation between unity and diversity; the relation between the whole and its parts; nominalism, conceptualization and universalism; theories of negation and the various explanations of perceptual error. According to

Potter's study the Jains are closer to Kumarila's Mimamsa, than any of the other systems of thought. Kumarila accepted the Jain notions that: all things are both similar and different depending on the conditions (anekantavada); the relation of identity in difference (bhedabheda); the whole is both equal to and not equal to its parts and that error is due to an object appearing different from what it really is (viparitakhyati). Buddhist Logicians (Dharmakirti) rank second only to Nyaya-Vaishesika in their degree of similarity with Prabhakara's Mimamsa. The Logicians and Prabhakara Mimamsa are in accord in accepting, continuous progress towards liberation, that the effect does not preexist in the cause (asat karyavada), the epistemological category of similarity (sadrshya) and in explaining negation by the non-apprehension of differences (bhedagraha, apohavada). For the seven items, Sankhya is as close to Advaita as is Qualified Advaita. Concerning the unity and diversity problem, the Jains are nearer to the Advaitans than Nyaya-Vaishesika is.⁸

Further analytical evidence is given by Karl Potter who proposed four questions on whether construction-free (nirvikalpaka) awareness and construction-filled (savikalpaka) awareness can be true or false? He discovered that of the four schools analyzed, Buddhist Logicians are more in agreement with Nyaya-Vaishesika than are Yoga or Advaita Vedanta.⁹ A fourth basis of comparison is provided by considering the number of valid means of attaining knowledge (pramanas) that each group accepts. The Buddhists are the only group that agree with the Vaishesika's in acknowledging only perception and inference. The Jains like the Sankhya, Yoga, Vishistadvaita and Dvaita accept perception, inference and verbal testimony.¹⁰ Fifthly, according to a recent book, written by Chandradhar Sharma, there are four varieties of Indian Advaitic philosophy: Advaita Vedanta, Kashmir Shaivism, Madyamika Buddhism and Yogacara Buddhism.¹¹ His study implies that Advaita corresponds to a

greater extent in some essential areas with these three groups, than it does with the other Vedantic schools. Reviewing the evidence we find the degree of correspondence between one school of thought and another varies from one study to the next, depending on which variables are used.

NUMBER OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

Two empirical inductive scientific techniques are employed, in order to get a better idea of how many systems of Indian philosophy there are. The first approach involved an examination of the Table of Contents, of twelve standard textbooks devoted to the history of Indian philosophy. S. Chatterjee and D. Datta, the Cultural Heritage of India, S. Dasgupta, T. Mahadevan, K. Potter, S. Prabhavananda, S. Prajnanananda, S. Radhakrishnan, P. Raju, A. Sharma, I. Sharma and H. Zimmer are the authors of the twelve publications.¹² The first numerical column of Table 1 and Table 2 given here cites all philosophical systems that are listed in the Table of Contents, of at least two of the twelve textbooks.

TABLE 1. Number (N_{books}) of History of Indian Philosophy Textbooks in which the Philosophical System is discussed in Detail and Number ($N_{\text{pub.}}$), Percentage ($\%_{\text{pub.}}$) and ranking ($R_{\text{pub.}}$) of Secondary Literature Publications Devoted to the Subject

<i>Philosophical System</i>	N_{books}	N_{pub}	$\%_{\text{pub}}$	R_{pub}
1	2	3	4	5
<i>Orthodox</i>	—	7976	64.48	—
<i>Vedānta</i>	12	2818	22.78	(3)
<i>Yoga</i>	12	618	5.00	(6)
<i>Sāṅkhya</i>	12	324	2.62	(12)
<i>Nyāya</i>	11	—	—	—
<i>Vaiśeṣika</i>	11	—	—	—
<i>Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika</i>	—	475	3.84	(8)
<i>Pūrva Mīmāṃsā</i>	11	192	1.55	(17)
<i>General</i>	—	3405	27.53	(1)
<i>Vyākaraṇa (Grammarian)</i>	—	144	1.16	(20)

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Heterodox</i>	—	3562	28.80	—
Buddhism, Indian	11	2944	23.80	(2)
Jain	10	538	4.35	(7)
Cārvāka Materialism	9	64	.52	(25)
Ājīvika	—	16	.13	(31)
<i>Scriptural</i>	—			
Bhagavad Gīta	9			
Upaniṣads	9			
Vedas	8			
Brāhmaṇas	3			
Bhāgavata	2			
Purāṇas	2			
<i>Religious</i>	—	415	3.35	
Shaivism	8	415	3.35	(10)
Shakta	4			
Tantra	4			
<i>Contemporary</i>	4	417	3.37	
Aurobindo, Sri	—	259	2.09	(15)
Radhakrishnan, S.	—	158	1.28	(19)
		12,370	100.00	

TABLE 2. Number (N_{books}) of History of Indian Philosophy Textbooks in which the Philosophical System is discussed in Detail and Number ($N_{\text{pub.}}$), Percentage ($\%_{\text{pub.}}$) and Ranking ($R_{\text{pub.}}$) of Secondary Literature publications Devoted to the Subject.

<i>Philosophical System</i>	N_{books}	N_{pub}	$\%_{\text{pub}}$	R_{pub}
<i>Buddhism—Indian</i>		2944	23.80	
Hīnayāna	4			
Mādhyamikā	3	409	3.31	(11)
Yogācāra	3	223	1.80	(16)
Sautrantika (Logic)	3	141	1.14	(21)
Mahāyāna	3			
Vaibhāṣika	2			
General	—	1682	13.60	(5)
Abhidharma	—	461	3.73	(9)
Sarvastivāda and Vaibhāṣika	—	28	.23	(28)
<i>Shaivism</i>	—	415	3.35	
Shaiva Siddhānta	4	173	1.40	(18)
Kashmir	4	110	.89	(23)
Vira	4	87	.70	(24)
General	—	45	.36	(27)
<i>Vedānta</i>	—	2818	22.78	
Advaita (Śaṅkara)	10	2016	16.30	(4)
Viśiṣṭadvaita (Rāmānuja)	8	317	2.56	(13)
Dvaita (Mādhva)	8	266	2.15	(14)
Suddhādvaita (Vallabha)	6	55	.44	(26)
Dvaitadvaita (Nimbarka)	6	20	.16	(30)
Acintya-Bhedābheda (Chaitanaya)	5	123	.99	(22)
Advaita (Post-Śaṅkara)	3			
Yogavaśiṣṭha	3			
Advaita (Pre-Śaṅkara)	2			
Ramakrishna, Sri	2			
Viśiṣṭadvaita (Yamuna)	2			
Bhedābheda	—	21	.17	(29)

Five of the twelve histories of Indian philosophy textbooks, discuss the Nyaya and Vaishesika views in the same chapter, due to their historical interconnection and common agreement on many ontological and epistemological issues. Nevertheless, it is not necessary that a modern Nyaya logician or epistemologist, subscribe to either the atomism (anu) or categories (padartha), which form the unique bases of the Vaishesika philosophy. A less significant difference is that Nyaya accepts verbal testimony and comparison as valid pramanas unlike Vaishesika.¹³ Since some aspects of Patanjali's Yoga teachings are based on the metaphysics of Sankhya, three of the authors dealt with them in the same chapter. These two darshanas are not in total agreement however, since Yoga unlike Sankhya, stresses meditation over knowledge and adheres to a belief in a Personal God (Ishvara). Most of the modern Indian writers and commentators on Yoga identify with one of the Vedantic systems and not with the Sankhya patterns of thought. For example, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan has written thoughtfully on Yoga, yet is quite critical of Sankhya doctrines, such as their rigid purusha-prakriti dualism and their belief in multiple purushas.¹⁴ None of the twelve writers extensively examine Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta) in the same chapter because of their many divergences.

A second method involved tallying the number of secondary books and articles written on each subject. Table 1 specifies 12,370 references, which are recorded in K. Potter's monumental two section, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Bibliography*.¹⁵ The references represent all of the secondary publications mentioned in Section 2 and the General heading of Section 1, in Potter's books. Commentaries and edited and translated versions of the original Sanskrit texts are not included on the list. Potter's *Bibliography*

specialized in strict systematic philosophical publications and consequently theological works and religious scripture covering the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, are purposely by-passed.¹⁶ The second numerical column of Table 1 and Table 2 specifies the total number of publications dealing with the particular subject, the third column gives the accompanying percentage of the 12,370 sources mentioned and the final column converts the percentage to a ranking from one to thirty-one, combining data from both Tables.

According to the data provided in the Tables, a religious metaphysical emphasis is noted, when comparing Indian to western philosophy, The combined number of publications for the religiously orientated Vedanta, Purva Mimamsa, Yoga, Buddhist, Jain and Shaivite systems is over seven times as high, as for the Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaishesika, Charvaka and Grammarian's. Within the six traditional orthodox structures, Vedanta and Yoga register over three and one-half times more publications, than Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaishesika and Purva Mimamsa combined. Indian metaphysical philosophies emphasize the Absolute (Brahman), the Transcendental Self (Atman), Personal God (Ishvara), revealed scripture (shruti and smrti), meditation (yoga), enlightenment (samadhi) and the techniques (four yoga's) to attain liberation (moksha).

A second disclosure is that the classical ninefold enumeration of Indian systems of thought serves as a norm for the authors of the textbooks. H. Zimmer's publication is the only text that did not cover all six of the orthodox darshanas. The reason for this is that Zimmer died before he could complete his comprehensive study of Indian thought. Joseph Campbell edited Zimmer's incomplete notes and published the volume posthumously.¹⁷ Interestingly, nine of the twelve authors include Charvaka materialism in their work, yet in terms of books and articles it is one of the least written about subjects.

A third finding is that though Indian Buddhism was historically considered

to be heterodox, there is a tremendous volume of contemporary scholarly literature on the subject. Daya Krishna mentioned that during the first millennium the number of Indian Buddhist writers and their literary production far exceeded the so-called orthodox schools of Indian philosophy.¹⁸ More secondary books and articles have been written on Indian Buddhism (2944) than on Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaishesika, Purva Mimamsa, Shaivism, Vyakarana, Sri Aurobindo and S. Radhakrishnan combined. Special interest has centered on Abhidharma (461), Madyamika (409) and Yogacara (223) Buddhism.

The data strongly supports a fourth conclusion, that the traditional listing of nine schools of philosophy is far too limited to encompass the wide range of Indian doctrines. Thirty-six schools of Indian philosophy were reviewed in special chapters in at least two of the twelve textbooks. Scriptural sources like the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads are widely discussed in nine of the twelve textbooks and the Vedas in eight. Also, the Brahmanas, Bhagavata and Puranas appear in special chapters in at least two of the publications. Unlike the other groupings, scriptural sources are not considered to be schools of philosophy. Shaivism is reviewed in eight of the texts, while Kashmir Shaivism, Shaiva Siddhanta, Vira Shaivism, Shakta and Tantra are each subject to special study in four volumes. More articles deal with philosophical Shaivism (415) than Sankhya (324), Purva Mimamsa (192) or Charvaka Materialism (64). The Vyakarana Grammarians (144) are ignored in all of the texts, with the exception of Karl Potter's *Bibliography*. There is a growing interest in this area, as witnessed by a special volume of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* being devoted to this subject.¹⁹ Also, there is a burgeoning contemporary literature which one third of the textbook writers discussed, placing the spotlight on Sri Aurobindo (259) and S. Radhakrishnan (158). The Neo-

Vedanta philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth century could form a separate category by-itself. These modern writers place more emphasis than traditional authors, on affirming the value and worth of the empirical world, seeking to improve human existence, on reason as compared to revelation and on adopting a cordial attitude toward other religions, other schools of Indian thought and secular knowledge. They have made many attempts to synthesize apparently divergent points of view.²⁰

A fifth point of consideration is the vastly unequal magnitude of the prominence of the various traditional categories. For example, forty-six times as many secondary publications have been written on Indian Buddhism (2944) than Charvaka materialism (64). Advaita (2016) which is a subdivision of Vedanta, recorded more books and articles than the combine total of the other five classical orthodox schools of thought. Perhaps in creating a list of Indian belief systems, it would be wise to subdivide some of the more popular categories into subgroups. Buddhism could be subdivided into Hinayana (Theravada) and Mahayana (or even more groupings), since they each receive more literary attention than the Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaishesika or Purva Mimamsa systems of thought.

In addition to the thirty-six categories of Indian philosophy that were reviewed in special chapters in at least two textbooks, Vyakarana (Grammarians), Political, Social, Indian Muslim Sufi, Sikh and Christian philosophies might be added to the list. Political philosophy is an important area of study, which spans the era from the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya to the modern approach of M. Gandhi, the most appreciated and widely known Indian thinker of the twentieth century. Also, social-legal philosophy centering on Manu's *Dharmashastra* and concepts like the four caste's (varna), stages of life (ashrama) and goals of life (purusartha), could be included in the

classification scheme.

According to the data given in the Tables, the number of Indian philosophies appears to be quite large. The fivefold enumeration system of Indian philosophies (Orthodox, Heterodox, Scriptural, Religious and Contemporary) used in Table 1 is one of many possibilities. The headings could be reduced to a tripartite division of: Naturalistic (Nyaya, Vaishesika, Sankhya, Vyakarana, Charvaka, Contemporary, Political and Social-Legal); Religious (Vedanta, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa, Tantra, Neo-Vedanta and Scriptural) and Religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Shaivism, Shaktism and possibly Vaishnavism, Muslim Sufism, Sikhism and Christian). Another approach would be to follow Smart and Potter's lead and to create a classification system, by evaluating each philosophy in terms of their position on every important issue. This would require an extensive knowledge of the subject.

References

¹ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (Oxford University, Bombay, 1992), pp. 24-27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³ Unknown Author, *Sarvasiddhantasamgraha*, translated by M. Rangacarya, Ajay (New Delhi, 1983). See also Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton University, Princeton), 1969, pp. 613-14.

⁴ Madhava-Vidyaranya *Sarvadarshanasamgraha*, edited by E. B. Cowell and A. E. Gough (Kegan, Trench, Truebner, London, 1894). See also Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990), pp. 350-53.

⁵ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol.1 (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1942), p. 534.

⁶ Daya Krishna, *Indian Philosophy A Counter Perspective* (Oxford University, New York, 1991), pp. 7-12; Daya Krishna, 'Indian Philosophy in the First Millennium AD: Fact and Fiction', *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 12, 1996, pp. 127-35.

⁷ Ninian Smart, *Doctrines and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1964), pp.129-31.

⁸ Karl Potter, 'A Fresh Classification of India's Philosophical Systems', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 21, 1961, pp. 25-32. Karl Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991), pp. 98-116, 182-83.

⁹ Karl Potter, 'Toward a Conceptual Scheme for Indian Epistemologies', *Self, Knowledge and Freedom*, edited by J. N. Mohanty and S. P. Banerjee (World Press Private, Calcutta, 1978), pp. 26-30.

¹⁰ John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* (State University of New York, Albany, 1989), p. 262.

¹¹ Chandradhar Sharma, *The Advaita Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1996).

¹² *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. 3, edited by Haridas Bhattacharyya (Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1953). S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1975). Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vols. 1-5 (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1988). T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (Humanities, New York, 1974). Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. 1 (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1995). Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1962). Swami Prajnanananda, *Schools of Indian Philosophical Thought* (Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1973). Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vols. 1-2. P. T. Raju, *Structural Depths of Indian Thought* (State University of New York, Albany, 1985). Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987). I. C. Sharma, *Ethical Philosophies of India* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1965). Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton University, Princeton, 1969).

¹³ John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, p. 262.

¹⁴ Sarvepalli, Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 2, pp. 303-07, 319-73.

¹⁵ Karl Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.

¹⁷ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, p. v.

¹⁸ Daya Krishna, 'First Millennium'.

¹⁹ Harold Coward and K. Kunjuni Raja. *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. 5, *The Philosophy of the Grammarians* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990).

²⁰ Rama Srivastava, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1965), pp. 1-11.