PART - V

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter we first attempt, in section (a), a brief recapitulation of the argument that runs through the preceding chapters; in section (b) we try to indicate what is possibly the significance of the general approach that we have adopted in this study; and finally in section (c) we touch upon the relevance of such studies as this for the vitality of philosophy in India today.

(a) The Argument in a Nutshell

The first question we addressed ourselves to, was:
How shall we understand the essential nature of Indian thought vis a vis modern Western thought?

The usual characterizations of this thought as spiritual, practical, etc. seemed to conceal more than reveal its true nature; they are at best oversimplifications and, at worst an unfortunate distortion of the philosophies under consideration. This is so, because such observations about the 'spiritual' character and the 'practical' nature of Indian thought are not based on a proper analysis of the issues
involved: such issues as the nature and role of theoretical philosophy in the two contexts of India and modern West; the relationship between reason on the one hand, and intuition of a framework of goals on the other; the relationship between Thought and Life; between the spiritual goal and the secular goals, etc. These and related issues have been discussed in some detail in Part II (Chapters 2 and 3).

This discussion suggested that probably there is 'reason' and 'intuition' in both the contexts, that there is 'theory' as well as 'practice' in both, and that the distinction between the two need not be, and perhaps cannot be, in terms of the rational-religious distinction or the theoretical-practical distinction. Further, though these elements may be present in both the contexts, their interrelationship may not be the same in the two cases.

For instance, according to the Indian understanding, neither reason nor intuition can be what it is supposed to be, in the absence of a certain relationship it is to have with the other. This relationship was discussed with reference to Bhartrhari’s understanding of the relationship between 'reason' and 'tradition'. In this understanding, their relationship is viewed as a mechanism of mutual dependence and mutual control, such that reason would not be able to perform its function without intuition, and vice versa.
Obviously, this understanding militates against the modern Western tendency to grant autonomy to reason. It remains to be investigated what role reason can play in such isolation, or when it enjoys this autonomy, and what role it plays when, as in the Indian context, it is viewed in its relationship with the intuition of a framework of goals. We therefore left open the question as to which understanding of reason is probably more 'rational'. It was, in any case, not necessary for us to determine this in order to see the nature of the difference between the philosophies of India and the modern West.

We have, therefore, been content with stating that this relationship of mutual dependence and mutual control need not be taken as severely restricting the scope of reason; we merely suggested that it is quite possible to view this understanding of reason as allowing it the maximum scope that it can possibly have.

In this way we tried to bring out the significance of the goal-orientation that most systems of Indian philosophy manifest. It was found possible to argue that this orientation need not be an embarrassment, that, if properly understood, it can provide a clue to the basic perspective of Indian thought as a whole, one which is significantly different
from the modern Western perspective, but not necessarily superior or inferior to it.

We were thus brought face to face with the question: In what sense and with what implications is Indian philosophy moksa-sastra or the science of spiritual liberation? Answering this question required that we examine the relationship between Experience (direct knowledge), Thought (theoretical philosophy) and Conduct (concrete life) as factors in the explanation and justification of the ultimate goal of life. We also had to look into the nature of the ultimate goal itself; this led to an examination of the interrelationship among the goals of dharma, artha, kāma and moksa; and this showed how it is possible to understand this relationship in such a way that none of these goals would be a human goal unless the other goals are also taken care of, at least at the level of the society if not also at the individual level.

As regards the interrelationship of Experience, Thought and Life, this was discussed by suggesting a reinterpretation of the systems of Indian philosophy. The suggested interpretation was considered with reference to the Advaita and the Samkhya systems of Indian thought. This brought out that Thought or theoretical philosophy plays its role in explaining and justifying a particular understanding of the ultimate goal of human life; but Thought plays this role only
in association with the aspects of Experience and Life. Analysis of these different factors showed that neither Experience, nor Thought, nor Life can by itself justify a particular understanding of the goal, that at the same time all these three in a certain interrelationship might be sufficient for this purpose. And in so far as justification of the goal is relevant for its realization, this meant that these three are factors of explanation, justification and realization of the ultimate goal.

The factors of Thought and Experience differ from system to system; but the Life factor is essentially the same. This view opened up a new way of looking at the Indian philosophical systems and their interrelationship among themselves. It appeared that a similar interpretation of the modern Western philosophical systems would rather be too contrived, though it is not altogether impossible. For, in that context, the relationship between Experience, Thought and Life seems to be conceived differently.

This discussion provided a clue to the essential character of Indian thought vis-à-vis modern Western thought. The Indian perspective, that is, the basic framework in which theoretical philosophy functions in this context, is found to be a matter of commitment to a direction that allows a variety
of theoretical positions and their corresponding Experiences to go hand in hand with essentially the same kind of life, the kind which is regarded as the life of the liberated person. This understanding of theory which may be said to pervade Indian thought in general, could then be identified as the single most important factor with reference to which one might distinguish this thought from modern Western thought.

This enabled us to formulate the difference between the Indian and modern Western approaches in terms of the different understandings of the function and formulation of theory: according to the Indian understanding, theory has a definite function and yet it can have many formulations. Its function basically is the explanation and justification of some specific understanding of the ultimate human goal, of course in association with the aspects of Experience and Life; and the formulation varies with the different perceptions of the nature of this goal and also in accordance with the differences among peoples in matters of context, background, temperament, etc. We could thus look at the conflicts between theoretical systems in a new way without at all denying the importance and significance of their differences in formulation: differences are in formulation and not in function, and at the same time the proper performance of the function depends also on the proper formulation of Thought.
This understanding of theory in terms of a function which is fixed and formulations which can vary, could not also be applied easily to the modern Western systems; for, in these systems, Thought or theory is viewed more or less in isolation from the aspects of Experience and life on the one hand, and from the framework of goals on the other.

All these elements - Experience, Thought, Life, the goals - are all present in the Western context too. But their relationship is probably different in this case. It is, as it were, theoretical philosophy is trying, almost single-handed, to analyse and if possible establish these goals, each in isolation from the others. Thus, for instance, when the moral goal is 'established', its relationship with the religious goal remains to be worked out, and vice versa.

Whereas in the Indian context, in the first instance, these goals are not proved or established by theory by itself; and, secondly, the goals are also not established in isolation from one another. Rather than goals, a framework of goals is what Indian thought is concerned about; and this concern is better understood as an attempt to explain the intuition of this framework, in rational terms and in association with the aspects of Experience and Life, and not a concern for proof in the modern Western sense of the term.
Bhartrhari's view that even if all the sastras are destroyed, as long as people are serious about the business of living, the same 'tradition' will be rediscovered, also seemed to suggest that what is essential to this 'tradition' is not a specific theoretical understanding of these goals, but their intuition and an understanding as to how different theories might differently interpret and explain them at the same time.

Modern Western thought seemed to differ radically from Indian thought in this regard. Its tendency to isolate the parts (theory, practice, reason, intuition, moral goal, religious goal, etc.) from the organic whole of which these are parts - this is a marked tendency.

This became clear when we considered, though in brief, the existentialist criticism of systematic philosophy as devoid of the practical dimension. This criticism, we found, is not wholly justified. True that the practical dimension is subdued there. But it is there, for instance, in Descartes. We might notice it if we see his theory in the context of his whole writings, not excluding his letters, and also in the context of his practical and religious concerns, all of which have a bearing on his speculative efforts. We could similarly argue that the theoretical component is not wholly absent in the existential philosophies. At the same time, the 'divorce' between thought and life seemed to have taken place as early
as in Descartes' own time; how else could he say that to correctly know the relationship between mind and body "one should live and refrain from speculation"?

It thus appeared that while the Indian approach could be described as approximating to a pattern wherein the parts are always dealt with as parts of the whole which is first intuitively present to some of the best minds, the modern Western approach could be understood as one which tries to construct the whole out of the parts or elements which are analysed in near-isolation from one another. Probably there is both analysis and synthesis in both contexts, but the roles they play could be significantly different. In one case intuition of the whole seems to guide analysis which in its turn redeems intuition itself from being mere illusion; and, in the other, the understanding of the whole seems to depend almost entirely on analysis and possible subsequent synthesis.

In spite of our proceeding to this conclusion on the basis of analysis of certain specific issues as they are discussed by important philosophers themselves, the above understanding of the basic perspectives of India and the modern West seemed to suffer from considerable vagueness. Therefore, in Part III (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) we tried to clarify
and concretize this understanding by illustrating the same with reference to the treatment given, in the two contexts of India and the modern West, to specific issues from the fields of metaphysics, ethics and philosophy of religion.

For instance, we analysed the metaphysical problem of mind-body relationship in chapter 4. This analysis showed that the Samkhya attempt is to understand mind, body and their relationship in the context of the unity of the self which explains their unity, and which in its turn is elaborated with reference to them. The Cartesian approach, on the other hand, is to begin with the understanding of the elements and then to attempt their synthesis. Both approaches do have their problems; but their difference, which is our concern here, is too evident to be missed.

In so far as our analysis did not base itself so much on the particular views of the Samkhya or Descartes as on the basic approaches involved, it was possible for us to suggest that what is true of the Samkhya could be true of the other systems of Indian philosophy. Thus, if the Samkhya metaphysics may be understood as an attempt to present one theory of the self, then, in so far as the other systems might also be viewed as providing their theories of the self and its possibilities, we are persuaded to view the elements of their theories in relation to the posited reality of the self and its unity;
and, in so far as the reality of the self and its possibilities are not merely a matter of theoretical understanding, we are compelled to view theory itself in its relationship with the non-theoretical aspects of Experience and Life. This possibility of viewing the parts in terms of the whole, we found, is considerably reduced when metaphysics is seen in a different relationship with ethics and philosophy of religion.

Similarly, in Chapters 5 and 6 we analysed the issue of the autonomy of morals and the question of idol worship (and conversion). While Kant and other modern thinkers tend to view morality as autonomous, we found that the theory of purusārthas is decidedly against this tendency. And, while the tendency of modern thinkers is to analyse such elements of religion as the creed, the code and the cult in isolation from one another, Hinduism seems to involve the principle of analysing these elements in the context of their interrelatedness and interdependence.

Thus, the perspectives of India and the modern West were found to differ, not so much in the presence or absence of the elements involved, nor in the degree and place of emphasis received, but in the understanding of the relationship of these elements and the role this understanding plays
in the over-all context of life and thought in the respective civilizations.

This meant that the basic perspectives/frameworks of the two differ in a way significantly different from that usually suggested by the differences of their elements; and this has the further implication that seeming similarity of elements might not be real, and many apparent differences might not be real differences. If the two frameworks are really different, and if it is the framework that determines the nature of what goes into it, then the two cannot be compared except as wholes. We thus arrived at the notion of "whole-to-whole comparison" as perhaps the only legitimate method of comparing the philosophies and religions of India and the modern West.

In Part IV (Chapters 7 and 8) we analysed the problems and prospects of comparison between the two perspectives. We found that one of the basic problems of present-day comparisons is what might be called a confusion of perspectives. And we saw that the framework of the ongoing comparisons, as evidenced by their presuppositions, methods and aims, is at variance with the framework that would be seen as the proper one, that is, if the difference between the two perspectives is paid the attention it deserves.
We felt that what goes on today in the name of comparative studies is mainly element-to-element comparison which presupposes the complementarity of the two perspectives and, therefore, aims at their synthesis. On the other hand, from the suggested understanding of the perspectives as alternatives, which also seem to be irreconcilable, it follows that what is to be attempted is whole-to-whole comparison, where 'whole' means not merely the totality of the theoretical system but includes also the dimensions of direct intuitive knowledge and concrete life which are all integrally related among themselves. If this is so, then we cannot compare, for instance, varieties of religious experience, or varieties of religious doctrines, without a proper comparison of the varieties of religious life itself.

And the aim of comparative studies, then, becomes one of placing one whole alongside the other; in this sense, the aim is to 'confront' one whole with the other. But, we found, this requires that we first comprehensively grasp and properly articulate the philosophies and religions that we compare. This alone can prevent mutual interference and bring out the real strength and limitations of the philosophies and their basic perspectives.

(b) The Approach and Its Significance

Our approach to the problem before us has not been
definitional. We have tried to understand the meaning of words in terms of issues and not the other way round. This is a matter of some importance and relevance for Indological studies. As we felt that the situation is already confused, it was important that we tried to redeem the discussion from the oppressive hold of terms and their definitions which might have become part of this confusion. Dependence on definitions being thus not very conducive to clarity about the issues and their underlying perspective, there has been, in these discussions, a rather conscious effort to minimise this dependence.

Thus, we did not begin with a well-defined notion of either philosophy or religion. Hence the question has not been really whether Indian philosophy is properly philosoph-ical or religious. Rather the question has been, what in any case is this philosophy/religion supposed to be doing. This approach has its disadvantages too. But, in so far as it enables us to deal directly with the issues involved and to get at the basic perspective of the philosophies and religions in question, its advantages are of some significance for similar studies at least.

Another feature of our argument is that at no stage have we tried to clinch the issue once and for all; we have proceeded more by 'suggestions' than by 'proofs'. This was
necessary in a sense; in spite of our efforts, it has not been possible to analyse all important aspects of the issues taken up for consideration. For one thing, we have touched upon many issues which naturally could not be dealt with exhaustively; and for another, we had to first have a rather detailed analysis of the perspectives and then see the implications of this for comparative studies. This put quite some restriction on us in the matter of paying attention to all aspects of any single issue.

And yet, it may not be too much to claim that what is possibly lacking with respect to the individual steps of the argument, is probably not as great a problem as it appears. This would become clear if the whole argument is taken into account and the individual steps are seen in the background of this coherent whole.

Thus, both the delineation of the two perspectives in Part II in general terms, and the discussion of specific illustrative issues in Part III, have their limitations; and yet the two parts support and strengthen mutually. Similarly, this discussion of the perspectives in Parts II and III on the one hand, and the discussion of the problems and prospects of comparison in Part IV on the other, also illumine each other: our understanding of the perspectives throws some light on the field of comparisons, and this new understanding
of the problems of comparison in turn renders the understanding of the perspectives more plausible. If the argument is thus taken as a whole, it may not be difficult to see how limitations at various points could be overcome.

The two above-mentioned characteristics of our approach, its being non-definitional and its not attempting to prove, - these indicate the exploratory nature of this study. The exploration, however, is not entirely left to be guided by imagination and by whims. For, there has been an attempt to follow the relevant texts as closely as possible under the circumstances. This, then, is a third important characteristic of our general procedure.

The discussion has mostly been carried on in rather close association with texts or portions of texts. It has always been a Bhartrhari or an Iswarakrishna, a Manu or a Gandhi, a Descartes or a Kant, that we have taken into account. There are, of course, many problems in trying to take on all these in such a study as this. But here too the advantages outweigh the disadvantages: it gains us direct contact with the issues involved.

Thus, for example, we analysed the mind-body relationship in the Samkhya with reference to the Sāmkhyakārikā of Iswarakrishna. And this enabled us to see that the way the
problem appears in the Samkhya is significantly different from the way it appears in Descartes, Spinoza, etc. We found that the Sāmkhya way of approaching the issue avoids at least one problem, that of having to put the two elements, the mind and the body, together. This is in spite of its ultimate dualism. But the question arose as to whether it is the same problem of mind-body relationship that we have in the Samkhya and in Descartes. It is the same, in one sense; but in another sense it is not the same. Authenticity of contact with the issues through a text enables us to see this: if we understand the issue in one context, it helps understanding the issue in another context, even when the issues have their differences.

Really, not sections of texts but whole texts have to be studies in this way; and this has not been possible in this study. But, even when we have considered a section of a text or a doctrine in a particular system, we have tried to understand it with reference to the text/system as a whole. This is because we felt that study of whole texts and not "shopping for ideas" will enable one to understand these philosophies.

One more characteristic of the approach adopted here needs to be noted and its significance emphasized; it has to
do with the specificity of the issues with reference to which the discussions have been carried out. It is this specificity which redeems the argument from being a mere set of generalities.

By the very nature of the topic, it was necessary that we raised some rather general questions, such as the one about the role of theoretical philosophy in the justification and attainment of the ultimate goal of human life. However, this issue was discussed with reference to one or two systems of Indian thought so as to mitigate the problem of vagueness and generality. Similarly, we discussed the general question as to how metaphysical issues are differently treated in the two contexts of India and the modern West, with special reference to the treatment of a single problem in the Samkhya and in Descartes. And the question of the relationship between reason and intuition was discussed with reference to Bhartṛhari's understanding of it.

This approach ensures that our 'general impressions' are by and large applicable to at least the systems/philosophers that we have taken into account; the question of their being applicable to other systems as well is a matter of suggestion with a certain degree of plausibility about it. It may be relevant to note this particular feature of the method we have followed, that is, if we are to develop a way
of comparing and contrasting as wholes the philosophies of India and the modern West.

(c) Relevance of This Study

Here we touch upon only one aspect of the relevance of our study and its findings, viz., how this study is relevant for progress of thought in India at the present juncture.

India today is, one might say, both itself and the West. But, perhaps, it is neither. For, the Indian and modern Western traditions have co-existed here for quite some time, but without a proper interaction between them.

But, how is this interaction important? Let us try to understand this with reference to the role of such interaction between the different systems of thought in the same tradition. Each of the two traditions in question contains many structures of thought which differ widely among themselves. At the same time, there are agreements as well as disagreements, mutual criticism, understanding of one another, and communication between them. And this makes up the philosophical ethos of the community, the framework in which the community articulates itself and earnestly tries to understand and shape itself.
Now, what about the philosophical ethos of the 'modern Indian' society? It is confused to a great extent. The reason for this is not far to seek: there has been no proper interaction, no communication, between the Indian and modern Western traditions of thought, though both have existed here side by side, long enough to confuse the best minds and through them a whole society.

Such interaction between them as exists today, we have found, is of a very general and superficial nature. Ample evidence to this is provided by the comparative philosophers who talk in terms of the 'rationality' of Western philosophy, the 'spirituality' of Indian thought, and the need of their 'synthesis'. Our analysis of the issues involved has indicated that the rational-religious distinction, or the theoretical-practical distinction, cannot be the basis for differentiating the two traditions in question. It is not at all clear how a tradition having serious problems on the practical side can ever be regarded as theoretically sound, or how if a philosophy is spiritually beneficial it can be rationally unsound. Our analysis has suggested that the differences lie deeper, and meaningful interaction between the two traditions is not possible unless there is an appreciation of this fact/possibility and its implications.
We have pointed out that one of the essential conditions for proper comparison between the two traditions is a more comprehensive and complete articulation of each of these so as to bring out the possibilities and limitations of each. This alone can prevent patchwork of ideas from different cultures and pave the way for real mutual enrichment.

In the absence of proper comparison and competition between the two traditions, it is inevitable that our thought fails to provide the necessary basis for individual and social life as a whole. There are, of course, sporadic attempts to wriggle out of this unpleasant situation; but these have yet to come into the mainstream of philosophical writing and discussion. Hence the relevance of this modest study and its findings.