

PART - I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Indian thought has, indeed, many facets. At the same time, there is something about it which compels one to view it as an organic whole with an identity of its own. This identity, however, is rather elusive. The prevalent characterizations of this thought as spiritual, religious, practical, synthetic, etc., show at once how compelling this factor of distinctiveness is and, also, how confusing the situation can become. The confusion as to the essential nature of this thought is evident in almost all areas of our thought and life; it is, perhaps, more conspicuous in the field of comparisons between Indian thought and modern Western thought.

It is in this background that we undertake here an inquiry into the basic difference between the perspectives of India and the modern West. This is done with the immediate aim of examining its implications for comparative studies in particular; it is hoped that this will enable us to both evaluate the existing framework of comparison and suggest a plausible alternative to it.

In so far as the future of philosophy in India is itself linked to the possibility of a fruitful interaction between Indian thought and modern Western thought, their comparison is the crucible from which has to emerge the theoretical understanding which will support and enrich individual and social life in this country. The main purpose of this inquiry is to facilitate, in a modest way of course, the emergence of this understanding.

(a) The Problem, a 'Hypothesis' and Its Implications

Is Indian philosophy philosophy proper ? Is it religion ? Or, is it both ? Is Hinduism religion ? Or, is it only a code of conduct ? Or, is it neither ? These ^{and} such other questions have raised considerable controversy and much greater confusion.

It has often been remarked, for instance, that Indian philosophy is religious in character, suggesting thereby that it is not rigorous enough to be regarded as philosophy proper. The rational-religious distinction has in fact been the guiding principle for most comparisons and contrasts between Indian and modern Western philosophies. Another prevalent notion in this regard is based on the theoretical-practical distinction : the notion that Indian philosophy is immensely practical while its western counterpart is highly theoretical.

In so far as rationality is the main if not also the distinguishing feature of theoretical systems of philosophy, and in so far as an active moral life is regarded as an essential component of religion itself, it may be noted that the rational-religious distinction and the theoretical-practical distinction are closely related.

Important questions about the meaning and validity of these distinctions notwithstanding, one might here try directly to inquire into the possible sense in which Indian thought could be characterized as religious. This may, indeed, be necessary in so far as this kind of description of Indian thought probably conceals more than reveals the true nature of it.

It is quite possible that the perspectives of India and the modern West could fruitfully be discussed with reference to the understanding of man's ultimate goals and their interrelationship in these perspectives; and this procedure seems quite appropriate in so far as the Indian philosophical systems are described as mokṣa-śāstra, mokṣa being the ultimate goal of human life.

The immediate question, therefore, is : In what sense and with what implications, is Indian philosophy the science of mokṣa or spiritual liberation ?

Discussion of this issue will, of course, entail consideration of such questions as : What is the nature of moksa as the ultimate goal of human life ? How is this goal related to the other goals recognized in the Indian tradition, viz., the goals of dharma, artha and kāma ? What is the role that reason plays in relation to these goals and their justification ? How does this supposed mokṣa-orientation affect the philosophical character of Indian thought ? And how does one fit systems like the Carvaka into this scheme ?

These and related questions will be discussed in some detail in the course of our analysis of the two perspectives in the next two chapters. In this introductory chapter it is merely intended to suggest the direction in which the analysis may have to proceed if we are to steer clear of the misunderstandings about Indian philosophy being described as mokṣa-śāstra.

One way to avoid misunderstandings about anything is to put forward what one supposes to be the proper understanding of it and to examine it for its validity. Hence the importance of the question we have raised : In what sense, and with what implications, is Indian philosophy the science of spiritual liberation ? Answering this question may suffice to clear many of the misunderstandings in this regard; for,

it would then show clearly, in what sense or senses it is not to be understood when Indian thought is described as mokṣa-śāstra.

It seems therefore that before one can proceed any further, one requires some hypothesis about the relationship between (a) mokṣa as the ultimate goal of man and (b) philosophy as a theoretical system consisting of rational ideas and arguments woven together in a particular manner. Could one possibly say that the recognition of this spiritual goal is peculiar to Indian thought ?

Certainly not. True that mokṣa occupies a predominant position in the 'hierarchy' of human goals in the Indian tradition ; the traditional scheme of the four-fold goals (caturvidha puruṣārthā^h) consists of dharmā, artha, kāma and mokṣa. It will, however, be a travesty of truth to deny the recognition of any of these goals in the Western context. Religion and morality, for instance, represent some of the basic values cherished for ever in every culture and tradition; and, in their deepest sense they have to do with certain goals, efforts towards the realization of which are generally supposed to give both direction and content, in a word significance, to human life.

At the same time, it may be suggested here that the

relationship between these goals, and consequently the understanding of each of these goals, can be significantly different in the two contexts, Indian and modern Western. But this shall be discussed later.

It would be simplistic even if one were to assume that in the Indian context there is, in addition to the recognition to these goals, a close relationship between philosophy on the one hand and religion, morality, etc. on the other, and that modern Western philosophy has little to do with religion and morality. For, if this relationship is only too evident in India to escape notice, the religious and moral concerns occupy a significant place in the philosophy of the modern West too. This is evident from, among other things, the large portions of philosophy called philosophy of religion, ethics, social philosophy, etc. which are related one way or another with metaphysics. We cannot, thus, summarily deny the relationship between philosophy, religion, morality, etc. in the Western context.

Surveying in general the Indian as well as Western philosophical landscapes, one is compelled to admit that any philosophy worth the name has taken religion and morality into account. Linguistic analysis could perhaps be regarded as an exception to this. But it is relevant to examine, how,

for instance, the language games of physical object language, language of ethics, language of religion, etc. are interrelated. That we often deal with philosophy of religion as a separate branch should not blind us to the fact that there is almost no philosophy without a philosophy of religion. And, what is more, to understand a philosopher like Descartes, it may be necessary that we look not only into the relationship between his metaphysics, his ethics and his philosophy of religion, but also into the relationship between his philosophy and his religious convictions.

But, here one might say, it needs to be considered whether religion is taken into account in the same way or in significantly different ways in the Indian and modern Western contexts. The question, in other words, is whether the acceptance of religious ideas can be said to be critical in one context and uncritical in the other.

It has been a temptation with many to assert that, unlike in India, the modern West is rational and critical in its acceptance of religion and religious ideas into its philosophical framework. But, in so far as arguments are presented and pressed in varying degrees in support of these ideas and doctrines in both the contexts, the difference between the two cannot simply be a matter of the degree and emphasis of the criticism involved.

In saying this we are, for the time being, ignoring the distinction between theology and philosophy of religion as it is very often made. Their distinction in terms of a prior commitment to some doctrines and the absence of such commitment, is certainly open to objections. And it is not clear that commitment to truth in a particular formulation of it has a definitely disastrous effect on our faculty of reasoning. Thus, for instance, it is not very clear that a St. Thomas is proving God's existence in a way less rational than, say, Descartes.

In any case, as we suspect that there is already a confusion of perspectives, and as we are discussing the Indian scenario, it is better to avoid, as far as possible, terms and distinctions which are primarily derived from the Western context and, therefore, directly applicable to that context.

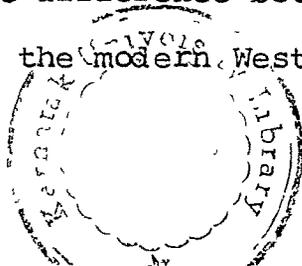
It then becomes necessary to try and explain in a more satisfactory manner the overwhelming preoccupation of the Indian philosophical systems with man's ultimate goal or goals, and to explain the marked 'religious' overtone of most of these systems. Hence, the importance of the question about the way in which philosophy is related to the various human goals, ethical, religious as well as secular, in the two contexts of India and the modern West. An answer to this

question might itself suggest a way of distinguishing between the Indian and modern Western philosophies.

At the risk of oversimplification, but as a kind of working hypothesis, it may now be submitted that philosophy, in the sense of a coherent theoretical system constructed out of rational ideas and arguments, may exist within the framework provided by intuitions about a structure of inter-related goals, in order to explain these goals and to assist in their realization.

Also, in the same sense as mentioned here, philosophy may have its relationship with these very goals in an entirely different way, such that it seeks to consider and, if possible, establish these goals, individually and on purely rational grounds; in which case, notwithstanding the possibility that here too the goals are as much intuited as they are reasoned out, the rational enterprise assumes an almost autonomous character vis a vis the intuition of these goals.

It is submitted here, again as a hypothesis, that Indian philosophy in general approximates to the former pattern while modern Western philosophy is a close approximation to the latter model. Herein probably is to be found the proper sense in which Indian philosophy is mokṣa-śāstra; herein also lies a clue to the basic difference between the philosophical approaches of India and the modern West.



Now, it needs to be explained what it is for a philosophy to exist in the framework of intuitions about an integrated ideal, and this would involve some illustrations with reference to particular systems of Indian philosophy. Moreover, this explanation will be found to involve, almost as a matter of implication, a whole new way of interpreting Indian philosophical systems themselves. For, if our supposition regarding a fundamental difference between the frameworks of the Indian and modern Western philosophies is correct, then it follows that a particular system of philosophy is best understood when it is seen in its organic relationship with its framework. The system, in other words, has to be viewed, first and foremost, in its own perspective.

It thus becomes important to illustrate how a philosophical system may be viewed in the background of the perspective to which it belongs, so that our delineation of the two perspectives in terms of the relationship between theoretical philosophy on the one hand and intuitions about the human goals on the other, though tentative, does not remain too vague to be of assistance in fruitfully discussing the issues involved. If we are to better formulate the essential difference between the two perspectives later on in the course of our discussion, it is necessary that sufficient clarity is ensured right here when we consider it with reference to the goal-orientation of Indian philosophy.

A possible interpretation, or reinterpretation, of a philosophical system on the lines suggested here serves at least two purposes: it helps to bring out what it is for a philosophy to exist in a larger framework and what, roughly, is the nature of that framework; at the same time, it shows, to the extent that this interpretation is a plausible one, the very plausibility of the suggested delineation of the framework.

(b) Method, Scope and Limitations

This dissertation is essentially exploratory; it explores the possibility of viewing philosophical and religious systems in such a way that the issues which are relevant for their comparison are brought into prominence and thereby their meaningful discussion is rendered feasible. This exploratory character has, in a sense, determined our approach in certain significant ways. On the whole we make the minimum necessary claims in the course of our analysis of the various issues ; those suggestions which have sometimes been highlighted without a fuller examination of their validity, may be regarded as suggestions made partly for future consideration on the same lines as pursued here, and partly to strengthen and support, indirectly, the main contention regarding particular issues under consideration.

Our approach is not definitional. We have tried to understand the meaning of words in terms of issues and not the other way. Thus, for instance, we do not try to fix the meaning of 'mokṣa' first; but we ask what it could mean if the issue involved is one of relating oneself, in a meaningful way, to oneself, to others in the society, and to God. This approach, it is believed, is important in the case of Indological studies, as here one might expect the limitations of word-meanings and definitions to come in the way of a proper appreciation of the issues and the solutions thereto. The usefulness of this approach cannot be denied, as it is conducive to clarity about the structure of issues, and of thought, in a particular context, clarity about a structure which might point to the underlying perspective.

Another characteristic of our approach is that, in analysing an issue, we have limited our attention to some particular work or some particular theory, without trying to make it thorough by bringing in different texts and/or theories. This method has its advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that we do not mix up elements from different texts, but can look for the structure of the elements in the same text. Another advantage is that one has a fair chance of going further and getting at the perspective involved, without being caught between the conflicting interpretations of the same text/theory.

A principle we have tried to adopt in our discussions is to take as worthy of consideration what has been stated in the authoritative texts and has been generally accepted in the tradition, and to see what can be made out of it; we are, thus, inclined to treat something as interpolation or as unimportant only when this attempt to find its meaning does not yield positive results. For example, we take the mokṣa-orientation of Indian philosophy quite seriously, and hope to arrive at an understanding of its perspective by doing so rather than by ignoring this orientation. There is no attempt to write off this concern with mokṣa as a matter of mere lip-service; no attempt is made here to 'rescue' Indian thought from these 'undesirable' and 'inconvenient' dimensions of it.

At the same time, there is also no attempt made to support the usual understanding of Indian philosophy as religious, spiritual, etc. Taking the mokṣa-orientation seriously does not bind us to any particular interpretation of it.

Also, we try to give the best possible interpretation to the concept or doctrine that we take up for consideration. This is not merely a matter of 'fairness'; rather it is one of necessity, because it does not take us anywhere to dismiss something on account of the prevalence of its corrupt forms and of its inadequate understanding.

It is too immense a task to analyse the philosophies and religions of both India and the West and to formulate their essential difference. The analysis we have attempted here is severely selective. We have identified some important issues thrown up by the existing attempts at comparing the two philosophies; and we have tried to indicate, by way of illustrations, the essential character of the philosophies in question. Though our analysis is not based on an exhaustive study of the philosophical and religious systems involved, it is, at the same time not merely a matter of generalities; for, our understanding holds good at least with regard to the systems that we examine. We have also tried to indicate the reasons for our supposing that what is true of the systems that we examine, might be true of the other systems as well. Looking for the determining goal-orientation of the various systems, may not work easily in every case; but it works in a sufficient number to justify the procedure.

As regards the specific manner of the analysis we have undertaken, we have tried, first, to indicate the essential nature of the two perspectives in question, by way of a general discussion of the issues relating to the goal-orientation of Indian philosophy; we have then tried to illustrate and support this understanding with reference to the treatment of some specific issues in the two contexts. Then we have drawn the

implications of this for comparative studies; and, finally, we have indicated what could possibly be a more fruitful framework for future comparison.

(c) Plan of This Study

As for the plan of this study, it is divided into five parts. The first part consists of only the introductory chapter. The second part consists of chapters 2 and 3 which together attempt to delineate the basic perspectives of India and the modern West by way of an examination of certain dimensions of the goal-orientation of Indian philosophy.

Chapter 2 examines what may be called the horizontal dimension of the moksa-orientation of Indian philosophy. Here we examine the relationship between Thought or theoretical philosophy on the one hand and the aspects of direct knowledge or Experience and concrete life or Conduct on the other. In other words, we examine the complexity of the justification of the ultimate goal. We find that the ultimate goal is more or less adequately supported by the Experience-Thought-Life complex, though no element of this complex can by itself constitute a sufficient justification of this goal. Here we also analyse the complex character of the ultimate goal in terms of the interrelationship between the goals of dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa.

Analysis of these issues suggests that the Indian philosophical perspective is one which views every part or element of the whole always as a part of this whole and never in isolation from it. If the whole is to be understood in relation to the parts, it is no less important a requirement that the parts be understood in their relationship to the whole.

Chapter 3 examines what may be described as the vertical dimension of the issue; it examines the relationship between the complex goal and its complex justification. The question here is : What are the implications of the relationship between Thought or theory on the one hand and the ultimate goal on the other. We discuss here, in some detail, the nature and role of theory in the Indian perspective and contrast this with the modern Western understanding of thought or theory. In this connection we look into the relationship between reason and intuition as it may be said to exist in the Indian context ; we find it is possible to argue that each of these is what it is, only in the context of the other. Further, it is found possible to suggest that there might be reason and intuition in both the Indian and modern Western contexts, but their inter-relationship is probably different in the two contexts.

This discussion on the nature and role of theory

support, as well as modifies the understanding of the two perspectives suggested in the previous chapter. It is found that, in India, philosophy exists in a certain relationship with the aspects of Experience and Life; it exists in the framework of an intuited structure of interrelated goals, a structure which is at the same time subjected to considerable rational criticism and analysis; and it is found that the modern West tends to consider and, if possible, establish these goals individually and on purely rational grounds.

Part III attempts to further clarify and concretize our understanding of the two perspectives by way of illustrations as to how the same issue is treated differently in the two contexts. This part consists of three chapters as we have illustrations from three different areas of philosophy, viz., metaphysics, ethics and philosophy of religion.

Chapter 4 is an examination of a metaphysical issue, viz., the mind-body relationship as it is discussed in the Samkhya and in Descartes. This enables us to see how Descartes begins with the parts or elements and then tries to arrive at their unity in man, and how Samkhya sees mind, body, etc. in relation to the self or pure consciousness so that the unity of the self, which is not merely a matter of theory but also of Experience and Life, explains the unity of the parts such as the mind and the body, and not the other way round.

Chapter 5 takes up an ethical issue, viz., the autonomy of morals as implied by Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative. We then point out how the theory of purusārthas militates against the modern Western tendency to view morality as autonomous. This is supported by an analysis of the sources of dharmā as set forth in the Manusmriti. Thus it is argued here that the modern West tends to view the moral aspect of the human goal in isolation from its other aspects, while the Indian tendency is to view the moral, religious aesthetic and economic goals as part of a totality which at once comprehends these and renders them meaningful.

Chapter 6 analyses an altogether different kind of issue, viz., idol-worship. This issue, which may be regarded as an issue in philosophy of religion, is concerned with a practice which, though it is fairly universal, is apparently an indication of the very 'primitive' character of Hinduism. This religion, it seems, has a surfeit of this particular ingredient. This issue is analysed here with reference to a controversy between the christian missionaries on the one hand and M.K.Gandhi and some other Hindu leaders on the other.

It is argued in this chapter that the Hindu approach involves the principle of viewing such elements of religion as the creed, the code and the cult in their flexible inter-

relationship as well as in relation to the totality of these elements. It is pointed out that, viewed thus, the practice of idolworship sheds its unintelligible and 'primitive' character. This shows, at once, how the Indian perspective differs from the modern Western and how the latter draws its sustenance partly at least, from a certain strand of the semitic tradition.

Part IV deals specifically with the problems and prospects of comparison, and it consists of two chapters.

Chapter 7 begins by discussing the interrelationship between the three areas from which illustrations have been drawn, thereby indicating yet another dimension of the difference between the two perspectives; this chapter, then, draws the implications of this difference for comparative studies between India and the modern West. It is suggested here that probably the basic problem in this field is a confusion of perspectives. Brief notices on some representative attempts at comparison with a few critical observations on them, go to support the notion that a confusion of perspectives is one of the main problems plaguing comparative studies today.

Chapter 8 is devoted to a rather detailed examination of the existing framework of comparative studies between India

and the modern West. It is argued here that the presuppositions, methods and aims of the present studies are such that they rule out a proper appreciation of the strength and limitations of the philosophies compared. It is also suggested here that the new framework has to be such as will render whole-to-whole comparisons possible: this alone can bring about a fruitful interaction between the two perspectives which, as a matter of fact, exist in India today side by side, but without this interaction.

Part V being the conclusion, it consists of only one chapter, i.e., chapter 9. Bringing together the threads of our argument and summing up the findings, we here touch upon the significance of such exploratory and pathfinding efforts as the present one : it is probably this kind of efforts which will help in the attainment of a measure of intellectual independence, a sine qua non for meaningful philosophy and, therefore, for meaningful life itself.