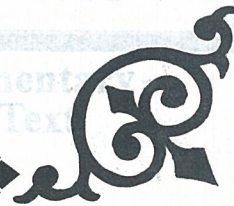




**THE NYĀYA
SŪTRAS:**

**A New Commentary
on an old Text**



Prof. Daya Krishna

Sri Satguru Publications

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Contents

	B
	C
	(iii)
	A
	B
	P
Introduction	
Chapter 1	(vi)
The Structure of the Nyāya Sūtras	14
Chapter 2	B
Questions and Problems Pertaining	C
to the Sūtras : A Dialogue with the text and development	
of a new methodology for understanding the Sūtras	46
Chapter 3	Appendix 3
Some Further Reflections on the Sūtras after reading the	
Commentaries on it, particularly those of Vātsyāyana,	
Uddyotakara, Vācaspati Miśra I and Udayana	171
Chapter 4	which were composed by
A Short Note on Jayanta and Bhāsarvajña	227
Chapter 5	conflicting, or if the 'sects' or 'schools' spoke with different
The Possible Extension of the Methodology for the	
Understanding of Other Texts in the Indian Tradition	231
Chapter 6	strategies, the tradition of the tradition of what?
Conclusion	234
Appendix 1	important beliefs of the no resemblance to the original
The Text of the Nyāya Sūtras: Some Problems	241
Sub-Appendices to Appendix 1	the text of the Nyāya Sūtras, the text of the Nyāya Sūtras
(i)	274
A	274
B	274-275
C	275-276
(ii)	276
A	276

sainpradāyas or the schools in an irreconcilable manner as each wanted to preserve its separate identity at all costs, even when it considered such 'identification' basically mistaken as was the case with Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta. Even the Jains stuck to their notion of '*anekānta*' as they thought it gave them that distinctive identity which differentiated them from others.

But what was this *prasthāna-bheda* which defined the philosophical school in its distinctive difference and in terms of which it sought to seek and preserve it for at least two millennia of its recorded history. In the case of the philosophical tradition these are, as is well known, the *sūtras*, the founding texts of the tradition. But what are these *sūtra-texts* from which everything is supposed to have flowed and which, like the Vedas, are supposed to have the same authority in respect of those traditions.

There could not perhaps have been a greater 'myth' superimposed on the tradition, but this time it was by the tradition itself. This was facilitated, perhaps even buttressed, by the style and character of the composition of these texts which, at least at first sight, seemed to render them unintelligible. The compression, the brevity and the opaqueness, coupled with almost a total lack of information about the '*context*' of discussion within the text itself made it virtually impossible to get directly at their meaning without which their very 'foundational' character would obviously be lost. This is supposed to be 'saved' by the universally held belief that the key to the meaning of the *sūtras* lies in the commentaries on them which, of course, are generally available and treated as if without their 'mediation' the 'secret' of the text would remain undeciphered. But, why the 'commentaries' in the plural, and why the commentaries on the commentaries, remains the unanswered question by those who have swallowed wholesale this myth about the tradition superimposed by the tradition itself.

What was the *sūtra-text* doing, and what are the commentaries doing, is the question that has to be raised in order that we may have some idea of what the philosophical enterprise of India was

about, and this is what this work sets about to do in respect of one such foundational text of the tradition, that is, the *Nyāya Sūtras*.

The long engagement with this foundational text has revealed that the usual views held about them, if not entirely false, are almost totally so. The text is intelligible, even if not completely so. There are places which are dense and opaque, but there also are others which are not so. But what comes out and strikes one as even stranger, is the intensely polemical character of the text which, yet, is full of an awareness that is amazingly self-critical of its own formulations and positions. And, even when it opts for a position, many a time it seems to be still in two minds and, at others, gives an impression of doing so only for pragmatic or cultural reasons. As the text unfolds, the story and its context becomes more and more clear and the intellectual milieu within which it was composed takes shape before one's eyes. It slowly ceases to be a 'foundational' text and begins to be seen as mirroring the past and reflecting the times in which it was written. It contains in itself intellectual and philosophical 'history' in a way that has not yet been seen even by those who have dealt with it generally for purposes of translating and making it available to the contemporary readers. This, as everyone knows, has been because those who have translated the text have invariably done so in the light of the commentaries written on it and, generally, with the accompanying translations of the commentaries which go with them also. The *sūtra-texts* have, therefore, never been seen in their own right and studied for what is contained in them. Nor has there been any attempt to articulate the issues and problems dealt with therein or the controversies it is engaged and involved in.

Yet, it is also a fact that these texts gave rise to works that are collectively known by the name of 'commentaries' in the English language, even though in Sanskrit they are known by different names and 'connote' different things. What is, however, most significant about these is that they occur in 'succession' and

show remarkable differences amongst them. The full corpus of these texts is so large and so varied that no one has yet come to terms with it, not even those who write with 'authority' on what they call 'Nyāya' or Vedānta' or 'Sāṃkhya' or anything else.

To make the 'understanding' of these so-called 'schools' of Indian philosophy even *more* difficult, there are what can only be called 'independent' texts in the tradition which, then, begin to have commentaries on them giving rise to varied and conflicting interpretations which can only be regarded as 'sub-schools' within the system. This is well known in respect of Gangeśa's work in Nyāya and, at a different level, in respect of Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya on the Brahma sūtras.

To compound the difficulties even further, there is the 'myth', invented by God knows whom, that nothing 'new' has been said in Indian philosophy in particular and Indian thought in general since the time of the Vedas or the Upaniṣads or the Mahāvira or the Buddha or those who are said to have written the 'founding texts' of the tradition. There are, of course, those who would like to draw the line somewhere else, but that the line has to be drawn 'somewhere' is accepted by everybody. In fact, the 'line' is not a function of empirical information but of an a priori belief in the trans-empirical authority of those who are supposed to have laid the foundation of, or initiated, the tradition. The true nature of the 'mythical' character of this myth, however, is captured not by those who write on these matters but by those who ascribe all 'beginnings', including the beginning of knowledge, to the creator of the world, that is, Brahmā.

But the myth, though hiding a profound insight, still remains a myth as is evidenced by the 'arbitrariness' of the line that is drawn by the person concerned and the 'shifting' character it has always displayed in the tradition.

The foundational texts are not all of a piece, nor are they concerned with an identical task and, for that matter, they even do not evince the same style. The Mīmāṃsā sūtra and the Brahma sūtra are concerned with the discrepant statements in a pre-

existent text whose authority they unquestioningly accept and which they attempt to present in a manner as if there were no discrepancies or contradictions within it. They both presuppose some sort of a desire to know or *jijñāsā* which is specifically restricted to *dharma* and Brahman respectively. The Nyāya sūtra does nothing of the sort. It merely recounts the topics it proposes to deal with and promises only that, if correctly understood and applied, it would lead to true knowledge of any subject whatsoever and the realisation of the purpose or value inherent in it. The Vaiśeṣika sūtras claim to be authoritative exposition of the way the world should be understood in terms of the relevant similarities and dissimilarities in the properties that objects display and suggests that if these are correctly known, they would lead to 'success' both in 'this-worldly' and 'other-worldly' enterprises of man. For some strange reason, the historians of Indian philosophy club it with the Nyāya tradition, but its 'no-nonsense', 'non-polemical' expository style is so different from that of the Nyāya sūtra that only those who are taken in by the later developments in Nyāya, forgetting its earlier history, would agree to this.

The retrospective superimposition of an spurious identity or similarity of interests which has been the fate of the presentation of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika thought in most texts on the subject, has also happened in the case of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, though perhaps for different reasons. The *Yoga-sūtra* is primarily a prescriptive text and proclaims this in the first sūtra itself, which is 'athayogānuśāsnam'. It is *not* a theoretical, discursive, argumentative, ratiocinative philosophical exercise. The Sāṃkhya Sūtra, though not a founding text of the system and supposed to be written much later, is nothing of the kind. Those who try to save the situation by suggesting that yoga is the 'applied' or the 'practical' supplement to what the Sāṃkhya theoretically propounds forget that the 'transcendental praxis' the *Yoga sūtra* delineates is practically accepted by everybody in the Indian tradition whether he theoretically believes in the 'truth' of Sāṃkhya or not.

The diversity of these 'founding' texts for the philosophical traditions of India and their being not so 'foundational' as has generally been supposed, dawned on me only gradually during the long, intensive, detailed interrogation and questioning of each sūtra of the Nyāya Sūtra in order to get into the spirit of the text and understand from within the philosophical endeavour which Gautama was engaged in. The present work documents this and suggests that the 'experiment' should be repeated with the other sūtra-texts so that a different picture of India's philosophical traditions may emerge which, hopefully, will be a little more in consonance with what actually happened and how it developed over time.

In fact, the idea was mooted and informally discussed, and even provisionally accepted at a meeting attended by Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Prof. K. Satcidananda Murty, Prof. R. Balsubramanyan and myself. But perhaps the idea was too premature and, in any case, no one seemed to know how to give shape to it. Another factor which intervened was the increasing realisation that these texts could not be understood in isolation, or even in the context of what preceded or succeeded them, but rather in the context of the issues and problems that were 'troubling' the philosophical minds in India those days. This realisation which cuts at the very roots of almost all writings on Indian philosophy till today found expression in the article "Towards a Field Theory of Indian philosophy"¹ where it was argued that instead of 'seeing' philosophical schools in India only in terms of their own history, they should be seen in an interactive, interdetermining relationship developing over time, each influencing and shaping the other and being influenced and shaped by them in its own turn.

This, however, remains still a dream and at least this work does not even attempt to do it as, perhaps, that type of work could only be undertaken *after* works of this nature have been done in respect of all the basic sūtra-texts of the Indian philosophical tradition. That might perhaps be one reason why D.N. Shastri's

path-breaking work *Critique of Indian Realism* could not be carried forward, as not only did he ignore the major players on the Indian philosophical scene and concentrated only on the interaction, and the gradual change introduced by this, in the positions of Nyāya and Buddhism in the long debate that occurred between them during the first millennium A.D. The exclusion of other 'schools', for example, resulted in the total absence and complete neglect of the debate over *śabda pramāṇa* which practically was non-existent for the Buddhist and played no role in his philosophical thought.

The only other person who has tried to see the philosophical 'schools' in some sort of an interrelationship is Karl Potter who in his *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* relates them to the goal they seek, that is, *moksa*, the differences between them arising because of the philosophical problems this goal gives rise to, and the different ways in which they were attempted to be solved. But the picture remains static, there is no interaction or 'influencing' as if all of them had sprung out of Brahmā's head. His later attempt to bring some movement into the picture by suggesting that there are five stages in the development of a school, paradigmatically illustrated in the advaitic tradition of Vedānta by the text called *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* which, according to him, represents the fifth and final stage of the evolution of Advaitic thought in the Indian tradition², is no better as it conveniently forgets the *history* of adyaitin's polemics *after* Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Advaita Siddhi* which itself was a reply to Vyāsātīrtha II's *Nyāyāmṛta*, the most well known attack on the Advaitic position from the Madhva side. Even in the twentieth century, the veteran Ananta Kṛṣṇa Śāstrī felt the need of replying to the famous Vedāntadeśika on the one hand and Jayatīrtha on the other. His *Śatabhūṣaṇī* is a reply to the *Śatadūṣaṇī* of the former and the *Advaita-tattva sudhā* to the *Nyāya Sudhā* of the latter. Vedānta Deśika's attack was, as is well known, from the Viśiṣṭādvaita side while that of Jayatīrtha was from the Madhva side.

The deliberate ignoring of this twentieth century discussion by Potter who, because of his long involvement and engagement with the Project on *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* may be presumed to have been aware of it, is only a symptom of that widespread attitude which does not want to see Indian philosophy as a ratiocinative enterprise seriously engaged in argument and counter-argument in its long history and developing because of this. This, and not mokṣa, is its life-breath as it is sustained and developed by it. Those, and this includes almost everybody, who think otherwise believe also that Indian philosophy stopped growing long ago, a claim refuted in detail and depth in *Developments in Indian Philosophy from eighteenth century onwards: Classical and Modern*³ where it has been shown that in almost every field of Indian thought innovative developments occurred during this period. And, if it *developed* till as late as the end of the twentieth century, why it should not have developed earlier? A closer look at the texts and the history of thought developing from and around them is, thus, a necessity without which we will continue to remain, as we have done up till now, in the realm of vague generalisations and stock descriptions which cannot stand the test when subjected to closer questioning and scrutiny.

This work is an attempt in this direction and continues what occurred, almost as an accident, a long time ago. *Three Myths about Indian philosophy* and *Three Conceptions of Indian Philosophy* were the first two papers that questioned the prevailing 'orthodoxy' at that time. Since then, the series of papers collected now and published under the title *Indian Philosophy—A Counter Perspective*⁴ and *New Perspectives in Indian Philosophy*⁵ have raised questions based on 'indisputable' facts regarding not only the widely accepted positions termed as *Mīmāṃsā*, *Vedānta*, *Śāṅkhya* or *Nyāya* but also that which is designated by the terms *Upaniṣads* and *Veda* in the tradition. The Jains have been asked 'How *anekantic* is *anekānta*?' and the Buddhists 'Does *Pratīyasamutpāda* say anything new?'

The questions raised have been attempted to be answered by scholars of eminence, starting from Karl H. Potter whose view of Indian philosophy propounded in his *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* was questioned in *Three Conceptions of Indian Philosophy*. Potter's was a serious attempt at meeting the objections and hence had to be taken 'seriously'. The reply is contained in the pivotal article entitled *Indian Philosophy and Mokṣa: Revisiting an old controversy* to which Potter replied by asking "Why cannot an Indian be Indian?"⁶ which, essentially, was a non-reply as he chose to opt out of the debate.

For some reason, this business of mokṣa and its relation to Indian philosophy seems to touch a raw nerve as five thinkers, including N.S. Dravid, J.N. Mohanty, Harsh Narain, K.J. Shah and Pratap Chandra disputed this directly or indirectly. The reply to each of these was given in the chapter entitled *Response to my Critics in The Philosophy of Daya Krishna*.⁷

This, of course, is the basic issue but 'orthodoxy' reigns in respect of almost every field of Indian philosophy. Even such a simple query as 'Nyāya-Realist or idealist?' offended the 'orthodox' to rush in and 'save' the citadel of Indian philosophy. Similarly, the question regarding the 'presence' of Vedānta in the first millennium A.D. was treated as if the holy waters of the Ganges were being polluted, or the 'unquestionable' questioned. The story of these may easily be found in the pages of the *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* where the discussion and debate regarding them, along with many others, is recorded.⁸ The whole material which includes detailed discussion on the contentions of such stalwarts as J.H. Staal and Karl H. Potter awaits publication by the Council in whose archives it has been lying for some time. It would be difficult for the 'orthodox' picture to remain unaffected once the concentrated and cumulative discussion on many of these issues are brought together and made available under one cover, instead of being scattered over issues and volumes which may not be all there even at one place in the libraries where journals are usually found.

10 ◆ The Nyāya Sūtras: A New Commentary ...

The methodology explored in this work has to be extended to other texts in the tradition. Some preliminary work has been done on the Vaiśeṣika sūtras which awaits completion. The first tentative 'discovery' through this work on the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra has been that the foundational texts of the two systems which are supposed to be so closely allied as to be regarded as almost one by every student of the subject just could not be true as the spirit, style and content of the two are so different that even the 'blindest eye' could not fail to feel it.

The story of the other sūtras could not be different, nor perhaps the relationship the explication and elaboration on the text, as the *Padārtha Dharma Saṁgraha* of Praśastapāda shows it. This, though related to the sūtra text, is so independent that it is literally unbelievable how the traditional orthodox view of the 'relationship' could be unquestioningly accepted.

The relation of the *Nyāya Sūtra* to the texts from Vātsyāyana to Udayana, including Jayanta and Bhāsarvajña, which has been explored in this work does not seem to be the same as the differences are subdued and not easily discernible at first sight. Yet, if this work had been undertaken *after* the work on the Vaiśeṣika sūtras we would have looked for what was so obviously there in the case of Praśastapāda's work on it. In fact, the work of Bhāsarvajña which was looked into almost at the end of the enterprise revealed a spirit similar to that of Praśastapāda. In any case, the relation of the foundational text to the commentaries and sub-commentaries on them was not, and never could be, the same as has been proclaimed by the orthodox pundits or the modern scholars who have built the picture of Indian philosophy up till now.

The generally accepted picture of Indian philosophy which is perpetrated through 'teaching' and thus passed on from generation to generation has to be replaced by an alternative picture that takes into account the facts and the arguments contained in the articles collected and published in the two volumes entitled *Indian Philosophy: A Counter-perspective and New Perspectives in*

Indian Philosophy, along with others not included in them. Such an alternative picture has been attempted in the author's two works; *Indian Philosophy: A New Approach*⁹ and *Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society and Polity*.¹⁰ The former attempts to tell the story of Indian philosophy as it has developed from the times of the Vedas upto the twentieth century, while the latter tries to articulate the intellectual problems that the Indian thinkers felt and faced, and the conceptual categories and structures in which they formulated them.

But the work on both of these, and even the work in Hindi (Bhartiya Darśana: Aika Nayī Dṛṣṭi)¹¹, revealed the need for detailed micro-studies and a relatively firmer grasp of the temporal placement and sequence of the texts in order that a more secure foundation be there for an 'objective' picture to emerge that is not just a 'subjective' superimposition of the thinker concerned. The present work thus arose out of the discovery that there were no such works even in the case of such a well known field of Indian philosophy as Nyāya, not to talk of the other so-called 'schools' of Indian philosophy.

But even this work is only a preliminary step as it not only leaves the story hanging mid-way, but does not do justice to the texts of the major thinkers considered in it. It is *sūtra*-centered, and remains focussed on it. The works of Vātsyāyana, Uddyotakara, Vācaspati Miśra I, Udayana, Jayanta and Bhāsarvajña are basically peripheral to it and hence treated in a manner that may appear perfunctory, but is not really so as it subserves a different purpose. Yet, each of these works deserves to be studied independently in its own right even if it is seen, as it should be, in relation to its predecessors, successors and contemporaries. This, however, is left for others who, hopefully, will contribute in their own way to the building of a new picture of Indian philosophy. The present work, it is hoped, will provide some impetus and impulse in this direction.

The work, I may add, was conceived a long time ago and

bears the mark of that chequered history. So many people have helped in the way it has come into being, but two names stand out, Rashmi and Rachna. The former was involved with almost everything that I wrote during that long period when not only the Project Volume on *Developments in Indian Philosophy from Eighteenth Century Onwards* but *Prolegomena to any future historiography of Cultures and Civilizations*,¹² *Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society and Polity* and *Indian Philosophy: A New Approach* were written. As for the latter, she helped not only on the Project Volume in the later stages of work on it, but also worked more collaboratively on this text on the *Nyāya Sūtras* particularly the portion relating to the discussion on the texts of Vātsyāyana, Uddyotakara Vācaspati Mīśra, Udayana, Jayanta and Bhāsarvajña which would have been scarcely possible without her active involvement in thinking about them. The memory of these two is deeply entwined with the works they have been associated with, and it is a pleasure to remember and record it here.

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