

Prelims Master Program (2023-24) – Ancient, Medieval, Art and Culture
Handout 26: Shad Darshans

Indian Philosophical Systems

*I do not think that I know it well. Nor do I know that I do not know it.
Among us those who know, know it; even they do not know that they do not know.*
— Kena Upanishad

Indian philosophy has a longer history of continuous development than any other philosophical tradition, and philosophy encompasses a wide variety of schools and systems.

Indian philosophical thought **originates from the Vedic hymns**, offering insights into how the mind shapes gods and cosmological ideas. The **Upanishads** further this with notions of a universal spiritual reality, blending matter and spirit. Despite their complexity, they cover diverse topics like nature, ethics, and social philosophy. Later, six schools of thought, known as **Shad Darshan**, emerged to explore fundamental questions. These schools engage in debates on reality, knowledge, and liberation. Dating back to around 800 BCE to 200 CE, these systems competed and integrated, reflecting a rich history of philosophical discourse among intellectuals.

The core themes of the philosophy are:

- **Cosmology:** Understanding the origin and structure of universe.
- **Metaphysics:** Exploring the fundamental nature of existence and reality.
- **Epistemology:** Investigating the nature of scope of knowledge.
- **Ethics:** Examining moral principles and values.
- **Logic:** Unraveling the principles of valid reasoning and argument.
- **Philosophy of Religion**

General characteristics of Indian philosophy

Indian philosophical darshans display a wide range of views and systems, making it hard to find commonalities. Even within Vedanta, philosophers had freedom to explore diverse ideas, using Vedic texts to support their views.

Still, certain commonalities emerge:

(a) Astika vs Nastika:

The ancient Indian tradition classified the various darshanas into astika and nastika. The various definitions for *Astika* and *Nastika* philosophies has been disputed since ancient times, and there is no consensus.

	Literally	Western	Theism	Panini	
Astika	There exists	Orthodox Schools	Accepts Ishvara (theist)	Asti Paralokah	Accepts the authority of the Vedas
Nastika	Doesn't exist	Heterodox Schools	Doesn't accept Ishvara (atheist)	Nasti Paralokah	Does not accept that authority.

Astika Darshan	Nastika Darshan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purva Mimansa: Jaimini • Uttar Mimansa (Vedanta): Badarayana <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Shankar, Ramanuj, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha • Nyaya: Gautam • Vaisheshika: Kanada • Samkhya: Kapila • Yoga: Patanjali 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhism • Jainism • Lokayata/Charvaka • Ajivika • Many others

Varying concepts of God:

Not all among the astika philosophers were theists, and, even if they were, **they did not all accord the same importance to the concept of God** in their systems.

- **Samkhya**: did not involve belief in the existence of God, without ceasing to be astika.
- **Yoga** made room for God not on theoretical grounds but only on practical considerations.
- **Nyaya** and **Visheshika** both believe in God and also makes God inevitable for soul to attain liberation. However, their god is not the creator god.
- **The Mimamsa** is a ritualist school when it comes to liberation, hence requires the existence of God to be entity of worship/for rituals, but it ignores, without denying, the question of the existence of God.
- **Vedanta** has many variations.
 - **Advaita Vedanta** of Shankara regards the concept of Ishvara as a concept of lower order than the knowledge of brahman. For Shankara brahman is everything.
 - **Ramanuja** and **Madhva** bring back the concept of Ishvara, which can said to have held similar characteristic as God.

Varying role of Vedas/Sacred Texts:

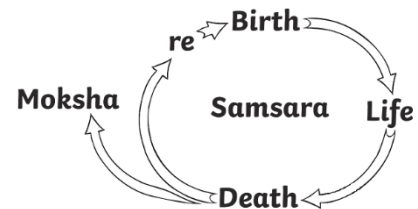
The role of the sacred texts in the growth of Indian philosophy is different in each of the different systems.

- Acceptance of the authority of the Vedas characterizes all the orthodox (astika) systems—but not the unorthodox (nastika) systems, such as Charvaka, Buddhism, and Jainism.
- Even when philosophers professed allegiance to the Vedas, it didn't stop their creativity. On the contrary, the acceptance of the authority of the Vedas was a convenient way for a philosopher's views to become acceptable to the orthodox, even if a thinker introduced a wholly new idea. Thus, the Vedas could be cited to corroborate a wide diversity of views.

(b) Three foundational concepts, Atman, Karma, Moksha

These concepts constitute the bedrock of Indian philosophical thought. With the exception of materialist Charvaks, all philosophical traditions grapple with these concepts and their interrelations.

- **Karma:** Denotes the moral efficacy of human actions. It is quintessentially Indian concept.
- **Atman:**
 - All six astika schools advocates the classical position of existence of bonded soul needed to be liberated. Although they differ in their detailing of their conception of the same.
 - Nastika schools
 - Jaina holds the same classical Indian concept of existence of soul-in-bondage which requires to be liberated.
 - Charvaka denies existence of entity called Soul, making it bondage and liberation irrelevant.
 - Buddha does not believe in any eternal and essential entity called soul but advocated liberation in the form of Nirvana.
- **Moksha:** It represents the highest ideal.
 - Indian philosophy advocates for four ultimate objectives of human life called पुरुषार्थः (*Purushartha*), which are- धर्मः (*Dharma* = virtue), अर्थः (*Artha* = wealth), कामः (*Kama* = enjoyment), मोक्षः (*Moksha* = liberation). Out of the four *Purusharthas*, Liberation is regarded as the highest and ultimate goal of man's life.
 - **Liberation (Moksha/Kaivalya/Nirvana)** means complete cessation of suffering. Different systems of Indian philosophy have given different views about the nature of liberation, but all agrees that liberation signifies an end to miseries in life.
 - **Pursuit of Liberation:** In many Indian philosophical systems, the pursuit of moksha wasn't closely linked with the systematic doctrines being discussed. Various debates on epistemology, logic, and metaphysics were conducted purely on rational grounds, without directly addressing the goal of moksha. Only Vedanta and Samkhya philosophy establish a closer relationship with the ideal of moksha, whereas the logical systems such as Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Purva-Mimamsa maintain only remote connections.



(c) Indian Epistemology

- In all the systems of Indian philosophy, there is a clear-cut distinction between 'valid' and 'invalid' knowledge. Mainstream classical Indian epistemology is dominated by theories

about knowledge-generating processes. The sources or methodology of valid knowledge has been called **pramana**.

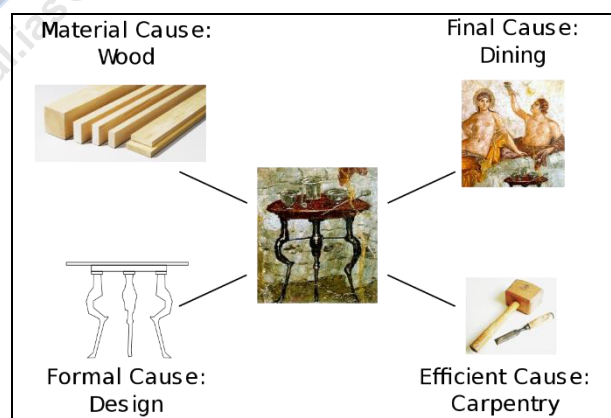
- The principal candidates are:
 - **Pratyaksha Praman** (sensory experience) is considered least controversial.
 - **Anumana** (inferential reasoning)
 - **Shabda** (word of an authoritative person)
 - **Anubhava** (direct experience)
- Other processes seem not truth-conducive or reducible to one or more of the widely accepted sources such as perception and inference.

(d) Indian Metaphysics

- Metaphysics means study of reality and existence. Metaphysical debates concern the status of certain concepts as the soul, God, substances, universals, time, change, permanence/impermanence, one and many, etc.
- Indian philosophy conceives of man as spiritual in nature and relates him to a spiritual or metaphysical concept of the universe. There is no single Indian metaphysics, but rather a plurality of ways of understanding and relating to Being. The Indian metaphysics is expressed through a rich variety of thoughts and practices that have developed over more than three thousand years.

Theory of Causation Causation was acknowledged as one of the central problems in Indian philosophy. Every school of Indian Philosophical system are accepted different type of causal relationship.

- They stressed the importance of the **material cause**, rather than (as is western philosophy) the efficient cause.
- The Indian theories of causation are traditionally classified by one question: **“Does the effect pre-exist in its material cause?”**



- **Svabhava-vada (Yadrichhavada):** Svabhava (nature) is the cause of the world. It says that the phenomenon of the world is produced spontaneously from the inherent nature of things. It is an old view, mentioned in Upanishads. It is also upheld by the **Charvaka** system.
- **Satkaryavada:** Here, the **effect already exists in the cause** in a potential condition. So, it is **not basically a new creation** and different from the material cause. But effect is only an explicit manifestation of that which is contained in its material cause. It is upheld by the Samkhya-Yoga and Advaita Vedanta philosophers.
- **Asatkaryavada:** The effect is not a transformation of the cause but a **new beginning (arambha), a new creation**; it is different from its cause, and it can never be the same

with cause. The main point of this doctrine is that the effect is not existent in its material cause before its production. Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Buddhists, Materialists and some followers of Mimamsa are asatkaryavadins.

(e) Other Important Features:

- In Indian philosophical discourse, the concept of **intuitive knowledge** holds significance.
 - Intuition = Looking into.
 - In Indian philosophy, truth is the knowledge of the self (atma jnana, or atma vidya). To attain it, intuition is often accepted as the only method.
- Indian philosophers differ from those in Western traditions by not seeking to justify religious faith. Instead, they **elevate philosophical wisdom to the level of religious truth**.
- Unlike the western thought, there is the absence of concerns related to **mathematics and history** in Indian thought.

(1) Purva Mimamsa

Mimamsa means **exegesis (explanation)**. This darshana was devoted to Vedic exegesis. It held the Vedas to be eternal and the authority on dharma. It aimed at explaining Vedic texts from the point of view of the nature and goals of sacrificial rituals.

Its earliest known important thinker was **Jaimini**, author of the **Mimamsa Sutra**, who lived in the 4th to 2nd century BCE.

- Jaimini understood Vedic ritual texts as embodiments of dharma and sacrifice was its central feature. Since this darshana focusses on the karma of sacrifice, it is also known as **karma-mimamsa**.
- The core objective of this darshana is to understand the nature of Vedic injunctions regarding the sacrifices.
 - As per Mimamsa, only scriptural injunctions are considered authoritative, asserting that the scriptures being **apaurusheya** are the exclusive source of valid knowledge regarding dharma.
 - Jaimini used the rules of language/grammar to explain how statements in the Vedas were to be interpreted as injunctions related to sacrifice. Thus, it led to the development of principles in scriptural interpretations, hermeneutics, and theories of meaning.
 - Rejecting the notion that scriptures are divine utterances, Jaimini contends that the **authority lies in the words themselves**.
- In the earlier phase, the **gods** were considered irrelevant; it was the sacrifice that was central. Later Mimamsakas acknowledged the existence of a supreme god.

This school came to be known as **Purva Mimamsa** in order to distinguish it from Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta.

(2) Uttar Mimamsa or Vedanta

Vedanta literally means "end of the Vedas". It emerged from the **speculations and philosophies contained in the Upanishads**. It developed on the basis of a common textual connection called the **Prasthanatrayi** (Principal Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita)

Vedanta does not stand for one comprehensive or unifying doctrine. Rather, it is an umbrella term for many sub-traditions, **ranging from dvaita to a-dvaita**. All Vedanta schools, in their deliberations, concern themselves with the following three categories, but differ in their views regarding the concept and the relations between them:

- Brahman: the ultimate metaphysical reality

- Atman: the individual soul or self
- Prakriti: the empirical world, ever-changing physical universe, body and matter.

One of the early exponents of Vedanta is **Badarayana**, who composed **Brahma Sutra** (aka Vedanta Sutra), a foundational book for Vedantic thought.

Over time, it became the most prominent school of Hinduism. Many extant forms of Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism have been significantly shaped and influenced by the doctrines of different schools of Vedanta. The Vedanta school has had a historic and central influence on Hinduism.

Purva Mimamsa & Uttar Mimamsa (Vedanta)

	Purva Mimamsa	Uttar Mimamsa (Vedanta)
Source of Knowledge	Vedas as valid source of knowledge and unquestionable authority.	Vedas as valid source of knowledge and unquestionable authority.
Basic source	Interpretation of Vedic injunctions.	Interpretation of Upanishads
Priority	Focused on sacrificial acts (karma). It prioritizes the ritual aspect.	Focused on knowledge (jnana). It prioritizes philosophical aspect.
Sutra	Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutra	Badarayana's Brahma Sutra Gaudapada's Mandukya Karika
Main focus	Jaimini's primary focus is on dharma, delineating what ought to be done	Badarayana delves into the exploration of Brahman, the absolute reality.

(3) Vaisheshika

- The **Vaisheshika Sutra** of **Maharshi Kanada** was written sometime between the 2nd c BCE - 1st c CE.
- **Metaphysics**
 - The school earns its name from its acknowledgement of ultimate particularities that are **vishesh** (particular). It considers Vishesh to be the essence of things and believes that every object in the universe has its own existence.
 - Vaisheshika school exhibits strong **naturalistic orientation**.
 - Material universe is posited to emerge from the combination of **four types of atoms** – earth, water, fire, and air. Thus, it delineates **atomistic cosmology**. It postulated that all objects in the physical universe are reducible to paramanu (atoms).
 - In addition to these, there exist eternal substance such as **ether** and **time**.
 - Despite its strong naturalistic orientation, the Vaisheshika system introduced **Adrishta**, a super-sensible force to explain the phenomenon beyond the purview of recognized entities. This introduces an **element of supernaturalism** that co-exist with the system's naturalistic foundation.

- It results in a metaphysics marked by **pluralism**. It claims that variety, diversity, and plurality are the essence of reality. It also claims that **particulars exist** independently of our perceptions. Thus, the philosophy of the Vaisheshika Sutra can be described as **pluralistic realism**.
- **Epistemology for liberation**
 - Vaisheshika system asserts that **moksha** is attained through **knowledge**.
 - Knowledge is attributed to self. It is contingent upon the interaction between the self and the senses, as well as between the senses and respective objects. Errors in perception are attributed to defects in the senses.
 - Vaisheshika accepted only two reliable means to knowledge: **perception** and **inference**.
 - Vaisheshika considers **scriptures as indisputable and valid means to knowledge**. Thus, works performed in accordance with Vedic injunctions may attribute to the realization of this ultimate state of liberation.
- In its early stages, the Vaisheshika was an independent philosophy with its own metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, and soteriology. After a period of independence, the Vaisheshika school **fused entirely with the Nyaya** school, a process that was completed in the 11th century. Thereafter the combined school was referred to as **Nyaya-Vaisheshika**.

(4) Nyaya

Nyaya ascribes its own origins to a person named **Akshapada Gautama**, who is supposed to have lived in the 3rd c. BCE. However, the **Nyaya Sutra** ascribed to him does not seem to be older than the 1st c CE.

Nyaya took over many of the Vaisheshika ideas and added to them. It laid down a formal method of reasoning to establish the correctness of the Vaisheshika pluralistic explanation of reality.

Epistemology:

- It claimed that **true knowledge** gained through Vaisheshika could lead to **liberation**.
- **Four means of valid knowledge** are recognized as perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony.
- **Syllogism:** Gautama supports a **five membered syllogism**.
 - Example:
 - We can say that the hill is fiery. It is a **pratijna**, a statement that which is to be proved.
 - Then we state because it is a smoky, which is a **hetu**, ie statement of reason.
 - Then we add whatever is smoky is fiery as is a kitchen. This is an **udaharan**, a statement of a general rule supported by an example.

- Then we further add, so is this hill as well which is fiery. It is an **upanaya** ie application of the rule in this case.
- Finally, we say that therefore this hill is fiery, ie **nigamana**.
- Nyaya logician emphasizes the example suggesting the concern not only for formal validity but also for material truth.

Navya Nyaya (neo-logical)

- It was a new development of the classical Nyaya darshana. It was established by philosopher **Ganesh Upadhyaya** in **Mithila** in the 13th c and was later developed by **Raghunath Shiromani**.
- Ganesha wrote a book titled **Tatvachintamani** in response to another book written by Sriharsha to defend Advaita Vedanta which had offered a set of thorough criticisms of Nyaya theories of thought and language.

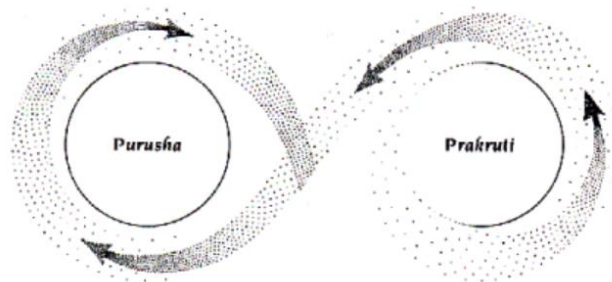
(5) Samkhya (Enumeration)

The word Samkhya is based upon the Sanskrit word samkhya which means 'number'. The school specifies the number and nature of the ultimate constituents of the universe and thereby imparts knowledge of reality. In fact, the term Samkhya also means perfect knowledge. Hence it is a system of perfect knowledge.

Ishvarkrishna's Samkhya-karika is a pivotal Samkhya text dating back to the 200 BCE. It stands as the earliest available work in the Samkhya tradition.

It holds that the world we see around us really exists. Two fundamental categories in Samkhya thought are **purusha** (the spiritual principle) and **prakriti** (matter/nature/primal substance).

- In the samkhya philosophy, the phenomenal nature evolves from the prime state of matter. This perspective is grounded in the theory of causality, known as **satkarya-vad**. It posits that an **effect is implicitly pre-existent in its cause** before its actual production.
- **Purushas** (spirit or conscious energy) is absolute, independent, free, eternal, unchanging, passive, above perception, and conscious witnesses.
- **Prakriti** (primal substance, cosmic material) is eternal and unchanging, but also active and unconscious.
 - It is an original material which is uncaused, eternal, all-pervading, singular, independent, self-complete and lacking distinguishable parts. From it, all the differentiation arises. In contrast, the entities emerging from this primitive metric are seen as caused, non-eternal, limited, numerous, dependent, wholes of composed parts and manifested.
 - Samkhya is known for its **theory of gunas**. According to Samkhya, the **prakriti has three gunas or qualities—sattva** (goodness), **rajas** (energy or passion), and **tamas** (darkness or inertia).



- The **relationship between purusha and prakriti** is described as similar to a passive observer watching a dancer. Thus, Samkhya adopts a consistent dualism of prakriti and purusha.
 - The two are **originally separate**.
 - **Theory of Evolution (Vikasavad)**: In the course of evolution, purusha mistakenly identifies itself with aspects of prakriti. **Jiva** (a living being) is that state in which purusha is bonded to prakriti in some form. This **fusion**, state the Samkhya scholars, led to the following **evolution/emanation**:
 - Prakriti → Mahat/Buddhi (intelligence) → Ahamkara (ego sense) → Manas (mind) → Five tanmatras (sense data) → Five sense organs → Five organs of action (tongue, hands, feet, evacuation, reproduction) → Five gross elements (ether, air, light, water and earth)
 - The source of suffering is ignorance regarding the true essence of the self. Attaining the freedom is contingent upon acquiring knowledge that distinguishes self from nature. Thus, **Liberation** consists of the purusha realizing its distinction from prakriti.
 - After liberation there is no essential distinction of individual and universal purusha. In a liberated state, self transcends attachment to nature, relinquishing roles as both an agent and an enjoyer. Instead, it assumes the true nature of a dispassionate witness consciousness ie **sakshibhav**.
- **Idea of God**
 - Despite not believing in God, the Samkhya school believed in Doctrine of Karma and transmigration of souls.

(6) Yoga

Yoga was another ancient system of thought and practice. The **Yogasutras** of **Patanjali** believed to have been composed around 200 BCE represent the earliest surviving manual on Yoga.

Yoga-sutras share a **close association with Samkhya** system, to the extent that they are often considered two facets of a unified tradition.

- The **practical aspects** of Yoga play a more important part than does its intellectual content, which is largely based on the philosophy of Samkhya. Thus, Samkhya represents the theory and Yoga represents the application or the practical aspects.
 - Both hold that moksha occurs when the spirit (purusha) is freed from the bondage of matter (prakriti). This bondage is resulted from ignorance and illusion.
 - The Samkhya view of the evolution of the world through identifiable stages leads Yoga to attempt to reverse this order.
- However, Yoga introduces the 26th principle to the Samkhya's list of 25, namely the supreme lord (Ishvara). Thus, Yoga assumes the existence of God and is therefore known as **sesvara-samkhya**.
 - **Concept of God in Yoga School**

- Yoga defines God a **special kind of Purusha** who is always free from pains, actions, impressions and effects. He is eternally free and was never bound. He is above the law of Karma. He is purest knowledge.
- But God of Yoga is not the creator, preserver or destroyer of this world. He is only special Purusha. He does not reward or punishes the soul.
- He cannot grant Liberation. Directly, he has nothing to do with the Bondage and Liberation of the Purushas. Ignorance binds and discrimination between Prakriti and Purusha liberates. The end of human life is not the union with God but only separation of Purusha from Prakriti.

Objective of Yoga:

- At the very outset, the Yoga Sutras state that its aim is cessation of the activities of the mind (**chitta-vritti-nirodha**). Yoga advocates control over the body, senses and the mind.
 - Similar to Samkhya, Yoga distinguishes Self from Mind (chitta). The objective of Yoga is to arrest mental modifications (chitta-vritti), thereby avoiding suffering.
 - An aspirant who has learned to control and suppress the activities of the mind and has succeeded in ending attachment to material objects will be able to **enter samadhi**.

Ashtangayoga:

- It describes the **eight stages of yoga** leading to the acquisition of siddhis (signs of success). It serves as a comprehensive guide for practicing yoga.
 - **Five stages** deal with training the **body** (external aids)
 - The initial two components form the ethical foundation of yoga.
 - Ahimsa is particularly emphasized as a part of an ethics of detachment.
 - **Three stages** deal the rest with perfecting the **self** (purely mental or internal aids)

Yama	Restraint	It includes the observance of 5 vows of Jainism - Panchamahavrat, which are - Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Aparigraha, Brahmacharya.
Niyam	Observances	It is self-culture and includes purification - external as well as internal, contentment, study and devotion to god.
Asana	Postures	It means study and comfortable posture helpful for meditation.
Pranayama	Regulation of breathing	It means control of breath and deals with regulation of inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath.
Pratyahara	Abstraction of senses	It is the control of senses and withdrawing the senses from their object.
Dharana	Concentration	It is the fixing of Mind on the object of meditation like tip of nose.
Dhyana	Meditation	It means meditation in the undisturbed flow of thought. It is contemplation without any break.
Samadhi	Complete trance	It is concentration and it is the final step in Yoga where mind is completely absorbed in the object of meditation. It is the highest means to realise the cessation of mental modification which is the end.

Additional: Linguistic philosophies

These are propounded by Bhartrihari and Mandan Mishra. The linguistic philosophers diverged significantly from the Mimamsa school. Challenging its realism, **Bhartihari's** chief work (**Vakpadiya**) and **Mandan Mishra's** works (Brahma Siddhi, Sphota Siddhi, Vidhi Viveka) delved into the intricate issues of language and meaning.

- **Bhartrihari:** Bhartrihari's metaphysical theory utilized the **concept of Sphota**, representing that from which the meanings burst forth. Sphota, in Bhartrihari's view, serve as the bearer of meaning. He distinguished between the word and sound, asserting that the word itself as sphota is the primary unit of meaning.
- **Mandan Mishra** was associated with Kumarila school.