CHAPTER VII

PRELIMINARY

Indian thought whose growth we have so far traced may be described as largely consisting of results. These results should of course have been arrived at by processes more or less definite; but we know very little about them now. The philosophy of the present period is different in this respect, and gives us not only conclusions but also the methods of reaching them. In fact, the several systems which develop now do not set about investigating their proper subject-matter until they have given us what may be described as a critique of knowledge and considered how we come by truth. In other words, Indian philosophy becomes self-conscious at this stage; and Logic emerges as an explicit branch of it. It is not easy to discover the exact causes of this change; but it is clear that the growth and consolidation of heterodox doctrines like those of Buddhism and Jainism must have contributed much towards it, especially as some of the latter claimed to base their conclusions exclusively on reason. The increasing opposition in thought forced each party in the controversy to entrench its position properly, and to the efforts put forth in that direction should be ascribed the generally critical character of Indian philosophy in the present period.

This change of standpoint accounts for the systematic attention that now comes to be paid by all the schools without exception to what are known as pramāṇas. The word pramāṇa signifies the essential means of arriving at valid knowledge or pramā. The object known is described as prameya; and the knower, pramātā. There is a great variety of views in regard to the nature and scope of pramāṇas; but it will do to refer now to only one or two general points about them. Broadly speaking, the pramāṇas are three—pratyakṣa or perception, anumāna or inference and sabda or verbal testimony. The value of the first two of these as pramāṇas is 1 Pramā-karaṇam pramāṇam.

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recognized by all; but the same cannot be said of the third. Its inclusion under pramāṇas along with perception and inference is indeed peculiar to the Indian view and requires a word of explanation. We should first distinguish here between two aspects of śabda. When we hear a sentence uttered, there is a certain impression produced on our mind through the auditory channel. That is perception and what we apprehend then are sounds occurring in a certain order. Śabda as a pramāṇa does not, of course, mean this, which is rather a prameya. There is another, the expressive or semantic aspect of it, and śabda as we are now thinking of it is of this latter kind. Its utility in life as a means of acquiring knowledge cannot be exaggerated. Of the numerous facts which a person knows, it is only a small portion that he has observed or deduced for himself. For the rest, he has to depend entirely upon the testimony of others which comes to him through spoken or written words. But it may be questioned whether so much is sufficient to constitute it into an independent pramāṇa; and we shall see as we proceed that some Indian thinkers denied to verbal testimony the logical status implied by classing it as a separate pramāṇa. That is, however, to understand śabda in a sense wider than the one which belonged to it at first. In the beginning it stood only for tradition¹ and its scope was extended in course of time so as to comprehend all verbal statements irrespective of their connection with ancient belief. We shall postpone the consideration of the pramāṇa in this extended sense to later chapters and shall confine our remarks now to it regarded as merely a vehicle of tradition.

The reason for including śabda in this sense under pramāṇas will become clear when we remember the vastness of the material of tradition that had accumulated by the time the pramāṇas came to be formally enunciated.² The

¹ In the Prābhākara school of Mīmāṁsā, śabda as a pramāṇa continues to this day to represent only the Veda.
² The words pramāṇa and prameya are found in the Maitrī Uṇp. (vi. 14); and prāmanika or ‘one who bases his conclusions on pramāṇas’ is used for ‘philosopher’ in the Greek accounts of ancient India (see Cambridge History of India, vol. i. p. 421).
main idea underlying the inclusion was that the contributions of history to philosophy should not be ignored. It also indicates the reverence with which the authority of tradition was regarded then (p. 91). But it would be wrong to conclude that the exponents of the systems surrendered their judgments by indiscriminately admitting as valid whatever belief had come down from the past, even though it were taught in the Veda. Such a course was indeed impossible as matters stood at the time. There was, on the one hand, the whole of the complex teaching of the Veda handed down from the past; and there was, on the other, a mass of heterodox thought which as the result of free-thinking in different circles exhibited a good deal of diversity. Philosophy as embodied in tradition was thus largely of a conflicting nature; and the need for testing the mutual compatibility of the elements constituting each creed was felt to be imperative. Both the orthodox and the heterodox accordingly set about examining their traditional beliefs, and tried to interpret them consistently. The interpretation involves a great deal of independent reasoning; and it is the result of this reasoned inquiry that we have to understand by śabda as originally conceived in Indian philosophy. The pramāṇa, therefore, signifies not tradition in general, but systematized tradition. It is such systematic interpretation of the teaching of the Veda that is, for example, the essential aim of the Mīmāśā system. Though both sets of thinkers admit tradition as a source of philosophic knowledge, there is an important difference between the ways in which it is conceived by them. For the heterodox, this tradition at no stage goes beyond human (pauruṣeya) experience, including in that expression what can be known not only through perception and reasoning but also through a higher faculty—no matter what name we give it, insight or intuition.¹ In this sense the value of tradition lies in its communicating to

¹ Not all the heterodox schools believe in such a higher faculty. So Indian schools may be classified under three heads: (i.) those that recognize only perception and inference, (ii.) those that recognize intuition in addition, and (iii.) those that substitute revelation for intuition.
us not what is humanly unascertainable, but only what is not knowable through mere reason and perception. In other words, tradition stands for truths that are beyond the reach of common men, but have been directly perceived by those that were possessed of spiritual vision. For the orthodox, on the other hand, it means revelation which, if not exactly divine or coming from God, is, as we shall see, supernatural (apauruṣeya) in some sense or other.  

The significance of the distinction is that while for the one school the realm of human experience understood in its widest sense exhausts Reality, for the other it does not. Human experience may be sufficient to understand nature; but nature, the latter contend, transcends itself and points to something beyond, and they postulate śruti or revelation as the sole means of acquiring what knowledge is possible of that transcendental sphere of being. According to the former, no such region at all exists; and to place anything beyond the reach of human powers is the same as denying reality to it. The question what śabda or tradition represents in the two schools thus resolves itself eventually into one of general philosophic outlook and connotes a fundamental difference between them in the conception of Reality.

The acceptance of śruti as an authority in this sense, it will be seen, has its danger; for it may lead to belief in anything under the plea that it has been revealed. The ancient Indian realized the danger and has hedged in his view of it by various conditions. They show what exactly revelation as conceived in orthodox circles is, and how it stands related to experience in general and to reason in particular: (i.) The first of these conditions is that the revealed truth should be new or extra-empirical (alaukika), i.e. otherwise unattained and unattainable.  

1 We might understand by tradition āgama in the one case and śruti or, as it is sometimes styled, nigama in the other case. This distinction in the use of the several terms is not, however, strictly followed.

2 Cf. the expression arthe anupalabdhe—'in respect of an object (otherwise) unknown'—used in Jaimini śūtra, I. i. 5.
of revelation for instance is not to be invoked to show that heat destroys cold, which is a matter of common experience.¹ Now it is clear that revelation should speak to us in terms of our experience, for otherwise it will be unintelligible and will therefore fail of its purpose.² Even the scripture cannot teach the unknown through the unknown, so that the theme of revelation cannot be wholly out of relation to human experience. When we take the condition of novelty along with this fact that the terms in which transcendental truth is communicated must necessarily be known to us, we see that what is revealed, so far at least as philosophic truth is concerned, cannot be altogether new, but can only be a new way of construing our experience. (ii.) The next condition is that what is revealed should not be contradicted (abādhita) by any of the other pramāṇas.³ Nor should one part of it be in conflict with another. This means that the content of revelation must be internally coherent and that, though it may be above reason, it cannot be against it. The very fact that conditions are laid down for determining the validity of revelation makes it evident that it cannot be opposed to reason. (iii.) It is not only thus negatively that revelation is related to reason. The relation is also positive in that we find a third condition laid down, viz. that reason should foreshadow what revelation teaches. That is, revealed truth must appear probable. If this condition again is not to clash with the first one of novelty, we must take it as meaning only a rough forecast of the truth under consideration by means of analogies drawn from the empirical sphere.⁴ They are not proofs of revealed truth; yet they are not useless, since they serve to remove any 'antecedent improbability' that may be felt to exist about the truth in

¹ The statement—agniḥ himasya bheṣajam—actually occurs in the Veda, but it is explained as an anuvāda or 'echoing' what is known already.
² See Śabara on Jaimini-sūtra, I. iii. 30.
³ Cf. the word avyatireka ('not negativ-ed') occurring in Jaimini-sūtra, I. i. 5.
⁴ Cf. Ānandaśīna's gloss on Śaṁkara's com. on Br. Up. p. 8; Saṁbhāvanā-mātreṇa liṅgopanyāsah. Na hi niścāyakatvena tadu-panyasyate.
The appeal to reason which we come across often in the śruti—particularly in the Upaniṣads—is explained by the orthodox as really of this kind. In their view, reason by itself is incapable of discerning such truths. At best, it may lead to two or more conclusions equally plausible; and, without the aid of revelation, it is impossible to avoid scepticism. The survival of the self after death is a good instance of a truth taught in the Veda which satisfies these conditions. It is not accessible to reason, but at the same time there is nothing in it to contradict reason. Despite these careful reservations, it should be admitted, śruti so defined remains an external authority; and that is the view taken of it in the orthodox schools.

The general name for the results arrived at by means of the several pramāṇas is darśana, which literally means 'sight,' and may be taken to indicate that what the Indians aspired after in philosophy was not a mediate knowledge of the ultimate truth but a direct vision of it. The word in that case would express what is a distinguishing feature of Indian philosophy in general—its insistence that one should not

1 In this sense they are known as yukti or anukūla-tarka, not anumāna or inference proper.
2 See VS. II. i. 11. As regards the claim of the rationalists that such truths can be reached through reason, it is pointed out that theirs is a case of reasoning when once the revealed truth is there. They do not know because they reason; rather they reason because they know. See Śaṅkara on VS. I. i. 2. and on Br. Up. p. 7.
3 Cf. Bahrtrhari: Vākya-padiya (i. 34).
4 It is obvious, however, that scriptural truth also should at first have been known by some human means—through direct intuition, if not reasoning. If the śruti also thus represents the intuitive experience of ancient sages and is pauruṣeya, it may seem hardly different from the heterodox āgama. But we may deduce a distinction between the two from a fourth condition sometimes laid down (cf. Kusumāṇjali, ii. 3 and SV. p. 90), that the revealed truth should have proved acceptable to the general mind of the community (mahājana-parigraha), or that it should be in harmony with what may be described as race-intuition. It is this sanction of the community in general that in the end seems to distinguish orthodox śruti from heterodox āgama.
rest content with a mere intellectual conviction but should aim at transforming such conviction into direct experience. It seems, however, more probable that darśana here, like its equivalent dṛṣṭi which is sometimes substituted\(^1\) for it, means ‘philosophic opinion’\(^2\) and signifies a specific school of thought as distinguished from others. There are many such schools of philosophic opinion. They are commonly reckoned as six, viz. the Nyāya of Gautama, the Vaiśeṣika of Kanāda, the Sāṅkhya of Kapila, the Yoga of Patañjali, the Pūrva-mīmāṁsā of Jaimini and the Uttara-mīmāṁsā or Vedānta of Bādarāyana. These six systems may be regarded as falling into three pairs—Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya-Yoga and the two Mīmāṁsās—as the members forming each pair agree either in their general metaphysical outlook or in their historical basis or in both. We shall deal here not only with these three groups but also with two more—Indian Materialism, and later Buddhism with its four-fold division of Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika. The latter, along with Jainism, are sometimes described as the six heterodox (nāstika) systems to contrast them with the same number of orthodox (āstika) ones just mentioned.\(^3\)

The germs of practically all of them are to be found in the literature of the previous periods, but their full development and systematization belong to the present one. The darśanas, when once systematized, determined the main channels in which philosophic thought ran for ever afterwards in India. Though ascribed to individual teachers, they in their present form are really the outcome of the thought of a long succession of thinkers, for the systems have grown with the growth of time. While we may know the names of some of the thinkers, we can hardly say what the nature of their contribution was and to what extent the original doctrine has been remodelled by each of them. For they always thought more of the system of which they were adherents than of claiming credit for their share in developing

\(^{1}\) Cf. NSB. IV. i. 14.

\(^{2}\) See BUV. p. 890. st. 22 (com.) and cf. SBE. vol. XXII. p. xlv.

\(^{3}\) Not all of these, as observed above (p. 107), are orthodox in the strict sense of the term.
it. The several systems are accordingly the result of what may be described as co-operative thinking; and the work of the individual is merged in that of the group. Even profound teachers like Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja were content to work for a system, sinking their individuality entirely, and have thus given proof of the complete disinterestedness with which they sought the truth. As more than one old writer has said, the pursuit of truth served as its own spur—neither glory, nor gain.\(^1\)

These darsanas are described as ‘systems’ because the thoughts in each are well co-ordinated and constitute a logical whole. They are systems also in another sense; for they are regarded as closed (siddhānta) in essentials, though not in matters of detail. Many of them are more than philosophy as we now understand the term, since they include on the one hand religion and, on the other, what would in these days be regarded as science. The value of the science contained in the systems cannot be great now when experimental methods of investigation have advanced so much; and we shall not, therefore, refer to it except when it has a clear philosophic bearing. The case of religion is, however, different; for in India, as already noticed, the line that separates it from philosophy is very faint. But we shall exclude from our purview the purely dogmatic side of the teaching. In particular, we shall leave out as far as possible those aspects which contain an eschatological reference, and shall estimate the value of a system not by the state of existence it promises to an enlightened person hereafter, but by the actual life which it expects him to lead after enlightenment and before physical death, i.e., in that condition which is described in some systems as jīvan-mukti or arhan-ship.

The primary sources of information in regard to the various systems are generally found in what are known as the Sūtras—a unique form of literature which was developed in India some centuries before the Christian era, when writing had not yet come to be used for literary purposes and the whole of the knowledge acquired had to be con-

\(^1\) Cf. NB. IV. ii. 51; Suresvara: Naiśkarmya-siddhi, i. 6.
served through mere memorizing. The sūtras or aphorisms of which they consist are extremely laconic in form, and are hardly intelligible without explanation. They were originally handed down by word of mouth from teacher to pupil together with their authoritative explanations and were reduced to writing much later. The explanations, which in the course of time had become more or less divergent, were also reduced to shape then and committed to writing under the name generally of bhāṣyās or commentaries written in the common or vernacular tongue (i.e. Sanskrit, not Vedic). This species of aphoristic literature continued to be produced long after the need for it had ceased; and some, if not all, of the philosophical Sūtras, as distinguished from the earlier ones like the Kalpa-sūtras (p. 88), are to be ascribed to this later stage. They are generally assigned to the period between 200 and 500 A.D. But it is essential to remember that it does not imply that the schools of thought, whose doctrines they expound, are themselves so late. They are undoubtedly considerably older and their high antiquity is indicated by the term ṛṣi or ‘ancient seer’ applied to their first exponents like Gautama and Kapila. The dates given above should, therefore, be taken as only indicating the period of their reduction to a definite form. Thus, though representing in one sense the starting-point of the darsānas, the Sūtras in reality presuppose a long course of development the details of which are lost to us, perhaps for ever. While they do not, therefore, correctly represent the real antiquity of the systems, they at the same time have received emendations at the hands of teachers and commentators since their first formulation. But there is no means now of determining exactly what parts are really original and what later modifications. The new is so inextricably blended with the old. The aim of the Sūtras may be described as two-fold—to establish the particular doctrine which they inculcate and to refute all others which are at variance with it. They are thus critical as well as constructive. The literature of a school consists, in addition to the Sūtra, of one or more commentaries upon it with works explaining 1 Dates of Philosophical Sūtras, by Prof. Jacobi.—JAOS. xxxi. (1911).
those commentaries themselves and treatises (prakaraṇa)—written in prose or verse or both—dealing with select phases of the doctrine. This literature in each case ranges over a very long period, beginning soon after the time to which the Sūtras are assigned and ending only a century or two ago.