



# Indian Philosophies, Ethics, and Pragmatism - Part 2

Nandan Kandanat\*

## Summary of Part 1

*The first part of this paper discussed the role of philosophy in human evolution, and the pivotal role ethics plays in Indian philosophies. The paper also discussed the common vedic origin of the six great Indian philosophies. Philosophy essentially being an exploration into the ultimate truth of life and existence, leads one to greater understanding of the fundamental nature of life. This understanding, in turn, gives one a certain purpose, intent and orientation on the evolutionary path and becomes a better version of oneself, in this life, here and now. A purposeful evolution-oriented life steadies and purifies one's mind and its activities. A self-disciplined, purposeful and conscious orientation in life gives rise to ethical behaviour towards everything external and internal to oneself.*

## Introduction

We have seen that the six Indian Philosophies share a common pedigree - the pristine and fertile grounds of *Vedas*. All of these six philosophies, for this reason, share certain common characteristics. A brief understanding on the common shared characteristics of these six philosophies together with a snapshot view of these six philosophies becomes inevitable to set the context for discussions on the ethical aspects contained in them. This general

understanding and context will help in the discussions on ethics and pragmatism in the next and final part of this paper.

Like *Vedas*, Indian Philosophies are also a record of the **direct experiences** of Truth, as directly 'perceived' by some of the highly evolved sages from the distant past. These sages were highly "conscious" humans, who intuitively knew the answers to the fundamental questions on ultimate Truths,

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\* Nandan Kandanat holds a BSc Degree and an MA Degree in Consciousness Studies (USA), along with a Post Graduate Diploma in Business and Industrial Management (India) and a Diploma in Marketing (UK). An ardent follower of Yogic Science from childhood, he is also an accredited Meditation Teacher. Retired in 2019 as the Managing Director of an Engineering company in Dubai, he now lives in Tripunithura, Kochi, India. [dhyanamarg@gmail.com](mailto:dhyanamarg@gmail.com) / <https://dhyanaavidya.in/>

thanks to the extraordinarily high intensity of their consciousness. When viewed together, all these six philosophies are indeed dealing with a single topic throughout, elimination of human suffering in life. This is achieved by becoming more and more aware of 'life' in its entirety and leading a life in sync with it. Liberation from suffering is possible only through developing the right knowledge about the 'sufferer'.

This is possible only by expanding the intensity of our individual consciousness. The *Advaita* philosophy proves that we are 'consciousness' and *not* this body or mind as we mistakenly believe now. The purpose of human life is to expand our consciousness. Consciousness can be defined as "aware of being aware". Our ability to know anything at all is directly proportional to the intensity of our consciousness. Consciousness is not a 'thing'. Consciousness is a quality. We are aware that we are alive. That awareness is thanks to our innate 'consciousness'. Consciousness is one's ability to become aware. On the contrary, "intelligence" is the ability to apply the knowledge that one happens to possess. These terms are inter-related but not the same. Instant knowing is due to the expanded state of that person's consciousness. All the six great Indian philosophies are in fact the teaching 'notes' prepared by highly conscious teachers. It is the result of the intuitive knowledge and direct experience of several highly evolved and conscious humans over extended periods of time.

### Common Shared Characteristics

**Direct Experiences** referred earlier is one of the most important shared characteristics

present in all six Indian Philosophies alike. Each school of Indian Philosophy is spearheaded and developed by a particular *Rishi* who explained his intuitive knowledge, tested and confirmed with experiments and logically debated and established. Many others re-experimented and re-debated and got these postulations or *Sidhantas* re-established. They are not the products of mere armchair pipe dreams. They are real and directly re-experienceable statements of truth.

All Indian Philosophies are founded on the firm grounds of **logic and reason**. They are all scientifically debated, peer reviewed and established as well founded "*Siddhanta*" or systematically proven postulations. All these six philosophies are very **open-minded** and they respected the philosophical views of one another. They were willing to listen to the points of view of other philosophies and often engaged in rule-based critical debates with a view to improving upon the previous views. This open-mindedness takes Indian Philosophies to their natural **broadness and completeness**. They start from the simplest of human understanding and then gradually build upon it by adding and assimilating new understanding to reach the present level of greatness and vastness. In other words, all of these six Indian philosophies helped each other to build the final robust ocean of knowledge about life in its entirety. The principle of **Cause and Effect** is one of India's unique contributions to the world. This is popularly known as the "**Law of Karma**". All of the six Indian Philosophies acknowledge the existence and operations of the Law of *Karma*. For every action, there is a reaction. For every effect, there is a cause. The causes

that we do not know are called ‘fate’, ‘luck’ etcetera. According to this law, there are no accidents whatsoever. All Indian Philosophies are trying to free humans from suffering. All of them have acknowledged **human suffering** as a fact of life. We can observe that our life is full of contrasting experiences of duality - pain and pleasure, light and darkness, heat and cold, love and hate etcetera. These dualities come and go cyclically in our experiences, taking us through the rollercoaster emotional rides. As a consequence, we suffer. Indian philosophies offer solutions to free ourselves from suffering by asking us to develop the right knowledge about who we really are, what is the nature of this world, what is the purpose of life, and so on and so forth. They unequivocally state that human suffering is due to our failure to understand our own true nature and the nature of everything else around us and due to our failure to build the right relationship with everything else and our failure to conduct our life in an ethically and morally correct manner without falling into the *Karmic* cycles. All Indian philosophies declare alike that there is an **eternal center** for all humans, which often goes unrecognized by most humans in their routine run of life. This eternal center is called by different names in different schools of Indian Philosophies, such as ‘self’, ‘consciousness’, ‘Atman’, ‘Purusha’, ‘Vigyana’, ‘Soonya’ etcetera. All of the Indian Philosophies state alike that we are this eternal center in truth and our real nature is ever-existing, all-knowing, all-pervasive, eternal and ever blissful. However, we have forgotten or we do not realize this true nature of ours, due to our low intensity state of ‘consciousness’. All Indian philosophies are **holistic** in

nature; meaning, they are composed of many disciplines such as metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, sociology, psychology etcetera. They take into account all parts of human existence into their focus. They consider and integrate the body, mind, life energy, the self, and man’s relationship with the external world into the scope of their detailed studies.

### ***Shad Darshans* - One script for the Great Escape from Human Suffering**

The six great Indian philosophies are collectively called in *Sanskrit* as “*Shad Darshana*” . They are *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Samkhya*, *Mimamsa*, *Vedanta* and *Yoga*. Together, in their larger holistic perspective, *Shad Darshanas* give us a complete script for our liberation from bondage and suffering to freedom and joy. Putting it in simple terms, *Nyaya* and *Vaisesika* give us the necessary methodology and training to gain knowledge about our true nature of things in life. Right knowledge is a prerequisite for undertaking any right action, which alone will lead us to the right results. *Samkhya* Philosophy gives knowledge about our present state of affairs and where on our evolutionary journey we stand today. It explains how we reached our present pitiable state of bondage and suffering. *Vedanta* Philosophy gives us an overview of our destination - where we should reach from where we are today so that liberation from suffering is made possible. *Mimamasa* and *Yoga* give us the road map and training to undertake this very great escape and reach our ultimate destination. Each of these philosophies are voluminous topics. We will only have a brief snapshot view of each of them now, in order to provide a reasonable

context to discuss the role of Ethics in our great escape from suffering in the next part of this paper.

**Nyaya** Philosophy is about the correct methodology for finding Truth. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word “Nyaya” is ‘correct judgment’. In a general way, *Nyaya* means the conclusion reached by correct thinking, after correct perception from a correct source and correct debate with logical reasoning. Our five senses are for acquiring the knowledge of reality. We can also think about what we perceive in this world because we have a mind too. We develop correct knowledge about this world through correct perception and correct thinking. Incorrect perception and incorrect thinking will lead to incorrect knowledge. Ethics is some of the guidelines for correct thinking. *Nyaya*, therefore, insists that the process of knowing should be based on correct thinking as described above. If our thinking about an object is correct, our knowledge and conclusion about the object will also be correct. If our thinking and the process of thinking is flawed, our knowledge will also be flawed. *Nyaya* states that anything that truly exists is definitely knowable to humans, at least in principle. They argue that correct knowledge and understanding is different from simple, reflexive automatic cognition; they insist that cross-examination and conscious cognition is required before admitting anything as true knowledge. *Nyaya Sutas*, believed to be written by *Aksapada Gautama*, (200 to 600 years before Christ and different from Prince *Gautama the Buddha*) is one of the important primary texts in *Nyaya* Philosophy.

**Vaisheshika** Philosophy is broadly similar to *Nyaya* Philosophy. They differ only in certain specific aspects on how differently both of them classify the valid source of true knowledge. *Vyseshika* states that knowledge is only of two types, namely Valid knowledge and Invalid knowledge. It gives a method based on logic and reason to decipher valid knowledge from invalid knowledge. *Vaisheshika* and *Nyaya* are often studied together. It is argued that *Nyaya* is an off-shoot of *Vaisheshika* philosophy and *Vaisheshika* is from a period far distant in antiquity than *Nyaya*. Sage *Kanaada* is believed to be the founder of the *Vaisheshika* school of philosophy. In the *Vaisheshika* system, the universe is formed by the aggregation of atoms. These atoms are innumerable and ever existing - it could neither be made nor could be destroyed ever. They are perpetually integrated, disintegrated, re-integrated and re-disintegrated by the power of *Adrishta*. Sage *Kanaada* did not use the word ‘God’. He merely referred to it as an invisible (*Adrishta*) force. He refers to it as the unseen force of *Karmas* or action-reaction consequences. He attributes the primordial activities of the atoms and souls to the principle of *Adrishta*. *Kanaada* defined an atom as ‘something truly existing, but having no cause, and is eternal’. It is less than the least perceptible by senses, totally invisible, indivisible, and intangible. Sage *Kanaada*’s atoms should not be mistaken for the atoms in the modern atomic theory. According to *Vaisheshika*, there are five atoms in eternal existence, which are earth, water, fire, air, and ether or space. Each atom has a *Visesha* or a uniquely distinct essence of its own. *Kanaada*’s belief was that the formation of the world was the result of *Adrishta*. Through the

study of *Nyaya* and *Vaisesika*, one can thus clearly see an epistemological unfolding of a self-aware universe from an atomistic force-field that is truly existing but imperceptible to sense based cognition. *Nyaya* and *Vaisesika* also give a research methodology based on logic and reason so that any knowledge can be debated and tested for its validity.

**Samkhya** Philosophy is attributed to Sage *Kapila*, who is believed to have lived in present day Gujarat some 600 years before Christ. Many other scholars give a much earlier period. *Samkhya* Philosophy is the edifice upon which *Yoga Shastra* and *Ayurveda Shastra* stand tall today. *Ayurveda Shastra* is designed to give relief from physical and mental suffering. *Yoga Shastra* is designed to give total freedom from suffering. This indicates the enormous relevance and significance that *Samkhya* philosophy exerts even today. *Samkhya* Philosophy literally means the “Theory of Numbers or Enumeration”. It encapsulates the subtle principle of energies that govern the universe, and all the living beings. Sage *Kapila* consolidated the theory of causation, the principle of *Prakriti* (unconscious principle in operation) and *Purusha* (conscious principle in operation), Evolution of the world, concept of liberation, and the theory of knowledge. The most significant amongst them are the theories of Causation and the theory of creation of the Universe involving *Prakriti* and *Purusha* principles (“*tattvas*”) and 23 other (total 25) principles. *Samkhya* posits that for every effect there is a cause and for every cause, there is an effect. In *Samkhya* philosophy creation begins with the concept of *Purusha* – which is the conscious directive principle; when the ‘will’ to create develops in *Purusha*, a part of itself is transformed into

the second concept of ‘*Prakriti*’ or Matter which is the unconscious creative principle. *Purusha* is the male principle and *Prakriti* is the female principle. In a living entity (called ‘*Jiva*’ in *Samkhya*), *Purusha* (Consciousness) is present in *Prakriti* (matter). In other words, a segment of the cause itself is transformed into effect. Consequently, the cause stands pervading the effect causing the formation of *Jiva*. When *Purusha* (Consciousness) withdraws from the *Jiva*’s *Prakriti* (matter), we call it ‘death’ and the matter disintegrates. In the process of creation, when *Purusha* is associated with *Prakriti*, *Purusha* develops three covers namely, Mind (*Manas*), Intellect (*Budhi*) and Ego (*Ahamkara*), which are again the *Tattva*-evolutes of *Prakriti*. This is then followed by the formation of further 20 *tattvas* (Five senses of cognition, Five Senses of Action, Five subtle Elements and Five gross Elements). An entity is a body-mind organism and is the combination of these 25 *Tattvas*, according to *Samkhya*. The perceiver, the perceived and the process of perceiving are all a conglomeration of these 25 elements or *Tattvas* in *Samkhya*. As a consequence of the formation of these 23 principles or *tattvas* around the *Purusha-Prakriti* entity (*Jiva*), *Jiva* assumes a separate egoic existence, and gets involved in the creation of similar downstream mini creations of its own egoic existence. **Suffering is the result of action-reaction-emotion cycles created by the interactions in this complex egoic existence.** Involution is the return journey to the non-dual *Purusha* state. *Samkhya* deals with Evolution, the journey to duality and *Vedanta* deals with involution - the return journey to non-duality. *Yoga* is the road map for this return journey.

**Yoga** Philosophy is a very popular word the world over today. But the *Yoga* version that is popular is limited to just one aspect of the eight aspects of the *Yoga* Philosophy - the *Asanas* or Physical Postures that are used mostly for physical wellbeing. In fact, *Yoga Shastra* is a total technology - an applied science - designed and perfected to liberate humans from all sufferings by pushing their existence from a lower unconscious level to a higher conscious level. *Yoga* Philosophy is built on the metaphysics revealed in *Samkhya*. *Smakhya* is the science and *Yoga Shastra* is the technology or the science applied in daily life. *Yoga Sutras* is the foundational text with 196 *sutras* composed by Sage *Patanjali*. The life period of Sage *Patanjali* is still being debated amongst the scholars and it could be anytime ranging from 500 BCE to 3rd century AD. Sage *Patanjali* organized *Yoga Shastra* into eight segments, called *Ashtanga Yoga*, where *Ashta* means the number eight. Strictly speaking, these eight-fold action plans are the practical and sequential steps one must take to achieve total liberation from bondage and suffering in human life.

These eight steps are *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Prathyahara*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, and *Samadhi*. *Yama* and *Niyama* are the codes of conduct or ethical aspects that humans need to strictly practice to release one from suffering. We will discuss this in detail in the next part of this article. We have seen in *Samkhya* Philosophy that the entire universe and all living beings are composed of and governed with the subtle principle of energies. These are conscious energies called "*Prana*". There are different types of *Pranas* functioning in our body. Health and wellbeing is possible only when these *Pranas*

are allowed to move unhindered in our body. It is, therefore, important to keep our physical body supple and flexible so that the *Pranic* movement is not cut off anywhere in the body. *Asanas* are practiced for this purpose of keeping the physical body flexible and agile. *Pranayama* is practiced to keep our mind sharp and attuned by manipulating the *pranic* moments in a way that will result in expansion of consciousness. *Prathyahara* is the practice of internalization of our focus and attention, since Energy flows where our attention goes. *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, and *Samadhi* are the next three states and we call it "meditation". In meditation, one remains internally focused and poignantly conscious with full internal awareness but devoid of thought streams stealing ones focus and attention. These are the eight practical steps we need to practice and become good at. Our interactions in life should be modified in line with the *Yama* and *Niyama* principles. *Yoga Shastra* promises that truthful practice of *Ashtanga Yoga* will liberate us from all suffering.

**Mimamsa** Philosophy - The literary meaning of the *Sanskrit* word "*Mimamsa*" is 'critical investigation'. The first organized work on *Mimamsa* Philosophy is "*Mimamsa Sutra*" of Sage *Jaimini*. The objective of *Mimamsa* Philosophy is to provide rules for the interpretation of the *Vedas*, and to give a philosophical justification for observing *Vedic* rituals. It is the forerunner to *Vedanta* philosophy. Fundamentally both *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta* are intellectual in nature. *Mimamsa* is the former part and *Vedanta* is the later part. *Mimamsa* deals with the former *Aranyaka* segment of *Vedas* while *Vedanta* deals with the later *Upanishadic* segment of

*Vedas*. For the sake of easier understanding we can say that both are intellectual studies of *Veda - Mimamsa* being the entry level studies and *Vedanta* being advanced level studies. It is sometimes accused that the *Mimamsa* philosophy is reinforcing the ritualistic habits in people. This is not true. These rituals include burning incense, offering flowers, sprinkling water, reciting mantras, performing certain gestures etcetera. These are intended to be external symbolic acts representing certain actual deeply meaningful actions. For example, certain swift gestures actually represent manipulation of pranic energy in a purposeful manner. Likewise, exact production of certain vibratory sound patterns are intended by mantras. There is a whole science of sound behind the pronunciations of *Mantras*. Vibrations produce effects in the energy patterns. When the underlying significance of these rituals are understood, rituals actually become enjoyable. Rituals are also intended to herald lifelong discipline which is essential to start with, since a much more demanding discipline and commitment is required in life as one graduates into *Vedanta*. Another significant aspect of *Mimamsa* Philosophy is its emphasis on *Dharma* and *Adharma* - virtue and non-virtue. The term *Dharma* also means duty, morality, righteousness and so on and so forth. These are the baby steps for establishing a life rooted in ethics, responsibility and commitment to all forms of life in and around oneself. According to *Mimamsa* Philosophy, activities that stymie the activities of others is *Adharma*. *Mimamsa* defines 'duty' as that which one is responsible for and that without which one cannot live a happy and peaceful life. One's duty unites one with others in the family, society, nation

and the universe. *Mimamsa* says the highest duty of one is to realize one's own inner Self in its purity while allowing others to do the same. All other duties are second to this preeminent duty. Other teachings given in *Mimamsa* philosophy are selfless action, non-attachment, self-discipline, daily activities for psychophysical wellbeing, social awareness, sense of equality, unity in diversity and so on and so forth. To sum it up, *Mimamsa* Philosophy is a huge treasure house of esoteric wisdom gift-wrapped in ritualistic clothe.

***Vedanta*** Philosophy - As we have seen, *Vedanta* and *Mimamsa* are closely associated. *Mimamsa* is the entry level of *Vedic* teaching while *Vedanta* is the advanced level teaching of the same. *Vedanta* Philosophy is the distilled form of all *Upanishadic teachings*, which is the grand finale of *Vedas*. In ancient India, the education of a child was never considered as complete, until he studies the *Upanishads* and experientially understands them. The literary meaning of the *Sanskrit* word *Vedanta* is 'end of *Veda*'. It was Sage *Vyasa* (also known as *Badarayana*) who first systematically arranged the *Upanishadic* teaching in an organized manner and ironed out all the seemingly conflicting concepts in them and wrote the preeminent '*Brahma Sutra*', which is one of the most acclaimed the principal texts on *Vedanta*. The life period of *Badarayana* is believed to be somewhere in between 200 to 500 years before Christ. Because the *Upanishadic* teachings are highly intellectual and *Upanishads* are written in terse, hard-to-understand verses, many teachers have interpreted it in many different ways. Therefore, many different *Vedanta* Schools have traditionally come into existence.

Most popular amongst them are the *Vedantic* interpretations of *Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava, Vallabha, and Nimbaraka*. However, the most outstanding interpretation on *Vedanta* is that of *Adi Shankara*. Much of the knowledge we have today on *Vedanta* is from the works of *Adi Shankara*. The *Vedanta* version popularized by *Adi Shankara* is called “*Advaita Vedanta*”.

*Advaita* literally means “absence of duality”. In common English language *Advaita* is referred to as ‘nondualism’ or monism. According to *Advaita*, everything is either *Brahman* or a projection of *Brahman*. In *Advaita Vedanta*, the manifested worlds and beings are mere projections, appearances, or illusions where only an illusion of transformation happens like in the magic show of a magician. The individual souls (*atman* in *Advaita* and *Jiva* in *Samkhya*) are also *Brahman* alone in *Advaita*. *Advaita* uses the analogy of forest and woods being the same. In their embodied state *atman* or soul is subject to delusion and ignorance; therefore, beings cannot perceive *Brahman* who is hidden in all; therefore, in the embodied state, the *atman* mistakenly accepts the world as true. *Advaita* uses the famous analogy of seeing a snake on a rope in darkness. When the light is brought, the snake disappears and the rope appears. Likewise, *Advaita*, argues that the world is unreal and *Brahman* alone is real. “*Brahma Satyam, Jagt Midhya*” is the maxim in *Advaita*, which means “*Brahman* is true, Universe is false”. *Advaita* holds the view that the illusion is due to ignorance and with knowledge the illusion will vanish, just as light vanishes the snake in the rope. *Advaita Vedanta* uses elaborate logic, numerous analogies, and intellectual debates

to drive the point home - “*Brahma Satyam, Jagt Midhya*” and in the end, *Adi Shankara* will convince you that “*Brahma Satyam, Jagt Midhya*” and “*Prjnanam Brahma*”, meaning, *Brahman* and Consciousness are one. In the ultimate understanding of *Advaita Vedanta*, the manifested universe is *Brahman*. It exists in *Brahman*. The knower of knowledge is *Brahman*. The known is *Brahman*. The process of knowing is *Brahman*. All understandings otherwise are mere ignorance, lack of right knowledge. One does not know this truth since in the embodied state the indwelling *Brahman* (read ‘consciousness’) is severely limited. The only intent and purpose in life, therefore, should be to expand the consciousness that one is and regain the full glory to the extent possible.

Understanding and appreciating *Advaita Vedanta* is an intellectual journey from duality to non-duality. It is a quantum leap from multiplicity and diversity to unity and harmony. *Advaita Vedanta* is considered as the ultimate human understanding of life and existence.

## Conclusions (Learning Outcome - Part 1 & 2)

*Vedas* are the records of fundamental life lessons on life and existence taught by highly evolved and supremely conscious humans who lived in distant antiquity. These teachers are called ‘Rishis’ or ‘sages’. These sages taught their life lessons verbally to those who are ready for such a teaching and learning process in a manner most suitable and appropriate for the grasping level of their students. They obtained these valuable knowledge after accessing their inner core of existence intuitively from within. The six great Indian Philosophies



(*Shad Darshanas*) are the well structured, well documented and logically articulated commentaries of the same teachings. They are offered in a specific format, after testing and trying the lessons by similarly evolved and conscious sages who lived in later centuries. All six *Darshanas* are narrations on a single theme, namely, ending human sufferings. These philosophies also gave necessary tools and training to prepare humans for ending their suffering. These philosophies are highly practical in nature. They give tools to expand our consciousness so that we can use it and expand our own awareness and knowledge to lead a correct life to get correct results which is to transcend our pain and suffering. It is in this context that Ethics is born. With this general background and context in view, let us now look at the role and significance of ethics in Indian Philosophies and the great pragmatism they hold.

[To be continued as Part 2 in Jan-Mar 2022 issue]

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(...to be concluded in the next part).



*“Yoga is India’s invaluable gift from our ancient vedic science and practice.”*

*“The rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind and the harmony of the soul create the symphony of life.”*

*“Yoga adds years to your life and life to your years.”*

*[Yoga Day is celebrated on June 21 every year]*