

I N T R O D U C T I O NHistorical Dimensions of Philosophical Thought

Human thought can be analysed and interpreted in terms of its origin, development and the impact it leaves on society. The origin of a thought presupposes an individual, as well as the circumstances under which the thought germinated. In certain cases the individual ingenuity seems to be the chief factor that gave rise to a thought while in other cases historical circumstances seem to figure more prominently. Whatever may be the relative importance of the individual and the circumstances in given cases, neither factor can be overlooked in analysing the background of a thought system. Among the circumstances the political, economic and social factors often seem to play a major role.

It is fairly impossible to identify all the external factors that contribute to the development of a specific trend of thought. What can be attempted is to indicate in a broad way, that certain aspects of a given society have either retarded or facilitated the growth of certain philosophical ideas. It is also possible to identify certain guiding forces that gave direction to a trend of thought. The helpful factors can, therefore, be categorised as growth-facilitating and direction-

pointing. It is somewhat perplexing to see that sometimes philosophical ideas germinate and flourish under stable conditions in society and other times under conditions of great instability. Therefore, there seems to be no general rule about the conditions of origin and growth of philosophical ideas. Every case has to be analysed in terms of specific period of time and locale.

Interconnections between Religion and Philosophy

In India as elsewhere, the beginnings of philosophical thought are to be found in the religious aspirations of man. The primitive man was filled with awe, adoration and supplication before the 'mystery' with which he was surrounded. These sentiments, together with a spirit of inquiry, gradually led him to speculate on the origin of the world, the destiny of man etc. In this process of growth, in the West, religion and philosophy followed distinct paths, though they influenced each other; they never merged. In India also there was a tendency for religion and philosophy to become distinct, but the link was progressively re-established. However, closeness with religion did not in any way minimise the strong intellectuality of the Indian mind. The intellectual impulse continued to thrive and as a result every system made persistent effort at systematic thinking. However,

the link has made philosophy intensely spiritual since each system incorporated in it strong theistic beliefs and well defined ethical codes.

The Social Dimensions of Religious Philosophies

The systems which arose as a result of the alliance between religion and philosophy had firm historical foundations since they were based on the authoritative texts of the land and on the experience of the saints and seers. At the same time, these religious philosophies were potentially relevant to the needs of the contemporary society because they were capable of accommodating the various segments of the society by retaining speculative thought on the one hand, and on the other presenting these thoughts in terms understandable to the common man. Though it is difficult to say to what extent the ācāryas of these systems intended them to be reform movements, yet looking back across the centuries, one sees that the circumstances leading to the formulation of these systems, especially of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śaiva-Siddhānta as well as their doctrinal contents depict the struggles, the hopes and the aspirations of the contemporary society.

The Scope of the Study

This study deals with the theistic systems of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śaiva-Siddhānta within the Cōḷa empire

from the tenth to the thirteenth century. It also deals with the historical circumstances which have either directly or indirectly contributed to the rise of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śaiva-Siddhānta.

The period from the tenth to the thirteenth century witnessed the heyday of the Cōḷa empire. This was also the time when a concerted effort was made to synthesise the devotional and speculative aspects of the Hindu thought. It was under these favourable circumstances that the theistic systems evolved. This period also represents a time when the North and the South happened to depict contrasting situations both politically and culturally. A consideration of this contrasting picture is important because it shows that the political situation in the North hindered the growth of religion and philosophy, while in the South, the sympathetic attitude of kings helped the growth of the same.

The Purpose of the Study

Though it is accepted on principle that philosophical systems do not arise in a social vacuum, the general belief is that Indian Philosophy is far removed from the day to day life of the society, to be affected by outside forces. The assumption here seems

to be that the philosophical systems arise through the efforts of certain philosophers, who are mostly engaged in speculations about the nature of Reality and pre-occupied with the liberation of souls from the shackles of samsāra. As such, the study of the various philosophical systems usually centres around an investigation of the way they reveal reality in its various aspects, for example, the relationship of Reality to the world and the individual souls, and the means of attaining final goal according to each system. This approach is, of course, valid. However, a study situating the various systems in their many-sided historical circumstances can make the knowledge about the systems much deeper. This is precisely the aim of this study.

In particular, an attempt is made to establish the link between the economic and social factors on the one hand, and the theistic systems on the other. In one or two instances the link is established through an interpretation of the medieval situation from a twentieth century standpoint. Thus, for example, the group oriented set-up in the economic situation is viewed as a limitation on the possibilities of free choice on the part of the individuals. Similarly, stratification of society into the elite and non-elite groups has been interpreted as an

antecedent for the alienation of masses. These interpretations have been employed since they provide a rationale for the alliance between speculative philosophy and popular devotions, seeking to unite the higher and the lower castes on the common forum of religious philosophies. At the same time, such interpretations relate to the pattern of thought development in the two systems : both recognised the individuality and permanency of the soul; both made philosophy intelligible to common man through their personalistic approach to Reality.

Sources

Inscriptions have been one of the most reliable, primary sources of this study, especially for the historical aspect. Though an abundance of information of all types is available from the inscriptions, considering the nature of the thesis, a judicious selection had to be made. Obviously, inscriptions pertaining to the religious activities, such as, endowments for religious studies and temple worship, were found valuable. From among the other categories, some of the inscriptions on the village set-up, trade, industry and social stratification, which either directly or indirectly, relate to the rise of religious philosophies, were also selected.

The author has tried to make a representative

selection of other types of sources as well. Of these latter, mention must be made of two contemporary writings of the period which have proved to be of immense help. The first among these is Periya Purānam of Śēkkiḷār written in the twelfth century A.D. The book is an account of the lives of the bhakti saints who lived in the Tamil country between the sixth and ninth centuries A.D., and, as such, it contains detailed descriptions of the social and religious conditions of the period. The work is also important because Śēkkiḷār, being the minister of the Cōḷa Kingdom, was in a position to obtain all possible first hand information. For example, he travelled widely visiting the places where the saints lived and observed the contemporary practices of veneration given to them. These practices have found their way into the book, thus giving us glimpses of contemporary society. The second contemporary writing, Kōyilolugu gives information on Rāmānuja's zeal in the cause of Vaiṣṇavism. It has some limitations as a historical chronicle, but the records contained in it are helpful particularly as primary sources for the happenings in one of the principal Vaiṣṇavite temples, i.e., the temple at Śrīraṅgam. Concerning the philosophy of the time, the study was mainly based on

Rāmānuja's Śrībhāṣya, Meykaṇḍadevar's Śivajñāna-bodham and Aruṇandi Śivācārya's Śivajñāna Siddiyār. The author has also consulted, as far as possible, other available sources about the topic, but particular attention has been paid to the works that are closely related.

Chapterisation

The theme of the thesis, the rise of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Śaiva-Siddhānta, has been developed in six chapters. Chapter I establishes that the rulers of the Cōla empire facilitated the growth of the two religious systems. Chapter II discusses some aspects of the economic and social conditions which in an indirect and remote manner contributed towards the direction taken by philosophy during the period, namely, the realistic, pluralistic, theistic turn. Chapter III shows that Rāmānuja combined the two already existing traditions, the Vedic and the Tamil devotional, in his personalistic approach to Reality as contrasted with the Advaita of Śaṅkara. Chapter IV discusses the practical discipline of Viśiṣṭādvaita, bringing out its openness to the masses, especially the lower sections of the society. Chapter V studies Śaiva-Siddhānta and shows that it adequately met the challenges from the siddhas and at the same time maintained the transcendental and immanent characteristics

of the system. Chapter VI discusses the Śaiva-Siddhānta ethics, highlighting its popular and positive aspects which made it meaningful to the common man. The last four chapters dealing with the doctrine of the two systems also pay equal attention to the historical circumstances which, either directly or indirectly, influenced the ācāryas in the formulation of the two systems.

.