

**CLASSICAL YOGA PHILOSOPHY  
AND THE LEGACY OF SĀṂKHYA**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	vi-xii
Acknowledgements	xiii-xiv
Abbreviations	xv
Introduction	1-35
<i>Yogasūtrapāṭha</i> ( <i>Sūtra-s</i> Alone)	36-68
Brief Outline of the Content of the <i>Yogasūtra-s</i>	69-75
<b><i>Pātañjala-Yogadarśanam: Yogasūtra-s (YS) with Bhāṣya (VB) and Tattvavaiśārādī (TV)</i></b>	<b>77</b>
A Brief Preliminary Note to the Reader	78-85
<i>Yogasūtra-s</i> (YS) with <i>Bhāṣya</i> (VB) and <i>Tattvavaiśārādī</i> (TV) (Page Index)	86-92
<b>THE TRANSLATION</b>	
Book One ( <i>SAMĀDHI PĀDA</i> )	93-344
Book Two ( <i>SĀDHANA PĀDA</i> )	345-600
Book Three ( <i>VIBHŪTI PĀDA</i> )	601-839
Book Four ( <i>KAIVALYA PĀDA</i> )	840-977
Select Bibliography	978-991
Glossary of Sāṃkhya and Yoga Terminology	992-1013
Index	1014-1023

## PREFACE

It was in the summer of 1964 when I had completed my first year in the doctoral program at Columbia University, New York City, the same year in which I had also completed my first full year of the study of classical Sanskrit, that an opportunity arose to do a summer reading course with a visiting professor of Sanskrit from India. He was only to be in the city for the summer, and a course in Sanskrit reading was hastily set up to accommodate his brief visit. One other doctoral student and I were available to take that brief reading course, and we decided to read a reasonably short Sanskrit text, namely, the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. It was a welcome change from the tedium of Lanman's *Sanskrit Reader* (*Nala*, *Hitopadeśa*, *Kathāsaritsāgara*, and so forth), an opportunity for the first time to read a philosophical text, the sort of reading that had persuaded me to undertake the study of classical Sanskrit in the first place.

I was enrolled in the joint Ph.D. program in the study of religion at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University, and my interests were primarily in philosophy of religion and the history of religions. I had studied Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (with John Macquarrie at Union Theological Seminary) and the general history of philosophy (with John Herman Randall at Columbia University). I had also begun serious reading in the intellectual history of India, including the principal Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the commentaries of the great Advaitin, Śāṅkara, Nyāya logic, early Buddhist philosophizing, the work of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu, and, of course, the various Vedāntas. I was also reading the standard secondary work commonly studied at that time, that is, the work of Paul Deussen, Erich Frauwallner, T. R. V. Murti, A. C. Mukerji, J. N. Mohanty, B. K. Matilal, *et al.*

As we read the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* that summer, I recall two vivid intellectual reactions. First, here was a philosophy of India dramatically different from the other traditions of Indian philosophy, an eccentric dualist ontology (not unlike the eccentric dualist ontology I had recently encountered in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre) that affirmed the productive reality of the natural, material world along with a notion of self (and/or consciousness) as a pluralistic presence that was the antithesis of any sort of cosmic absolute (whether as Brahman, Ātman, God, Emptiness,

or whatever). Second, here also was a philosophy that had stimulated considerable intellectual interest among scholars in the early modern historiography of the field of Indology (both Indian and European) (in the work, for example, of R. Garbe, H. Oldenberg, Th. Stcherbatsky, A. B. Keith, S. N. Dasgupta, *et al.*) but was for the most part dismissed as a serious intellectual position, largely, it seemed to me, because of the negative critique of the Sāṃkhya philosophy in Śaṅkara's famous *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, a critique that as far as I could tell, as a young scholar, had been uncritically cited by almost all interpreters but had never been properly critiqued itself. In other words, I had the sense that Śaṅkara's critique had come to be a standard "hit" piece vis-à-vis Sāṃkhya philosophy, not unlike what Hegel did in the nineteenth century to Indian philosophy in general. As Halbfass has commented regarding Hegel's influential critique of Indian philosophy:

. . . Hegel's negative statements on India and the Orient in general, and his pronouncement that "real philosophy" begins only in Greece, found wide acceptance, and they were taken as a justification to dismiss Indian thought entirely from the historiography of philosophy, or to relegate it to a preliminary stage.<sup>1</sup>

It appeared to me that both critiques, that of Śaṅkara and Hegel, *mutatis mutandis*, were motivated to a significant degree by a perceived need to come down hard on philosophical views that could possibly prove to be important rivals to their own positions. In the case of Hegel, Indian philosophy, according to Hegel, was insufficiently grounded in historical consciousness and thus hopelessly limited to vacuous abstractions in a "night in which. . . all cows are black."<sup>2</sup> In the case of Śaṅkara, the Sāṃkhya assertions of the reality of the natural, material world (*pradhāna*) and the pluralization of consciousness (*puruṣa-bahutva*) radically called into question the fundamental intuitions upon which the

1. Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 98.

2. See Hegel's comment in his famous Preface to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, well worth quoting again:

". . . yet in the Absolute, in the abstract identity  $A = A$ , there is no such thing at all, for everything is there all one. To pit this assertion, that "in the Absolute all is one", against the organized whole of determinate and complete knowledge, or of knowledge which at least aims at and demands complete development—to give out its Absolute as the night in which, as we say, all cows are black—that is the very *naïveté* of emptiness of knowledge." Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans., by J. B. Baillie, Second Edition (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1931), p. 79

Advaita position was dependent, according to the revelations as found in the *mahāvākyas* of *śruti*. More to the point, both critiques in their respective historical contexts were remarkably influential in undercutting much if not all of subsequent philosophical hermeneutical interest, not only of Sāṃkhya in the context of Indian thought, but of Indian philosophy generally in the context of modern western philosophy. It was perhaps a ripe time, in my view, to reconsider these older views in traditional Indian philosophy and in modern western thought, both historically and philosophically.

Willy-nilly, those two vivid reactions to my first reading of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* inclined me on a research trajectory, first, for my doctoral dissertation at Columbia in 1967; second, to the revision of that thesis into my first book, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning* in 1969 (and the second revised edition in 1979, reprinted most recently in 2014); third, to years of working together with a distinguished pandit in India, Dr. Ram Shankar Bhattcharya, co-editing with him, in 1987, *Sāṃkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, and eventually, in 2011, *Yoga: India's Philosophy of Meditation*, respectively volumes IV and XII of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, under the general editorship of Karl H. Potter. Apart from long introductory essays, the encyclopedia volumes include summaries of the contents of all Sanskrit published texts on Sāṃkhya and Yoga that we could find from ancient times to the twentieth century.

In the Epilogue to the first edition of my *Classical Sāṃkhya*, I attempted to compare and contrast the eccentric Sāṃkhya dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* with the equally eccentric but strikingly similar dualist ontology (the *pour-soi* and *en-soi*) of Jean-Paul Sartre in the hope of showing the salient difference of the Sāṃkhya dualism (as well as the Sartrian dualism) from the garden-variety Cartesian dualism of western thought as well as the standard dualistic versions of the Vedantic philosophies in India. In the Epilogue to the second edition of my *Classical Sāṃkhya* in 1979, I attempted to offer what I think is the first serious critique of Śaṅkara's critique of the Sāṃkhya philosophy, highlighting the manner in which Śaṅkara clearly misunderstood the nature of the Sāṃkhya dualism and thereby set in motion a misunderstanding of the Sāṃkhya philosophy, which continues even now in some contemporary accounts of Sāṃkhya. In the two introductory essays to the encyclopedia volumes mentioned above, I have tried to argue that classical Sāṃkhya philosophy is a creative and original tradition of philosophical reflection, and far from being a curious piece of cosmological speculation, is in many ways one of the

truly important intellectual achievements in India's intellectual history. In a similar manner I have tried to argue that the philosophy of Yoga (as a *samāna-tantra* "common tradition", or a "*sāṃkhya-pravacana*," that is, an "interpretation or explanation of Sāṃkhya") is unintelligible philosophically apart from the Sāṃkhya dualist ontology and its eccentric notion of the "pluralization" of consciousness (*puruṣa-bahutva*).<sup>3</sup>

I have come to appreciate more and more, in other words, what the great Gopinath Kaviraj said to me nearly half a century ago, when as a young postdoc at Banaras Hindu University I told him that I was studying one of the systems of Indian philosophy, namely, the Sāṃkhya. He waved his arm to interrupt what I was saying, and commented, "Sāṃkhya is not one of the systems of Indian philosophy; Sāṃkhya is the philosophy of India!" He had in mind, of course, the remarkable influence that the basic categories and notions of Sāṃkhya and/or Sāṃkhya-Yoga have had on almost all aspects of Indian culture and learning in philosophy, mythology, theology, law, medicine, the arts, aesthetics, and the various traditions of *tantra* in the classical period. The ubiquitous presence of the Sāṃkhya network of notions (especially *triṅgaṇa*, *satkāryavāda* and the absolute differentiation, *kaivalya*, between *puruṣa* and *citta-sattva*) has functioned as an essential cultural "code" (to use a semiotics idiom) to which intellectuals in every phase of cultural life in India have felt a need to respond, not always in agreement, to be sure, but as a starting-point for their own conceptual constructions.

### The Present Undertaking

These days I am retired from two professorships, first, in 1995, having become professor emeritus, religious studies, the University of California, Santa Barbara, and then second, in 2003, having become professor emeritus from the Rabindranath Tagore professorship of Indian Culture and Civilization and director of India Studies, at Indiana University, Bloomington. Because of the freedom for research that emeritus status provides from full-time teaching, I decided to take up a demanding task that I had set aside during my active years of teaching,

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3. Through the years, I have returned on several occasions to offer further treatments of the manner in which the eccentric dualism and the equally eccentric notion of the pluralization of consciousness (*puruṣa-bahutva*) are distinctive notions for properly grasping the purport of the classical philosophies of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, or perhaps better, classical Sāṃkhyayoga. Cf., for example, Gerald J. Larson, "An Eccentric Ghost in the Machine: Formal and Quantitative Aspects of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga Dualism," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 33, No. 3, July (1983): 219-233; "K. C. Bhattacharyya on the Plurality of Puruṣas (*puruṣa-bahutva*) in Sāṃkhya," *Journal of the Indian Council for Philosophical Research*, Vol. X, No. 1 (1992): 93-104; and "Materialism, Dualism and the Philosophy of Yoga," *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 17, 2 (2013) 183-221.

namely, the task of providing a new accessible English translation of Vācaspatimiśra's *Tattvavaiśārādī*, an important commentary (*Ṭīkā*) on the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali together with the brief commentary (*Bhāṣya*), attributed to a certain Vedavyāsa.

Vācaspatimiśra, an erudite scholar of Indian philosophy who lived in the middle of the tenth century (ca. 950 CE) in north India, although personally himself an intellectual adherent of the Advaita Vedānta of Śāṅkara, composed a number of detailed commentaries on many of the other systems of Indian philosophy, including Sāṃkhya and Yoga. He composed a relatively short and elementary commentary on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, entitled *Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī* ("Moonlight on the truth of Sāṃkhya"), followed thereafter by a major commentary (*Ṭīkā*) on the *Yogasūtra* and its *Bhāṣya*, attributed to the legendary Vedavyāsa, entitled *Tattvavaiśārādī* ("A Skilled Clarification of the Truth") (of Yoga). Vācaspatimiśra's *Tattvakaumudī* on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* is a rather elementary commentary, offering little more than basic (although certainly useful) explanations of the words of the various *kārikā*-s. The verses of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, however, are fairly straightforward and reasonably intelligible in and of themselves. More than that, the verses of the *Kārikā* are explicitly characterized as a summary of a system of thought, referred to as "the system of sixty" ("Ṣaṣṭitantra"), an older and detailed formulation of an ancient account of Sāṃkhya, which provides a sort of template for constructing an interpretation of classical Sāṃkhya.

The *Yogasūtra*-s, to the contrary, are little more than laconic utterances that are largely unintelligible taken solely by themselves, and throughout require a commentary for their interpretation. Furthermore, the commentary that accompanies the *Yogasūtra*-s, the so-called *Bhāṣya*, attributed (incorrectly according to most scholars) to the legendary Vedavyāsa, is hardly a model of clarity. The *Bhāṣya*, of course, provides much background information, but also often provides little more than passing notations that have led some interpreters to think that the *Bhāṣya* is what is known as a *svopajña* composition, a self-composed set of notations on the *Yogasūtra*-s. Vācaspatimiśra's *Tattvavaiśārādī*, therefore, on the *Yogasūtra* and the *Bhāṣya*, attributed to Vedavyāsa, is a much more ambitious undertaking than his work in the *Tattvakaumudī*, and it is essential reading for understanding the classical Yoga of Patañjali (as found in the *sūtra*-s and its *Bhāṣya*). It is a major and thorough discussion of the classical Yoga of Patañjali (and its Sāṃkhya philosophical environment) and has been profoundly influential in all subsequent commentaries on both Yoga and Sāṃkhya from the tenth century through the present day, including the discussions



of the *Yogasūtra-s* by Aniruddha, Vijñānabhikṣu, *et al.*, in the later centuries (the sixteenth century and beyond). In my view, it is essential to read the *Yogasūtra-s* and its *Bhāṣya* with the *Tattvavaiśāradī* (along with the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and its commentaries) as the core literature of classical Sāṃkhyayoga.

Vācaspatimiśra's massive comment was translated into English over a century ago, first, in a rather casual manner by Rāma Prasāda (in the Sacred Books of the Hindus series) in 1912 and then again in 1914, in a full scholarly treatment by James Haughton Woods entitled, *The Yoga System of Patañjali* (as volume XVII of the Harvard Oriental Series). As will be discussed in the Introduction, however, both translations (while, of course, useful) are now quite dated both in terms of English usage and in terms of characterizing Sanskrit technical notions in a systematic manner. At many points, both translations are nearly unintelligible when read with or without the Sanskrit. More than that, as will be discussed in the sequel, neither translation sufficiently addresses the classical Sāṃkhya philosophical framework with which these Yoga texts are intimately related.

The only other commentary that provides comparable information on classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga is the recently translated (indeed, twice-translated) text entitled, *Pātañjalahyogaśāstra-vivaraṇa*, attributed to the great Advaitin, Śaṅkara. I say "twice-translated", since there have been two complete translations which reach dramatically different conclusions about the *Vivaraṇa*. The first is that by Trevor Leggett entitled, *The Complete Commentary by Śaṅkara on the Yoga Sūtra-s* (published by Kegan Paul International, in 1990), arguing that the commentary is by the great Advaitin, Śaṅkara, deriving from the eighth century. The second is that of T. S. Rukmani, entitled, *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇa of Śaṅkara* (published by Munshiram Manoharlal, in 2001), arguing, to the contrary, that the text is a much later commentary by a different Śaṅkara than the great Advaitin, but possibly a follower of the great Advaitin, and having been composed somewhere between the tenth and fourteenth century. There has been considerable debate on both sides by competent scholars, and it must be concluded that at the present time, no consensus has been reached. My own view is that the *Vivaraṇa* is somewhat later than Vācaspatimiśra's *Tattvavaiśāradī* but that the authors and works of both were unknown to each other. Further research hopefully will clarify the relation between the two texts. I hope also that my new English translation of the *Tattvavaiśāradī* will be helpful in clarifying the significance of Vācaspatimiśra's own views as well as his own misunderstanding of some aspects of the *sūtra-s* and

the *Bhāṣya*, including his misunderstanding of the name of the author of the *Bhāṣya*, which, in my view, is not the legendary Vedavyāsa but more likely the Sāṃkhya reformer, Vindhyavāsin.

In any case, in 2003, I began a line by line daily reading of the *Pātañjala-yogasūtra*, its *Bhāṣya*, and Vācaspatimiśra's *Tattvavaiśārādī*, utilizing primarily the Sanskrit text as constituted by Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, which is based for the most part on what is usually considered the "vulgate" edition of K. S. Āgāṣe, *et al.*, from 1904. There are still many passages in the text that appear unclear to me, both in the Sanskrit and the various English translations, even after twelve years of ongoing work, and I invite other Sanskrit scholars to offer suggestions and/or corrections based on their own reading. Overall, however, I hope that the translation that I am offering is an improvement of our understanding of these texts at this time in the still unfolding history of the philosophy of Sāṃkhya and Yoga.

Let me offer two final prefatory remarks. The title of this book is *Classical Yoga Philosophy and the Legacy of Sāṃkhya*. By this title I wish to underscore that the philosophy of classical Yoga as set forth in the *Yogasūtra*, attributed to Patañjali, is, as the colophons to the manuscripts to its basic *Bhāṣya* attest, a "*sāṃkhya-pravcana*," that is to say, "an interpretation and/or explanation of the philosophy of Sāṃkhya." I also wish to underscore my view that the attribution of the compilation of the *sūtra*-s to the famous grammarian, Patañjali, author of the *Mahābhāṣya*, may well warrant revisiting, insofar as the *sūtra*-s in the famous *yogāṅga*-portion of the text (YS II.28 ff.) may well be traced to an earlier time, as J. W. Hauer suggested many years ago. It is certainly the case, as will be discussed in the Introduction, that the name of the famous grammarian was commonly associated with classical Yoga by about the time of Vācaspatimiśra and Bhoja, that is, the middle of the tenth century or the early eleventh century, and probably much earlier. Moreover, my view that the author of the *Bhāṣya* is the Sāṃkhya reformer, Vindhyavāsin, which follows earlier discussions by Ashok Aklujkar, *et al.*, and is supportive of the suggestion that there may possibly be a link (for example, *sphoṭa*-theory) between the philosophy of Yoga and the grammarian tradition in the intellectual history of India in these early centuries.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been assisted through the years by many colleagues in various fields in the preparation of this work, and I would like to take this occasion to mention the names of at least a few of the most important. First and foremost, I would mention Dr. Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, with whom I read the texts of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, beginning in my post-doc year (1968-69) at Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, India, and continuing many years thereafter from the late 1960s onwards to his untimely death in June of 1996. While critical methods of traditional pandits are often interestingly different from modern scholarly methods, there finally is no substitute for reading classical Sanskrit with a traditional pandit by way of gaining a fuller access to the nuances of Sanskrit interpretation that go beyond the scholastic rules for understanding the meaning of a Sanskrit text.

Second, I decided to provide a complete text of the Sanskrit of the texts included in this volume, namely, the *Yogasūtra*, its *Bhāṣya*, and an important *Ṭīkā* on the *Bhāṣya*, entitled *Tattvavaiśāradī*, by the famous tenth-century polymath scholar of Indian philosophy, Vācaspatimiśra, and to do so in the Devanāgarī script so that the text would be easily accessible to both English readers as well as students and scholars in India. I have used the original text that is commonly used in printed editions from the *Ānandāśramasaṃsktagranthāvali*, volume 47, as found in Ram Shankar Bhattacharya's edition of this old "vulgate" edition (and see Select Bibliography for details). The texts have been re-typed by a young Sanskrit scholar in Nepal, Prabhakar Wagle, in consultation with me and with Sthaneshwar Timalina, religious studies professor and Sanskritist, California State University, San Diego.

Third, I wish to acknowledge the technical computer assistance of James Aeby, software specialist, book designer and editorial consultant, of Iris Studio, Bakersfield, CA. Jim has worked tirelessly over many months in designing the format and presentation of the various components of this volume. Also, in regard to computer assistance, I would like to thank Dwayne Pack, director of computing of the School of Humanities of the University of California, Irvine. I have been in conversation with

Dwayne for several years in trying to work out possible online access for this volume and other publications of mine. Moreover, Dwayne has designed and maintains my website ([www.geraldjameslarson.com](http://www.geraldjameslarson.com)) for which I am continuously grateful.

Fourth, many of my former doctoral students, now professors at institutions around the world, have read portions of this volume in various stages of its preparation. Two in particular deserve special mention, Professor Knut A. Jacobsen, history of religions, University of Bergen, Norway, and Professor Wade Dazey, professor of religious studies, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater. In addition, I wish to thank Professor Jonathan Edelmann, University of Florida, Gainesville, who spent hours reading significant portions of this volume and kindly provided many pages of helpful corrections and suggestions. Needless to say, of course, I bear full responsibility for all of the content of this volume.

Finally, I would like to mention that fifty years ago (in the fall of the 1968-69 academic year when I was a postdoc at BHU) I met Mr. N. P. Jain of Motilal Banarsidass at a conference in Patna in the State of Bihar, India. He asked me if he could read my recently revised doctoral dissertation from Columbia University, New York City. He then, in turn, introduced me to Sundarlal Jain, proprietor of Motilal Banarsidass, who offered to publish the manuscript that same academic year. That manuscript became my first book, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning* (1969; second revised edition in 1979; and reprinted most recently in 2017). Through the years I have come to know N. P. Jain, J. P. Jain, R. P. Jain and most recently Rajeev Jain, and many of their associates at Motilal Banarsidass. The family will be amused when I say that they taught me that contrary to the old cliché, there is, indeed, such a thing as a free lunch! I have had many of them with the Jain family through these five decades of our association, and I am delighted that they will be publishing this final volume of mine in the 80<sup>th</sup> year of my current rebirth!

***'asato mā sad gamaya,  
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya,  
mṛtyor mā 'mṛtaṃ gamaya!'***  
(Bṛhad. Up. 1.3.28)

***Oṃ śantiḥ śāntḥ śāntiḥ!***