

*Asian Philosophical Traditions and Their Importance in Conceptualization of a  
Universal, Borderless Philosophy*

Narmada Poojari, University of Hyderabad, India

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**Abstract**

In recent times there has been an increased focus on non-Western philosophical traditions and their place in the world. This shift is a consequence of socio-political, and economic changes that the world has witnessed lately. Each successive historical phenomenon whether colonialism, post-colonialism, or globalization has led to the reconceptualization and transformation of philosophy as a discipline. Post colonization has shifted focus from the Eurocentric ‘Self’ to the indigenous ‘Other’. Indian Intellectual history also followed its own course reflecting the developments in the West. In this paper, I would like to draw attention to the non-Vedic, atheist traditions of Buddhism, its various sects and the materialistic schools of Carvāka/Lokāyata of the classical period in Indian philosophy. I would like to argue that these early atheistic, rational traditions apart from offering alternative methods of reasoning and thinking, embody modern democratic values of justice, equality and liberty. Indian atheistic (*Śramaṇa/nāstika*) traditions were borne out of skepticism against the established, ritualistic, caste based dominant oppressive systems of premodern India. These schools did not just address everyday existential problems of man but also suggested alternate egalitarian, socialist form of government as opposed to monarchy where each individual could truly develop to his or her own capabilities. Finally, in conclusion, I argue how the study of debates of premodern India within and across diverse, disparate traditions offers vital insights into current issues plaguing modern India such as identity politics, social and religious freedom, economic inequity, and suggest ways of bringing these divergent, opposing groups and viewpoints into dialogue and conversation.

Keywords: Carvāka, Lokāyata, Śramaṇa, nāstika, skepticism

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## I

### **Universal vs. Localized, culture specificity of Philosophy**

Typically, Philosophy is understood as dealing with problems which are universal by nature and perennial such as the nature of knowledge, mind, substance, time, causality, truth etc which are essentially acultural and ahistorical. But, the history of philosophy or intellectual history has shown how these problems which seem obvious to all of us are problems which have been shaped by particular events and theoretical developments over the course of time. Concepts develop within particular contexts, and in that sense they are historical products of their time (Tartaglia, 2014). Universalists claim that irrespective of its specific origins, philosophies subject matter, purpose, aspirations has always been universal. Historicist rejects the view that philosophy deals with “perennial, eternal problems – problems that arise as soon as one reflects” (Ibid., Rorty 1979, p.3) instead they propose the idea that philosophy is culture specific. An objective, unbiased look at non-Western intellect traditions shows how early thinkers within these traditions actually dealt with problems which are perennial, and eternal this can be seen through their contributions to fields such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine etc. The problem with universality or universal claims to truth is that its validity cannot be questioned. In the context of the binary between West and non-West, universalism would be nothing but Eurocentricism or cultural imperialism.

The idea of philosophy as a culture can be attributed to pragmatic thinkers like John Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Rorty who in their own ways were critical of Western philosophy. Dewey (1988) was critical of the way that Western philosophy draws distinction between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’, Wittgenstein (1953) in his *Investigations* was critical of the subject-object distinction that is central to Western philosophy, so also Rorty proposed philosophy as cultural politics, where he suggests Philosophers need to intervene in cultural politics, by drawing the ‘Other’ into the conversation by suggesting newer vocabulary and practices designed to make a pragmatic difference in the world. The foundation of culture or regional or race philosophy is based on the necessary relationship between culture and philosophy, because of which today we can speak of Asian philosophy, Indian Philosophy, African philosophy etc. Culture Philosophies or culture politics allows as Rorty argues to “expand the conversation of mankind” beyond the West to include the non-West, those that were previously excluded and marginalized. Another important critique of Western thought and their representation of the “Other” was given by Edward Said, who argued that one of the biggest problems of modernity was taking the “Other” seriously.

Underlying the tension between the Universalist and culture specific aspects of philosophy is the definition and conception of philosophy as a discipline. While it is not possible to let go of foundational universal concepts such as truth, justice, freedom etc, it is also important to recognize that truth and reality can be understood in multiple ways. The challenge is to find a balance between naïve universalism and resistant localism, the relationship between the one and the many, needs to be worked out. In this paper, I argue that while cross-cultural philosophy and comparative philosophy has broadened the scope of philosophy by taking the conversation beyond the West to include previously excluded, marginalized voices much needs to be done in terms of making non-western philosophies mainstream moving them from religious and theology departments across the world to philosophy departments. While in the

past for thousands of years Chinese, Indian, Japanese cultural and intellectual traditions etc have developed in relative isolation from the West in today's largely interconnected, interdependent, globalized world the voice of the 'Other/s' cannot be ignored, the artificial binaries and colonial asymmetries such as 'East'/ 'West', 'secular'/ 'religious' etc. do not hold anymore. Philosophy needs to have a vision for itself and for the world and in this context, I would like to extend the argument put forth by Jonardon Ganeri, Jay Garfield and others that on one hand, philosophy needs to go global and on the other that academic philosophy as taught in philosophy departments across the world needs to diversify. Also Indian philosophy as presented in Indian texts needs to diversify and move beyond the dominant Sanskrit traditions to include those philosophies which offer a counter perspective to Vedic or Brahminical philosophy, in this context, at the local level Indian philosophy needs to decolonize.

### **Postcolonialism, premodern thought and comparative philosophy:**

Asian Philosophical traditions whether Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism are not just philosophies they are also practicing religions whose sequence of intellectual history is very different both within the various regions of Asia, and also distinct from Western history. Modernity in Asia is associated with colonialism, when the West discovered the non-West and the Orientalists began translating indigenous texts into English for a largely Western audience. Modernity in India is still a project in progress conditioned by colonialism, so postmodernity in India is not a critique of modernity but colonialism and hence called postcolonialism. Postcolonialism in India is a problematizing of premodern themes because the traditional religious and philosophical discourses are still very much alive. Similarly, modernity in China is said to have begun after it was discovered by the West through its various voyages and explorations to southern and eastern Asia (Clarke, 1997, p.39). It is important to keep in mind that the idea of 'modernity' itself is a Western concept which does not mean that it cannot be applied to non-western traditions or that does not imply that all non-Western societies are premodern but that they had a notion of modernity which was different from the West. In this paper, I limit my discussion to the study of Classical Indian philosophy instead of larger category of Asian philosophical traditions because of the vastness of the topic which is beyond the scope of this paper.

The first phase of Indian intellectual history following colonialism is characterized by 1. The Orientalists and 2. The Nationalists both of whom in different ways were carrying out the colonial project. The rediscovery of India's past was their central purpose in order to forge a modern Hindu identity through the positing of Indian philosophy as a single, homogenous tradition. William Jones (1746-94), Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837), Max Mueller (1823-1900) were some of the most influential Orientalists who were singularly responsible for creation of a monolithic, singular tradition whose attributes were that Indian philosophy originated from the Vedas, Vedanta is the culmination of all philosophy, it is a world negating philosophy, it is a philosophy that centered round schools and that mokṣa or liberation was its final goal. All these characterizations made Indian philosophy essentially not philosophy but a "wisdom" tradition. The Nationalists like Radhakrishnan, Aurobindo and others continued with the colonial portrayal of Indian tradition a spiritual, ahistorical. They sought recognition for their indigenous ways of thinking from the colonial powers by showing that they too had philosophy which was comparable to the West. This was done through comparative philosophy which is not a distinct form of philosophical

method or a new philosophy insight but a heuristic tool introduced to bring together disparate philosophies. It is based on the assumption that different philosophies are complementary to each other and hence a synthesis is possible. Comparative philosophy was the first tool towards decolonization.

The second generation of Indian thinkers, sought greater integration and philosophical recognition from the Western academia. These thinkers were involved with the reinterpretation of traditional concepts using Western methods. These attempts did not produce anything new in terms of philosophical insight, nor were they critical of the colonial structures, they largely retained or worked within those structures and hence, Western philosophy remained the dominant paradigm around which Indian philosophy revolved. While comparative philosophy did introduce newer ways of thinking and indigenous forms of knowledge, it did nothing in terms of understanding the 'Others' or to critically engage with the non-West.

The third generation of thinkers were involved with critical evaluation of Indian philosophy. These included 1. Marxist interpretation of Indian philosophy (reading of Indian philosophy from a critical perspective) which included the writings of thinkers like Rahul Sankrityayan, K. Damodharan, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya 2. Periyar and Dravidian reading of Indian Philosophy 3. The Sikh readings of Indian Philosophy 4. The Islamic reading of Indian Philosophy and 5. Evaluating Indian Philosophy from Dalit Perspective – Mahatma Phule, Iyothee Das, and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. These trends represents postmodern thinking in Indian philosophy.

Each phase of Indian Intellectual history led to a reconceptualization of Indian philosophy, the first generation colonial thinkers postulated Indian philosophy as essentially being spiritual, the second generation thinkers critiqued this notion and argued that Indian philosophy is essentially about schools or *darśanas*, a third description is of Indian philosophy as logic or reason (*ānvikṣiki*) and finally Indian philosophy as a method of reasoned debate and deliberation. So, broadly re-appropriation and interpretation, reinterpretation and integration seem to be main trends of comparative philosophy in the Indian context. However, today to make Indian Philosophy locally and globally relevant one needs to move beyond just comparative philosophy to exploring different ways of doing Indian philosophy.

Having laid out the background, and the context of the paper, the next section draws attention to the non-Vedic (*Śramaṇa*), atheistic (*nāstika*) traditions of classical Indian thought the materialist (*Cārvāka/Lokāyata*) and the realist schools of Buddhism which have been largely ignored by both mainstream Indian and Western academia. A study of the history of these traditions offers a completely different perspective contrary to the way Indian philosophy is presented in standard texts on Indian philosophy. History of Indian thought, is written from the perspective of the orthodox or *āstika* traditions such a representation leads to the misrepresentation of the heterodox (*nāstika*) traditions as being marginal, insignificant and non-existent while the contrary is true.

## II

### **Atheism, and rational materialism in ancient Indian thought:**

The current depictions of Indian philosophy as spiritual, pessimistic, dogmatic, unprogressive has roots in colonialism. These simplified representations resulted in

the complete neglect of the atheistic, rational traditions of early India which arose in opposition to the dominant Vedic traditions or Brahminical orthodoxy<sup>1</sup> and provide a counter to the standardized depiction of history of Indian philosophy. These traditions represent dissent and protest in early Indian also called counter traditions (Thapar 1981). The atheist schools (*nāstikas*) of Indian thought such as Cārvāka, Sāṃkhya, Buddhism and Jainism have roots in early Indian asceticism and proto-materialist schools. These schools did not believe in the idea of a creator God, they rejected Vedic authority, the performance of rituals and Brahmanical practices, they questioned the social status and power of the Brahmins within the caste (*varṇa*) system. These heretical traditions represented a move away from ritualism and mysticism of early Vedism and Brahmanism toward logic, rationality and ethics and hence, are representative of change in Indian thought.

### **Cārvāka/ Lokāyata: The philosophy of the common man**

If there has been any one school of thought that has been criticized by every other school whether orthodox or unorthodox, realist or idealist across traditions it is the Cārvāka philosophy, also called the Lokāyata. This system of thought flourished in the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E and was influential until the 12<sup>th</sup> or the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The term Lokāyata can be broken down in to two terms “*Lokā*” meaning “world” and “*yata*” meaning “world-view” or “life-view” or “view prevalent among people” (Joshi, 1987). The term ‘Cārvāka’ is derived from the words ‘*Cāru*’ meaning ‘sweet’ and ‘*vāk*’ meaning ‘speech’ or ‘words’. The other terms used to refer to this philosophy is Lokāyata, Bārhaspatya, and *nāstika* (Hemachandra’s *Abhidhāna Cintāmaṇi*, 3.526-27). According to Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (1956), the Cārvāka philosophy developed among the slaves, the trader community and the lower classes, so its origins were not elite. Ramakrishna Bhattacharya (2011) argues that materialism in India did not start with Cārvāka/ Lokāyata but has a longer history in older works where thinkers at that time argued about the primacy of matter over consciousness, the pointlessness of performance of rituals and the offering of gifts (*dāna*) to brahmins. Since the original texts of this philosophy are lost, references to its central tenets are found in texts (*sūtras*) of other traditions such as the Jain and Buddhists texts and in political texts like *Arthaśāstra* mostly as the opponent’s viewpoint or *pūrvapakṣa*<sup>2</sup>. But many of these texts present a one-sided, homogenous, narrow view of this school, which in fact is as diverse as the Vedānta or the various schools of Buddhism. They were not just materialists, they were also realists and skeptics. They were materialists because they privileged matter over spirit and consciousness, they were realists because they believed in perception (*pratyakṣa*) and in some instances they also allowed for inferences (*anumāna*) as a valid source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*)

<sup>1</sup> S.Radhakrishnan describes Buddhism as an offshoot of Hinduism more specifically Brahmanism, and it is from this perspective that the history of Buddhism in India is constructed. This view was supported by Indologists like Jacobi (1884), Max Mueller (1879) and others who argue that the so-called heterodox traditions are but derivatives of Brahmanism. However, others such as T.W.Rhys Davis (1936), Paul Deussen and Richard Garbe (1903) have argued that the history of the atheistic or *Śramaṇa* traditions is not a continuation or development of the Vedic religion but a rather a reaction against it. The Kṣatriyas were the ones who reacted against the hegemony of the Brahmanical traditions and the originators of the counter traditions.

<sup>2</sup> The method of argumentation in the dominant Vedic tradition has the following structure *pūrvapakṣa* (prior view), *khaṇḍana* (refutation of the view) and *uttarapakṣa* or *siddhānta* (statement and proof of one’s own position or conclusion). All schools or *darśanas* emerged from this process, when particular *darśana* is enumerated all others are taken as the *pūrvapakṣa* which keeps the schools open and evolving in nature.

as long as it was obtained through the senses, they were agnostics (*ajñānavādin*) because they refuted and rejected rituals, obscure concepts like karma, rebirth, eternity of soul, the caste system, and they were also skeptics (*samśayavādin*) who doubted that any kind of knowledge is possible like in the case of Jayarāṣi Bhaṭṭa (770-830).

Here, we look at the ethics of the Cārvāka/ Lokāyata who are often criticized as lacking in morals and unethical because of their materialistic position. However, the Cārvākas did possess a moral perspective, they had a diversity of value perspective and believed in this worldly human goals (Gokhale 2015).

### **The ‘this-worldly’, commonsensical ethics of Cārvāka/Lokāyata:**

The *Sarvadarśanasāṅgraha* of Mādhava-Sayana, a 14<sup>th</sup> century Vedantin discusses the central tenets of the Cārvāka philosophy in the *Cārvākadarśanam*. The following passage from it speaks of the Cārvākas criticism of performance of elaborate, irrational rituals and using it as a means to earning livelihood was directed at the Brahmin priests. The Cārvākas declare,

The agnihotra practice, (recitation of) three Vedas, holding ascetic's three staves, smearing oneself with ashes, all these according to Bhartṛhari, the means of livelihood of those who lack intelligence and strength. That is they use such superstitious and deceptive means of livelihood because they lack enough power and intellect to use legitimate means.<sup>3</sup> (Trans. Cowell & Gough, 2007, 10)

They rejected the notion of an afterlife, and hence, they criticized the ceremonial rites performed for the dead by the Brahmins priests as just trickery by them and was nothing more than a means of earning for them. They say,

Moreover, all these ceremonies for the dead are the means to livelihood which the Brahmanas have created for themselves. There is no other (fruit) obtained elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> (Trans. Cowell & Gough, 2007, 10)

They believed that the idea of *afterlife* propagated by the Brahmanas and the other elites was untrue, everything ended with the death of the physical body and that consciousness disappears after death. So, performance of rites for the dead was a useless exercise which meant nothing except to serve the economic needs to the Brahmin priests.

The Cārvākas were critical of the value system advocated by the brahmanical texts which viewed human beings as governed by an unequal hierarchical system of caste or *varṇas*<sup>5</sup>. In a text, written by Kṛṣṇamiśra in the eleventh century called

<sup>3</sup> *agnihotraṃ trayo vedāstridaṇḍaṃ bhasmaguṅṭhanam/  
buddhiparūṣahīnānām jīviketi brhaspatiḥ// (SDS, Cārvākadarśanam)*

<sup>4</sup> *tataśca jīvanopāyo brāhmaṇairvihitastviha/  
mṛtānām pretakāryāṇi na tvanyad vidyate kvacit// (SDS, Cārvākadarśanam)*

<sup>5</sup> The chaturvarṇa system is a system of social stratification where people were divided into four social groups depending on their birth into the four castes. The monarchies often referred and strictly adhered to this system. This system elevated the Brahmanas to the top and all others below them, the Kṣatriyas were the next powerful group. This classification was not just social it was also economical, it denoted access to resources, wealth,

*Prabhodacandrodaya* translated as the rise of moon-like intellect, a materialist by the name of Mahāmoha declares:

If bodies are alike in their different parts, the mouth, etc.  
How can there be a hierarchy of castes?<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in the text *Naiṣadhacarita* by 12<sup>th</sup> century Vedantin Śrīharṣa, a materialist heretic criticizing the unequal division of people into castes based on notions of purity and pollution declares:

Since purity of caste is possible only in the case of purity on each side of both families of the grandparents, what caste is pure by the purity of limitless generations?

Fie on those who boast of family dignity! They hold women in check out of jealousy; but do not likewise restrain men, though the blindness of passion is common to both!

Spurn all censorious statements about women as not worth a straw.

Why dost thou constantly cheat people when thou, too, art as bad as women?<sup>7</sup>

Both Kṛṣṇamiśra and Śrīharṣa, through their translation depict the Cārvākas as heretics and non-believers. The defying of the caste order and speaking for gender equity was taken to be form of heresy and hence needed to be condemned therefore, they were declared as non-conformers or *nāstikas*.

Kauṭilya in his *Ārthasāstra* speaks of only three systems Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Lokāyata that can be classified as logical<sup>8</sup>, rational system, the used the term *Ānviṣiki*. Kauṭilya argues that the Lokāyatas rationally regulate the scopes of religion, economy and polity. The Cārvākas believed that if the state was to be prevented by chaos and anarchy, then law and order had to be established which was achieved through legal sanctions (*daṇḍanīti*) by the state. Eli Franco (1991) sums what the Cārvākas were hoping to achieve perfectly, he says “[A]ll the Lokāyatas were fighting for ... was ultimately to found social and political institutions independently of religious dogma...”, in that sense they were secular and essentially democratic. Caste, Gender Inequity, inequity of rights and opportunities, religious dogma, social exclusion are still very much part of Indian society today as they were in those early times. The Cārvākas rejection of God,

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authority, distribution of power etc (Thapar 1981). Another category which does not belong to the varṇa system were added, they were the untouchables or the caṇḍālas, who were kept out of access to resources, or power or wealth. These untouchables are the modern day Dalits, who still face discrimination and kept out of power and denied access of resources.

<sup>6</sup> *tulyatve vapuṣāṃ mukhādyavayavair varṇakramāḥ kīdrśo...* [2.18 ab]

<sup>7</sup> *śuddhir vaṃśa dvayī śuddhau pitrordekaśaḥ |  
tadanantakuḷādopādadoṣā jātirasti kā || 17.40*

*trīṣayā rakṣato nārīrdhikulasthithidāmbhikān |  
smarāndhatvāviśeṣe'pi tathā naramarakṣataḥ || 17.42*

*trīṇānīva ghrṇāvādān vidhūnaya vadhūranu |  
tavāpi tādrśasyaiva kā ciraṃ janavañcanā || 17.58*

<sup>8</sup>Ramakrishna Bhattacharya in his works on the *Cārvākasūtra* argues that Cārvāka was the first school to develop logic. He draws similarities with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, also suggests that Nyāyayikas could have been earlier Cārvākas because both admitted perception and inference as valid source of knowledge provided inference is rooted in perception. Using logic and reason (*ānviṣiki*) the Lokāyata/Cārvakas attempted to regulate rationally the economy, religion and polity.

authority, karma, afterlife etc created a spiritual void which allowed the space for alternative forms of religious movements to develop such as Buddhism and Jainism.

### **From rational materialism and realism of the Cārvākas towards the secular democratic philosophy of the Buddhists**

We have previously seen how the skeptical, rational, commonsensical attitude of the Cārvākas allowed for other alternative religious movements to appear on the scene. One such religious movement was Buddhism. There is textual evidence of debates between the followers of Cārvāka and the Buddhists in the *Mūla-Sarvāsti-Vāda* of the Nikāya-Vinaya. Epistemologically, Cārvākas and Buddhists are much closer to each other than with others schools because both accept perception and inference as a valid source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and disregarded verbal testimony (*śabda*) as a valid source (Bhattacharya, 2011). Also metaphysically the concept of *Svabhāva* (self nature, inherent essence), which rejects causation theory and the notion that there are god and evil consequences of moral actions is attributed to the Cārvākas, which was later appropriated, incorporated and reinterpreted by the Buddhists, Vedantins and other major schools. The Buddhists incorporated the same notion of *Svabhāva*, into their teachings to provide justification for their ethical teachings. Earlier, we have seen how the philosophy of Cārvākas have a political dimension which is seen through their critique of social norms, Vedic authority and privileges. In Buddhism, we do see how this further develops into political theory.

A study of the development of Buddhist political theory is significant because there are many regions today in Asia such as South East Asia, East Asia, and South Asia, where Buddhist legal theory is practiced and continues to dominate the everyday life of citizens in those countries. The underlying foundation for Buddhist political theory is the notion of the individual (*puruṣa*) and its relationship to society and the world at large, which is similar to the Western political theory. But the notion of the Individual in the Buddhist context is very different where the individual has an interdependent relation to nature unlike the western conception of an individual as independent of nature. While it's not possible to discuss in detail the various aspects of Buddhist political theory, in the next section I discuss one aspect of the Buddhist legal tradition, which is the procedure of majority voting and consensus for dispute resolution.

### **Majority Voting, Consensus and Dispute Resolution:**

The study of classical Buddhist texts shows how democracy is deeply rooted in Buddhist history. Buddhist political theory are some the oldest in the world, consisting of a large oeuvre of literature which speak about the importance of politics in an individual's life and of active engagement in politics. The Pāli canonical texts *Aggañña Sutta*, the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, the *Mahasudassana Sutta*, the beginning of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* are texts which offer a normative commentary on politics and discusses issues related to social class, caste, and distribution of resources. Here, I look at the Vinaya texts which speak of the structure and the governing of the *Saṅgha*. The structure of the *Saṅgha* as first set up by Buddha himself was republican in character, there was no leader of the *saṅgha*, all decisions were made in open meetings, all monks had equal rights to make proposal and vote, the *saṅgha* is considered an the ideal model of social organization (Moore, 2015).



The Vinaya texts speak of a highly complex set of procedures to resolve conflicts or disputes arising between members of the monastic community (*saṅgha*). The procedure of majority vote (*yebhuyyāsika*) is a process in which disputing monks come together to settle a dispute within the framework of the Buddhist *Dhamma*. The procedure of majority voting is remarkably similar to the modern democratic process of voting and voting rights. The Buddha describes the will of the majority in the *Majjhimanikāya* (Collection of Middle length discourses) as:

And what, Ānanda, is the will of the majority (*yebhuyyasikā*)? If those monks, Ānanda, cannot settle that dispute in that dwelling, then they should go to a dwelling where there are many monks. There, they should assemble, all in concord. Having assembled, the guideline of *dharma* is to be threshed out. Having threshed out the guideline of *dharma*, that dispute is to be settled in accordance with it. Thus, Ānanda, is the will of the majority. And in this way, there is the stilling of various disputes, namely by the will of the majority.<sup>9</sup>

If the monks at a particular residence are unable to resolve disputes, they are asked to seek the assistance of the monks residing elsewhere where they are larger in number. The Will of the Majority was realized through the process of voting. Voting was a way in which the community settled disputes and litigation through the proper application of the norms specified in the Buddhist political texts. Steven Collins, elaborates on the purpose of the Voting procedures, he states that:

[T]exts from the Vinaya provide much evidence to suggest that it is appropriate to speak of the monastic community as in some sense a "democracy,"....The *Vinaya* rules contain provisions for deciding a disputed matter by majority vote (*Yebhuyyasikā*: votes were cast and counted by means of small pieces of wood *salākā*) and by referral to a sub-committee composed of one or more monks (*ubbāhikā*). Such procedural rules, along with the specific directives by the Buddha that there should no individual as his successor, no Buddhist "Pope," do perhaps justify using the term democracy. But the overriding value here is not that such procedures are important in themselves – as, say, a way of guaranteeing individual freedoms – but rather they are a means, resorted to only when necessary, of achieving the goal of harmony and unanimity between monks. [...] The ideal form of decision making in the Order is for an elder to propose a resolution three times, and for the members of the community present to indicate agreement by silence<sup>10</sup>. Any such proposal should be clearly in accordance with established rules, and in conformity with the *Dhamma*, and so able to be approved without discussion, unanimously.

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<sup>9</sup> *Tehi ānanda bhikkhūhi sabbeheva samaggehi sannipatitabbam sannipatitvā dhammanetti samanumajjitabbā dhammanettim samanumajjitvā yathā tatha sameti tathā tam adhikaraṇam vūpasametabbam. Evaṃ kho ānanda sammukhāvīnayo hoti (Majjhimanikāya II, 247)*

<sup>10</sup> There are two modes of authority in the early Buddhist texts 1. *Ekarāja* (sovereign authority/ monarchy) and 2. *gaṇarājya* (authority drawn from an assembly of people similar to a democracy). After the demise of the Buddha, a model of political and social organization was developed which was based on the hierarchical ordering of the assembly where the disputes which arose were settled at various levels in the absence of the Buddha, this assemblage is the *gaṇarājya*. Often there is a tension between these two modes of authority argues Stuart which is found in the early Buddhist texts and the vote of the majority (*Yebhuyyasikā*) was a way of resolving this tension.

A community organizing its affairs by uncoerced vote rather than authoritarian *fiat*, and achieving (in aspiration, at least) a state of unanimous harmony, represents a powerful ideal in modern times; and so it is not surprising to find it so used by modern Buddhists.<sup>11</sup>

From the above passage, it is evident the early Buddhist texts speak of procedural rules and their performative methods which were invoked to resolve disputes among monks and to maintain harmony within the community this was specifically done to prevent schisms within the monastic community. The settlement through majority vote (*Yebhuyyasikā*) is just one process, the others include *sammukhāvinaya* - settlement through presence, *sativinaya/ smrtivinaya* - settlement through memory, *amūlḥavinaya* - settlement by the procedure of regaining one's wits, *paṭiññātakaraṇa/pratijñākāraka* - settlement by the procedure of confession/acknowledgement, *tassapāpiyāsikā/tatsvabhāvaiṣīya* - settlement by the procedure of particular fault/seeking the nature of the issue, and *tiṇavatthāraka/trṇaprasāraka* - settlement through the procedure of spreading over the grass<sup>12</sup>. In these early legal texts there is strict adherence to the sovereignty of Buddha and the conformity to the *Dhamma*, the general spirit of these procedural laws to resolve any kind of dispute among the monastic community is in the spirit of democracy and to maintain harmony within the *Saṅgha*. The conflicts were taken as opportunities for public enactment of hierarchical power on one hand, and on the other, of expressing dissent and protest. Buddhist legal procedures evolved in the context of constant tension between monastic centralized authority and the social context in which varied dissenting voices demanded expression. The concept of majority voting, consensus, dispute resolution is similar to the concept of representative democracy practiced today in democratic societies.

### **Conclusions:**

In summary, this paper can be divided into two parts the first part discusses the role of non-Western philosophical traditions within the larger context of Western philosophy. It argues that Asian traditions although deeply rooted in specific cultures have always addressed problems which are universal in nature. Each of these cultures have contributed towards the overall development of the philosophical thought. If philosophy is about reasoned debate, resolving conflicts, clarification of concepts and in general an expression of a uniquely lived human lives then there is no single origin of philosophy, philosophy developed simultaneously around the same time in different parts of the world. So one needs to move beyond constructed binaries such as East/West, rational/mystical, spiritual/scientific and look for newer ways of doing philosophy which is truly global. The second part of the paper attempts to briefly revisit the non-Vedic, atheist traditions of Indian thought which have been purposefully and consistently neglected by scholars because they defy stereotypical, standardized, homogenous, representation of Indian philosophy. The Śramaṇa traditions, which gave rise to schools like Cārvāka/Lokāyata, Buddhism and Jainism, represents a long history of dissent, rationality, atheism in Indian philosophy. Many of the issues discussed by these schools such as caste distinction, gender inequality, superstition, blind faith, questions of justice, right to vote, freedom etc. are valid even

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<sup>11</sup> Collins (1998, 446-47)

<sup>12</sup> Refer to *Rules Of Engagement – Medieval Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Regulation*, Eds Susan Andrews, Jinhua Chen, Cuilan Liu

today, these issues still plague modern Indian society. In the contemporary period, many social movements, such as the Bhakti movement of the medieval period, the anti-caste movements of the modern period etc can be traced to these early heterodox, heretical traditions and hence, it is important to study Indian philosophy from the perspective of these traditions.

Finally, I would like to argue that globalization is challenging us to rethink the way philosophy is presented and practiced as a discipline. Philosophy is still largely dominated by the sensibilities and imaginations of a few communities whom we collectively refer to as the 'West' that needs to change. There is a need for philosophy to be more inclusive. Non-Western traditions offer alternate ways of thinking, reasoning, sorting out disputes, addressing inequalities, dealing with issues of gender, environmental degradation etc. Philosophy has since its beginnings been global and emancipatory but somewhere it seems to have forgotten its true purpose and restricted itself to the four walls of a philosophy department limited by linguistic, genre, geographic and bureaucratic boundaries. With globalization, the West and the world at large would benefit from the sheer diversity of perspectives, viewpoints and differing imaginations that non-Western intellectual traditions have to offer.

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