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The Indian Origins of “Comparative Religion”

Compendia of Religious-Philosophical Worldviews or “Cosmovisions” (*darśana-s*)

It is often argued that the practice of comparing and classifying religions¹ has been an exclusive achievement, or invention, of the modern West. Such a categorical statement admits no exceptions and would therefore exclude the possibility of finding such endeavours in other epochs and places, such as premodern India. There should be no textual evidence that comparing and classifying religions, as a scholarly enterprise, was ever done outside the Western world. In this contribution, I will argue that there is actually good evidence that religious traditions were compared in premodern India. This implies, that certain epistemic pre-conditions were in place there, too, which allowed, to a certain extent, for comparisons of religions.

However, for reasons discussed below, textual witnesses of these comparisons were mostly read by scholars interested in philosophy. Accordingly, they were read as philosophy, and not as documents also reflecting on religious traditions. The genre of these texts is usually designated with their most prominent specimens as *darśanasamgrahas*, translated as “compendia of philosophical views”. It is the aim of this article to highlight the relevance of these works as forms of comparing religion/s. It will show that a scheme for classifying religious traditions that provides the epistemic backbone of implicit comparisons was already present in these

¹ An earlier version has been presented, together with contributions by Oliver Freiberger and Christoph Kleine, in the panel “Comparison as Method and Topic in the History of Religion”, chaired by Markus Dreßler, at the European Association for the Study of Religion (EASR) conference 2018. My thanks go to the panel participants and the audience for the very fruitful panel discussion. In addition, I am grateful for comments by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, Claire Maes, Karl-Stephan Bouthillette, Oliver Freiberger, Andrea Rota and Carla Hagen.

early Indian texts. This observation prompts a follow-up question: Why did these premodern approaches of comparing religious doctrines, rituals, and other traits, not develop into an intellectual project that defines itself as “comparing religions” from an unbiased and neutral point of view? While a detailed answer cannot be provided here, a few comments on this issue will conclude this contribution. It seems that some of these factors that prevented such a development in medieval India are still active today, obstructing, together with other factors, the institutionalisation of a comparative study of religion at Indian universities.

However, it is a still pressing need that the Western discipline’s prominent and often exclusivist and Eurocentric self-understanding – comparison of religions is being inherently connected to the European history of religions and post-enlightenment developments, and could only emerge here – is put into perspective.

To provide necessary background information, the article will begin with a short review of the discussion on the alleged European exceptionalism of comparative religious studies. This argument prompted European scholars to frame *darśana* mostly as “philosophy”, and the genre the *darśanasamgrahas*, therefore, as “doxography”. However, a closer look at the classificatory criteria and a discussion of selected contents of four textual examples will demonstrate that this conceptualization does not capture all aspects of the genre. In fact, the authors of these works delineate in their *comparanda* prominent features of religious traditions such as ascetic practices, devotional attitudes, dress, and so forth. The goal of Indian authors in reviewing their own “philosophical-religious worldview” together with other competing ones is largely, though not always, to prove the superiority of their views and salvific practices. This notwithstanding, certain features of a comparative approach to religious views and practices are clearly at work in late antique and medieval India.

The European Exceptionalism of “Comparing Religions”

As Amitav Ghosh noted recently, there is one feature of Western modernity that seems truly distinctive, namely, “its enormous intellectual commitment to the promotion of its supposed singularity” (Ghosh 2016: 103). One of the cornerstones of this opinion is the conviction that non-European, premodern cultures did not possess a concept that equals the Western concept of religion. There was no designation available, it is argued, that could be used to identify different “religious traditions,” or “religions.” In consequence, there could be no discourse aimed at comparing these traditions in terms of dogmatic teachings, beliefs, communities, or practices. A variant of this thesis consists in the claim that, in premodern times, it was generally impossible to look at one’s own “religion” from an external point

of view. It was only possible to conceptualise oneself as “inside” of a specific religious tradition.

The concept of the specialness of the “European History of Religion” (*Europäische Religionsgeschichte*) is predicated, on the other hand, on the thesis that the systematic study of religion was enabled in Europe, because it was here that a discursive field emerged in which religious and non-religious perspectives of science, art, and politics could meet. This led to an internal plurality of a dominant tradition and its accompanying alternatives (Judaism, heterodox sects, Paganism, Esotericism, etc.). This situation further prompted internal dynamics of a hitherto unknown complexity. Burkhard Gladigow and other advocates of this model (see Kippenberg, Rüpke, von Stuckrad 2009), argued that beyond Europe there was either a strict dominance preventing the rise of religious alternatives, or a field of merging traditions with blurred boundaries, which in turn prevented that strict religious identities and “external points of view” could develop. In this vein, Helmut Zander (2016) argued that almost only in Europe religious traditions were conceptualised and demarcated in a way that forced believers and practitioners to decide and to declare to which religion they exclusively belonged. I will not discuss this paradigm here which, especially in earlier contributions, left Asia unconsidered, as an “unmarked space”.

An even stronger claim with important political ramifications is advocated by many scholars in the tradition of postmodern and postcolonial studies. According to this position, “religions” as conceptual entities did not exist in Early India, but are European superimpositions. In particular, this claim has been made with regard to the so called “invention of Hinduism,” but has also been extended to Buddhism and Jainism. Frits Staal argued in *Rules Without Meaning* that even in late medieval India there was no indigenous conceptual scheme that allowed Indian-born and non-Indian religious traditions to be subsumed under one and the same class. His influential argument ran like this:

„The inapplicability of Western notions of religion to the traditions of Asia has not only led to piecemeal errors of labelling, identification and classification, to conceptual confusion and to some name-calling. It is also responsible for something more extraordinary: the creation of so-called religions [...]. The reasons lie in the nature of Western religion, which is pervaded by the notion of exclusive truth and claims a monopoly on truth [...]. In most parts of Asia, such religions do not exist [...]. If [scholars] cannot find them, they seize upon labels used for indigenous categories, rent them from their original context and use them for subsequent identification of what is now called a ‘religious’ tradition. Thus, there arises a host of religions: Vedic, Brahmanical, Hindu, Buddhist, [...] etc. In Asia, such groupings are not only uninteresting and uninformative, but tinged with the unreal. What counts instead are ancestors and teachers – hence lineages, traditions, affiliations, cults,

eligibility, and initiation – concepts with ritual rather than truth-functional overtones” (Staal 1989: 393).

Although it would be worth reviewing this position more thoroughly, it will suffice to point out that Staal’s argument is obviously circular. He criticizes the Western view that reified “religious traditions” in Asia, but argues subsequently with the very same concept of “traditions” (e.g., of teachers): “traditions” that shall now count in Asian indigenous discourse. This is hardly better than earlier scholarship criticised by Staal.

Numerous examples of cognate claims can be found in recent “Postcolonial Indology”, most prominently in the work of Richard King (see King 1999), I will only refer to a statement by S. N. Balagangadhara, who argues that ‘Hinduism’ or ‘Buddhism’ are concepts that exist only in the ‘Western mind,’ or in Western universities, respectively. He holds that

“the West did two things: (a) created ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Buddhism’ etc. as coherent and structured units and (b) did so as religions. The issue is not whether western culture created a monolithic religion instead of recognizing the multiplicity of theories and practices that go under the label ‘Hinduism’ [...]. Instead, it lies in the fact that ‘Hinduism’, as a concept and as an experiential entity, provided the westerners with a coherent experience” (Balagangadhara 2010: 138).

Balagangadhara’s argument rests again on the assumption that there were in pre-modern India no concepts available for categorising religious traditions. Moreover, if Europeans used the concept of “Hinduism” in order to create an entity that was later to be coherently experienced as a monolithic entity, an initial “experience” must be accepted without anything that is experienced. What could such an “experience” be?

***Darśana* = “philosophy”, and *sarvadarśanasamgraha-s* = philosophical doxographies?**

Before moving on to the first Buddhist author who surveyed *darśana-s* more thoroughly, some comments on the concept should be in place. The technical term *darśana* derives from the Sanskrit root *drś*, “to see.” In its nominal form, *darśana*, it has the primary, neutral meaning of “vision” (cf. Halbfass 1988: 263). Yet, the Buddhist concept *dr̥ṣṭi*, connected to the same root, denotes “views,” “speculative views,” “theories,” in a pejorative sense. It depicts theories that are either useless, or worse, increase suffering. The Pāli Buddhist term *dassana*, however, can assume a positive meaning, for example in describing the unobstructed view, to “see [reality] as it is” (*yathābhūta-dassana*). In this case, it points at the utmost goal of Buddhist salvific practice. At its foundation, there is the canonical idea of “puri-

fyng through [correct] view and knowledge” (*nāṇa-dassana-visuddhi*, M I 147), without which liberation cannot be reached (cf. Fuller 2005: 41; 96). However, in its more technical meaning, it is probably in the Jain tradition that the term *darśana* emerged. Kendall Folkert (1993: 114) refers to an early Jaina text (*Tattvārthādhi-gama Sūtra*, I.1) that defines the “way to release” (*mokṣa-mārga*) as consisting of “right faith” (*samyag-darśana*), right knowledge, and right conduct. In this text, the term does not yet seem to entail the same technical use as in the compendia. Therefore, Folkert subscribes to the opinion that in this case, *darśana* is best translated as “faith”. A faith, however, in the sense of a “firm conviction concerning the true nature of things” (Folkert 1993: 115) – an idea close to the Buddhist’s description of “right view”.

The genre of Indian texts that were later labelled by Western scholars as “doxographies” emerged in 6th century India. These works aim to outline commonalities and fundamental differences among Indian “(world)views,” or “opinions” (*darśana*), or “established tenets” (*siddhānta*), respectively. The genre found also entry into Tibetan Buddhism, where such works on “established tenets” (Tibetan short title: *grub mtha*’) even included Daoist, Confucian and other systems. However, a complete history of the numerous Indian and Tibetan texts that belong to this genre has yet to be written.

So far, Western scholars have predominantly read these works as “philosophical” texts, as the choice of labelling them “doxographies” already indicates. However, major specimens of this genre, such as Mādhava’s *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (14th century), while describing philosophical doctrines, also include remarks on soteriological and cultivation practices, teachers, ritual duties, and worship. Therefore, their classification as “doxography” is certainly not wrong, but it is clearly too narrow.

Known doxographical texts emerged in three traditions, namely, Madhyamaka Buddhism, Jainism, and Advaita Vedānta. Earlier substantial research on these works by V.V. Gokhale, Wilhelm Halbfass, Kendall W. Folkert, and Olle Qvarnström has recently been taken up by Andrew J. Nicholson and Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette, among others. Nicholson is mainly interested in the doctrinal classification of the Hindu tradition, and the underlying dialectical structure of *āstika* and *nāstika*, used to distinguish between insider- and outsider-schools. His main venture is to understand premodern Indian traditions with the “underlying logic behind systems of doctrinal classification” (Nicholson 2010: 148); In his view, this classification formed a “comparative heresiology” (see Nicholson 2010: 166-184). Heresy, noted in passing, is a religiously loaded concept. In addition, he describes how Western scholars have read texts of this genre.

Bouthillette’s most recent work examines three doxographies, the *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* of Bhāviveka, the *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* of Haribhadra, and

the *Sarvasiddhāntasaṅgraha*, attributed to Śāṅkara. He emphasized the performative function of these texts as transformative “spiritual exercises”,² or, as depictions of the salvific path – of the one, true, and most effective way. Far from being neutral in their attitude, he writes, these texts emerged from debate, or apologetical dialogue, among adherents of different schools. In particular, their Buddhist and Jaina authors regarded them as a therapeutic reflection of the views of other schools, a “vision therapy” – but not only of others. Bouthillette observes that “doxographies are designed to transform one’s ‘view’; that they seek to redirect it from the unreal (*asat*) to the real (*sat*)” (Bouthillette 2020: 14; cf. 16) – an idea that could also be framed as “yogic cultivation of wisdom” (*jñāna-yoga*). Against this backdrop, doxographies, while lacking interest in the history of thoughts and practices, served the purpose of classifying views, usually presenting an inherent “dialectical teleology”. Thus, Bouthillette is open to the religious motives in the genre, and calls attention to “the socioreligious motives of doxographers, and the dialectical methods they designed, for engaging with the plurality of philosophico-religious views” (Bouthillette 2020: 11). Nevertheless, he mostly sticks to the established translation of *darśana* as “philosophical worldview”. But how did it come about that these works were named “doxographies”?

Nicholson (2010) traced the history of the concept back to its invention by the German scholar of Greek philosophy, Hermann Diels, in the 19th century. Diels introduced this neologism in 1879 to identify Greek works, for example by Plutarch or Cicero, that present different philosophical schools or thinkers (see Nicholson 2010: 9; 145–146). The decision to adopt the term “doxography” for the *Sarva-darśana* genre is predicated on an underlying premise of much of 19th century Western scholarship on India. Many scholars wanted to demonstrate that early India was in possession of an intellectual tradition or intellectual quest, that equalled (or even surpassed) Western philosophy and its Greek origins. Dependent on this was a second decision, namely to liken the *darśana*-compedia to Greek doxographies of philosophical traditions, thus assumed to be similar in purpose and structure. In sum, although the soteriological aspect of *darśana* is essential (as will be discussed below), European and Indian Indologists and philosophers of the 19th century were eager to see the term as equivalent to “philosophy.”

Henry T. Colebrooke (1824: 19–43) expanded in his *On the Philosophy of the Hindus* what he called the “orthodox” and “heterodox” “philosophical systems” of the Hindus. To do so, he drew on the distinction of *āstika/nāstika* (accepting/disregarding Vedic authority) used in some *darśana*-compedia. Nicholson (see 2010: 129) explains that Colebrooke was primarily concerned with the differen-

² See Bouthillette 2020: xii, 18–20, referring to Pierre Hadot’s work and its recent reception in Buddhist Studies.

tiation of philosophical doctrines and the enumeration of schools as presented in the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*. Other scholars such as Max Müller or Paul Deussen used schemes and translations of the “six systems”-model (*ṣaḍdarśana*) as a blueprint for their own presentations – for example, Müller in his *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (1899) or Deussen in his *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie* (Vol. I, 3 [1908]: 190–344). As early as 1883, Müller referred in his book *India – What Can It Teach Us?* to a more recent compendium, the *Ṣaḍ-darśana-cintanikā*, a title he translated as “Studies in Indian Philosophy”. According to Müller, it outlined “Indian Philosophy” as it is portrayed in Vedānta works on the *darśana*-s: “Philosophy in India is, what it ought to be, not the denial, but fulfilment of religion; it is the highest religion, and the oldest name of the oldest system of philosophy is Vedānta, that is, the end, the goal, the highest object of the Veda” (Müller 1883: 244; cf. 80).³

In general, however, Western scholars of Indian philosophy sympathised with the claim of Mādhava that Advaita-Vedānta, his own school, was the highest expression of Indian philosophy, an argument supported by its reading through the lens of German Idealism (see Nicholson 2010: 127). Nevertheless, the predominant scholarship in the 19th century understood the genre as classifications of orthodox and heterodox philosophy (probably in some ways similar to Christian heresiologies discussing, for example, gnostic heresies), as it is obvious in Horace H. Wilson’s essays on the “religious sects of the Hindus”, “heretical schools of philosophy” etc. in 1828 and 1832.

From the mid-19th century onwards, aspects that did not exactly fit the view of these texts as “philosophical” compendia, or compendia on philosophical doctrines, were pushed to the background. An emphasis on the philosophical elements of the genres was deemed more elevating and better suited to feed the vibrant Western enthusiasm for Indian thought. Yet, as will be shown below, those compendia also include non-philosophical statements on religious schools, on the adherent’s life-style, on cultivation practices and rituals, on garments, hair styles, or other aspects of ascetic lore. In addition, the strong “orthodox/heterodox” division permeating the later works of the genre points to a religious dimension.

Both Indologists and Indian modernists such as Vivekananda (see *Raja Yoga*, 1896, preface) argued that Indian philosophy was in depth and rank almost comparable to German Idealism. Thus, they chose to translate *darśana* with “philo-

³ Most of the latest generation of the *darśana*-compendia written in the late 19th century Raj were works written from an Advaita-Vedānta perspective. But there were also unusual variants such as the Christian apologetic work *Ṣaḍ-darśana-darpaṇa* (Hindī, 1860) by Nehemiah Nīlakaṇṭha Śāstrī Goreh (1825–1895), translated by Fitz-Edward Hall as *Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems* (1862).

sophical system” (“philosophical system” was in the 19th century almost an epitheton for Hegel’s system).

The final and extremely successful move in Western scholarship of the 20th century was to apply Diels’s neologism “doxographies” to these works. This happened around 1980s, when two scholars, Wilhelm Halbfass and, subsequently, Olle Qvarnström, adopted the term “doxography” for the genre. Actually, it was the genre itself that lead Halbfass to argue that *darśana*-s are “philosophical systems”: “An obvious basis for the semantic association between “philosophy” and *darśana* is given by the fact that *darśana* is a familiar and characteristic term in Indian doxographic literature”, classifying “the main schools or systems of what is commonly called ‘Indian Philosophy’” (Halbfass 1988: 264). This new designation made it almost impossible to question the conceptualization of *darśana*-s as “philosophic views”. It blocked the possibility of asking whether a term that also captures the religious practices and beliefs included in the *darśana*-domain would not provide a better understanding of the genre. Furthermore, this approach to “Indian philosophy” was supported by the widespread conviction among scholars that the most promising term to find an equivalent to the Western concept of “religion” was the Indian term *dharma*.

Less frequently, and more recently, *darśana* has been rendered with “world view” (cf. the contributions in Balcerowicz 2012). Bouthillette, too, suggests and occasionally uses the term “worldview”. However, he says, “view” does not fit in every respect. Being a Mādhyamika Buddhist, Bhāviveka aims in his pre-compendium (see below) to overcome all views. Accordingly, Bouthillette argues that for Bhāviveka “the ultimate truth cannot be a ‘view,’ or a ‘worldview,’ because it is the opposite of conceptuality” (Bouthillette 2020: 38). The conventional realm of worldly parlance is, in contrast, “made of ‘views’”, and thus *darśana* “a philosophical system” that merely makes “sense of the world in conventional terms” (Bouthillette 2020: 80). Moreover, the competing concept of *darśana* as “salvific seeing” in the meaning of devotional Hindu traditions was, at the same time, strongly rejected by Buddhist and Jain authors who were the leading scholars in the constitutive phase of the genre (see Qvarnström 2015: 182; Bouthillette 2020: 65–6). Mere “seeing”, they argued, does not grant liberation (*mokṣa*).

Thus, the translation as “world-views” is not without problems, especially if varied with “philosophical views”, or “philosophical theories”, respectively (Bouthillette 2020: 14; cf. 179). My argument is, instead, that the classification *darśana* deals – side by side with philosophical theories – with whole traditions (e.g., the *bauddha-darśana*), religious practices, theological concepts, and so forth. The term “world view” was lately revived as a suitable category for the discussion of religion/s that confront the “big questions” (see Taves 2020). However, I maintain

that the neologism “cosmovision”, in use mainly in Latin American Studies dealing with indigenous perspectives on nature and humankind (see, e.g., Medina 2000: 99–120), is more appropriate. Cosmovisions may be defined as *philosophical and religious views* that provide answers to the “big questions” (for example, the affirmation of an immortal soul) and to “second-rank questions” (for example, on dietary practices) alike. In contrast to the concept of “world view”, cosmovision does not refer to a certain understanding of the “world”. The world is not a prominent frame of reference in several Indian systems. The term “cosmos” points to a broader view, which may even include views of various universes and transcendent realms in Indian thought.

Vāda/vādin, diṭṭhi, sāsana, pāṣaṇḍa, or dharma, as categories comparing “religions”?

Beyond any doubt, Buddhists and Jains of the 6th century already inherited a comparative interest in different systems of thought. But they were the ones to establish categories that were later used for denoting groups with common views, doctrines, practices and even a sense of communal belonging. Several categories were used, in early Buddhism and Jainism, for different teachers and traditions. It seems that it was among their adherents that an interest arose in classifying the “other,” or the “others,” respectively.

In the Pāli canon, various religious and philosophical views, theories, practices, and doctrines are already mentioned in detail – for example, in the first two Suttas of the *Dīghanikāya* that enumerate the 62 “wrong views” such as the view of eternal existence. The term “view” (*diṭṭhi*) denotes, in this context, a “vision” that usually implies attitudes toward practices, as, for example, Ajita Kesakambalī’s view of nihilism (*natthika-diṭṭhi*). In these early Pāli texts, the term “view” is not used as a signifier for the group holding the respective view (cf. Fuller 2004). For this purpose, amongst others, the terms *vāda/vādin*, “way,” “follower of a way,” is used. The term *vāda* is somewhat more neutral, and occasionally used for views of the own tradition. Jains for example designate their view of the “non-onesidedness of reality” as a *vāda*: the *anekānta-vāda*; see Matilal 1981; Bouthillette 2020: 95; 99-105).⁴ Thus, the translation of *vāda* may also be “theory” or “doctrine”. In the case of “nihilism,” *natthika-vāda* is “doctrine/way of nihilism,” and someone adhering to this view is called a *natthika-vādin*. Nevertheless, what seems missing is a use (and concept) that reflects on the group as

⁴ The term *vāda*, however, can also designate the form of an Indian debate – with earlier position, counter-position, refutation, and so forth, as defined, for example, in Gautama’s *Nyāyasūtra* (NS 1.2.1, cf. Bouthillette 2020: 50).

“community of followers” as a classificatory category. On the contrary, sometimes any reference to an adherent is absent. In these cases, *dit̥ṭhi*-s do not appear as actual views held by someone, but as part of a hypothetical set of *possible* views in respect to a systematic question (cf. Qvarnström 1999: 173).

Surely, a number of terms are used to denote the Buddhist practice or “in-group”: *nikāya* (group with the same regulations and beliefs), *saṅgha* ([concrete] community, in a certain meaning, cf. D II. 150–1: ‘all these *śramaṇa*-s and *brāhmaṇa*-s with their communities (*saṅghino*)’, *sāsana* (a certain transmission line, or a following of teachings), or, again, *vāda*, e.g. *ācariyavāda* (Dube 1980: 37–38). In the *Kathavatthu*, for example, different “schools” within the Buddhist *saṅgha* are named as *-vādin* (Puggala-vādin, etc.), all belonging to the same *sāsana*, which Rhys-Davids boldly translates as “religion” (Kh-V, 2). However, the latter term, *sāsana*, as is often the case with *āgama*,⁵ is only used to designate one’s own tradition. Here, the classification consists of one criterion only: being an insider, or an outsider.⁶ “Outsider”-teachings are moreover often described in pejorative terms by referring to their “heretical teachers” (*tiṭṭhiya / tīrthika*) – which, again, is usually no comparative category, but draws a line between different outgroups on the one side, and the Buddhist ingroup on the other side. Piotr Balcerowicz (1997), however, shows that Jaina texts used the term *tirtha* (“ford”) as indicating the Jaina “religion”, that is, the canonical scriptures, the respective conduct, and the community of followers (cf. Balcerowicz 1997: 204), and derivatives such as *anya-tīrthika* (‘adherent of another religion’, cf. Claire Maes, in press) being semantic indicators that this concept could be extended to other religious traditions as well.

An interesting case is the term *pāṣaṇḍa*, which refers, as Joel P. Brereton argues, in its early usage “to a religious community that is contrasted to the community of the Buddha” (cf. S I.133-4; Brereton 2019: 22). The etymology of the word is unclear.⁷ Oliver Freiburger (2013: 35) argues that *pāṣaṇḍa* was in the era of early Buddhism an equivalent to our plural “religions”. The term has come to prominence because of its use in the edicts of Aśoka, where it stands for the more or less neutral concept of “religious groups”. In the 7th Pillar edict, *pāṣaṇḍa* subsumes ascetics, householders, the Buddhist *saṅgha*, brahmans, *ājīvika*-s, Jains, and various other *pāṣaṇḍa* (see the translation in Thapar 1997: 250-266; PE 7). It declares,

⁵ The term *āgama*, “arrival”, has been used in modern times as an equivalent of “religion,” but “premodern uses indicate specifically a textual tradition” (Bretfeld 2012: 279).

⁶ This is the logic of questions such as whether certain Buddhist ideas are taught by teachers who are “not belonging to the *sāsana* too, or whether the *sāsana* of the Tathāgata should be reformed (cf. Kh-V I.1; XXXI, 351).

⁷ According to Mayrhofer, EWAia II: 101, it may connect to Sanskrit *par(i)-śad-*, “come together”; “congregation”, etc.

moreover, that the “beloved of the gods”, Aśoka, wishes that “all *pāṣaṇḍa*-s shall dwell everywhere, for all of them desire self-control and purity of heart”. Interestingly, in bilingual Aśokan rock edicts (12 and 13), the Greek translation renders *pāṣaṇḍa* with διατριβή (*diatribe*), “a word typically glossed as ‘philosophic school’” (Brereton 2019: 29). Moreover, in the Greek translation there is a connection between *pāṣaṇḍa/diatribe* and practice of “self-control” (*enkrateia*). This meaning is particularly noteworthy because it mirrors a similar meaning in the use of *darśana*, to which I will return below.

In Aśoka’s inscriptions, it seems obvious that the word *pāṣaṇḍa* denotes a group with a relation to *dharma* – that is, in this context, to religious duties. Thus, a *pāṣaṇḍa* is a religious community characterized by the teaching of a *dharma*, or better, “the universal *dharma*” – a kind of common *dharma* that Aśoka seemingly endorsed (cf. Rock edict 5, 13).⁸ In sum, the category *pāṣaṇḍa* has been in use to designate different groups, but seems to have no strong connection with teachings or doctrines. A use in a more classificatory, comparative meaning is equally absent.

Finally, the category *dhamma/dharma* has been identified by Western scholarship as the most suited term to convey certain traits of the Western concept of “religion”. It can take on a variety of meanings, many of them as category *sui generis*, making it almost impossible to use *dhamma* and *dharma* in the sense that different “religious traditions” can be compared.

However, the Buddha, for example, is depicted as having used *dhamma* in his description of the practices of Uddaka Rāmaputta and Ājāra Kālāma, his two yogic teachers whom he followed before his awakening.⁹ The Buddha, we read elsewhere, had taught “doctrines” (*dhamma*-s) which “could be asserted categorically (*ekamaṣika pi*) and others which could not be asserted so (*anekamaṣika pi*; D I. 191; cf. also MN 99).¹⁰

Usually, however, *dhamma/dharma* refers only to one’s own practice – if not to the one and only true teaching and practice. Yet, the *Lalitavistara* (*Sarvāstivāda*) formula does not speak of a *dharma*, but of a *mārga*, a path – a path that

⁸ Conversely, some later texts as the *Dīpavaṃsa* display a more negative view of *pāṣaṇḍa*, whereas elsewhere in Sanskrit literature, the concept depicts more neutrally ascetic communities living in groups, or members of religious orders (cf. Brereton 2019: 26–30).

⁹ The formula with which the Buddha retrospectively describes their practice is the following: “This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, [...] peace [...] direct knowledge [...] Nibbāna, but only to reappearance in the stage of ‘nothingness’. Not being satisfied with that Dhamma, disappointed with it, I left” (M I. 165; cf. Eltschinger 2014: 7; of a *dharma* speaks also the MV II.119).

¹⁰ Matilal argued that both the *anekamaṣika* and the *vibhajya-vāda* attitudes were forerunners of the Jaina *anekānta-vāda*; quoted in Bouthillette 2020: 95, see below.

“does not lead to bliss, to detachment” (LV 285, 11). In other words, the term for “soteriological paths”, *mārga*, is used in a certain comparative meaning here, though with an apologetic stance.¹¹ However, all these terms did not form the basis for systematic comparison. This task was largely left to the term *darśana*.

Bhāviveka and the Pre-Type of a Compendium of *darśana*-s

It is largely accepted that Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, which deals with *pramāṇa* (“means of valid cognition”) of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, and Mīmāṃsā, does not count as a specimen of the *darśana*-genre, but inspired Bhāviveka (ca. 490/400-570 CE), whose work *Madhyamakahr̥daya-kārikā* (“The Heart of the Middle Way,” MHK),¹² is often considered to be the first attempt at surveying the different schools. Still, this aim is neither indicated in the title, nor do we find the more technical meaning of *darśana* in the work. Qvarnström (2015: 6; cf. 1989: 15) recently reaffirmed his earlier opinion that Bhāviveka initiated the “comprehensive history-of-philosophy genre”. Malcolm Eckel even considers Bhāviveka to be “India’s first systematic comparative philosopher”, that is, the first to engage in the task of “the systematic comparison of philosophical schools in India” (Eckel 2008: 3).

In retrospect, however, Bhāviveka’s work is, in various respects, unusual for the genre. It starts with three chapters outlining the author’s own system, Buddhist Madhyamaka, which is said to transcend all views. From there, it moves on to cover six “schools”: Śrāvakayāna/Hīnayāna, Yogācāra, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Vedānta, and Mīmāṃsā. The term Bhāviveka uses for these is *vāda*.¹³ The classificatory criterion is, more precisely, the *vāda*’s *tattva*, the specific ontological ‘truth-principle’ of each school (see Bouthillette 2020:42). Here, *Vāda* seems to depict not only philosophical positions but also soteriological paths, thus verging on to the concept of *mārga*.¹⁴ Thus, the “materialist” *lokāyata* school, included in later compendia, is excluded as it does not engage with soteriology.

¹¹ See also the contributions in Buswell, Gimello (1992). In the first century CE, in Aśva-ghoṣa’s *Saundarananda* (3, 1-5; Johnston 1928: (II.) 15), Śākyamuni is depicted to examine “which of the various sacred traditions in the world [is] the highest”. Here, *āgama* is used, and, again, *mārga* (cf. Eltschinger 2014: 8–9).

¹² Including the auto-commentary *Tarkajvālā*, “Flame of Reasoning,” TJ, Tibetan *Rtoge ’bar ba*.

¹³ The work, for example, defines *vedānta* as believing in the substantiality of the soul, and the TJ adds that one who holds or maintains it as one’s own is called a *vedāntavādin* (cf. Gokhale 1958: 167).

¹⁴ Bouthillette does not discuss the term *vāda* as used by Bhāviveka. He translates it in the context of the compendia as “asserter (*vādin*)” of “pronouncements (*vāda*-s)”, which might be somewhat narrow (see Bouthillette 2020: 56).

Bhāviveka also uses the concept of *drṣṭi*, “wrong views”. He even presents himself as the “eye doctor” who is – in parallel to the Bodhisattva – committed to removing obstacles in the eyes of others, that is, the “wrong views”.¹⁵ The former terms, *vāda* and *darśana*, are sometimes close to the meaning of *drṣṭi*, Bhāviveka also employs for the sake of classification, namely with reference to the canonical sixty-two “wrong views” (*kudrṣṭi*); these are, once again, primarily classified as *vāda*-s (*uccheda-vāda*, etc.).¹⁶

As mentioned, Bhāviveka starts by summarizing his own system first (ch. 1-3). Here, without question, the focus is primarily on dogmatic and philosophic views. However, in the chapters on other systems, he also refers to practices. For example, in verse 15 on the pre-Śāṅkara-Vedāntavādins, he defines the *yogin* as achieving an eternal, immortal, pure refuge through the practice of cultivation and meditation (see Gokhale 1958: 177). As the *Tarkajvālā* explains, this happens by means of an intense practice of “deep meditation” (*bsam gtan gyi sbyor bas = dhyānayogena*; cf. *ibid.* 177; on *dhyānayoga*, cf. Bouthillette 2020).

In chapter 4 about the Śrāvaka-Buddhists he says that according to this school, the Mahāyāna – which is his own tradition – is in some ways similar to the *Vedānta-darśana*: “The Mahāyāna cannot represent the teaching of the Buddha, either because it is not included among the *Sūtrāntas* etc. [...], or because it teaches the heretic paths of salvation, thus being similar to the Vedānta system [*vedānta-darśana*]” (4.7).¹⁷

Two things are remarkable here: the use of *darśana* and *mārga*,¹⁸ and the use of different school perspectives that Bhāviveka entertains here. As noted, his argument implies that a certain quality makes a certain “path” (*mārga*) similar to a second *mārga*, or a second *darśana*. It seems as if both terms are used almost interchangeably. Following Eckel, Bouthillette (2020:129) stresses that in Bhāviveka’s work the concept of *darśana* as a philosophical school “was only emerging”.

Moreover, Bhāviveka embraces the view of a school of Buddhism to which he does not belong (we could say the “internal other”). This move allows him to say that this Buddhist school views Mahāyāna as being similar to a third, non-Buddhist

¹⁵ Cf. Bouthillette 2020: 38, with references.

¹⁶ See the Tibetan commentary, sDe-dge edition, Dza, folio 325b, quoted in Eckel 2008: 91.

¹⁷ *na buddhoktir mahāyānam sūtrāntādāv asamgrahāt / mārgāntaropadesād vā yathā Vedāntadarśanam* // (Gokhale 1958: 179).

¹⁸ Obviously, in the MHK, various other terms are used. In addition to *mārga*, we find the concept of a systematic “cosmovision” as *mata* (“thought”; see Eckel 2008: 28). Once and there, a system is also called a *siddhānta* (“system of teachings,” or “established position”) – a term that implies, in this context, an even stronger ahistorical view of fixed traditions (cf. Bouthillette 2020:129; 9).

system, the Vedānta-darśana (cf. Qvarnström 1989: 15, n. 9; 91). Of course, for Bhāviveka, it is fundamentally wrong to draw such a parallel. Nevertheless, Bhāviveka is clearly inherently doing a comparison here, although he does not explicitly declare that he is engaged in an act of “comparing *mārga-s*”. The goal of engaging in other schools’ perspectives is apologetic, not comparative.

A closer look at the MHK reveals that it is neither arguing exclusively on a philosophical level, nor only dealing with philosophical topoi. In chapter 9, reviewing the system of the Mīmāṃsā, Bhāviveka aims at debunking the belief in central deities. Śiva, he says, is consumed by his own anger. Likewise, he tries to demystify Kṛṣṇa pointing out his all-too-human misconduct: a false friend, if he would exist at all (cf. MHK 9.59–73). In fact, it is actually quite difficult to subsume such a discussion under the heading of “philosophical views”, since it is quite obviously a straightforward criticism of religious belief, forms of veneration, religious views of salvific efficacy, and so forth. The Hindu gods, in short, are impotent, devoid of agency, and more fictitious than real.

It is surely misleading if one would assert that MHK’s *vāda-s* and *darśana-s* consists in just “philosophical views”. Many of them are cosmovisions as defined above, and include even central activities of religious practice, including, as mentioned, a range of ritual activities such as bathing as a purifying practice, suicidal jumps into the fire, the (Jaina) fasting to death (*saṃthāra*), purification by abstention from meat eating, and worshipping inanimate objects such as trees.¹⁹ All of these practices are declared to be unmeritorious actions or, in the best case, as merely harmless.

The fact that Bhāviveka’s work clearly *also* includes religious belief and practice in its concept of *vāda-s* and *darśana-s* becomes even clearer in his lament against a god who allows the bad and unjust (MHK 9.110–111). Here again we are deeply involved in questions of religion. In the West one would call this the theodicy problem. Surely, such “grievances against god”, Bouthillette (2020: 88) reminds us, “are an old and common theological trope”.

Bhāviveka, however, entertains a special relationship with Vedānta, declaring that “whatever is well said in the Vedānta has all been taught by the Buddha” (MHK 4.56; cf. Gokhale 1958: 180). Thus, this content must have been borrowed or stolen from the Buddhists (cf. Qvarnström 1989: 103–4). On the one hand, this statement can be characterized as apologetic polemics. On the other hand, it can also be read as evidence that Bhāviveka acknowledged “hybrid identities” in the denominations, that is, that the interreligious other can be close in terms of teachings, beliefs, and practices.²⁰

¹⁹ See ch. 9.120-150; discussed in Bouthillette 2020: 66–s69. It is especially the TJ that expands on common religious practices, see, e.g., Gokhale 1958: 179.

²⁰ This does not only pertain to hidden Buddhist elements in Vedānta, but also to Buddhist practices that, if understood correctly, express the same as those of Vedānta. Bhāviveka,

For a final illustration of how Bhāviveka builds metaphorically on the visible religious attributes to conclude that their core is Buddhist, the following magnificent passage from the second chapter, *Munivratasamāśraya* (MHK 2.8–12), is a case in point:

“Wearing the black antelope skin of compassion, the one carrying the pure water jar of faith, who’s sensory doors are guarded by mindfulness, sits on the reed rug of resolution; takes refuge at the penance grove of great delight, the Mahāyāna; feeds on the fruits of the rapture of meditation, having the ‘establishment of mindfulness’ (*smṛtyupasthāna*) as sphere of activity. He whose offenses are destroyed by reciting the entire *sūtra*-s, eloquent and deep; mutters the *Sāvitrī* [prayer] of dependent origination, because he resorts to the two truths; worships daily the sun who is the one who has attained complete awakening, with the blossoms of the path, so rich in words, exuding fragrances throughout all of space; having burned unhealthy convictions (*saṃkalpa*) [as sacrificial oblation] in the fire of thorough analysis (*pratisaṃkhyāna*); thus may he practice the vow of the ascetic to reach the ultimate abode” (trl. Bouthillette 2020: 78).

This passage argues that religious practices by Brahmins and other followers of the Veda, from the fruitarian diet up to sun worship, are efficacious only if practiced in conformity with Mahāyāna Buddhist views, although the devotional practices in the phenomenal world may remain unchanged. A change, with which the substance of a Vedāntin is transformed into a Mādhyamika, while the visible characteristics remain unaltered – one would not be wrong to see in this passage also a strategy to temper the intrareligious critique of Mahāyāna’s “Hinduisation” by ‘Hīnayānists’.

To sum up the case of Bhāviveka’s initiation of the compendium genre, one can surely say that Bhāviveka does not compare systems of thought only, but full cosmovisions – insisting, of course, on the superiority of his own (cf. MHK 6. 64; Qvarnström 2015b: 149). So, why did he do that? What enabled him to put different *vāda*-s, *mārga*-s, *darśana*-s or *siddhānta*-s into a scheme of teachings (and groups) that share a certain *tattva*? To be sure, he must have had an implicit understanding that allowed him to include certain groups and teachings while excluding others, such as the Lokāyata.

Here a pre-comparative comparison seems at play that allowed him to discuss and, finally, refute, relativize or include (see the above case) other systems’ thoughts and practices. But what enabled him to pursue such a pre-comparative

for example, says that the Mahābrahmā of the Vedānta, being adored by its followers, is adored by the Bodhisattvas through the method of “non-adoration” (*anupāsanayoga*) – worshipped through “non-worshipping” (cf. Gokhale 1962: 274–5). In contrast to the Vedāntin, however, the Mādhyamika explicitly *knows* that salutations, recitations of hymns, etc., are only illusory manifestations.

comparison? In my opinion, it was the radical nominalism of Madhyamaka Buddhism (cf. Schlieter 2019) that allowed him to do so. Bhāviveka departs from Nāgārjuna’s argumentation that any view has to express itself in conventional language and is, therefore, from the perspective of highest truth (*pāramārtha*), unable to express reality (cf., e.g., MHK 6.15–16). In this regard, as Bouthillette (2020: 40) aptly remarks, for Bhāviveka “every view is refuted from the beginning”. Nāgārjuna’s opinion not to depart from a dogmatic assertion, as explained in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, seems to have had its share. Bhāviveka explains that a claim should be “critically investigated by persons who do not take up a dogmatic position (*pakṣa*)”, because, in line with Nāgārjuna, he postulates that a mind that is “concealed by attachment to a position (*pakṣarāgāvṛtamati*) does not even understand the truth (*satya*)” (MHK 8.18; trl. Qvarnström 1989: 102).

According to our modern understanding, a fully self-reflective comparison would encompass a neutral description of others. It would also include a reflection on the selection of the *comparanda*, the criteria of exclusion and inclusion, and a reflection on the “tertium” used in the procedure of comparison (see Freiburger 2019). Obviously, none of these aspects is reflected by Bhāviveka, nor is it within reach. Bhāviveka’s apologetic pre-comparative comparison seems closer to Buddhist therapeutic polemics of non-Buddhist views.²¹

Classification of *darśana*-s: Haribhadra Sūri’s *Ṣaḍdarśana-samuccaya*

The first work that showcases the scheme of classification of *darśana* already in its title is the short treatise by Haribhadra Sūri (8th century), belonging to the Jain-tradition.²² In his work *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* (“Summary of the Six Systems”, ṢDS), Haribhadra describes six cosmovisions: Buddhism (*bauddha ... darśana*), Nyāya, Sāṃkhya, Jaina, Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā (cf. verse 3, trl. in Qvarnström 1999: 189). In contrast to Bhāviveka, Haribhadra designates these systems not primarily as *vāda* but as *darśana*. However, he deals with a somewhat different set of traditions, leaving Vedānta unconsidered. The six systems are analysed according to their “fundamental differences” (*mūlabheda*), namely, how they express themselves according to the criteria of opinions on the “deity” or “deities” (*devatā*) and, further, regarding their ontological “principles” (*tattva*) (cf. Qvarnström

²¹ This is also a feature of Buddhist ‘doxographical’ works to come, written, for example, by Śāntarakṣita. It is their explicit aim to refute all “erroneous views of the self” (*vitathātmadrṣṭi*; see Eltschinger 2014:13), including those one still harbours oneself.

²² Qvarnström (1999:177) has identified earlier Jaina sources that use the concept of *darśana* in doxographic contexts

1999: 189; Nicholson 2010: 156). As can be seen in his treatment of his own tradition, the Jaina system, Haribhadra seems to build on an understanding of suffering in *saṃsāra* and final release (*mukti*, *mokṣa*), on morality, virtuous conduct (*dharma*) and benevolence, as well as the cultivation practices of Yoga. Surely, the Jaina doctrine of *anekānta-vāda*, or the “position of manifold perspectives,” had an impact on the attitude to deal with other traditions somewhat more “impartially” (*pakṣapāta*, “without assertion”). Folkert (1993: 218–227) describes the underlying attitude as “intellectual *ahimsā*”. In a nutshell, this doctrine holds that all judgments are necessarily conditional, and of provisional value in certain conditions. This attitude is expressed by prefacing every conceptual statement with *syāt* (“may be”). Therefore, the view is also called *syād-vāda*. However, Bouthillette (2020: 95–103, see 102) highlights the function of the “view of multiplexity” as a kind of “cleansing device” – similar to the concept of a Nāgārjunian “emptiness” – for getting rid of “the karmic layers of deluded views (*darśana-moha*).”

I will now take a closer look at the classificatory principles that structure Haribhadra’s work. It begins with a definition of the criteria that are used to group the *darśana*-s together. “Fundamental differences” (*mūlabheda*) of “all systems” (*sarvadarśana*, verse 2) pertain to “deities” (*devatā*) and “principles” (*tattva*). In addition, a third criterion, or probably a third way to articulate the two criteria given, distinguishes between *āstika* and *nāstika*, “affirmative” and “denying”. One may speak of a fourth, implicit criterion that governs the classification, which is the number of accepted, valid epistemological means (*pramāṇa*).

After paying homage to the Jina in the first Śloka, the ŚDS starts by outlining the Buddhist system. Haribhadra presents the Sugata, the Buddha, propagator of the four noble truths, as the deity (*devatā*) in the *bauddha-* or *saugata-darśana* (v. 4). In other words, he understands Siddhārtha Gautama as a *devatā* venerated as the Buddha similar to his depiction of the Jinendra, the Mahāvīra, as the *devatā* in Jainism (v. 44; see Qvarnström 1999: 194). The subsequent verses describe the *tattva*-s of Buddhism, which is the five constituents of the empirical person (as that which enacts the embodiment in the cycle of transmigration and constitutes suffering), the concept of the “self”, attachment, liberation, and finally, the two valid means of knowledge that Buddhists accept, namely, perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*) (vv. 5–10). Verse 12 declares that this was a summary of the Buddhist doctrine. There is no additional comment, nor even an attempt of further classification. The same holds true for his summary of the other systems. An interesting point is the fact that Haribhadra explains in regard to the *devatā*-criterion in Sāṃkhya: “Some followers of Sāṃkhya are atheists (*nirīśvarāḥ*), others have Īśvara as their deity” (v. 34; 193). Again, no final evaluation, comparison, or rating of these systems is given. The only explicit comment that the whole work

drops on the truth of the systems is a qualification that concludes the presentation of Haribhadra's own *darśana*, which is declared to be "faultless" (*anagha*) (v. 58), because it is consistent, and devoid of contradiction all the way through. The final system portrayed is the Lokāyata, the "materialists", relegated to an appendix (vv. 80–87). According to this unorthodox, or better, non-affirming system, a self or soul that searches for liberation is denied (*nāsti jīvo na nirvṛtiḥ*, v. 1). There is no karma, no world beyond sensual perception and sensual pleasure. To pursue the latter shall be the only goal in this one and only life.

Haribhadra's implicit comparative perspective is truly remarkable. The criterion of *devatā* does not only include the belief in an *īśvara* (as in a fraction of the Sāṃkhya), but includes the founders of two systems, Buddhism and Jainism, who are seemingly declared to be super-human. This is of course a problematic use of the word *devatā*, as the Buddha and the Jina were in the view of a considerable number of adherents initially not seen as "Gods" but as human originators of their teachings, or human beings in a state of omniscience and perfection (see Balcerowicz 1997: 208–210). Nicholson reads this as follows: In Haribhadra's portrayal of Mīmāṃsā, "deity" (this time: *deva*) is implicitly defined as "means of knowledge", in that way that their words or teachings lead to truth. The words of the Buddha and Jina, he continues, could be seen as "a means of knowledge", too, and even as "objects of devotion". In this sense, Haribhadra's claim that Buddhism and Jainism accept a 'deity' becomes indeed somewhat more plausible (cf. Nicholson 2010: 177–158). In any case, a broad meaning of "deity" that includes not only theistic views but also intentional behaviour of veneration, would allow us again to conclude that *darśana* does not only encompass philosophical views but also religious behaviour. To summarize: In contrast to the "non-theistic" Lokāyata, Buddhism and Jainism are declared to be "theistic" in the sense that transcendent, "deified" founders were of increasing importance to their followers. The second criterion, the *tattva*-s, pertains to the fundamental entities or truths accepted by each tradition, and is as such of direct soteriological importance.²³

In contrast to Nicholson who is less convinced that Haribhadra's criteria *devatā/tattva* may capture Lokāyata or Mīmāṃsā (Nicholson 2010: 147; cf. 157), I would like to take a different perspective. Exactly this artificiality that is not in every respect "fitting" can be seen as an outcome of his comparative and classifying endeavour. It demonstrates his preconception of *vāda* and *darśana*, which are

²³ In other texts such as the *Yogadrṣṭi-samuccaya*, Haribhadra focused more on ethics and spiritual practices, pointing more explicitly to the soteriological relevance of the "tattva-s". "Fallacious argument," Haribhadra holds, "produces in the mind sickness of intellect, destruction of equanimity, disturbance of faith and cultivation of pride. In many ways, it is the enemy of existence" (87; trl. Chapple 2003; cf. Bouthilette 2016: 8).

not only philosophical doctrines, but take on practical aspects of ways toward liberation. This implies that Haribhadra does not portray the schools as they would portray themselves, but compares them with an “ideal system” that is not articulated as such – even his own system, the Jaina tradition, usually does not portray itself with the category of “deity.”

Another classification that Haribhadra introduces and that will later gain momentum, though not in its original sense, is the difference between systems that are labelled as *āstika*, “affirmative” (*asti*, “faithful”), and those that are “denying” (*nāstika*). Haribhadra holds that the large majority of five systems including Buddhism and Jainism, are *āstika*, whereas only one, the Lokāyata, is declared to be *nāstika*. Unfortunately, the category is not explicitly defined, but it seems to be clear that Lokāyata does not count as a *darśana*. For Haribhadra, the “positive [soteriological] ways” (*āstikavāda*-s, v. 77) are those which build on moral and soteriological consequences of thoughts and actions. They focus on a final goal of liberation, and mostly include a *devatā*.²⁴

In sum, Haribhadra’s significant work does not only aim to portray all systems, but to do this exercise with a modest ranking only – actually, merely by underscoring the matchless qualities of the Jina and his insights (cf. Bouthillette 2020: 115). Based on further texts of the Jaina tradition such as the *Tattvārthasūtra* and its relation of *darśana* with *samyaktva* and *mithyātva*, wrong- and rightness, Folkert argued (1975: 240–2) that *darśana* in Jaina usage comes close to “a faith”, as a set of beliefs. This, he says, “the transformation of ‘faith’ into ‘a faith’”, was surely not simply the outcome of an “encounter with philosophical diversity”, as, for example, Eckel holds (2008: 34). It presupposes a new capacity, namely, to see even in one’s own faith a faith of a kind. I can only underscore Bouthillette’s convincing interpretation of the subtle way the ŚDS achieves its salvific purpose here. He argues that the work is not simply an introduction to the “history of philosophy”, but “a training into truth (*tattva-abhyāsa*), a *jñāna-yoga* fully coherent with the Jaina path. It uses heterodoxy to establish orthodoxy” (2020: 118). Most fun-

²⁴ The latter would, of course, if taken to be a criterion of exclusion, be problematic for the “atheist” fraction of Sāṃkhya. It is certainly not a definition of *āstika* as the orthodox traditions that assume a deity in a strong sense, and, even less so, the criterion of those who subscribe to the infallibility of the Veda. Nicholson evidences this interpretation of *āstika* / *nāstika* by pointing to Mañibhadra’s commentary on Haribhadra text that defines *āstika* as those systems “that affirm the existence of another world (*paraloka*), transmigration (*gati*), virtue (*puṇya*), and vice (*pāpa*)” (quoted in Nicholson 2010: 155). So, interestingly, the mark *nāstika* seems initially directed against schools that – seen from an “orthodox” view – denied the realm of morality, such as the heretic teachers as depicted in polemical texts of the Buddhists. Only much later, the term became a partisan variant striking the critics of the Vedic lore.

damentally, the work aims to turn the karmically poisonous views of other *darśana*-s into an all-encompassing gnosis.

Mādhavācārya's and Rājaśekhara's *darśana*-compedia

I will now turn to works of the 13th and 14th centuries in order to reinforce how *darśana*-compedia can be read as “comparing religions” *avant la lettre*. In his extensive *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, Sāyaṇamādhava sets out to describe in detail the teachings and tenets of 15 different schools (including Cārvāka, Buddhism, Jainism, or the Yoga system). The 16th school, Vedānta or “Ādi Śaṅkara,” the position of the author himself, is only alluded to. Mādhava portrays the *darśana*-s in an ascending, hierarchical, and almost dialectical way. Each system appears to be a rejection or enlargement of the former, which fulfils the unsatisfied epistemic desire of the preceding system. This vaguely resembles, as has been noted, G.W.F. Hegel's dialectic presentation of the history of philosophy.

Vedānta, of course, is the consummate and perfect system. Remarkably, however, Mādhava classifies and assembles the systems in heterogeneous ways. Some *darśana*-s represent only internal differences in one and the same tradition (e.g., Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita within Vedānta), or present a certain sub-school such as the grammarians (*pāṇini-darśana*). Other *darśana*-s consist of entire traditions. Cārvāka, Buddhists and Jains are now considered to be *nāstika*.²⁵ In other words, a categorisation of *āstika* as orthodox, and *nāstika* as heterodox, absent in Haribhadra, has been established in the meantime.

Interestingly, Mādhava exclusively deals with systems that originated in India. Neither Muslim traditions, nor Parsis or Jews are mentioned (cf. Halbfass 1988: 361). This could point to a hidden conception of *darśana*-s as somehow related to the Veda, even if the latter is rejected. This argument would be somewhat similar to the assumption that a full-blown atheism is only possible with Abrahamic monotheisms at its root. It could also be motivated by an implicit view that *darśana*-s need to relate to “Indic” cultivation practice (*yoga*).

Relevant for the question pursued here is, moreover, the fact that Mādhava does not deal with philosophical doctrines alone but includes descriptions of religious and social practices. To quote from the classical translation of the first 15 chapters of Mādhava's work by Edward B. Cowell and Archibald E. Gough: “All the four (sects of) Bauddhas [i.e., Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, Sautrāntika, and

²⁵ This builds on the view by Manu (2.11) that all of them reject the Veda: “Any twice-born who disregards these two roots [*śruti* and *smṛti*] on the basis of the science of logic should be excluded by the righteous as a *nāstika*, a reviler of the Veda” (trl. in Nicholson 2010: 168).

Vaibhāṣika] proclaim the same emancipation, arising from the extirpation of desire, &c., the stream of cognitions and impressions. The skin garment, the water-pot, the tonsure, the rags, the single meal in the forenoon, the congregation, and the red vesture, are adopted by the Bauddha mendicants” (Cowell, Gough 1882: 35; my additions in brackets). Elsewhere, Mādhava depicts devotional attitudes, as seen in earlier works. Buddhists, he says, put trust in their holy teacher, the Buddha (cf. Cowell 1882: 24). The chapter on the Jaina tradition does not start with dogmatic aspects, but states: “The Gymnosophists [i.e. without garment, naked, the *Vivasana*-s, JS], rejecting these opinions of the Muktakachchhas [i.e. *muktakaccha* = Buddhists; making a specific detail of Buddhist robes the mark of distinction], and maintaining continued existence to a certain extent, overthrow the doctrine of the momentariness of everything” (Cowell, Gough 1882: 36). Again, social practices are used to describe the system of Rāmānuja (1050–1137), or to distinguish between the two strands within Jainism: “The Swetambaras are the destroyers of all defilement, they live by alms, they pluck out their hair, they practice patience, they avoid all association, and are called the Jaina Sādhus. The Digambaras pluck out their hair, they carry peacocks’ tails in their hands, they drink from their hands, and they eat upright in the giver’s house, – these are the second class of the Jaina Rishis”; in the concluding summary, he even elaborates on the religious status of women, commenting a woman “attains not the highest knowledge, she enters not Mukti, – so say the Digambaras; but there is a great division on this point between them and the Swetambaras” (see Cowell, Gough 1882: 62–3).

The probably most prominent example for the argument that *darśana*-s are in this genre more than just philosophical tenets is the *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* by the Jaina monk Rājaśekhara (Maladhāri Rājaśekharasūri), 13th century.

Rājaśekhara’s work of 180 verses follows in several respects the work of Haribhadra (and used even the same title). It may be no exaggeration to argue that in this work, the process of implicit comparison of “religious traditions” is more prominent than in any other premodern Indian work. Rājaśekhara enlarges the number of two (or three) categories (named “marks,” *liṅga*), *devatā* and *tattva*, and, implicitly, *pramāṇa*, by the additional six categories: “dress,” “conduct” (that is, salvific and ascetic practice), “teacher” (*guru*), “liberation” (*mokṣa*), and “logic” (*tarka*; cf. Folkert 1993: 127–128). Verse 2 declares:

“Dharma is beloved in all the world; let the six systems [Jaina, Sāṃkhya, Jaiminiya, Yoga, Vaiśeṣika, and Bauddha] declare it. Among them, in mark, dress, conduct, deity and teacher, in *pramāṇa* and *tattva*, release and logic (*tarka*), one perceives difference. This is their common declaration: release comes through the eightfold yoga” (*Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* 2-3, trl. Folkert 1993: 361).

This statement is crucial, obviously highlighting a comparative approach. First, it outlines an intrinsic relationship between the *dharma* and the six systems: *Dharma* has often been taken as the closest equivalent to the Western concepts of “religion/s”. *Dharma*, as said above, can be used to denote one’s own system, but usually not in a comparative sense. In the case of the Jainas, *dharma* may illustrate the claim that all sorts of possible, meaningful teachings are included in the Jaina cosmivision. In addition to this meaning of *dharma*, well-known meanings of *dharma* are righteousness, or the whole sphere of morality, as is argued in various Hindu scriptures. It seems that it is in this sense only that Rājaśekhara can reasonably argue that “*dharma* is beloved in all the world.”

Moreover, the verse above explains that the only mark, which in addition to *dharma*-belovedness unites all *darśana*-s, is the concept of a salvific Yoga practice. Yoga, a means to release, consist of knowledge, faith, and conduct (cf. verse 155). I will get back to this remarkable opinion below.

The treatment of the Mīmāṃsā (Jaiminīya) can serve as an example of how Rājaśekhara describes the non-philosophical marks of *darśana*-followers: “The Jaiminīyas also carry the single or triple staff like the Sāṃkhya. (61) The Mīmāṃsāka are two-fold: karma- and brahma-Mīmāṃsāka. [...]. (62) They are clad in *dhātu*-red, and sit on a deerskin; The Bhāṭṭas and Prābhākaras are shaven, and carry a water-pot. (63) The only practice accepted by them is *vedānta* meditation; In their doctrine there is no deity distinguished by omniscience, etc.” (trl. Folkert 1993). In the same way, followers of all other *darśana*-s are characterized. The Śaiva-Yogins, for example, wear a wooden cloak, a mass of knotted hair, smear their bodies with ash, eat tasteless food, may be married or not, clean their bodies before meditation, greet in a special way, worship Śiva, etc. (cf. vv. 84–90).

The *nāstika* position of the Lokāyata does not represent a *darśana*. Rājaśekhara declares now explicitly what Haribhadra’s attitude already implied, namely, that this school lacks the specific sense of *dharma*. It also misses the eightfold practice of Yoga.²⁶ Again, *āstika* here includes much more than simply traditions that embrace a *devatā*, or the Veda, etc. It seems that for Rājaśekhara, all *darśana*-s concur in their aim to bestow meaning on Yoga practice because *there is* soteriological efficacy.²⁷ Accordingly, he holds that all six *darśana*-s – Buddhist, Jains, Mī-

²⁶ Cf. verse 31 on the Jains: “One who takes pleasure in the eight-fold yoga [...] will obtain uninterrupted bliss” (Folkert 1993: 364).

²⁷ Qvarnström has put forward the idea that in the whole genre of *darśana*-doxographies, yoga practice may be a common preconception of what a *darśana* entails. Patañjali’s classical yoga system, he says (cf. 1999: 174), is neither made into a system, nor criticised, which is, as Bouthillette (cf. 2020: 63) has recently shown, not fully correct, at least in respect to Bhāṇiveka.

māmsā-Hindus, etc., take the eightfold Yoga – *yama* and *niyama*, that is morality, including non-injury and purity, *āsana* (sitting postures), *prāṇāyāma* (breath regulation), etc., as their orientation – enumerated and explained in the concluding part that deals non-denominational with all *darśana*-s (verses 149–155).

Having outlined the common ground of the six *āstika darśana*-s, Rājaśekhara adds three verses on the different interreligious meanings of *dharma* and the intrareligious differences of professional and non-professional engagement with *dharma*: “*Dharma* consist in cessation in the systems [*darśana*-s] that seek the highest good; But it consists in activity for householders desiring the pleasures of royalty, etc.” (verse 156). In other words, *dharma* may lead to release, but it is also the foundation of morality and moral reward (see verse 157). It is exactly at this juncture where Rājaśekhara assumes a common ground of the *darśana*-s that is beyond “philosophy.” All *darśana*-s take two things for granted. First, there is a moral causality. And second, each system shall for the professional consist of cultivation practices that will realize, actualize, or stabilize *dharma*, whereas the non-professional lay practitioner may practice *dharma* in worldly activities (cf. verse 156). In Rājaśekhara’s view, the Lokāyata is no *darśana* because it emphasises sensual pleasure and happiness in this one and only life, does not see the soul as moral agent in terms of *karma*, and accepts just one *pramāṇa*, viz. “sense perception.” In Western terms, the system has been called Materialism, or philosophical scepticism. Interestingly, in the 13th century, it is merely a reminiscence, because the school was no longer extant in medieval India. However, by denying that the Lokāyata is a *darśana* at all, Rājaśekhara constructs a category that is again closer to classifying “religious traditions” than “philosophies.”

In other words, in Rājaśekhara trajectory, we can witness a “religionization” of the genre: He delineates religious traditions, of course, in the Indian understanding: that is, as salvific systems building on a teacher, “god” or “gods,” cultivation practices, and philosophical doctrines of ontology, epistemology, logic, or of the nature of the person.

Although there are obviously different agendas at play by the different protagonists of this genre, it should be mentioned that a number of them, and especially those written by Jainas, aim to portray religious practice and philosophical thoughts of competing schools in neutral terms. But will all this suffice to justify the claim that this genre is a kind of “comparative religion”? Does it not overstretch the evidence? These questions shall now be discussed in a concluding section.

Conclusion

To start with the most general observation: The four specimens of the genre of *darśana*-compendia discussed here clearly show that *darśana*-s cannot be taken to mean just plain “philosophical system”. Thus, calling the compendia “doxographies” made significant content invisible, namely, that they referenced views and practices that are better captured as religious cosmovisions, including, occasionally, ‘theological’ arguments, and finally, the focus on salvific self-cultivation practices, which is a backbone of *darśana*-s according to most of the compendia.

Definitely, for a number of Western and Indian Indologists and philosophers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the *darśana*-genre was – because of their classificatory, inherently comparative perspective, a means to argue that Indian “schools” are philosophical, because the genre argued with a certain rational disengagement for the superiority of a certain philosophical system. Thus, some Western scholars tend to downplay that the genre was also identifying and categorizing followers of ascetic teachers with visible identity markers, which points to solidified group identities.

However, more recently, the salvific and social dimensions of “Indian doxography” has been put on the agenda. Bouthillette (2020: 181) argues that “these texts appear to convey a religio-political vision of the status and function of the doxographers’ tradition”, explaining not only philosophically to others in which system salvific truth resides, but also seeking, in consequence, to convince respective rulers which school or religious community they should support.

Yet, the compendia’s hidden messages can also be read as means of identity politics. Philosophical-religious cosmovisions of others are used to articulate one’s own inter- and intrareligious identity, and to position the realm of religious cosmovisions as whole against secular alternatives such as the Lokāyata. All of this fulfils more than anything else a religious agenda. A religious agenda, in this context, can be defined as any discursive strategy that defines human finitude (mortality) as a fundamental lack, while it declares, on the other hand, a transcendent system of moral reward and retribution as compulsory.

Moving to the second major aspect discussed here, the question of how these works can be seen as indigenous forms of “comparative religion”, it seems, first of all, worth noticing that the compendia-genre materialised with Mādhyamika and Jaina thinkers. Both traditions developed metatheories of how to disengage ‘metaphysical’ views. A training of how to assume a “no-view”, or how to achieve a perspectival “over-view”, was considered key, and it seems to me that these attitudes are exactly the necessary epistemic fundament for analysing other tradition’s doctrines and practices from a detached perspective. Or, to analyse – from

a philosophical point of view – other traditions as *believing in* their philosophical doctrines, that is, to analyse them as religious cosmovisions.

But can it be justified to describe these texts as classifying and comparing “religions” given the heterogeneous nature of *darśana-s*? Obviously, some may be addressed as “religions” (Jains, Buddhists, etc.), while other *darśana-s* are certainly more philosophical, or “intra-religious others”. In the latter cases, their following is never addressed as a distinct social group.

One should proceed with caution here. Even if the genre can be seen as a practice of implicitly comparing religious ideas and practices, it would probably overstretch the evidence to read *darśana*-compendia as dealing primarily with something similar to “religions”. In fact, the genre discusses *darśana-s* as largely ahistorical units. In the works discussed above I could not find any explicit reflection on the historical development of social communities of practitioners or believers. This is mirrored, for example, in the way the category *devatā* is applied to the Mahāvīra or the Buddha. Actually, Jainism and Buddhism are never discussed as historically emerging.

Likewise, the application of the concept “comparison” is not without difficulty. A theory of “comparing *darśana-s*” seems to be absent. Only occasionally, certain marks outlined in the portrayal of one *darśana* are directly compared with marks of a second. More often, the systems are portrayed in a “compartment” style, and treated one after the other. I would suggest the following hypothesis here: Perhaps it is an underlying assumption of this genre that one actually has to *practice* a system for unlocking and testing the salvific potential. In the same way, one must practice a *darśana* in order to evaluate the system’s ability for establishing a moral community. Rājaśekhara follows this trajectory in plotting the category *darśana* against the non-soteriological and immoral Lokāyata, in which there is no such practical dimension. Looking at *darśana-s* from such an evaluative point of view may usher comparative interests, but only to a certain degree. In the final consequence, it will undermine and devalue a purely comparative interest:²⁸ Once that the most effective practice has been determined, comparison as a theoretical endeavour is no longer needed. The Buddha’s view of his own two yoga teachers, whose practices were effective, but did not lead out of suffering, may already be an illustrative case in point for this attitude.

This whole attitude is, presumably, one of the reasons why “comparative religion”, or the systematic study of religions as an academic discipline, has never been more broadly institutionalised at Indian universities. Indian traditions are taught in Sanskrit colleges and Western religion/s in Theological seminars.

²⁸ The Western project of comparing religions, however, was until recently not so “neutral” as it often wants to see itself (see Gladigow 1997).

Beyond this, there are some few institutions researching religions with sociological methods, and predominantly tribal religion with ethnological paradigms. Asha Mukherjee, surveying “comparative religion” as an academic field in contemporary India, argues that in the West, philosophy and theology are conceptualised as opponents, which she considers from her Indian background to be an artificial distinction. Personal self-transformation, by way of studying both “philosophy of religion” and “comparative religion” is no “private” side effect, but, in her understanding, an intended outcome of the interconnected disciplines of religion and philosophy (see Mukherjee 2016: 33–37). In this way, she understands her own task in doing “comparative religion” at the Viśva-Bharati University in Śāntiniketan.

In an earlier contribution, Pratap Kumar already saw the marginal institutionalisation of comparative religion in India rooted in the view that religion, in contrast to the Western conception, is “not necessarily a personal matter but something too intellectual and hence distanced from one’s personal life”. In India, religion is still “more about practising it than intellectually comprehending its various not too direct or obvious implications” (Kumar 2004: 128). And, once again, Kumar (2004: 130) repeats the argument that “in the absence of a generic notion either a general comparativism or a historical treatment of religion as a general phenomenon could not take place”. So, he concludes that comparative study in premodern India did take place, but only for “theological reasons”. “Indian philosophical debates comparing Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and other religio-philosophical positions” were done with the purpose “of disputing the other’s claims”. A secular view, he holds, was never achieved. Indian scholars were too deeply immersed in the “experience of religion” for being able to see religion “as a part of a totality that includes religion as a social phenomenon” (Kumar 2004: 135).

While such opinions can certainly be defended, it is nevertheless an open question why the genre of the *darśana*-compendia, already engaged in comparative perspectives, did not pave the way to the normative idea of a neutral and “objective”, and deliberately self-reflective practice of comparing cosmovisions. For sure, I will not presuppose here that neutrality and objectivity in comparing “religions”, championed by many modern Western scholars of “comparative religion”, has ever been fully achieved in the West. Nevertheless, it was obviously one of the discipline’s regulative ideas. For the Indian authors of the *darśana*-works, such a regulative idea might exactly be an attitude they would have found less attractive, if not pointless. In this vain, the decision to ignore Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in the latest generation of newly written *darśana*-compendia may provide a clue here. To consider these fairly new arrivals in India, for whatever motives, as non-compendium worthy, or “non-*darśana*-s”, was probably the most effective obsta-

cle that hindered on the side of Hindu traditions the emergence of a broader understanding of “comparative religion” as an academic discipline in modern India.

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