

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: ORTHODOX AND HETERODOX SCHOOLS

Indian Philosophy or Hindu Philosophy is generally classified into 6 orthodox schools (āstika) and 3 heterodox (nāstika) schools.

Difference between Astik schools and Nastik schools

The basic difference between the two branches of Hindu Philosophy schools is said to be based on the recognition of Vedas. Orthodox schools recognize the authority of Vedas while heterodox schools don't believe in the authority of Vedas.

Out of these nine systems, eight are atheistic as there is no place for God in them. Only Uttara Mimamsa, which is also called Vedanta, has a place for God in it.

Six Orthodox Schools of Hindu Philosophy

The six orthodox schools are called as shatdarshanas and include Nyaya, Sankhya, Yoga, Vaisheshika, Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta Philosophy). Most of these schools of thought believe in the theory of Karma and rebirth. Moksha (salvation) is believed to be the liberation from the cycle of birth and death and is the ultimate goal of human life.

1. Nyaya Philosophy

Nyaya school follows a scientific and a rational approach. Sage Gautama is the founder of this school. Nyaya school banks upon various pramanas (mechanism of attaining knowledge). It believes that gaining knowledge through the five senses is the sole way of attaining liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

2. Sankhya Philosophy

Sankhya is the oldest of all philosophies put forth by the sage Kapila. It is a dualistic philosophy with Purusha (soul) and Prakriti (nature) in it. Advaita Vedanta derives its base from Sankhya School. Sankhya also devolves philosophical basis for Yoga. It emphasizes the attainment of knowledge of self through meditation and concentration.

3. Yoga Philosophy

Yoga school introduces the methods of the discipline of body and mind. Sage Patanjali is the founder of Yoga. Emancipation of Purusha from Prakriti by self-awareness through the discipline of body and mind is conceptualized by Yoga. It is believed that practising Ashtanga Yoga is the way to relieve oneself from past sins in order to make way for liberation.

4. Vaisheshika

Vaisheshika school deals with metaphysics. It was founded by the sage Kanada. It is an objective and realistic philosophy of the Universe. According to the Vaisheshika school of philosophy, the universe is reducible to a finite number of atoms, Brahman being the fundamental force causing consciousness in these atoms.

5. Purva Mimamsa

Purva Mimamsa school believes in the complete authority of Vedas. It is based on sage Jaimini's Mimamsa Sutras. It emphasizes the power of yajnas and mantras in sustaining the activities of the universe. It states that a human being can attain salvation only by acting in conformity with the principles of Vedas.

6. Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta)

Vedanta school is a monistic school of philosophy that believes that the world is unreal and the only reality is Brahman. The three sub-branches of Vedanta are Advaita of Shankaracharya, Vishishta Advaita of Ramanujacharya and Dvaita of Madhwacharya. Uttara Mimamsa is based on Upanishads (the end portions of Vedas).

Three Heterodox Schools of Indian Philosophy

Schools that do not accept the authority of Vedas are by definition unorthodox (nastika) systems. The following schools belong to heterodox schools of Indian Philosophy.

1. Carvaka

It is characterised as a materialistic and aesthetic school of thought. Accepted direct perception as the surest method to prove the truth of anything. Insists on joyful living.

Also known as Lokayata, Carvaka is a materialistic school of thought. Its founder was Carvaka, author of the Barhaspatya Sutras in the final centuries B.C.

The original texts have been lost and our understanding of them is based largely on criticism of the ideas by other schools. As early as the 5th Century, Saddaniti and Buddhaghosa connected the Lokayatas with the Vitandas (or Sophists), and the term Carvaka was first recorded in the 7th Century by the philosopher Purandara, and in the 8th Century by Kamalasila and Haribhadra.

2. Buddhist Philosophy

It is a system of beliefs based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhism is a non-theistic philosophy whose tenets are not especially concerned with the existence or non-existence of God.

Four Noble Truths in Buddhism are the following.

1. There is suffering
2. There is a cause of suffering

3. There is a cessation of suffering
4. There is a way to cessation of suffering

Buddhists philosophy of life to get 'Nirvana' from suffering is based on the following eight principles:

1. Right Faith (Samyak Dristi)
2. Right Resolve (Samyak Sankalpa)
3. Right Speech (Samyak Vakya)
4. Right Action (Samyak Karmanta)
5. Right Living (Samyak Ajiva)
6. Right Thought (Samyak Smriti)
7. Right concentration (Samyak Samadhi)
8. Right Effort (Samyak Vyayama)

3. Jain Philosophy

Already in existence by the 6th century B.C, it was revived by Mahavira, the 24th Jain Tirthankara. According to Jainism, Nirvana or liberation is obtained through three jewels: Right Philosophy, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct (Tri-ratna). Right conduct implies 5 abstinences: not to lie, not to steal, not to strive for luxury and not to strive for possessions, not to be unchaste and not to injure (Ahimsa).

Ajivika Philosophy

A related philosophy that some classify under the heterodox system is Ajivika Philosophy. The Ājīvikas may simply have been a more loosely organized group of wandering ascetics (shramanas or sannyasins). Some of its prominent figures were Makkhali Gosala and Sanjaya Belatthaputta. This was an ascetic movement of the Mahajanapada period in the Indian subcontinent.