

Vāda Paramparā (वाद परम्परा) As an Intellectual Tradition: Its Historical Emergence and Development in India

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Abstract:

The Vāda Paramparā (वाद-परम्परा), or debate tradition in India, originated in the Vedic period through brahmodya (ब्रह्मोद्य-philosophical dialogues) and matured in the Upaniṣadic saṃvāda. It was later systematized in the Nyāya Sūtras, which classified debates as vāda (truth-seeking), jalpa (argument for victory), and vitanḍā (mere refutation). Buddhist and Jaina thinkers further enriched this tradition, making dialectical exchanges a central feature of philosophical development in India. Over centuries, debates in royal courts, monasteries, and centers of learning shaped the growth of Indian philosophy, reflecting a culture that valued rational inquiry, pluralism, and the pursuit of ultimate truth. Its development demonstrates the vibrancy of India's intellectual culture and its enduring contribution to global philosophical traditions. The objective of this study is to explore the **origin, evolution, and development of the Vāda Paramparā** highlighting its role in shaping India's intellectual and philosophical heritage. The Vāda Paramparā in India emerged from Vedic dialogues and evolved through philosophical traditions, fostering a culture of **truth-seeking, rational inquiry, and intellectual**. The study follows a **historical and analytical method**, using primary sources such as the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Nyāya Sūtras, Buddhist and Jaina texts. A **comparative and descriptive approach** is applied to trace the origin, evolution, and significance of the Vāda Paramparā in Indian philosophy.

Key words: Vāda Parampara, jalpa, Vitanḍā, Veda, Indian Philosophy, Intellectual Tradition.

1. Introduction

The Vāda Paramparā in India is a significant aspect of the country's intellectual and philosophical history, highlighting the evolution of discourse, reasoning, and argumentation across various traditions and schools of thought. This tradition embodies the systematic exploration of philosophical concepts, the dialectical method of inquiry, and the continuous engagement with diverse perspectives. Right from inception of Indian Civilization, the art of debating was taken up seriously and cultivated assiduously. The debates have been diverse and shifting; many a times very complex and competitive, or enduring and lasting in agreements and understanding also. There are situations of debate described in the vedic saṃhitās. The

Upanisads use the term Brahmodya for Vāda and give a number of specimens it great debates revealing with insights of seers and intellectuals.

2. Meaning and the Significance of Vāda

The word ‘Vāda’(वाद) means ‘**Debate**’; Parampara(परम्परा) means ‘**Continuing Tradition**’(Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016,p. 21). The vāda process aims for a conclusion and theory building along the way, leading to vāda also meaning a “**Sense of theory.**” Theories in the philosophical systems were named vādas, e.g. Ārambhavāda, Prāmāṇyavāda, etc. “Some of the treatises dealing with specific theories were named as vāda granthas”(Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016,p. 26).

Vāda, Debate or argumentation or discussion is one of the padārtha-s. refers to discussions and it one of the padārtha-s that differ across philosophical systems. While the ‘Vad’ (वद्) is derived from root ‘Vad’ (वद्) (to say- yahha), which has ageneral meaning to speak or to say, but in the present context, the specific meaning of ‘Vad’ is grahuysa.

India has been continues to be a ‘Knowledge Society’ dating back to its Vāda , the source of the Indian/ Hindu intellectual tradition were logic and reasoning protected democracy from authoritarian tendencies. Veda is known as ‘**Śruti (श्रुति)**’ or revealed knowledge intuited by rishis. Veda is derived from the verbal root ‘vid (विद्)’; ‘vid’ meaning ‘to know.’

“Indian debate has a rich history of three millennia. There have been debates with a view to find out the truth, for a search of harmony and inherent unity of divergent theories. There have also been debates with sharp differences emphasizing (Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016, p. 25).

In the Indian systems of Logic, B.K. Matilal recognizes two distinct traditions. (Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016, p. 21).

- 1) **The tradition of vāda (debates, dialogues and discussions)**
- Uses “**dialectical tricks, arguments and sophistry**”
- 2) **The pramāṇa tradition**
-Is concerned with **criteria for empirical knowledge**

Although Matilal does not show a relationship between these two distinct traditions, they are interrelated, according to Tripathi. The vāda tradition, “Does not simply subside in sophistry and tricks, it very much effects and enriches the other tradition concerned with epistemology, providing a critique of diverse schools of philosophy. Vāda leads to true knowledge which would culminate in salvation (mokṣa). In fact pramāṇa is invariably linked to both vāda and darśana. There is a popular saying amongst Sanskrit paṇḍits —vāde vāde jāyate.”

Tripathi points out that the (Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016,p. 5),

“First aphorism of Nyāyasūtra by Gautama says that by the true knowledge of sixteen categories of this discipline, niḥśreyasa (liberation) is acquired. Dīnāga in his Nyāyapraveśakasūtram says . . . After acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of Nyāya, one knows the despicable and the acceptable, and acquisitioning the acceptable, one gets salvation”.

Tripathi goes on to assert that there is an inextricable link between vāda and darśana. The popular saying of the Sanskrit paṇḍits —"vāde vāde jāyate tattvabodhaḥ (वादे वादे जायते तत्त्वबोधः- **after going through the series of vādas, true knowledge is acquired**).” The concept of tattvabodha is to arrive at “the very essence and ultimate truth,” and this is a feature of the vāda tradition that distinguishes it from western dialecticism (**Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016,p. 21**).

The **Greek philosophers** like **Aristotle** saw dialectics primarily as,

“The art of discussion, debate, controversy, a method of argument or disputation, the process of discursive or conversational thinking,” (**Esther Solomon 1976, Indian Dialectics, vol. 1, p. 4, quoted in Tripathi, 51**).

In the Indian traditions, words, speech, and sound are said to liberate because they enlighten. In some traditions, the word is viewed as the world and as Brahman. A person achieves purification of self when they test a theory through vāda (वाद) (proper debate, discussions and dialogue) and are able to settle disputes. In such a world, vāda assumes great importance. In fact, words were seen as a spiritual pursuit with the power to emancipate (**Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016,pp. 21-22**).

The Indian debating tradition held all to a high standard and debates were graded according to “ the honesty of their purpose, the quality of debate, the decorum and the mutual regard of the participants.” The highest in status, considered to be the most noble, is **Samvāda(संवाद)**. This dialogue “takes place, in all earnestness, between an ardent seeker of truth and an enlightened teacher. Most of the ancient Indian texts are in this format.” **Samvada** is a discourse structured for imparting some teaching. **Vāda(वाद)**, **Jalpa (जल्प) (debate)** and **Vitanda (वितण्डा- one-sided debate)** “are clever and structured (Tantra–yukthi) debates and arguments between rivals (**Sreenivasarao, Debates and Arguments: Ancient India- Part One,2021,sreenivasarao's blogs**).

3. Historical phases of the tradition of vāda in India

Tradition of 'Vad' in India Historically, the development of debate in India can be divided into four phases.

- i. **The Age Revelations (around 3000 BCE to 500 BCE) : was the period when mantras were revealed to the seers through their vision. (Vedic Period)**
- ii. **The Age of Argument (around 500 BCE to CE 1000) : Was the most fertile period for the development of concepts related to Vāda and it was also marked with most serious debates. (Tarka Period)**
- iii. **The Age of Diversification (Around CE 1000 to CE 1800) : sectarian debates between diverse philosophical schools were intensely carried on in this age. (The expansion Period)**
- iv. **The Modern Age (around CE 1800 onwards)**

The first level is the Vedic period from Prehistoric times to about 1000 CE. In this first phase, We would have seen a later tradition in the form of “ Brahmoyna”, “Brahmasabha”, “ Samvad- Episode”, Prchha Vichikitsa and Vakovakya.

i. The Age Revelations - around 3000 BCE to 500 BCE : (Mantra- Kāla =Vedic Period) Origins in Vedic Literature

The origins of vāda paramparā can be traced back to the Vedic texts, where early forms of philosophical inquiry and discourse began to emerge. These prose texts provide explanations and interpretations of the rituals outlined in the Vedas. They reflect early discussions about the significance of rituals, serving as a platform for philosophical dialogue.

There were democratic institutions in Vedic age, i.e. **sabhā and samiti** (like perhaps the lower and upper houses of parliament today), where discussions and debates could materialize. The continuity of a sabhā and samiti was maintained in **village panchayats**. In 1828, Raja Rammohun Roy traced an analogy of "Panchayat" to ancient Hindu law books connecting them to the organization of sabhā.

The dialogue hymns of **Rgveda** have ample elements of **debate**.

➤ **Dialogue between Indra and Agastya (Rig Veda 1.170) :**

Q: "Agastya asks Indra how human can attain divine grace and wisdom, and he questions Indra's role as the provider of power and strength to those who worship him."

A: "Indra responds by reaffirming his power and the necessity of action and effort from humans to invoke divine support."

➤ **Sarama and the pani's (Rig Veda 10.108):**

Q: "Sarama demands that the Pani's return the stolen cows, representing wealth and resources that rightfully belong to the gods and the people who worship them."

A: "The Pani's mock sarama and refuse to return the cows, engaging in a back- and forth with her as they try to justify their action and trick her."

➤ **In the "Hymn of Yama and Yamī" (X.10), the dialogue between a brother and a sister turn on the propriety of incestuous relations. Yama counters each and every statement of Yamī.**

➤ **In the hymn on Purūravas and Urvaśī (X.95) all the points raised by Purūravas are countered by Urvaśī.**

The concept of brahmodya (the assemblies for conducting debates and discussions) is spelled out in the dialogue between Śauceya and Uddālaka Āruṇi.

Additionally, Brahmodyas took place during the Aśvamedha and Daśarātra yajñas. At that time, the titles of kavi and vipra were bestowed to the academics who performed the best in a brahmodya.

Que: "Who is born again?"

Ans: "It is the moon that is born again."

Que: "What is the great vessel?"

Ans: "The great vessel, undoubtedly, is the world".

Que: "Who was the beautiful one?"

Ans: "Śrī (Lakṣmī) was the beauty beyond any doubt."

Que: "What is the remedy for cold?"

Ans: "The remedy for cold undoubtedly, is fire."

Que: "Who was the tawny one?"

Ans: "Undoubtedly, there are two tawny ones the day and the night."

(Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.4)

In another interesting brahmodya described in **Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XI.4**, i.e. Uddālaka Āruṇi, a resident of Kurupāñcāla country is confronted for the brāhmaṇas of north with several.

Asking riddles and solving them was another aspect of Brahmodyas. Śatapatha Brahmana and other Vedic scriptures provide examples of these brahmodyas. The brahmodyas did not always pose metaphysical questions. A question about the center and the farthest end of the earth is addressed in the **Taittirīya Samhitā of the Yajurveda**.

Q: "Who is the one that roams alone? Who is the one that is reborn again and again? What is the remedy for ice? What is the great field for sowing?"

A: "The sun roams alone. The moon is the one that is reborn again and again. Fire is the remedy for ice. Earth is the great field for sowing."

In Vedic literature, the words "**brahmavāda**," "**brahmavādin**," and "**brahmavādini**" have been used to describe debaters and discussants.

Those who are learned and gifted with vision are referred to as **kavi (poet)**, **vipra (scholar)**, and **rṣi (seer)**. To find these poets, seers, and academics, assemblies were arranged. They were referred to as vidatha.

Upanishads

The Upanisads are that end part of the Vedas. Representing a major shift from ritualistic practices to metaphysical inquiry, the Upanishads contain dialogues between teachers and students, addressing profound questions about existence, the nature of reality (Brahman), and the self (Atman).

Hence Upanishads debates are also taken as an example here;

In the **Chandogya Upanishad**, the dialogue between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shvetaketu explores the relationship between the individual self and the universal self, illustrating the use of dialogue for philosophical exploration.

The extensive record of the proceedings of the debate in the Upanishads is one of the most valuable and authentic documents of a philosophical debate even if the characters of this narrative do not belong to the history in the modern sense of the term, they are very much parts of a larger history of ideas.

Brahmodya compromised of questions raised by one wings and answers provided from the other wing. This method is followed in the great debate or brahmodya between Yājñavalkya and other scholars in the court of Janaka as described in the Upanisad. (**Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (3rd Adhyāya-)**).

Asvala was first to confront Yajnavalkya with his question:

“By what means, the sacrifice is liberated having overcome the clutches of death?”

Yājñavalkya replied:

“By speech with is fire in the shape of hotā, the first priest. The speech is fire, and fire is hotā,, this fire of hotā, is liberation, and this liberation is absolute liberation ”

Asvala again asked:

“ Yajnavalkya, all this is pervaded by day and night, all this is subjected by day and night. By what means, the sacrifice is liberated having overcome the clutches of the day and night?”

Yajnavalkya replied:

“By the eye, which is aditya, in the form of the adhvaryu priest. Verily, the eye of the sacrifice is adhvaryu. This eye is Aditya, this Aditya is adhvaryu, and adhvaryu is liberation, and this liberation is absolute liberation.”

There is a pattern in the questions posed by all challengers. Asvala’s further questions pertain to the means of overcoming the clutches of the light and dark halves of the lunar month.

The Upanisads also evolved some simple but very systematic techniques for carrying out Vāda. There are:

1. Prasana: Questioning to initiate a dialogue,
2. Anuprasna : Counter - questions arising out of the discussions on the preliminary query,
3. Anatiarasnanivarana : avoiding too much questioning which leads to the sidetracking of the issue itself,
4. Vyakhya : detailed explanation of the theory,
5. Anuvyakhya : further explanations
6. Drstanta : illustration
7. Akhyayika : narrating a story as an exposition of the theory, and
8. Urdhvapravacana : deciphering the extant of learning that has already been acquired by a disciple, so that discussion be carried on after it.

These techniques became the precursors of the concept of pancavayava - Vākya (sentence with five divisions)..These methods later influenced Nyāya and Vedānta traditions.

Epic and Puranic

The Mahabharata and Ramayana, composed during the classical period (approximately 400 BCE - 400 CE), significantly contributed to the vāda tradition through their narratives and dialogues.

Rāmāyāna

Rāmāyāna of Vālmiki was written in the age of dialectic of ideologues. The ethical concepts as well as the tenets of major philosophical systems were in the process of their evolution. This is reflected in the scepticisms, discussions, dialogues and debates in which we find the characters of Rāmāyāna involved.

The following debates, dialogues and discussions in Rāmāyāna, reflecting divergence of ideas, may be mentioned:

1. Discussion and debate between Rāma, Bharata, Jābāli and vasistha on nullification of Rāma's banishment.
2. Dialogue between Sita and Rāma in Dandakaranya on the vulnerability of violence and practice of non- violence
3. Dialogue between Rāma and Sita before Sita's agnipariksha (the fire test)
4. Hanuman's debate with his own self during his search for Sita in Lanka.

Mahābhārata

This epic features numerous discussions that address moral dilemmas and philosophical questions. The Bhagavad Gita, a key section of the Mahabharata, presents a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, exploring concepts of duty (dharma), righteousness, and the nature of reality.

Example: Krishna's counsel to Arjuna on the battlefield embodies the use of Vāda to navigate ethical and existential challenges.

The tendency to use tricks in scholarly debate must have been in practice during the age of Mahābhārata. Techniques of Vāda had systematically been developed when this great epic was being compiled.

The word Samvāda is used in Mahābhārata in the sense of highly profound discussion between two intellectuals that was carried out in past and lives in the collective memory of a race, constituting an itihāsa. Many such Samvāda are cited in Mahābhārata. The Samvāda between Kṛṣṇa and Nārada on various questions of diplomacy of polity is cited as something that happened in yore (**Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016, p. 26**).

Puranas

- The Puranas, rich in mythology and cosmology, often contain philosophical dialogues between deities, sages, and other figures, furthering the discourse on ethical and metaphysical issues.

ii. The Age of Diversification - around 500 BCE to CE 1000 : (Tarka- Kāla =The Rise of Philosophical Schools)

The beginnings of the age of arguments which is spread over the whole millennium between 500 BCE to CE 1000, were marked with the emergence of the six systems of Vedic philosophy and the onslaught of various heterodox systems- Carvaka, Ajivaka, Jainism and Buddhism.

Philosophical Schools

Nyāya:

Gautama (Aksapāda), in his system of Nyāya, uses the term kathā to refer to “all kinds of discussions, conversations, debates and dialogues. Vāda is understood as a type of kathā (**Radhavallabh Tripathi.,2016,pp.25-26**). Nyāyasūtra classified jalpa (wrangling) and vitaṇḍā (cavil) as types of katha. Nyāya emphasizes logic, epistemology, and the systematic study of reasoning. The Nyāya Sutras codify methods for argumentation, establishing rules for valid reasoning and the classification of fallacies.

Nyaya Sutras mention, There are three types of '**Katha**' (**conversation**). These are 'Vāda (Conversation with intellectual discourse), 'Jalpa' (Debate) and 'Vitanda' (One-sided debate). In the context of the interpretation of the above passage of **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita "Vadah Pravadtamham"**, **Acharya Shankara** says that “**among these three distinctions of 'Katha', 'Vad' is the best**”, therefore ‘**Shri Krishna has called it his Vibhuti**’. The reason for the excellence of 'Vaad' is that 'Vaad' inevitably arises out of intellectual discussion, as a result of which it culminates in 'Dialogue', whose fruit paves the way for the welfare of the human society

Vaisheshika:

- Developed alongside Nyāya, Vaisheshika focuses on the classification of reality and the nature of substances, using vāda to engage in metaphysical discussions about categories of existence.

Mīmāṃsā:

- This school centers on the interpretation of Vedic texts and rituals. Mīmāṃsā philosophers utilized vāda to resolve doctrinal disputes and clarify the meanings of rituals.

Advaita Vedanta:

- Adi Shankaracharya used vāda extensively to defend non-dualism against competing views, employing rigorous debate to elucidate the concept of Brahman as the ultimate reality.

Example: In his commentaries, Shankara often engages in vāda with proponents of Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita, arguing for the illusory nature of the material world (Maya).

Buddhism:

Buddhist philosophers, particularly in the **Madhyamaka** and **Yogācāra schools**, engaged in vāda to articulate their understanding of emptiness, perception, and consciousness, often debating with other philosophical traditions.

Jainism:

In **Jainism**, Vāda (वाद) means a constructive debate or dialogue aimed at discovering truth, grounded in the doctrines of **anekāntavāda** (non-absolutism) and **syādvāda** (conditional viewpoints). Jain thinkers distinguished between **Vāda** (truth-oriented discussion), **Jalpa** (argument for victory), and **Vitandā** (mere refutation). Unlike other traditions, Jain vāda emphasizes **intellectual ahimsā** (non-violence in speech), making it both a philosophical method and an ethical practice.

iii. The Age of Diversification - Around CE 1000 to CE 1800) : (Vistāra- Kāla Expansion Period)

The medieval period saw the expansion of vāda through increased interactions among various philosophical schools and the rise of new movements. Udayana was perhaps the last great philosopher to have cast an everlasting impact on the philosophical traditions through Vādas. The debates between diverse schools of Vedānta- Advaita, Dvaita, Dvaitādvaita, Suddhadvaita, etc.- Continued generation after generation.

Revived by **Madhva, Rāmānuja, Vallabhācārya (1479- 1531), Caitanya (1485- 1533), Turkārāma (1609-49)** and other saint, the Bhakti movement had a domination effect even in the area of philosophical reasoning.

Dvādaśa (Twelve Schools)

The concept of Dvādaśa, referring to the twelve principal schools of thought, illustrates the diversity of Indian philosophy. Schools engaged in vāda to address philosophical questions and seek resolutions to doctrinal differences.

Notable Philosophers

- **Madhvacharya (Dvaita Vedanta):** Advocated a dualistic view of reality and utilized vāda to emphasize the distinction between the individual soul and the supreme soul.
- **Rāmānuja (Vishishtadvaita):** Employed vāda to advocate for qualified non-dualism, aiming to reconcile philosophical inquiry with personal devotion.

The Bhakti Movement

The Bhakti movement (approximately 7th to 17th centuries) introduced a new dimension to vāda, emphasizing personal devotion and direct experience of the divine.

Saints such as **Mirabai, Tulsidas, and Kabir** utilized vāda in their poetry and teachings, engaging in dialogues that challenged established norms and promoted a more inclusive spiritual vision.

The movement encouraged dialogue among different religious traditions, blending devotional practices with philosophical inquiry. Philosophical discussions often centered around the nature of God, the self, and the path to liberation, emphasizing personal experience over ritualistic orthodoxy.

iv. The Modern Age (Around CE 1800 onwards)

The arrival of European colonialism in India during the 18th and 19th centuries brought about new challenges and opportunities for the vāda tradition.

The 18th and 19th centuries form one of the most fertile periods in the history of Indian intellectual discourse. Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), Swami Narayana (1781- 1830), Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83), Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86), Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-84), Chattampi Swamikal (1857-1924), Sri Narayana Guru (1857- 1928), Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Sri Aurobindo (1872-1951) and Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891-1956) are some of the names known for revolutionizing the vision and thought processes of the country.

Important Characters and Actions

- **Rammohun Roy:** A social reformer who sought to reinterpret religious texts, employing vāda to promote rationality and social progress.

- **Swami Vivekananda**: Advocated for the relevance of Indian philosophy in a global context, using vāda to engage with Western philosophical thought and spiritual ideas.

Philosophical Engagement

The revival of interest in Indian philosophy led to renewed discussions about the application of vāda to address contemporary social issues and ethical dilemmas. Thinkers like **Aurobindo Ghose** and **Mahatma Gandhi** incorporated vāda into their writings, addressing complex questions of ethics, politics, and spirituality.

4. Contemporary Period: Vāda in Modern Philosophy

In contemporary times, vāda remains a vibrant method of inquiry, influencing academic discourse, interfaith dialogue, and social philosophy.

Current Trends

Academic institutions in India and abroad host conferences, workshops, and seminars that emphasize the importance of vāda in contemporary philosophical discussions. Scholars analyze ancient texts and traditions through the lens of vāda, highlighting its relevance in addressing modern issues.

Interfaith Dialogue

Vāda contributes significantly to interfaith dialogues, promoting understanding and cooperation among different religious traditions. Engaging with various philosophical perspectives fosters a more inclusive approach to spirituality and ethics in a pluralistic society.

5. Conclusion

The Vāda Paramparā in India represents a rich and evolving tradition of philosophical discourse that has profoundly influenced Indian thought throughout history. From its early roots in Vedic literature to its flourishing in classical philosophical schools, its integration into the Bhakti movement, and its relevance in contemporary philosophical discussions, vāda has remained a vital means of inquiry. This tradition fosters rational dialogue, debate, and the pursuit of truth, reflecting the diverse intellectual heritage of India. As such, vāda continues to inspire contemporary philosophical dialogues and interfaith discussions, underscoring its enduring significance in the quest for knowledge and understanding in a complex and pluralistic world.

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