



# A Revived Sāṃkhyayoga Tradition in Modern India

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the phenomenon of Kāpil Maṭh (Madhupur, India), a Sāṃkhyayoga *āśrama* founded in the early twentieth century by the charismatic Bengali scholar-monk Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947). While referring to Hariharānanda’s writings I will consider the idea of the re-establishment of an extinct spiritual lineage. I shall specify the criteria for identity of this revived Sāṃkhyayoga tradition by explaining why and on what assumptions the modern reinterpretation of this school can be perceived as continuation of the thought of Patañjali and Īśvarakṛṣṇa. The starting point is, however, the question whether it is possible at all to re-establish a philosophical tradition which had once broken down and disappeared for centuries. In this context, one ought to ponder if it is likely to revitalise *the same* line of thinking, viewing, philosophy-making and practice in accordance with the theoretical exposition of the right insight achieved by an accomplished teacher, a master, the founder of a “new” revived tradition declared to maintain a particular school identity. Moreover, I refer to a monograph of Knut A. Jacobsen (2018) devoted to the tradition of Kāpil Maṭh interpreted as a typical product of the nineteenth-century Bengali renaissance.

**Keywords:** Indian modern spirituality, Yoga, Sāṃkhya, Kāpil Maṭh, Hariharānanda Āraṇya  
**Słowa kluczowe:** współczesna duchowość Indii, joga, sankhja, Kāpil Maṭh, Hariharānanda Āraṇya

Although some of the writings of Swāmi Hariharānanda Āraṇya (1869–1947)<sup>1</sup> are well known and have been discussed among scholars specializing in Indian philosophy,

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<sup>1</sup> *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali*, aka *Patañjala Yoga-darśana* – considered to be his *magnum opus* – was originally published in Bengali then in Hindi. During the last years of his life Hariharānanda Āraṇya asked some Indian and non-Indian scholars to take up the work of rendering it into English. The English edition was published in 1963 by the University of Calcutta (cf. *Preface* to the first edition in: S.H. Āraṇya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali with Bhāsvatī*, trans. P.N. Mukerji, Kolkata 2000, pp. xiii–xiv). Since then it has been reprinted several times, revised, and enlarged.

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he is not commonly recognized as a great modern yoga teacher or as the founder of a living tradition, unlike some other Bengali figures of his time such as Swāmi Vivekānanda (1863–1902) or Śrī Aurobindo (1972–1950). Apparently, the fact that he established Kāpil Maṭh, an *āśrama* dedicated to the legendary sage Kāpila, whose members wish to cultivate the strict ancient model of renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*), did not bring him due fame. According to Hariharānanda Āraṇya it was Kāpila, dated to the 7th century BCE, who was the first to attain liberating knowledge (*mokṣa*) and establish the worldview of both Sāṃkhya and Yoga. Therefore, both philosophical schools are perceived by Hariharānanda as being embedded in one integrated tradition and their followers are known as Sāṃkhyayogins.<sup>2</sup>

## When did neoclassical Sāṃkhyayoga start?

Presenting the history of Sāṃkhyayoga tradition, Gerald J. Larson points to three main historical stages of its development which seem to echo three dimensions of meaning in the word *sāṃkhya*, namely: (a) an enumerated set or grouping (*sāṃkhya* as an adjective); (b) someone who calculates, enumerates, or discriminates properly and correctly (*sāṃkhya* as a masculine noun); (c) and a specific system of dualist philosophizing that proceeds by a method of enumerating the contents of experience (*sāṃkhya* as a neuter noun).<sup>3</sup> Hence, the three historical phases of Sāṃkhya development cover accordingly: (1) the period when Sāṃkhya denotes intellectual inquiry and attempts at grouping systematic thinking, which are documented in the oldest learned traditions of ancient India (from the Vedic period ca. 1500 BCE through the third century BCE); (2) the second period when Sāṃkhya becomes linked to a methodology of reasoning that results in spiritual knowledge leading to liberation from the cycle of rebirth (ca. eighth century BCE till the first centuries of the Common Era); and (3) the third phase when Sāṃkhya technical philosophical terminology and normative formulation is complete and begins to circulate in the form of *Yogasūtra* ascribed to Patañjali (ca. 4th c.), or rather *Patañjalayogaśāstra*,<sup>4</sup> and *Sāṃkhyakārikā*

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located in Madhupur. I owe my thanks to Swāmi Bhāskara Āraṇya, the current head of Kāpil Maṭh, and Professor Arindam Chakrabarti, who helped me contact the Kāpil Maṭh devotees in Kolkata. I am particularly grateful to Adinath Chatterjee and his son Abhiprasun Chattopadhyay for their continued and wholehearted assistance.

An early version of this paper was presented in March 2018 at the conference on “The Sāṃkhya System: Accounting For The Real,” organized by Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA. I also discussed Hariharānanda Āraṇya’s life story and his philosophical contribution to Sāṃkhyayoga tradition in my other paper: M. Jakubczak, *Why Didn’t Siddhartha Gautama Become a Sāṃkhya Philosopher, After All?*, [in:] *Hindu and Buddhist Ideas in Dialogue. Self and No-Self*, I. Kuznetsova, J. Ganeri, Ch. Ram-Prasad (eds.), Farnham 2012, pp. 29–45.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K.A. Jacobsen, *Yoga in Modern Hinduism: Hariharānanda Āraṇya and Sāṃkhyayoga*, London–New York 2018, pp. 2–41.

<sup>3</sup> *Sāṃkhya: A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, vol. 4, G.J. Larson, R.S. Bhattacharya (eds.), Delhi 1987, pp. 3–41.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P.A. Maas, *A Concise Historiography of Classical Yoga Philosophy*, [in:] *Periodization and Historiography of Indian Philosophy*, E. Franco (ed.), Vienna 2013, pp. 53–90.

compiled by Īśvarakṛṣṇa (ca. 5th c.), which are the main texts of the two currents of Sāṃkhya that emerged from the common source.

We can label the above stages of the tradition's development as follows: proto-Sāṃkhya period, pre-classical Sāṃkhya, and the classical period when Sāṃkhya and Yoga gain the status of separate schools. Furthermore, we can distinguish the stage labeled as post-classical Sāṃkhyayoga when its text-readings undergo the influence of other traditions, especially monistic and theistic currents of Vedānta, as well as the *tapas* tradition of Indian ascetics and the Haṭhayoga tradition. The vedāntic interpretations have been developing since the tenth century and brought about such important texts as *Tattvasamāśasūtra* (14th c.), *Sāṃkhyasūtra* (15th c.), and some commentaries of Aniruddha and Vijñānabhikṣu. Although the Haṭhayoga tradition, present in India from the eleventh century, differs significantly from the classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga, teachers of modern postural yoga have often linked their practices to the *Yogasūtra*, ignoring the fact that this text emerged within a wider Sāṃkhyayoga lineage. Paradoxically, Sāṃkhya philosophy has not attracted much attention until now, even though *Yogasūtra* attracts millions of readers worldwide. The revival of yoga in modern Hinduism and its global popularity, which has been increasing gradually since the 1960s, has been predominated by vedāntic and haṭhayogic interpretations which usually underestimate the historical context and ignore the philosophically relevant background of *Patañjalayogaśāstra*.

Here, I propose to highlight the fifth stage of the Sāṃkhyayoga tradition initiated by Hariharānanda Āraṇya, a Bengali philosopher and ascetic, whose interpretations remain fully in line with the spirit of classical Sāṃkhya. What makes him unique and outstanding among many other modern teachers of yoga is not only his writing, which consists of a number of in-depth commentaries written mostly in Sanskrit and Bengali, but also the fact that his genuine lifelong practical engagement led to the establishment of a small monastery aiming to revive Sāṃkhyayoga as a living philosophical tradition. This new period, which started with the founding of Kāpil Maṭh in 1924, may be labeled as neoclassical Sāṃkhyayoga.

Thanks to the extraordinary charisma of Hariharānanda Āraṇya, manifested in his involvement in personal meditative and ascetic practice, monastic activity, and philosophical reflection, this tradition, considered extinct for centuries, has been brought back to life. Although the renewal movement of the classical Sāṃkhyayoga associated with the center of Kāpil Maṭh has not gained much popularity in the past century, its very existence to this day and the rich legacy of the *quasi*-classical Hariharānanda's commentaries, successively translated into English and published thanks to the efforts of the Kāpil Maṭh community,<sup>5</sup> is a unique socio-philosophical phenomenon, and as such should be acknowledged as an example of a living tradition.

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<sup>5</sup> Some basic information on Sāṃkhyayoga philosophy, the issued publications and on-going activities taking place on the Kāpil Maṭh Campus are available on the website: <http://kapilmath.com> [access: 10.02.2020].

## Who was the founder of Kāpil Maṭh?

Little is known about the life story of the founder of Kāpil Maṭh. Hariharānanda Āraṇya was born to a well-off upper caste Bengali family (*bhadralok*) and started his intellectual and spiritual exploration at an early age. He joined the prestigious Presidency College in Kolkata, but progressively losing interest in formal education he decided to leave before graduation. Soon after, he was to adopt an ascetic life-style and dedicated himself entirely to the pursuit of liberating knowledge. Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* was to be an enormous inspiration on his spiritual path. Around 1890 he was initiated into *saṃnyāsa* by Swāmi Trilokī Āraṇya, who was at that time returning from a pilgrimage to Gaṅgāsāgar, south of Kolkata, and was maintaining a vow of silence (*mauna*). Trilokī might have been a Kāpila worshiper, since Kāpila is the main divinity worshiped at the Gaṅgāsāgar festival on the island of Sagar. Hariharānanda Āraṇya probably never met his guru again. Shortly afterwards he went into complete retreat, in the solitary caves of the Barābar Hills near Gaya, in Bihar.<sup>6</sup> After 1898 he returned to live in a monastic society where he continued his meditative practice and his studies of the ancient Hindu and Buddhist philosophical texts independently. First, he spent some years at a small hermitage in Tribeni, on the bank of the Ganges, then he went to Kurseong near Darjeeling. Finally, in 1924 he decided to reside for good in Kāpil Maṭh, in Madhupur.

While leading a hermit's life, Swāmiji continued his spiritual practice and at the same time occupied himself with writing. He wrote numerous philosophical commentaries and essays, including *Sāṃkhyatattvāloka*, an interpretation of the Sāṃkhya texts, and *Bhāsvatī* (alias *Yogakārikā*), a masterly annotation to Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* and *Yogabhāṣya*, and *Karmatattva*, an insightful explanation of the doctrine of *karman*.<sup>7</sup> Most of his contributions prove the great erudition and philosophical insight of a dedicated *yogin* with a non-sectarian view, and they were written in Sanskrit and Bengali. He was able to read Pāli, Sinhalese and Burmese, which was helpful while preparing the first rendering of *Dhammapada*, the collection of the Buddha's sayings, from Pāli to Sanskrit, and the first Bengali translation of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, a Buddhist manual for the practice of yoga for *bodhisattva*. Thus, to revive Sāṃkhyayoga as a living tradition Āraṇya contributed his own original commentaries on the core texts of the tradition. Since his interest was not merely intellectual but spiritual as well, he wanted to test his understanding as self-experience by personally following the strict discipline of the renunciant.

His main interest was to rediscover and purify the tradition of yoga and to revitalize the original Sāṃkhyayoga philosophical framework of the *Yogasūtra*. As Jacobsen rightly suggests, the modern rebirth of Sāṃkhyayoga represented by Kāpil Maṭh was based on the assumption spread in late nineteenth-century Bengal that it was Kāpila and not Patañjali who was the originator of the philosophy of Yoga as being

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S.H. Āraṇya, *A Unique Travelogue. An Allegorical Exploration of Spirituality and Yoga*, trans. S. Guha, Madhupur 2001.

<sup>7</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *The Doctrine of Karma (Karmatattva). A Philosophical and Scientific Analysis of the Theory of Karma*, trans. I. Guptā, Madhupur 2008.

a part of the Sāṃkhya philosophical tradition.<sup>8</sup> Even though Patañjali has become central to modern yoga, and in the nineteenth century was celebrated mostly by Orientalists and proponents of Western Esoterism, he plays no special role in Kāpil Maṭh. Moreover, no element of postural yoga is promoted there. Instead, among the eight limbs that constitute Patañjali's yogic practice (*aṣṭāṅgayoga*) the emphasis is on the five restraints (*yama*), five observances (*niyama*), and concentration (*samādhi*), while bodily posture (*āsana*) is understood as just sitting comfortably on the floor in the lotus position, and focusing on the breath as a way of calming the mind.

After 1900, Hariharānanda's writings and conceptions became increasingly popular, and the *aśrama* he founded attracted many interested people from all parts of India and even abroad. Among them were powerful people, teachers, intellectuals, and politicians. However, Hariharānanda was quite aware that Sāṃkhyayoga appeals to a relatively small number of people. He emphasized the difficulty of yoga and suggested that to attain the goals of yoga one needs to become a *saṃnyāsin* living outside of society. In 1926 he decided to isolate himself even from his students, closing off the entrance to his artificial cave (*guha*).<sup>9</sup> From 1939 onwards, due to his poor health caused by diabetes, Hariharānanda was regularly visited by his closest student, Dharmamegha Āraṇya. In 1947, at the age of 78, he decided to stop maintaining his life and died after five days of total fasting.<sup>10</sup> After his death his body was laid within the Maṭh but he forbade erecting a memorial edifice or writing any biography to commemorate his person.<sup>11</sup> Dharmamegha Āraṇya, who after his master's death became the leader of the *aśrama*, was highly appreciated by the Kāpil Maṭh devotees for his charismatic personality and he put effort into the translation and publication of some of his Bengali writings. When he died in 1985, Bhāskar Āraṇya, the current guru born in 1942, took over the duties of leader and maintains the same lifestyle of austere seclusion as both his predecessors did.

## What makes Kāpil Maṭh really *Sāṃkhyan*?

We can now consider some questions that arise when we appraise such a phenomenon as Kāpil Maṭh. One can doubt if it is possible at all to re-establish a philosophical tradition which has broken down and has had no succession for centuries. Can we respect such a lineage of self-identity declared by a modern thinker, despite the obvious discontinuity of the tradition he wants to identify with? And is it sufficient for a contemporary philosopher, who is an outstanding *yogin* and a knowledgeable,

<sup>8</sup> K.A. Jacobsen, *Yoga in Modern Hinduism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> For more details on the cave tradition see K.A. Jacobsen, *In Kapila's Cave: a Sāṃkhya-Yoga Renaissance in Bengal*, [in:] *Theory and Practice of Yoga. Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*, K.A. Jacobsen (ed.), Leiden 2005, pp. 333–349.

<sup>10</sup> Such a method of meeting death is a centuries-old Indian tradition practiced mostly in the Jain community.

<sup>11</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *Progressive and Practical Sāṃkhya-Yoga*, A. Chatterjee (ed.), Madhupur 2003, p. 141.

brilliant commentator of the canonical *sūtras*, to proclaim the texts of a particular ancient tradition, like Sāṃkhyayoga, to be the expression of his own insights and therefore an authoritative source for the followers of the “new,” revived philosophical school identified with the “old,” or “genuine” *darśana*?

Before giving a negative answer to the questions above one should reflect on the fact that there are also some time gaps within the earlier history of Sāṃkhya, between its proto- and classical periods. Thus, looking at the modern revival of this philosophical school with suspicion, one ought to also query the continuity of the tradition between Kāpila and Pañcaśikha, and between the latter and Vārṣaganya, and subsequently Īśvarakṛṣṇa. Perhaps it was the case that the subsequent Sāṃkhyayoga philosophers, whose names have been recorded, had to recover and re-establish this school numerous times by updating the old issues with their own exegetical insights, and thus were contributing to the tradition text, that is to the ongoing process of philosophy-making within a certain school.<sup>12</sup> Each tradition text has its authoritative sources grounded in the oral transmission, its summaries and its ongoing written elaborations. The exegetical material gradually expands, refines and modifies arguments, sometimes adding some new ideas, usually with increasing precision. The philosopher-commentator seeks to remain faithful to his sources and to bring greater systematic coherence, but on his own creative terms. Surely, Sāṃkhyayoga has been developed over centuries as an influential textual tradition. Yet, apart from some discrete flourishing periods there were also several longer spans of time when a few *saṃnyāsins* scattered around India were practicing some form of Sāṃkhyayoga that was transmitted orally. The example of the *aśrama* discussed here shows that tradition may be understood as a succession of “reincarnations” aiming to rediscover the message of Kāpila and to develop it on the Sāṃkhyayoga path through a unique combination of theory and practice or “practised theory.”<sup>13</sup>

So, our initial inquiry needs to be rephrased as follows: on which grounds can we regard the revival of Sāṃkhyayoga, carried out by the Kāpil Maṭh founder, to be the opening of another period of development in this long lasting and, most likely at times discontinuous tradition? There are two arguments which I would like to provide when giving my answer: one is to argue for the Sāṃkhyayoga orthodoxy of Kāpil Maṭh, and another is to demonstrate the uniqueness and originality of Hariharānanda Āraṇya’s contribution. Together they allow us to label Kāpil Maṭh as a “neo-classical” phase of Sāṃkhyayoga, not just as an epigonic or imitative phenomenon.

First, let us look closer at the inheritance of Kāpil Maṭh. A contemporary reinterpretation of the classical texts is worthy of consideration as long as it is philosophically coherent, non-sectarian, inspiring, and, above all, *really* Sāṃkhyan. That means we expect it to be in agreement with the spirit of the school and to contribute to the tradition text by incorporating the philosophical content of a school in a creative and

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<sup>12</sup> E. Deutsch, *Knowledge and the Tradition Text in Indian Philosophy*, [in:] *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, G.J. Larson, E. Deutsch (eds.), Delhi 1989, pp. 165–173.

<sup>13</sup> M. Jakubczak, *op. cit.*, p. 37.



consistent way.<sup>14</sup> Naturally, we cannot make the definition of “the Sāṃkhya spirit” too narrow or too rigid, as the tradition has been interpreting and re-interpreting itself over the ages. Nonetheless, if one wants to attribute the Sāṃkhyan core to a worldview or to detect the philosophical perspective typical of this school, there are some crucial assumptions we should examine. The points that define the unique identity of Sāṃkhya are captured in its classical period, codified by Īśvarakṛṣṇa in his *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. Let us start with the four rudimental claims. First and foremost, to think in the “Sāṃkhyan way” one needs to assert the ultimate dualism between the objective and subjective realm: discrimination between the self (*puruṣa*) – being the principle of consciousness – versus the unconscious and spontaneously creative nature (*prakṛti*), is considered crucial and effective for liberation (*mokṣa*) from worldly suffering. The second key assumption is the recognition of the 25 principles, or categories of reality (*tattvas*), and the distinction between the evolvent and the evolute of nature (*prakṛti-vikāra*). Thirdly, the recognition of three constituents of nature (*guṇas*), or the substantive “threads” of objective reality, which account for: pleasure, thinking and clarity (*sattva*); craving, activity and attachment (*rajas*); and depression, restraint and delusion (*tamas*). Fourthly, emphasis on egotism (*asmitā*) and misattribution of the self (*ahaṃkāra*) as the basic manifestation of fivefold ignorance (*avidyā*), the root of all suffering.

The list of crucial assumptions and claims may be extended, of course, but here it is interesting to refer to the Sāṃkhyayoga teachings as they are summarized by Hariharānanda Āraṇya himself. Apart from acceptance of the authority of Kāpila, he captures the core of Sāṃkhya doctrine in twelve points: (1) liberation (*mokṣa*) consists in the complete cessation of all suffering; (2) on attainment of liberation one abides in one’s immutable and attributeless self (*puruṣa*); (3) in the state of liberation, the mind (*citta*) returns to its original cause (i.e. *prakṛti*); (4) cessation of the mind can be brought about by renunciation and supreme knowledge acquired through concentration (*samādhi*); (5) concentration is attainable by observance of the prescribed codes of conduct and practice of meditation; (6) liberation brings about cessation of the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*); (7) this cycle is without a beginning and is the result of latent impressions (*saṃskāra*, *vāsanā*) left by our physical and mental activities (*karman*); (8) nature (*prakṛti*) and the countless selves (*puruṣas*) are respectively the constituent and efficient causes of the creation; (9) *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* are non-created realities with neither beginning nor an end; (10) *īśvara* is the eternally free self; (11) *īśvara* has nothing to do with the creation of the universe or life; (12) the lord of the universe is demiurge, called Prajāpati or Hiraṇyagarbha, and the whole universe is being held and sustained by him.<sup>15</sup>

As we can see, Hariharānanda makes it clear that yoga is primarily a philosophical teaching which needs to be complemented with renunciation, which is a prerequisite for every serious practitioner of yoga discipline. His idea of the living Sāṃkhyayoga

<sup>14</sup> Cf. D. Krishna, *Is Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṃkhya-Kārikā Really Sāṃkhyan?*, [in:] *idem, Indian Philosophy. A Counter Perspective*, New Delhi 1996, p. 146. Also, E. Deutsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–170.

<sup>15</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali...*, *op. cit.*, p. xxv.

tradition contrasts sharply with modern postural yoga institutions which promote bodily practice to influence and improve mental and physical health.

## Comparative perspective of Hariharānanda

The writings left by the founder of Kāpil Maṭh are original, thorough, and consistent. Although he uses philosophical Sanskrit vocabulary quite freely, citing from a variety of Indian sources, Āraṇya's interpretations are coherent, based on profound scholarship and formulated clearly from the classical Sāṃkhyayoga perspective which is, as he says, "logical and systematic right through."<sup>16</sup>

In his *Karmatattva*, a comprehensive elucidation of the Sāṃkhyayoga theory of action, the Bengali ascetic tries to apply an inter-cultural comparative perspective, referring frequently to Western philosophical thought, both ancient and modern, and also making numerous remarks on the findings and popular theories of the late nineteenth-century science right up to the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> He mainly cites or comments on physical chemistry, biology, materialist theories in modern physics, evolutionism and Darwinism. Hariharānanda refers to such authors as Ernst Haeckel (*Riddle of the Universe*, 1900), James Hopwood Jeans (*The Universe around Us*, 1929), Oliver Lodge (*Life and Matter*, 1905), William H. Conn (*The Story of the Living Machine*, 1899), John B. Burke (*The Origin of Life, Its Physical Basis and Definition*, 1906), and Arthur S. Eddington (*The Nature of the Physical World*, 1928). The most influential among them was, probably, Haeckel, a German adherent of Darwin and an outstanding biologist, physician, philosopher and artist who discovered and named thousands of new species, and who coined many terms in biology, including "anthropogeny," "ecology," "stem cell," and "Protista." Āraṇya must have also been inspired by James H. Jeans, an English physicist and mathematician known for his popular books about astronomy. He was the first to propose the continuous-creation theory: claiming that matter is continuously created throughout the universe. Darwinism, which seemed to Hariharānanda Āraṇya to be in tune with the Sāṃkhyayoga vision of spontaneous evolution of nature (*prakṛti parināma*), originally gained scientific acceptance after Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), but later in the mid-twentieth century became a synonym of a simplified theory, and has been used within the scientific community only to distinguish the modern evolutionary synthesis, sometimes called "Neo-Darwinism," from the outdated theory of Darwin himself. Thus, nowadays, Darwinist terminology in the comparative remarks of Hariharānanda does not imply the same up-to-date and intellectually attractive connotations as it did in his life-time.

Yet in the comparative studies of the Kāpil Maṭh founder the main focus is on intra-Indian discourse. His argument, inspired by a sort of pan-Indian universalism,<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *Sāṃkhya Across the Millenniums*, A. Chatterjee (ed.), Madhupur 2005, p. v.

<sup>17</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *The Doctrine of Karma...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–58.

<sup>18</sup> The comments on Āraṇya's life story and his idea of pan-Indian universalism are partly repeated after: M. Jakubczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–33.



is not devoid of syncretism and remains open to criticism, either from the perspective of the idealistic Vedānta or the theistic currents of Indian philosophy. First of all, he strongly believes that the philosophical positions of Sāṃkhya-yoga and early Buddhism have much more in common than was conventionally acknowledged, arguing that “they are the branches of the same tree, nourished by the same roots.” Like the orthodox Hindu traditions respecting the authority of Vedas (*āstika darśanas*), heterodox Buddhism belongs to the tradition of the sages (*ṛṣis*) called *ārṣa dharma*, or *ārṣaism*, inaccurately termed “Brahmanism.”<sup>19</sup> As Hariharānanda puts it, the lineage of the sages was broadly divided into two currents: one, called *pravṛtti dharma* (the creed of worldliness), preached and practised the performance of religious rites leading to worldly happiness, while the other, called *nivṛtti dharma* (the creed of renunciation), propounded the path of liberation from all worldly conditioning. The latter, of which Paramaṛṣi Kāpila was known to be the greatest exponent, owed its origin to those *ṛṣis* who had discovered the way to self-realisation and developed from their own spiritual experience a complete system of theory and practice for guiding others along that path towards liberation from the cycle of rebirth.<sup>20</sup>

Attainment of the ultimate aim of the creed of worldliness (*pravṛtti dharma*) involves the worship of God or saints, the practice of virtues along with the performance of good deeds (*punya*) and proper rituals (*yajña*). The creed of renunciation, on the other hand, points out that the ultimate aim of liberation from *saṃsāra* can be achieved only through a complete knowledge of one’s true self. In his introduction to a translation of the *Dhammapada*, an early Buddhist text, Āraṇya believes that the majority of mankind can only follow the creed of worldliness by practising good deeds, which he calls “the lower rungs of the great ladder,” which leads to “blowing out” (*nirvāṇa*).<sup>21</sup> As he emphasises, in this matter there is no difference between the Buddhists and the *ārṣas* because both may promote either *nivṛtti* or *pravṛtti dharma* aspirations. Thus argues for a kind of pan-Indian universalism which challenges such entrenched categories as heterodox versus orthodox (*nāstika/āstika*), accepting the doctrine of the self versus no-self (*ātman/anatman*) or believing in god versus rejecting god (*seśvaravāda/nirīśvaravāda*). Yet, the only crucial distinction we should never overlook when describing a particular philosopher or school is the one between *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*. What Hariharānanda emphasises above all is the uniqueness of human endeavour aiming at self-knowledge-through-renunciation and describes it as a very narrow current within the multiple and disparate philosophical traditions of India. As he ironically or just realistically observes, every genuine spiritual tradition focused on renunciation cannot continue unbroken for a long time. Each philosophical school or yogic monastery of this kind, he predicts, can function properly and stick closely to its founder’s recommendations for a generation or two, after which irregularities creep in and various sects and fractions arise.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, even though he considers the stability and durability of transmission of the creed of renunciation to

<sup>19</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *Progressive and Practical Sāṃkhya-Yoga...*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali...*, *op. cit.*, pp. xxi–xxv.

<sup>21</sup> S.H. Āraṇya, *Progressive and Practical Sāṃkhya-Yoga...*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

be extremely fragile, Āraṇya had no doubt about its eternal, universal accessibility to highly motivated and persistent seekers, no matter the time or the place, or from which religious tradition or philosophical school they come. According to his successor's account, Swāmi Hariharānanda maintained that yogic lore encouraging self-knowledge, unlike any physical science or other branch of knowledge, has not evolved over time or, in other words, undergoes no substantial historical development.<sup>23</sup>

## A hybrid identity of the living Sāṃkhya yoga tradition

A close connection between the Sāṃkhya and Buddhist ideals is openly declared by Kāpil Maṭh members.<sup>24</sup> Hariharānanda maintains that there are undeniable affinities between Buddhism and Sāṃkhya yoga, and that the Buddha's teachings were profoundly influenced by the ancient doctrine of Sāṃkhya, as transmitted to the Buddha through Ārāḍa Kālāma and Rudraka. The current guru, Bhāskar Āraṇya, in his public talks calls the Buddha the most accomplished philosopher within the whole Sāṃkhya tradition and the most outstanding of all Kāpila's disciples. On the other hand, it is no secret that the Buddha favoured the doctrine of no-self (*anātman*). His criticism of the concept of the permanent unchanging self (*puruṣa*) accepted by Sāṃkhya, however, does not diminish the close relationship between these comparable traditions. As Hariharānanda assumes, his own in-depth reading of the Sāṃkhya yoga and Buddhist core texts can go beyond the seeming contradictions between both conceptions. Moreover, he offers a new perspective showing that the living Sāṃkhya tradition can benefit from the Buddhist challenge and gain a new, more precise, formulation of its classical position. To see how this is achieved, let us trace a few Buddhist counter arguments and the ways in which they may be addressed from the neoclassical Sāṃkhya yoga perspective.

As we learn from Aśvaghōṣa's famous Sanskrit poem *Buddhacarita* (1st or 2nd century CE), Siddhārtha Gautama (to become the Buddha) was first inspired but then disappointed with the philosophical teachings of Ārāḍa Kālāma, a popular Sāṃkhya *yogin* of his time, who was believed to have gained insight into absolute bliss.<sup>25</sup> In *Buddhacarita* 12.69–88, the Buddha claims that the self – declared to be eternal and pure – is the causal root for continued existence and rebirth. So the very concept of the self is recognised as a hindrance on the path to ultimate liberation from all suffering. Therefore, he rejects this concept by discrediting its Sāṃkhyan definition,

<sup>23</sup> S.A. Dharmamegha, *So Have We Heard (Iti Śuśruma)*, trans. I. Gupta, Kolkata 2003, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup> Until recently connections between Sāṃkhya philosophy and Buddhism have been under-researched but, fortunately, more and more scholars have undertaken this topic. For instance, Ferenz Ruzsa, summing up his original interpretation of Sāṃkhya dualist position, persuades that the Buddha inherited his substance-reductionist ideas from the proto-Sāṃkhya circles of Āruṇi and Yājñavalkya. Cf. F. Ruzsa, *Sāṃkhya: Dualism without Substances*, [in:] *Indian Epistemology and Metaphysics*, J. Tuske (ed.), New York 2019, pp. 153–181.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. "Ariyapariyesana Sutta," *Majjhima Nikāya* 26 (*In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*, Bhikku Bodhi (ed.), Somerville 2005, p. 72). Also see: *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghōṣa*, trans. P. Olivelle, New York 2008, pp. 322–323.

which is as follows: the true self, being eternal and contentless, by no means can be objectified, even by or for itself. First, Siddhārtha undermines the permanence of the self, noting that as long as there is a knower, there is something for him to know, and since there is something for him to know, he can never be released (*Buddhacarita* 12.80). The early Sāṃkhya philosopher could readily refute such criticism by stating that to capture the meaning of ‘self’ one must distinguish between the upper self – being true and pure consciousness, transcendent to nature (*prakṛti*), but also absolutely passive, not involved in the process of knowing or doing – and, on the other hand, the lower embodied self, or empirical “I,” that is the psycho-physical organism fully engaged in all mental and bodily activities. In the subsequent passage of the *Buddhacarita*, Siddhārtha seems to anticipate this possible Sāṃkhya defence by asking ironically: if the “field knower” (*kṣetrajña*) can also refer to the one who is actually *not* a knower, as a non-engaged transcendent self, then why should we call this not-knowing self “the self,” after all? Such a strong concept of the self (*puruṣa/ātman*) sounds to him inconsistent and simply invented, so he mocks it by stating that one can easily do without the self, since “absence of knowing exists in a log or a wall” (*Buddhacarita* 12.81). Bodhisattva clearly rejects a distinction between the upper and the lower self for one further reason. He asserts that removing the imperfections of the self by abandoning all desire and ignorance cannot be successfully realised as long as one keeps identifying oneself with the self – no matter upper or lower – and upholds its everlasting existence (*Buddhacarita* 12.73). While Ārāḍa, the early Sāṃkhya teacher, assumes eradication of the I-sense (*ahaṃkāra*), together with the egotism it causes, to be the crucial prerequisite for achieving the ultimate meditative absorption and liberation, Siddhārtha doubts if the ego may really be abandoned unless belief in the permanent self has been completely given up (*Buddhacarita* 12.76).<sup>26</sup>

Thus, what makes the pure self inevitable for the Sāṃkhyayoga conception of human nature, since – as a Buddhist opponent suggests – every psycho-physical function may be accounted for by the transient empirical self, called *antaḥkaraṇa* in *Sāṃkhyakārikā* or *citta* in *Patañjalayogaśāstra*? What is this concept good for, and why is it worth upholding, despite all the criticism directed at the Sāṃkhyayoga idea of subjectivity? Why should a metaphysical claim about the existence of a permanent, immutable, and inactive subjective being be favoured over the view that everything, including the self, undergoes continuous change, which is just a continuum of dependently originated events and phenomena?<sup>27</sup>

While specifying the rationale for the absolute self, the principle of consciousness, one cannot forget the ultimate purpose of any cognition or meditative insight, but also the conceptual view following the act of directly acquired knowledge. Any view worth maintaining is to be useful and beneficial for achieving liberation. Therefore, the Sāṃkhya belief that whatever happens in the realm of *samsāra* is for the sake

<sup>26</sup> In the later Buddhist tradition especially in the Abhidharma texts, we can find more arguments against Sāṃkhya metaphysics. Cf. J. Bronkhorst, *Sāṃkhya in the Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣya*, “Journal of Indian Philosophy” 1997, vol. 25, pp. 393–400.

<sup>27</sup> On the possible defense of the Sāṃkhyan self, reinterpreted in Buddhist terms and to some degree inspired by the position of Swāmi Hariharānanda, I wrote in: M. Jakubczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–45.

of the self, including the discriminative knowledge (*vivekakhyaṭi*) of the known versus the knower,<sup>28</sup> must be *of some use* for the ultimate enterprise, namely achieving liberation (*mokṣa*).

## Conclusion

When reconsidering the fundamentals of Sāṃkhyayoga philosophy, especially the conception of the self, in the light of the comparative remarks of Hariharānanda Āraṇya and his followers, we can see that they do not only aim at defending their doctrine against criticism of other Hindu and Buddhist philosophers, but make every effort to reinterpret it creatively, addressing some of the counterarguments as well as the advances of contemporary natural science. What is also significant is that they do not mind using *vipassanā*, which is the unbroken lineage of the Buddhist meditative practice, to their advantage.<sup>29</sup> Apparently, neoclassical Sāṃkhyayoga can benefit from Buddhist critiques. Its way of dealing with the alternative conception of the self, proposed by the Buddha, seems to be in line with the general Indian agenda of cultural adaptation and assimilation: a rival Buddhist view is not rejected or dismissed right away, but is rather mitigated by reinterpreting it according to one's own perspective, and it is also used to better formulate, rephrase and re-evaluate the Sāṃkhyan conception of the self.<sup>30</sup>

Thus the revived Sāṃkhyayoga's spirit can persist, despite an obvious historical discontinuity, but also gain a new hybrid identity thanks to embracing some supplementary assumptions. First, Buddhism as such is considered to be a re-establishment of Kāpila's tradition. That is why the Buddha's conception of no-self (*anātman*) is not perceived as being totally opposed to Sāṃkhya's position, but rather as a radical exposition of the universal self-knowledge that may be articulated differently and more adequately in terms of neoclassical Sāṃkhyayoga. Second, the fact that the canonical Buddhist texts contain references to a supposed Sāṃkhya teacher, the hermit Ārāḍa Kālāma,<sup>31</sup> who was abandoned by Siddhārtha Gautama after mastering his teachings, does not prove the Buddha's total rejection of the Sāṃkhya path, but rather testifies to his high motivation for attaining self-knowledge through direct

<sup>28</sup> *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 2 defines liberating insight (*vivekakhyaṭi*) as recognizing a distinction between the manifest (*vyakta*) and the unmanifest (*avyakta*), and the knower (*jñā*), i.e. the self (*puruṣa*).

<sup>29</sup> When I visited *aśrama* for the first time in 2010, there were two monks including Ṛtaprakāṣa Āraṇya, the younger one who was the chief editor of their journal *Sāṃkhyayāna*. When asked about the practical method helpful for the Sāṃkhyayoga monks in realising their philosophical and spiritual purpose, Swāmi Ṛtaprakāṣa Āraṇya pointed to the *vipassanā* technique (i.e. meditative insight into impermanence) as it is taught nowadays at the Vipassanā Meditation Centres initiated by Satya Narayan Goenka, who mastered it under the guidance of his Burmese teacher U Ba Khin.

<sup>30</sup> The assumptions of this rephrased neoclassical Sāṃkhyan conception of the self I discussed in more detail in: M. Jakubczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>31</sup> Apart from abovementioned episode of the Buddha's life recorded by Aśvaghōṣa in *Buddhacarita*, which refers to Ārāḍa Kālāma (cf. M. Jakubczak, *op. cit.*), also in the Pāli canon the Buddha makes a passing remark upon Āḷāra Kālāma (cf. the sutta on The Noble Search – Ariyapariyesana Sutta, *Majjhima Nikāya* 26). Cf. B. Bodhi (ed.), *op. cit.*

insight, which he valued higher than any verbal testimony. Third, a textual reference to Āraḍa's and Udraka's meditative achievements when describing the multi-stage process of meditation shows that the Buddha followed his teachers' footsteps, although he contributed some essential innovations to the method used by his predecessors. Fourth, even though the Buddha rejects certain assumptions of the early Sāṃkhya metaphysics and further develops its meditation technique, elevating the new concept of *vipassanā*<sup>32</sup> (i.e. insight and thorough penetration of an object), he integrates it with a pre-Buddhist yogic system of *dhyāna* (Pāli *jhāna*), based on the *śamatha* method of meditation,<sup>33</sup> which allows to achieve a well-balanced, tranquil state of mind. This invention of the Buddha does not violate the Sāṃkhyayoga theory of self-development, and was successfully adjusted and fitted into its own methodology, at least in *Patañjalayogadarśana*.<sup>34</sup> Studying the phenomenon of Kāpil Maṭh, a contemporary example of the Sāṃkhyayoga living tradition, we can learn how the spirit of innovation and fidelity to tradition interact to produce another hybrid identity which can be labelled as the *quasi*-Buddhist orthopraxy synthesised with the Sāṃkhyan orthodoxy.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Maharaj, *Yogic Mindfulness: Hariharānanda Āraṇya's Quasi-Buddhistic Interpretation of Smṛti in Patañjali's Yogasūtra I.20*, "Journal of Indian Philosophy" 2013, vol. 41, pp. 57–78.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. P.V. Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice. A General Exposition According to the Pāli Canon of the Theravāda School*, Colombo 1962, pp. 4–5.

<sup>34</sup> Larson characterised Yoga as a hybrid form of Sāṃkhya or neo-Sāṃkhya, which reflects the interaction between Śaṣṭitantra and Abhidharma of Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika. Cf. G.J. Larson, *An Old Problem Revisited: The Relation between Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Buddhism*, "Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik" 1989, vol. 15, p. 135; J.G. Larson, *Classical Yoga as Neo-Sāṃkhya*, [in:] *Astatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*, vol. 52, 1999, pp. 723–732.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. M. Jakubczak, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

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