



## From Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja to the positive creation of peace: a project for applied philosophy

According to Randall Collins' *The Sociology of Philosophies* (1998), periods and conditions of intellectual *stagnation* deserve our attention, in addition to periods of creativity and progress which are normally in the focus of studies of intellectual life. Collins mentions two reasons why we should be interested in intellectual stagnation and its possible social causes: first, it is only through contrast with periods lacking creativity that we can recognize the periods of creativity; second, it may very well be that "at present" -that is, at the end of the twentieth century, when Collins wrote his book - we are in a period of intellectual stagnation rather than one of genuine creativity. A major form of intellectual stagnation according to Collins is what he calls "Stagnation A: Loss of cultural capital." In the light of Collins' approach to intellectual history, we may have a fresh look at the relationship between different thinkers and different systems of philosophy in ancient India, especially, in this paper, at the way Vedānta dealt with the knowledge system Sāṅkhya, and at Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's specific ways of interpreting the relationship between Vedānta and Sāṅkhya. This exploration has two aims: first, it should contribute to a new understanding of these Indian philosophers and their systems; second, it will lead us to propose modifications to the model proposed by Collins which he has applied to ancient and pre-modern India, China and Japan only secondarily, but primarily to Europe and the Western world up to modern times and to the pre-modern worlds of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Rāmānuja (born in India ca. 1000 years ago, in 1017 C.E.) and Śaṅkara before him (ca. 8th century), were not only reacting to contemporaries and immediate predecessors, but were interacting with much older and quite developed knowledge systems including Sāṅkhya. In the terse and aphoristic Brahma-sūtra, on which both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja wrote a detailed commentary, several prominent sections are devoted to discussing Sāṅkhya. The aphorisms or sūtras, however, are usually explained in slightly different ways, occasionally in *very* different ways, by the two illustrious commentators. Did the work of Śaṅkara and that of Rāmānuja represent a creative period of intellectual progress, or, overall, a period of Stagnation A, B or C? As for earlier knowledge systems taken into account by the two Vedānta teachers, esp. the ancient system of Sāṅkhya, were Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja seeking to suppress it, to absorb it, to tolerate it or to transcend it? Did the transition generated by Śaṅkara and the one generated by Rāmānuja represent an increase, a loss or a preservation of "ideodiversity"? As for Collins' model, how adequate is it to deal with Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's contributions to Indian philosophy? Are there any modifications and improvements that can be proposed for this model? These are the main questions we are addressing in this paper - without expecting to be able to provide any final answers - on the basis of selected passages in Śaṅkara's Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya and in Rāmānuja's Śrībhāṣya.



Since Rāmānuja was able to integrate much of the older philosophy of Sāṅkhya and of the related Yoga-system into his own philosophy, we may here ask a further question in the light of an urgent problem of modern society. The Yoga-system expresses the principle of 'radiation of peace' which is also found described elsewhere in Indian literature and even in traditions outside India. Was a 'radiation of peace' also experienced near Rāmānuja (and, several centuries earlier, Śaṅkara)? Is the psychological part of this principle reflected in the story of Kūreśa and his wife Āṇḍāammā on their way through the jungle to Śrīrangam in order to meet Rāmānuja there?

If the application of the principle worked in the past, can it also work for 'normal' people at present, can it be applied to current problems of society such as violence and terrorism?

Contribution to the International Conference on The World of Rāmānuja, Chennai, 2-5 January 2017.

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