

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. The implications of the notion of 'relation'

Relation, an important philosophical category, has been discussed extensively both by Indian and Western thinkers. As Klausner and Kuntz remark, "Nothing can be known except as it stands in relationship to something else. Relations are the necessary if not the sufficient conditions for the existence of any object -- this could be called a "relation predicament."<sup>1</sup> In spite of its importance, relation has been described as an indefinable ultimate,<sup>2</sup> in view of the complex nature of the phenomena denoted by it. But what is true of the category of relation, is true of almost all significant philosophical concepts. Therefore, keeping in mind the limitations of definitions of philosophical categories in general, we may consider some definitions of relation to arrive at an understanding of the phenomena so designated.

The Oxford Universal Dictionary gives a very broad definition of relation. Relation is, "that feature or attribute of things which is involved in considering them in comparison or contrast with each other; the particular way in which one thing is thought of in connection with another, any connection, correspondence, or association which can be conceived as

naturally existing between things."<sup>3</sup> A more specific definition is offered by Johnson. A relation or relational adjective is defined by him as, "a type of adjective, whose meaning when analysed exhibits a reference to some substantive other than that which it characterises."<sup>4</sup> Or, again, "A relation is properly defined as a transitive adjective."<sup>5</sup> Johnson's definition of relation is in adjectival terms. A definition in terms of mathematical concepts is given by Whitehead and Russell. They remark, "A relation as we shall use the term will be understood in extension. It may be regarded as a class of couples  $(x,y)$  for which some function  $(x,y)$  is true."<sup>6</sup> In order to provide for the asymmetry of certain relations, this definition is qualified in a note to the effect that the couples in a question have a sense.<sup>7</sup> Commenting on this definition, Parker observes that the Whitehead-Russell definition may be criticised on the ground that it covers only dyadic relations. He points out that it can be modified to give it complete generality and defines it as a class of individuals to which some function  $F(x,y,z,\dots)$  applies.<sup>8</sup> As he puts it, "A relation is a many valued function in contrast with a simple concept, which is a one valued function  $F(x)$ ."<sup>9</sup>

There is an important difference between the definitions given by Johnson and the one given by Whitehead and Russell. Johnson treats relation as an adjective, a

transitive one, of a substantive, while the latter definition is more general, treating it as a predicate of a system involving more than one term. Both agree in so far as they hold that a relation applies to more than one individual. We also find that these definitions do not specify the nature of the terms involved in a relation. The absence of such a specification is necessary in view of the varied nature of the relata one comes across in the course of an analysis of the different kinds of relations.

Another dimension of relation is brought out by Alexander. According to him, when a relation relates certain terms a connected whole of these terms may be said to come into existence. He says "Conceived in this concrete fashion a relation may be described as the whole situation into which its terms enter, in virtue of that relation."<sup>10</sup> Chatterjee reiterates the same idea when he describes a relation as a form of order among things which belong to one system. He remarks, "It holds between two or more things and brings them together as parts or as members of one whole or systems."<sup>11</sup> The point that is emphasised here is the element of unity that is implicit in any relational situation. It is true that there are different views regarding the nature of the unity involved, and the nature of the unity may also vary depending upon the nature of the relata. Some form of unity among the terms is, however, an essential aspect of notion of relation.

## 1.2. Western views on relation

The philosophical importance of the notion of relation is evident in the extensive discussions regarding the various questions involved in the conception of relation found in the philosophical literature. Reviewing the observations of many idealistic and realistic thinkers of the West in this regard, Datta points out that three groups of problems have become prominent in contemporary literature regarding relations, viz., questions regarding their metaphysical status i.e., the real or unreal or existential or subsistent nature of relations, their logical implications, i.e., the internality of externality of relations and questions about their epistemological validity, i.e., their perceptual or conceptual nature. He also notes that there is an overlapping of metaphysical, logical and epistemological questions.<sup>12</sup>

Datta's analysis reveals that these thinkers have analysed relation as a general philosophical category. Relation also admits of classification into different classes. Relations may be classified in terms of the nature or number of the terms involved, their logical properties, etc. The nature of the classifications varies depending upon the criterion adopted.

### 1.3. The need for a study of Indian views on relation

A study of the philosophical literature reveals that attempts have also been made to examine in detail the various questions involved in specific relational units. This is particularly true of the Indian systems. Most of the Indian systems do not examine relation as a general category. Though one of the Indian systems, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika holds that the same relation samavāya, unites different kinds of relata, relation without reference to the relata, has rarely, if ever, been a subject of discussion. The relevance of a study of the views of the Indian systems regarding relation has been pointed out by Dravid. He remarks, "...only a profound knowledge of Indian philosophical doctrines would reveal as to how much diversity of views hinges upon a careful drawing of distinctions in this field."<sup>13</sup>

### 1.4. The scope of the study

On the basis of the variations in the nature of the relata, relations can be classified into metaphysical, epistemological, logical, linguistic, etc. In the present study the views of four realistic systems of Indian Philosophy, viz., Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita regarding three metaphysical relations and an epistemological relation are examined in a comparative framework. The relations taken up

for study are substance-attribute, whole-part and cause-effect under the metaphysical type and cognitive relation under the epistemological category.

Of the different metaphysical relations, only three have been selected and this needs to be justified. Commenting on the nature of unity involved in a relational situation, Bhattacharya points out that a distinction can be made between two types of objective unity, a distinction that is similar to that between a natural kind and artificial class.<sup>14</sup> According to him, Indian philosophers have concentrated more on relations that form objective unities of the first type, viz., the natural kind. The relations that are included by him under this category are whole-part, cause-effect, substance-attribute, universal-particular, relation of contact, resemblance, etc.<sup>15</sup> Of these, the first four differ from the rest in involving apparently inseparable terms and consequently pose special difficulties when an attempt is made to analyse them. The problem of universals has been studied extensively<sup>16</sup> and has, therefore, been omitted in the present study. It is true the problem of causation has also been investigated in detail.<sup>17</sup> But it has been included here as the problem of causal relationship has been approached from a different angle in this study.

Further, we find that "substance", "whole" and "cause" are interrelated conceptions and need to be studied together. Many thinkers hold that casual efficiency is an important feature of substance. Similarly, discussing the notion of cause, Pratt points out that the possibility of change implies that there is something that changes. He says, "The assertion of the reality and importance of causation in the existential world, is thus the assertion of the reality and importance of continuous processes and enduring substances within it."<sup>18</sup> These observations have special significance in a study of Indian philosophical systems, some of which relate different kinds of relata with the help of the same relational category.

The relation between metaphysical and epistemological conceptions has also been pointed out by many thinkers. Commenting on the relation between knowledge and the conception of substance, Santayana remarks, "All knowledge being faith in an object posited and partially described, is belief in substance, in the etymological sense of this word; it is belief in a thing or event subsisting in its own plane, and waiting for the light of knowledge to explore it eventually, and perhaps name or define it."<sup>19</sup> Santayana's view is no doubt influenced by his realistic presuppositions. Still, it brings out the relation between the metaphysical and epistemological views advocated by philosophical systems. The

phenomenon of knowledge is, therefore, taken up for study under the epistemological category. There are thinkers who deny that knowledge is relational in nature. But in the context of the realistic presupposition of the existence of objects independent of the experiencer, the process of knowledge does imply some kind of relation, though, there are significant differences in the views of the different philosophical systems regarding the nature and number of the terms involved in this relation.

The systems selected for study in this thesis are realistic in their approach to reality and experience. The term 'Realism' is derived from Latin 'res' meaning thing. Realists, in a broad sense, are those who are convinced that things exist in their own right, without necessary dependence on the mind. They are, etymologically speaking, the thing-ists.<sup>20</sup> Philosophical systems can be realistic both in metaphysical and epistemological senses. Epistemological realism holds that the objects of experience are existentially independent of mind and the cognitive process. Metaphysical realism insists not only on their epistemic independence of knowledge but metaphysical independence of and unlikeness to mind.<sup>21</sup> It should be kept in mind that one form of realism does not necessarily imply the other. We find that some metaphysical idealists are epistemological realists and likewise some metaphysical realists are epistemological monists.

The four Indian systems selected for study here are generally considered to be realistic in both the senses. Some doubts, however, have been expressed regarding the realistic nature of Sāṅkhya. Commenting on the realism of Sāṅkhya, Murti remarks, "It is not quite a type of realism, for it takes phenomena as in some way due to the entanglement of the subject (puruṣa) with the object (prakṛti), though the latter is free in a material sense. This can hardly be subscribed to by any realism."<sup>22</sup> But he recognises that Sāṅkhya is neither consistent nor thorough in carrying out this doctrine.<sup>23</sup> Sāṅkhya is taken up for study along with the other realistic systems in the present investigation as such a study would bring out the special problems encountered by a system which advocates epistemological realism and metaphysical dualism of a specific kind.

#### 1.5. The Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study is to examine the following issues.

1. The extent to which the views of these systems regarding these three metaphysical relations reflect and justify their metaphysical realism.
2. The inter-relations, if any, among the views regarding different metaphysical relations.

3. The degree to which the views offered regarding cognitive relation imply epistemological realism.
4. The relation, if any, between the metaphysical and epistemological views of these systems.
5. The possible sources of variation in the nature of the analysis offered by systems sharing the same metaphysical and epistemological orientations.
6. Points of similarity and difference between the approach adopted by Western and Indian realistic systems towards problems of common philosophical interest.

In view of the fact that the relational units selected for study are not unique to the Indian tradition, it is also believed that the study would provide new insights into these traditional philosophical problems. Pointing out the values of comparative philosophy, Bahm says, "New insights into old philosophies can result from seeing them from new perspectives, challenging them with new questions, and subjecting them to new criticisms."<sup>24</sup> We believe that a comparative approach, in spite of the difficulties inherent in comparative philosophy in general, does provide new insights apart from revealing similarities and differences between the philosophical analysis offered by systems belonging to the same tradition as well as different traditions.