Indian philosophy is a broad spectrum encompassing among others, what are called six orthodox systems (those that owe allegiance to the Vedas) and two major heterodox ones. The former comprise the Sāṇkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Nyāya, Yoga, Pārva – and Uttara Māṁśāsā (or Vedānta). The latter include the Jaina and the different schools of Buddhist thought. Though each one of them differs from the other in its essential thought structure, the core of all of them is principally concerned with emancipation or liberation (vimukti) from bondage or suffering. The pathways of all knowledge and all practices that they deal with, are tuned as it were towards this end. These systems are called the darśana-s, the word darśana meaning incise, holistic insight or knowledge. The word philosophy in English is hardly an equivalent for it, except perhaps in the Socratic sense. When one thinks about Indian philosophy, one has to keep in mind the word darśana, its goal of liberation. To overlook this pristine objective of Indian philosophy, as the author has done in the book under review, is to traverse the periphery, trying to interpret the surface without understanding its deep roots.

It needs to be recognized that philosophy of science, apart from its concomitant dimensions of logic and methodology, is also concerned with reality or the basic stuff of the Universe. In this concern, however, philosophy of science does not go far beyond science and its sensorial and verifiable determinants. Nor is it involved in any manner with the ultimate purpose of life like liberation from bondage – the forte of Indian philosophy. In any case, there has been no finality in science, and its conceptual foundations have been changing from time to time since the time of Renaissance.

The author rightly says that philosophy of science explores the foundational structure of science (p. 7) and he tries to explain the kind of philosophy that would be most useful for such an explanation. He claims that certain aspects of Indian philosophy ‘are not only relevant to a foundationalist description of sciences, but that they also share something in common with scientific methodology’ (p. 9). In this connection, he has projected as a candidate the Indian theory of doubt (saṃsāra-s), especially of the Nyāya system, and its relation to doubt in science.

There is no denying that the Nyāya system has its own epistemology towards the acquisition of valid or precise knowledge. However, the very first two sārta-s of the Nyāya speak of nihāreyas (the highest good; beatitude) and apavarga, connoting the knowledge leading to liberation. Towards this end, Nyāya has developed its epistemology and lent its support to another darśana called the Vaiśeṣika. The Syncretic Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika is a dominant Indian school of realism and is well suited for a critical examination of its thought structure vis-à-vis the philosophy of science. The author has deliberated upon the pramāṇa-s (means of knowing), including direct perception and the kinds of inference, as well as doubt, debates and the like, as expounded by the Nyāya system. He has also discussed the five-membered syllogism of Nyāya as well as the cause–effect relationship, besides some aspects of Buddhist (Dignāga and Dharmakīrti) logic. For his understanding of Indian philosophy and what he calls its rationalist tradition, the author, as admitted by him (p. 18), has drawn extensively from the secondary sources, viz. the works of Matilal and Mohanty as well as a few others. Since his concern is more with Nyāya epistemology, he could well have studied the original Nyāyasastra-s (ed. tr. into English by Ganganath Jha, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1984, in four vols with commentaries by Vatsyayana and Udyotakara, and their responses to Buddhist logic). This would have led him to his own, original insights particularly in respect of the four pramāṇa-s, doubt and others.

Verbal testimony (āprākāya or acādha) has been included among the four pramāṇa-s and this has its own nuances in the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika. It is naïve to think and go along with the author when he says (p. 215) ‘that in various ways scientific knowledge is also dependent on testimony as a source of knowledge, whether in learning science as children or even as professional scientists who gather knowledge from books, journals and peers’. It needs to be emphasized that scientific knowledge being acquired through textual sources, is already tested and verified, besides being permissive of re-testing and re-verification, if desired. The innate strength of science lies in its method. The verbal testimony in the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika scheme is more in the nature of belief and trust in the words or opinion of a reliable person. Even doubt, a method of inquiry or examination in the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika, can also lose its form and rigour on the anvil of verbal testimony as an authority. Science recognizes no authority. When the great scientific luminary, Albert Einstein stated that light rays bend when they pass through a heavy gravitational field, his statement was not accepted immediately as one coming from a reliable or authoritative person. Its acceptance had to wait till it was experimentally verified by A. S. Eddington during the solar eclipse of 1919. Verbal testimony as a pramāṇa in the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika cannot be regarded as scientific. Even Kaṇṭha, the author of Vaiśeṣika, did not include testimony as a pramāṇa.

In recent decades, cosmology has been scaling new heights. The Big Bang cosmology has thrown up some far-reaching issues like the four forces (weak, strong, electromagnetic and gravitational) and the fine-tuning of the Universe, intelligent design, anthropic principle of life and observer-related Universe. Philosophy of science needs to reflect upon these and allied issues for understanding the reality of the Universe. Interestingly, the Vaiśeṣika concept of substance (dravya) includes the observer, the observed matter and motion, mind, space and time— all towards comprehending the basic reality. Perhaps Sundar Sarukkai could have examined in this book, the concept of substance from the point of view of philosophy of science and the Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika.

Sarukkai has discussed what he calls ‘Logic in science: the Western Way’ and ‘Science in logic: the Indian Way?’, the nature of scientific knowledge and allied aspects. The issues dealt with by him are stimulating and debatable alike.

B. V. SUBBARAYAPPAN

31, Padmanabha Residency, Apt. No. 101, 3rd Cross, 10th Main, Guruvayur Layout, Banashankari 3rd Stage, Bangalore 560 085, India e-mail: phispc@bgl.vsnl.net.in