BOOK REVIEW

Indian Philosophy in English: From Renaissance to Independence, edited by Nalini Bhushan and Jay Garfield, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp 644. ISBN 9780199769254.

The title and the subtitle of the book under review have a contextual significance. The title signifies the context with the language 'English' whereas the subtitle signifies the context with the period of work.

The context of the book as mentioned by the editors is Daya Krishna's provocative remark which they consider to be deeply mistaken, that 'anybody who is writing in English is not an Indian philosopher'. This statement raises a serious question that needs to be addressed, the question being: 'Is there any Indian philosopher in the modern period that can fit into the parameters of Daya Krishna?' This provocation shoves into oblivion the whole of the modern philosophy that has been taught for the past one hundred years and also that which is being written. This also prompts us to look at another broader issue of serious concern regarding the relation between language, culture and philosophy since it addresses the issue of the relation between language and philosophy.

The context of the title 'Indian Philosophy in English' has a couple of aspects to be considered. The title presents the discontinuity of the classical Indian philosophy *done* in Sanskrit with Indian philosophy *written* in English. It also presents a distinction between philosophy done and produced in the form of various systems which is an outcome of continuous debates from the one developed as an academic discipline in modern India with the establishment of the university system in the country (during the 1850s); the origin and development of Philosophy as an academic discipline and the introduction of Indian Philosophy as a part of the curriculum.

The context of the subtitle is the period from 'Renaissance to Independence'.

While arguing that ‘philosophy was central to the renaissance’ the editors rightly point out that ‘Anglophone Indian philosophy is coeval with and contributes to the Indian renaissance.’ (xv) This renaissance was ‘more than a revival of Indian cultural, artistic, and intellectual life.’ The editors inform us that the renaissance shaped a new trajectory for India, construction of which is required for Indian nationalism – ‘a trajectory that is grounded in historical narrative and aimed at an independent future.’ (xvi)

These are a few contexts which prove the relevance of the present volume which stands as a signpost showing the way towards the much neglected philosophical literature of colonial India.

The collection consists of 27 philosophical essays written by major scholars of the period, along with four articles written by the editors in addition to the introduction and discussion of a symposium of the Indian Philosophical Congress held at Amalner in 1980. The editors' efforts in selecting this small sample from the vast philosophical literature produced during the period from ‘renaissance to independence’ must be appreciated as the collection effectively serves the purpose of reinvigorating interest in the philosophy of colonial India and demonstrates that Indian intellectuals actively and creatively merged with both their past and the intellectual currents of the broader world. (xv)

The present work is an attempt to show that ‘important and original philosophy was written in English, in India, by Indians’ from the late 19th c through the middle of 20th c. (xiv). In fact, it tells us that these works ‘sustained the Indian philosophical tradition and were creators of its modern avatar.’ (xiv) The authors of these works ‘pursued Indian philosophy in a language and format that could render it both accessible and acceptable to the Anglophone world abroad.’ (xiv)

This small selection is appropriately grouped under four themes – National Identity, Aesthetics, Vedanta, and Metaphysics and Epistemology - as each of these themes exerted a significant influence on the Indian psyche in general

during colonial-independence times. Except five essays – two by M. Hiriyanna on Aesthetics (1951,54), one each by V.S. Iyer (1955) G. R. Malkani (1949) and A. C. Mukerji (1950) – all others were either written or published before India attained independence.

Instead of reviewing each of the edited essays included in the volume, I prefer to look at the articles written by the editors themselves as they provide the context for the volume. These essays have already been published elsewhere and individually they speak of the context to which they were reactions. They were authored between 1904 and 1955. The earliest essay included in the volume was published about 108 years ago and the most recent one was published about 57 years ago. Though it is difficult to provide a context for the essays written during such a long period, the editors have provided useful background by their well-written articles. Their collective existence will give us more meaningful insights into the recent past of the history of Indian philosophy which the editors attempt to offer in their articles. However, the grouping and contextualising of the edited essays attempted by the editors needs a careful and critical reading to draw insights from their collection.

The 'secular modernity' bequeathed by the Anglophone intellectuals of India facilitated a public discourse embodying an Indianness grounded in India's diverse religious traditions, while transcending that very diversity and religiosity celebrated by the editors in their article "Pandits and Professors: The Renaissance of Secular India." In this article the authors have attempted to show that Indian nationalism was prompted more by secular thinking and attitude than religious one by taking examples of various scholars. This article prepares the platform and background for the essays written by Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, A. K. Coomaraswamy, Lajpat Rai, Bhagavan Das and K. C. Bhattacharyya which depict divergent views on the idea of nation that are included in this volume. Each of these authors provides varied versions of looking at India's past while contributing to global discourse on

the concepts of nation and identity.

In their article "An Indian in Paris: Cosmopolitan Aesthetics in Colonial India" which is included in the second part of the volume devoted to Aesthetics, the editors explicate in a striking manner the politics of authenticity in Indian aesthetics. The authors have explained the use of authenticity and creativity in evaluating Indian art by the art critics. The art and artistic sensibility of Amrita Sher-Gil was distinguished from that of Ravi Varma and Abanindranath Tagore. The distinctions that were brought out with regard to the Soul of Indian art (materialistic or spiritualistic); training lineage (Bombay and Madras versus Calcutta schools of art); appropriation of the styles (European versus Japanese and Mughal) along with the success with the masses versus elite have been brought out well in this essay which future researchers can probe further. This essay concludes Part Two of the volume which includes the essays of A. K. Coomaraswamy, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, B. K. Sarkar, K. C. Bhattacharyya and M. Hiriyanna.

How Aurobindo's *Lilavada* interpretation of Vedanta made so much sense in India during the renaissance period as a vehicle of modernity has been explained by the editors in their article "Bringing Brahman Down to Earth: *Lilavada* in Colonial India" which forms a part of the section on Vedanta. It is argued that the pressing need of the time for a theoretical foundation for modernity in India was highlighted by Indian philosophers of that time by 'erecting a metaphysical foundation that at once unifies a modern vision of India with a classical tradition and breaks with that tradition to forge a creative vision of future philosophy.'(436) Aurobindo gave a 'startling, realistic twist' to Vedanta by basing its metaphysical foundation on *Lilavada*. The authors contend that *Lilavada* provided 'the framework and the metaphors that allowed India to construct its ideological identity and its engagement with modernity on its own terms.' (450) This article of the editors encompasses the significance of the articles included in Part Three of the volume devoted to

Vedanta. The essays of R. D. Ranade, Vivekananda, A. C. Mukerji, Ras Bihari Das, S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri, V. S. Iyer and P. T. Raju which discuss various aspects of Vedanta such as the problem of ultimate reality, Jnana yoga, theory of consciousness, world, causality and scepticism which are aptly chosen to depict the varied and rich literature on Vedanta.

By showing the contribution of A. C. Mukerji as an example of the authentic and creative work produced during the colonial period, the editors in their article "The Plato of Allahabad: A. C. Mukerji's contributions to India and to World Philosophy" argue that 'there was in fact a renaissance under way in Indian Philosophy during this period which is still not recognised.' (457) The authors rightly point out that 'there were many others working in the universities of India during the British period who did not themselves see tradition and innovation as mutually exclusive categories, who creatively and successfully overcame this divide but who were not, and still are not, recognised for their efforts.'(459) This essay precludes Part Four of the volume devoted to Metaphysics and Epistemology. This part includes the contributions of Hiralal Haldar, K. C. Bhattacharyya, M. Hiriyanna, G. R. Malkani along with that of A. C. Mukerji on such themes as realism, idealism, truth, epistemology and concept of philosophy.

Part Five of the volume includes a very fascinating discussion on 'Has Aurobindo Refuted Mayavada?' with brilliant expositions by Indra Sen, N. A. Nikam, Haridas Chaudhuri and G. R. Malkani. This discussion was the subject of a symposium organised as a part of the Indian Philosophical Congress held at Amalner in 1950.

The editors' efforts at collecting and providing a rich bibliography of the significant works in Indian Philosophy produced from the colonial period and the immediate post-Independence period are praiseworthy. Keeping aside the issue of comprehensiveness of the list, this would definitely help the future researchers interested in 'philosophy during colonial India' in understanding

the rich diversity of the philosophical literature produced by Anglophone academia of India.

The editors lament that ‘there is no recovery effort under way to restore to public consciousness the high quality work of the philosophers of that period’ and further that tragically ‘the dichotomy of the authentic versus the creative as it applies to philosophy is as unbridgeable as ever in the attitude of the present-day Indian philosophers.’ (458) The editors aptly point out the ‘urgency’ of detailed research into the work of Anglophone academia so that these can be ‘stitched together to provide a comprehensive history of Indian philosophy in English.’ (468)

What we can learn from the present volume is that there is a huge pile of philosophical literature of colonial India contributed with equal enthusiasm by academia and public figures of the time which can be thematically grouped, not necessarily in the way presented here. The volume must be taken as a takeoff point to further analyse and discuss concepts such as ‘secular modernity’, renaissance in Indian philosophy; and the distinctions brought out between public and private in practice; math and the academy, authenticity and creativity and various types of nationalisms in India by the editors in their articles.

However, one would be surprised by the fact that none of the essays of Sarvepalle Radhakrishnan, who is mentioned as ‘a prototype of philosophy’ (457) by the editors could find a place in the volume. While dealing with diverse and unclassified material, one would face many difficulties with regard to inclusion and exclusion of essays. It must be noted that the editors' objective was to bring order to the material, the volume of diversity, variedness and richness of which is incomprehensible. There may be many works of authors who have contributed substantially to Indian philosophy during and after the colonial period which still have to see the light of day. The editors' pioneering efforts at dealing with this incomprehensible literature

must be appreciated and taken up further to bring as much comprehensiveness, as much diversity and as much clarity as possible to the philosophical literature of colonial India.

The present work should spur the growth of interest in the history of Modern Indian Philosophy with a concern to locate the unrecognised and ignored aspects of the study of history of Indian Philosophy. The work both by challenging the critics of the Anglophone Indian philosophy and by encouraging further probing into the works of early Indian academia should serve as the platform for reconsideration of the arguments of the critics by the future researchers.

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