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Philosophizing in contemporary India: Some observations

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Abstract

To discover parallelism between Buddhism and European Idealism or Nabbahyaya and contemporary analytical philosophy is nothing but farce. It is an essay in counterfeit and pseudo-scholarship. This mockery must terminate. Let us liberate philosophy in contemporary Indian from inane archaeology dead systems whether indigenous or belonging to other places, Anatomy of Ancient mind, and India being an old civilization could be an object of students of Ancient culture, and thoughts by scholars of History, Linguistics, even of Religious studies, everywhere, but as I have remarked earlier, we cannot sacrifice philosophizing for delineation of history of ideas for their nativity on Indian soil, alone. This is no better knowledge of states quo texts in Pali, Sanskrit, Greek, Latin or modern languages is rare, so in realistic terms in foreseeable future, I cannot visualize in India any very profound Centres for study of History of Ideas based on direct assimilation of texts in languages either of ancient, medieval periods or of modern classics in Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian or German, emerging anywhere among philosophical scholars, at any rate, How much do we know of our contemporary Indian mind, for that matter, as incorporated in Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, or Punjabi writings, either?

Keywords: Farce, civilization, history, linguistics, even of religious studies

1. Introduction

I. The Main Issue

We have teaching and research in several departments of Philosophy in Indian Universities. There are preachers and otherwise interested non-philosophy scholars who advocate their own preferred world-views or ideologies to those who care to be enlightened by their wisdom. A quick over-view of the ideational profile of our times would make us recognize the bewildering incoherence and obfuscating incompatibility of beliefs dispositions and attitudes even among the most articulate champions of every possible level of opinions and convictions ranging from the most elementary and crude animism, fetishism, occultism to utmost of abstract subtleties of the alternative critical theologies or theosophies amongst our peers. These opinions could be related to one or the other most specific micro-domains or about the over-all world-hypotheses. So, one could imagine that contemporary philosophizing in India is not suffering of any scantiness, if at all it is having the malady of over proliferation, or lack of cohesive unity. One could as such feel that there is little reason for anxiety about the quality and worthwhileness of this rich activity. I do not know if any of my distinguished colleagues among the participants really takes this position, if some-one does well, I would have to disagree from such an appraisal, I would give my reasons for such a contrary appraisal in the course of discussing the concept of philosophy itself, and subsequently, as I get down to uphold some

One such distinguished individual is Marxist Sri Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya a student of Sanskrit and Ancient History who in his borrowed title "What is living and what is dead in Indian philosophy" Borrowed from earlier work of Benedetto creces classic What is living and what is dead in Philosophy of Hegel') Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976 has over-simplified the entire universe of Indian thought in his meat dialectical polemic as the struggle between two competing (of course ignorant and self-deceived protagonist) schools of Idealism and Priestly bourgeoisie (whatever it may mean) & Materialism the working class ideology of workers, Vaidyas and worriers.

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suggestions that according to my view need attention in order to promote genuine philosophizing in our times. But before I come down to these, I wish to formulate a distinction between philosophical concepts uncritical review and an interest in critical or review of common beliefs, philosophical systems, ideologies, or generally History of Ideas, that to my mind, we in our context have not been able to enforce in our professional practice, even if we could appreciate it, in principle.

I am submitting the observation that a critical analysis of philosophical courses, dissertations and instruction through academic publications and philosophical seminars, symposia, colloquium (that we get in plenty, now, thanks to U.G. G. I. C.P.R., I.C.S. S.R or other funding agencies, both Indian and Foreign). We would discover that apart of representation of traditions, stereotypes or ideologies, and reviews of such ossified materials over and over again, we do little else. If after bracketing all such overviews, or microscopic details of scrupulous analyses, We question cur academic and professional works of Indian philosophers in last two generations. We shall be left with something hopelessly patchy, marginal and inadequate, it is highly depressing and one can only bemoan its intellectual sterility. No refreshingly new idea seems to ever blow our academia. Why? This issue needs some examination before I proceed to talk about Philosophy and try to sketch some philosophical concepts that need be tackled by all of us in our generation.

Let us straight away plunge into this question of interpreting our hoary philosophical traditions. I am sorry I am convinced that despite the noises for Indianisation over last two decades and more amongst neo-swarajists we have been hardly offering any convincing instance of pioneering or daring analysis above and uplifting from the beaten tread of old schools of spiritualism, illusionism ritualism and materialism in our latest historical representations of old systems. These are not even comparable to some of these that were offered, by scholar-savants of an earlier generation like B. G. Tilak's on Karma Yoga Shastra, M.K. Gandhi's teachings on Ahimsa and Satyagraha or even Varnashrama or Sri Aurobindo's advocacy of Vedic Sadhana and vision of super-conscious reaches of mind. Examples from Iqbal, Tagore and M. N. Roy would provide a full profile of that generation of thinkers who desired their peers to wake up and take their place in modern world that our own stupor and as unjust slavery has denied us, till then.

Lesser minds like those of S. Radhakrishnan and publicists like Jawaharlal Nehru have led us too much glorification of the sterile verbosity and intellectual pusillanimity. Ours, unfortunately, is a world of platitudes and unredeemed mediocrity this we suffer, endure, without shame, sans intelligence. It is further distress that we do not witness scholar savants of Indology, any more in our Universities either. I mean people who could aspire to equal or excel the standing and calibre of a Mahamahopadhyaya Pt. Gopinath Kaviraj, Professor R.D. Ranade, R. G. Bhandarker, S. N. Des Gupta, B. G. Siricar, Anand Kumaraswami, P. V. Kane, or likes of Ganganath Jha or Mimamsa

Bahul Sankratayyan of Tibetan Lamaism or Swami Dayanand on Rig veda, today in our midst. In that sense cultured India is falling prey to the worst hubris, this mindless Media-slavery and instant imitation of crazy western models, even if it amounts to carrying Ganga-Water from Seattle to Kashi or tur-bid filth from Seine to Kanchi.

(Oraze for T.M. as a net of reimport via Berkeley and Geneva).

Yet this excessive dose of indological materials in our philosophical pursuits in India in recent decades has been counter-productive. It borders on academic tokenism and titunt comparisons and comparative philosophy have been a mochary. To discover parallelism between Buddhism and European Idealism or Nabbahyaya and contemporary analytical philosophy is nothing but farce. It is an essay in counterfeit and pseudo scholar ship. This mockery must terminate. Let us liberate philosophy in contemporary Indian from inane archaeology dead systems whether indigenous or belonging to other places, Anatomy of Ancient mind, and India being an old civilization could be an object of students of Ancient culture, and thoughts by scholars of History, Linguistics, even of Religious studies, everywhere, but as I have remarked earlier, we cannot sacrifice philosophizing for delineation of history of ideas for their nativity on Indian soil, alone.

We must also suspend this mindless worship of the long chain of our very venerable teachers, and avoid their period commentators and expositors. In the course of last one hundred years of our coming to acquire acquaintance with fast changing modes and fashions in European culture, we are now, perhaps indulging in self-same verbose and pedantic name dropping tokenisms with analytic Movement, phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism or their several possible permutations. This is no better knowledge of statesque texts in Pali, Sanskrit, Greek, Latin or modern languages is rare, so in realistic terms in foreseeable future, I cannot visualize in India any very profound centres for study of History of Ideas based on direct assimilation of texts in languages either of ancient, medieval periods or of modern classics in Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian or German, emerging anywhere among philosophical scholars, at any rate, How much do we know of our contemporary Indian mind, for that matter, as incorporated in Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, or Punjabi writings, either ? We must realize Philosophy is intimately related to writings of poets, play wrights, critics, arts, artcritics, as much as it has something to do with modern ethnomethodology of social-sciences, or structural linguistics, cybernetics, hermeneutics Foundations of Mathematics, Logic and Natural, life and physical sciences, or political ideologies.

Regarding this last, we are imitators in philosophical reflections as are based on contemporary world-views about as much as we are craving for scientific and technological transfers from West and Soviet civilizations. Neither, we plug the gaps in the areas of high technology nor we are yet capable of assimilating the philosophical implications of the new sciences like gene-engineering, artificial computer languages, or could explain how molecular biology is related to memory-conceptualizations and structural engrams of our cerebral events (see Sir John Eccles, and Popper's Self and its Brain) Philosophy and philosophers when they used to be at their honest best could join the theoretical rigour to practical wisdom and poesis of feeling and its expression. This thought-edifice would be magnificent to visualize, while scrupulously accurate in assimilating all the known first order truths. Since, last century this is becoming rare, everywhere, including modern India. One explanation that occur to me about this waning of interest in speculative construction is the vast

deluge of now knowledge that has accrued since the rise of modern Industrial society in Europe after French Revolution and later elsewhere. Philosophical inquiries (Logic, Metaphysics and ethics) are critical analyses and constructions of our first order information's. First think of Logic, it wishes to investigate the structures of formal deduction that range over vast formal systems of Mathematics, computerized sciences, statistics Methodology, induction and probability theories, (ignoring syntactical structures of artificial 1 languages. Is there only one Logie? We often ask this question now Seerndly Metaphysicas it tries to articulate an over-all conceptual framework that shall capture the most important elements of our vast information about matter, life, mind, and thought and languages. It looks almost an impossible task. So we hear: Metaphysics is non-sense, or at best only stipulative formulations of usage. Lastly ethics: it relates to our own intimate awareness of our Ego-self's interior, and its anatomy and convulsions studied through introspection grasped by arts, poetry, theatre, psycho-analyses and psychiatry as well as through objective scientific study of other cultures', which means that we are now extremely self-conscious in not imposing ascriptive our ethno-centric preconceptions of what is right or the good in all their men whose values we know do not converge. On it be most reasonable to cease philosophizing about values, altogether? Or could philosophical accuracy impose on each one of us a total abandonment of moral counselling?

Apart of the above bewildering perplexities let me also list two major onslaughts on philosophical non-partisanship; one from the side of Marxist theory of ideology as based on the rejection of autonomy of cognition and conceptualization, in general as a mere super-structure of the more primary structure of relations of production of course mediated through abstractions and verbalizations. The other is rejection of any criterion for theoretical models of our world-pictures which in different measures has been articulated in some later works (as interpreted) of Wittgenstein, Thomas Kuhn, Peter Winch, Jurgen Habermas, Paul Feyerabend (see last Against Method).

Of course, I do reject this irrational connection of conceptual enterprise, by these Linguistic behaviorists and advocates of stale medicine of Dialectic (see Popper- Mind, 1940) which I think is nothing but a category- confusion. Nor I am willing to go all the way with analysis of Rule following which is a phenomenological delineation of my several conceptual acts, implying no dispositional transcendental structure at all. Even amongst scholars of Philosophy a clear distinction between the conceptual order and its sociocultural enactment does not always emerge, as some of us fly at a tangent with lexical, biographical, social, or linguistic flourishes of the ancient text that we pick up for our own philosophical contemplation. More recently, ideological commitment, trendy media lingo, populism and mindless journalistic Marxist shibboleths vitiate our earlier sanctimonious religiosity and didactic enterprises. Philosophical critique and transcendental detachment (a la Kant) is hardly evident in our conceptual effort. It has to be repaired.

II. What is Philosophy?

Of course, Philosophy' could designate any of the following genres of intellectual activities say (a) speculative (h) critical (e) constructive (see my paper "Is Philosophy

Culture Free" Philosophy Dept. pp.51-3, Anivikshk1 1971, B, H. U. Journal) or (d) My Philosophy which could as well stand for " My faith and Values ". The last does not call for public discussion for that is steeped in the mystery of how one gets to articulate and individuate his concrete being, which is often (save in some very exceptionally gifted and self-conscious person) not quite fully transparent even to the given Ego, itself. In all other types (a), (b) & (c) where we conceptualize about domains marked by recurrent family resemblances constituted of similarities and order in demarcated phenomenon, one can hope to witness by critical analysis and reflections a reliable and objective framework of ideational structures, of course at various tiers. Philosophy is an effort to etch out these structures. In that sense Keats' transcendental proscription in his underlying conceptual methodology of his critiques is really impeccable, and holds for all philosophy. It side-steps all geo-political boundaries, and rises beyond all episodic elements, to ensure its minimum conceptual distancing (My apologies for adopting Professor John Bullogh's idea of psychical distancing see his work on: Aesthetics) and holding to dispositionalism of concepts (Rules paradigms). In an even greater sense critical philosophers (b), Pick up only such basic categories or their schemata though enacted in various terminology and different natural languages whose family resemblances hold across the epochal cultures and are truly history-free. Just to think of formulation of concepts of Being, Meaning or sense, Negation', consistency', predication', 'deducibility', 'possible or necessity of ideas, or objects or properties. These of course and embedded in writings of well-known philosophers but are timeless, like Logic or geometry, "Is, seven plus five equals twelve is true at 3.00 p.m. only?", readers of Wittgenstein would take on the point, I hope, easily.

As such true philosophy cannot be under any circumspections of accidents of speech, our level of information about particular or even specific generalizations about such classes of particulars. It is so, because a philosophical concept is truly foundational and even if different conventions of signs and schemata are conceivable as alternative representations of these, it is maintained that a trained philosophical mind would not (hopefully) miss their mutual convergence, equivalence or translatability.

I hold, philosophical thinking (strictly speaking) only to be confined to investigations into such concepts as those explicate structure of Being of the following four fold orders: first of signs, second of Acts, third of concepts and fourth of objects (including various factitious, quasi and abstract entities).

Philosophy, is not concerned in amassing true or warranted propositions about any one of the above order, exclusively. Despite of the several distractions known to history of speculation and those fanciful webs that metaphysical spiders have often woven, no serious philosophy ought to revise, add or modify our concrete beliefs about elements of Nature, or could change or lay down new rules either about 'signs or even 1 concepts by themselves nor investigate and formulate models' or paradigms for our mental-acts per se, such as those of conception', assertion rule following, definition', 'referring', verifying, identifying', 'proving hating 'intending', positing etcetera. Philosophical reflections basically conceptualize about inter-order schemata and notions designed to delineate them. (That is involving signs, Acts, concepts and objects). In that sense

every philosophical concept has to tidy the entire skein of every possible coherent visualization of sense in assorted types of our thoughts. To visualize these through thought experiments or language-games is almost the core of philosophizing, somewhere amongst the concepts and our own distorted conceptions that accompany them in us, are their lexical tokens or names of these concepts, one should keep these distinct, and steer clear, if not always differentiated from them. In this quest for clarity about the foundational principles only the most acute and perspicacious aiche can hope to make some headway. For a fact philosophical concepts could only be introduced through linguistic tokens', 'Mental Acts', and of course with some thematic contents (quasi-objects ?) culled generally from amongst universals or family, resemblances inhering in our several modes of immediate-awareness.

Philosophy is the name of that retroactive self- reflexive criticism or syncategorematic judgments about the aforesaid four orders (signs, acts, concepts and objects that could superveniently enlighten and delineate the very limits of the speak able and reveal the totality of our understanding's effort to constitute meanings, through linguistic and mental devices.

If what I have sunted above about philosophical concepts, their inborn reflexivity or their inexorable syncategorematic level of functioning and creating a precise philosophically objective and yet purely constructed order of sense (through reflective interpretations) is justified, (and I think it is it seems particularly absurd to me to hope that by managed research projects, seminars or other funded probta mmes we can make any headway to resolution of these basic issues. Not at all, however, these can have some heuristic functions, only. We can hope to sensitize our keenness of mind by listening to criticism of colleagues about the well-recognized thrust areas, and it may lead us to recognize the dead-locks we reach in this process of thinking through. But let me once again emphasize, unless, we are taking philosophy to be a hand- maid of some ideological commitment or cultural umbrella or purpose emanating from there we cannot and ought not feel discouraged if there are no final terminal pay-offs in terms of definitive, rounded conclusions about our own immediate experience, Logic, Language or the world. Ofcourse philosophical forays may enliven and prompt reformulation of any of these and can give or provide insightful research programmes in areas of physical, mathematical and social sciences such as Freges, Russell's, Wittgenstein's work in foundations of Mathematics had promoted Von Neumanh's studies in cybernetics and Chomsky's structural analysis of linguistics under the concept of 'Rule- following. Likewise, the idea of a rational person or agent. Make us think anew on the very idea of a social science (Peter Winch).

One misconception that may drop up because of what appears in my above discussion, a 'family' resemblance with analytical philosophy, is that philosophy is nothing but a matter of words, and their usage. I do not share this linguistic solipsism, and would be appalled if you accuse me of this sort of perverse debauchery. Nor do I feel much concerned with hackneyed varieties of Ego-centric Predicaments. I want to rescue Kantian critique tradition, from the trap of neo-marxists of frankfurt, who besaude Kantian transcendental approach by adapting it to esoterica analysis of intentionality and back to relativizing it all to class-orientations of the historic episodes of philosopher's

life. It is hoped that, if the supervenient and Inherently deontologist meaning discourse as created by our capacity to play language-games', is noted, entailing in their visualizations of possibilities which are not yet actual and are largely like rules amounting to quasi-objects, (ep. these to what B. Russell referred as incomplete symbola, or unsaturated expressions, see his principles of Mathematics) which could be reduced either to acts of interpreting or to patterns of signs in the arbitrary notation, we can grasp philosophical activity, truly and better. It is on the contrary the inhering disp csl- national isomorphism and sufficiency shared and recognized between the two orders that is signs and our acts. These constitutive rules call for their most transparent delineation despite their perplexing 'token-reflexive attributes and involuted structure of this universe of discourse. Once we start grasping the implications of Man's conceptual openness in designing such universes of discourse, we shall finally be redeemed from seeking realization of pointless hopes of solving and philosophical issues, by finally listing a definitive body of basic truths.

III. Some suggestions regarding Philosophy in Contemporary India

We should take our own thinking a little more seriously than our unjustified sense of inferiority and tendency to imitate does not permit us to do so far. We also ought to stop this going on rehearsing even second rate textual matters from the medieval period of India's vast scholastic store-house. (let that be confined to historians of intellectual history of India, who have the requisite taste and functional skills, linguistic capacities, for such textual hermeneutics), but the philosophical Gcumen whatever little of it we have should not be wasted on this disastrous reconstruction of dead philosophies. Of course, parroting borrowed controversies and worthless ShibboTeths from the high tables of Cambridge, Harvard, Berkeley or for that matter Frankfurt, or Havana is hardly any better. Let us self-consciously decide to live our life of mind, here and now. Therefore, what I list below as serious issues (of course to my mind) that are only born of some of their long reasoning with me, and my more than ordinary incompetence and terrible conceits and vanity. I hope some of you can tackle these in time to my edification, either right in the seminar or later in your serene reflections, on return to your respective places (please do send me off-prints).

Analysis of the mystery associated with person- hood. The struggle and perplexities associated with my values and my personal identity, self-recognition and my framework of conceptual-identity itself, are reciprocally interdependent. Ofcourse, we do not recognize easily the fact that underlying Rules determine my personal identity', which of course gets articulated in and through my world', constituted in its turn by the plenitude of the framework of sense (a set of dispositional rules of concepts). My freedom, my words, my resolutions, and my world follow always laws of my conceptualization in their fullness and yet gradually enact my freedom in progressively concrete embodiments in my language, my moral code, my society and my civilization, and through them myself (see my unpublished paper on! A Note on Value CPR Bhubneshwar, Utkal University, seminar March 1984). Clear formulation of the various uses of the term meaning likewise standardization of what Being stands for, or how it can be unequivocally used. We should seek adequate delineation of these expressions.

What is the locus of meaning? Is it a function of episodes such as speech acts, of hearing, decoding and interpreting our signs by explicit rules or it is founded on enveloping-our form of life? Of course Rule of identity as the Basic foundation of all other rules (see philosophical invest and more recently Kripke's "Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Languages" (pp. 238-297) in perspectives on Philosophy of Wittgenstein, edited by Irving Block B & Blackwell, 1981) Kripke quotes on his p.297. Wittgenstein's remarks on the foundation of Mathematics V(33), p.184, does this mean I.e. that the definition of some would be this game is what all or most human beings take for the same? Ofcourse not ". He asks us to compare this with philosophical investigations para 226 Human beings believe that twice two are four and "Twice two are four" do not mean the samo.... Kripke asks us are these reflections of Wittgenstein amount to giving a full and formal definition of 'same? Again, Kripke asks, or can Crusoe be following rules on his island? Is there canonical method of determination if one is following a rule? Here I am sure one has to apply all the skills of conceptual criticism and techniques of formalization of the issue of Identity of Rule, identify of an act or of interpreting it, and identity of the instance before one sens what question we are facing let alone solve it.

The issues regarding innate conceptual possibilities of all languages and restructuring of thoughts in relatively fewer forms (problems of Panini, Chomsky Wittgenstein, Kripke of basic categories of Aristotle). Can we extend now universe of discourage by arbitrary use of new inscriptions? Or all newen systems despite our vanity go on following the one deep con ceptual grammar which we cannot but re-present in every nev Innovative notation? I have no definite answer myself to give but we must sock this answer to this question of all times and for all times.

Lastly, the fact of growing illiteracy fears, hotrods and killings the crying injustice to raped women my sisters in India or their sale as chattels abroad agonies of the starving unemployed millions, and frustrated dreams with whom It ind as flesh of my flesh, bloed of my blood and bones of my bones nood be conceptually tackled in depth. Will we live as a people, as a culture, as a nation K, at all? Our Mizoram, Nagaland, Jharkhand, burning Assam yesterday and our Punjab today? These agonizing questions of moment are as challenging to me, not only as an Indian, but as a student of Philosophy of History of India s undying identity or culture if it is certain? Whose identity is this, we must ask? This last point to me is far more historically relevant in our times, than (1), (11) & (111), posed above.

Conclusion

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