



Debates in Indian Philosophy: Classical, Colonial, and Contemporary, A. Raghuramaraju, Oxford University Press, 2007, 0195693027, 9780195693027, 139 pages. This book traces the effects of colonialism and Western philosophy on Indian philosophical thought and highlights the elaborate debates that formed the pivot of the classical Indian tradition as opposed to the general tendency in contemporary Indian philosophy to avoid direct dialogue..

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The Indian philosophical tradition has been overlooked by Western commentators for too long. Most especially, there is a particular neglect of contemporary Indian philosophy. When we think of 'Indian philosophy' in general, what often comes to mind is only classical Indian thought. Chiefly, we think of the Vedic period (the Vedas and the Upanisads) and the Epic period (the Bhagavad GĀ«tĀ• in the MahĀ•bhĀ•rata, The Laws of Manu, and Kautilya's Artha-Ā›straĀ•), writings that were produced roughly between 600 (or earlier) BC and 200 A.D. Whilst a rich philosophical tradition continued afterwards -- giving us various schools of Jain, Buddhist, and Advaita Vedanta thought -- this receives far less attention than what little is given to the more classical Indian philosophical texts. Contemporary work in Indian philosophy escapes notice in the West altogether.

This presents us with a growing problem. Our world continues to get smaller. Political philosophers once spoke chiefly about justice within the state: now work on global justice is in ascendancy. Western philosophers in all areas continue to make great progress in thinking about philosophy beyond their borders. The primary defect is its complete failure to engage at all with philosophies beyond their borders. We speak of reasonableness in terms no one might reasonably reject from within our tradition, without considering how such views might be received within other traditions. To claim that the future of philosophy -- at least in areas such as global justice -- will lie in a greater engagement with non-Western philosophies is too certain to be a prophecy.

When we do begin engaging with other traditions, such as those developed in India, we quickly find our efforts rather fruitful. The dynamism, complexity, and interchange between canonical figures we enjoy in the Western tradition are no less present in the Indian philosophical tradition. We have much we can learn. What the Indian philosophical tradition might teach us extends far beyond simply developing our understanding of the philosophy of religion more genuinely, although this is also the case.

Perhaps the main reason the Indian philosophical tradition has escaped notice in the West is in part because what little was known was considered 'religious,' not 'philosophical,' and 'classical,' not 'contemporary.' (In fact, Raghuramaraju notes that only recently did the Journal of Indian Philosophy change its editorial policy and begin publishing work on Indian philosophy beyond its classical period (28).) Despite the appearance of many important contemporary figures in the Indian literature, we unfortunately have difficulty finding them in the Western literature.

Raghuramaraju has written a most wonderful book meant to introduce contemporary Indian philosophy to the West, while making a contribution to Indian philosophy as well. He divides the book essentially into three main chapters that examine key debates between two major thinkers. In each case study, Raghuramaraju seeks to not only explain what a major figure on each side of the debate sought to say, but also to clarify the nature of their disagreement, sometimes in disagreement with recent work in India on these topics. Thus, he attempts to make contribution beyond simply introducing us to important persons and ideas.

The first major chapter examines India's relationship with colonialism, comparing Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi. Vivekananda is said to defend a more accommodating position with the West. That is, he recognizes both the existence and extent of India's poverty due to its lack of economic development, while celebrating India's spiritual past. The way forward is to modernize, but without sacrificing India's spiritual heritage. For example, he says:

Vivekananda believes India has much to learn from the West in terms of economic development. However, India can give something back: spiritual development to the West. He says: 'If we have to learn from them the ways and methods of making ourselves happy in this life, why, in return, should

we not give them the methods and ways that would make them happy for all eternity?' (47). A balance can be struck in a mutually beneficial relationship whereby a materialist West can bring economic development to the East and a spiritual East can bring religious development to the West.

This view is challenged by Mahatma Gandhi, who denied that materialism and spirituality could be brought together in a harmonious way. Gandhi argued that what characterized modern civilization is its replacement of God with materialism (51). Thus, modern civilization is not merely incompatible with spirituality, but, in truth, 'Satanic' (51). Materialism, for Gandhi, did not merely oppress non-Western societies, but it also oppressed Western societies. Thus, like Vivekananda, Gandhi associates materialism with the West and spirituality with the East, but where they part is Gandhi's rejection of materialism.

The second major chapter focuses on religion and politics, again looking at Mahatma Gandhi, but contrasting his views on this topic with V. D. Savarkar and his ideology of Hindutva. Savarkar distinguishes 'Hinduism' from 'Hindutva.' Hinduism is a religion. Hindutva is not religion, but personal: it is a community of persons who share a pre-British and pre-Islamic history, who speak Hindi, who are Hindus, and enjoy 'a common culture and law' (78). Curiously, Savarkar argued that those who are Hindutva should join the British Indian army. Their task was not to help the British, but rather to acquire military training they could not acquire otherwise in order to eventually drive the British from India (see 79-80). There is, thus, a militancy about the Hindutva ideology that is modern, not classical.

If then I want political power, it is for the sake of the reforms for which the Congress stands. Therefore, when the energy to be spent in gaining that power means so much loss of energy required for the reforms, as threatened to be the case if the country is to engage in a duel with the Mussalmans or Sikhs, I would most decidedly advise the country to let the Mussalmans and Sikhs take all the power and I would go on with developing the reforms (85).

Politics can serve useful ends, but it is only an instrument by which we may enjoy such ends. Moreover, Gandhi's religious thought held Hinduism as a religion of love, not political might, in keeping with a doctrine of non-violence. Thus, while Gandhi may have wanted to spiritualize politics, he rejected Savarkar's militant views on politicizing spirituality.

The third and final major chapter compares Sri Aurobindo and Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya on science and spirituality. Sri Aurobindo argued that (materialist) science was compatible with Hindu spirituality. Hinduism often downplays the physical world as a sphere of illusion, or maya, turning its focus instead on an eternal beyond this world. Materialist science is incomplete, yet complements this traditional Indian picture. Where this picture is lacking, science can fill its gaps and vice versa. He says:

Bhattacharyya disagrees. He argues that science views its objects as 'knowable and usable,' whereas our true 'spiritual demand is that nature should be contemplated and not merely used or manipulated' (105). Reality is something more than what we can measure. Science denies the presence of what we cannot measure, a metaphysics beyond matter. This view is captured well by Tagore: 'Truth is the infinite pursued by metaphysics; fact is the infinite pursued by science' (112n3).

The book concludes with a magnificent closing chapter that contemplates the future for Indian philosophy. One thing many readers will note is that while the various figures discussed offer a variety of interesting and exciting claims, these claims are not particularly rigorously argued. Raghuramaraju is well aware of this problem, claiming that the lack of rigor is particular to contemporary Indian philosophy and not classical Indian philosophy (see 118). It is easy to get a real sense from this chapter that colonialism damaged India, not least its self-confidence and flourishing philosophical tradition. The good news is that this tradition lives on with new figures and new ideas, often building off of India's intellectual past, but also in combination with imported Western ideas. In this sense, contemporary Indian philosophy is ahead of its Western counterparts in forging an awareness and possibility for a common ground.

My first criticism is that the focus is entirely on Indian philosophers who are Hindu. This gives the misleading impression that Hindu philosophers are the only figures of importance in contemporary Indian debates. Nothing could be further from the truth: contemporary Indian philosophy is as diverse as ever. Of course, I recognize that no book can cover every topic and figure. However, I was very surprised to find no mention at all of B. R. Ambedkar, a Buddhist convert who studied with John Dewey at Columbia and returned to India, widely credited with being the drafter of India's constitution.

A second criticism is that perhaps the two Hindu writers most worthy of inclusion were excluded: Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Rabindranath Tagore. Perhaps other than Mahatma Gandhi (who receives ample attention), few other Indian writers have received greater attention in the West than Radhakrishnan and Tagore. Radhakrishnan was well versed in both Western and Indian traditions, working with the British Idealist John Henry Muirhead, including a co-edited book, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, published in 1952. Tagore is cited often in Raghuramaraju's notes supporting the views of less well known contemporary figures. However, it is a pity Tagore's words did not merit greater attention in the main text, given his phenomenal influence on Indian thought at his time and afterwards.

Third, I believe Raghuramaraju could have made the book more accessible to a Western audience. Whilst his summaries are excellent and I think he chose wisely to include many extended remarks from Indian figures (whose work may otherwise be quite unknown to the West), these passages convey a number of important concepts that prevail in Indian philosophy, but are largely unknown in the West, such as karma, maya, mukti, samsara, and others. The Western reader would have benefited greatly from some explanation of these terms either in the chapters where they arise or in a glossary.

These criticisms should not detract from how strongly I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in expanding their horizons and exploring the development of current Indian philosophical thought. I have profited from its pages. As our world continues to shrink, an engagement with other philosophical traditions will become ever more necessary. Perhaps it will take one of our finest Western moral and political philosophers to bring Indian philosophy to the centre of our attention: indeed, Martha C. Nussbaum has begun doing just this for many years and increasingly so.

Raghuramaraju's *Debates in Indian Philosophy* is the first of what I hope will be many steps in this project of bringing Western and Indian philosophies into conversation with each other. He does admirably well in this task and his book is a tremendous achievement. I recommend it without reservation. Let us hope that much more is to follow.

This book retraces the severity of the impact of colonialism and Western philosophy on the making of Indian thought. It highlights the general tendency in contemporary Indian philosophy to avoid direct dialogue as opposed to the rich and elaborate debates that formed the pivot of classical Indian tradition. The author peruses works in and on Indian philosophy, searching for possible and hidden dialogues and identifies three important areas where there is a clear possibility of dialogue: between Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, V.D. Savarkar and Mahatma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo and K.C. Bhattacharya. He retrieves these debates on state and pre-modern society, religion, and politics, and science and spiritualism respectively. He concludes by indicating possible directions that Indian philosophy can take, and explicates the nature of the postcolonial self not merely at a political level but by restoring the metaphysical texts of contemporary India. This book will be of considerable interest not only to students and scholars of Indian philosophy and religious studies but to scholars of politics and sociology as well.

Advaita Advaita Vedanta argument Ashis Nandy aspects attempts Bankim Bhima British Chattopadhyaya classical Indian philosophy colonialism communities consciousness contemporary Indian philosophy contemporary Western philosophy context contrast critical critique of modernity cultural Daya Krishna debates dialogue difference discussion distinction dominant Enlightenment essay evolution fact fascism formulation Further Gandhian highlighting Hindu Hinduism homogeneity idea ideology of Hindutva important Indian thought instance J.N. Mohanty Jarasandha

Javeed Alam Kalidas Bhattacharyya Keer Killingley Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya Liberalism logic Mahatma Gandhi Mahatma paradigm Matilal matter Mehta metaphysics mind modern civilization modern West Mohanty monism moral Muslims nationalism nationalist non-dualism Partha Chatterjee philosophical activity pluralism political position possible pre-modern present problems Radhakrishnan Raychaudhuri reality reason reference rejected relation religion religious S.N. Dasgupta Sangh Parivar Sarkar Savarkar and Gandhi says Social Contract spiritual Sri Aurobindo Swami paradigm Swami Vivekananda Swaraj Tagore theory thinkers tradition truth unity Vedanta Vivekananda and Gandhi West with materialism

"Debates in Indian Philosophy retraces the deep and disturbing impact of colonialism and Western philosophy on the dialogical structure of Indian thought. It highlights the general tendency in contemporary Indian philosophy to avoid direct dialogue as opposed to the rich and elaborate debates that formed the pivot of the classical Indian tradition. Perusing works in and on Indian philosophy, the author searches for possible and hidden dialogues."--BOOK JACKET.

This book discusses the state of contemporary Indian philosophy, lamenting the fact that its rich classical heritage of debate and rigorous argumentation has faded away for reasons both internal to it, and external factors such as colonialism. He takes on the colossal task of surveying the contemporary scene both within the discipline of philosophy and outside it and the conclusion he comes to is grim: "This means, that we cannot even articulate our philosophic concerns, except via the classical Indian and contemporary Western philosophy. There cannot be a more nihilistic view about the philosophical possibility of us as a people facing challenges that call for intensive thought."

This is to throw the baby out with the bath water. Raghuramaraju makes no attempt to seriously consider the actual content or method of these modes of philosophising before dismissing them as not laying the basis for "intensive thought". Even the Jaipur and Rege experiments that were carefully structured and controlled experiments, he dismisses with no intellectual scrutiny, simply using the irrelevant fact that they afforded only a couple of more meetings of scholars and pandits, as a sign that nothing came out of them. The `Svaraj in Ideas' debate (in the special Volume of the IPQ, Vol. XI, no.4, 1984) and the `Tradition, Modernity and Svaraj' (Vol.1, 1990) that addressed the very concerns that Raju addresses, of course, don't even figure perhaps because no second step came out of them. Surely one needs to arrive at an intellectually rigorous diagnosis as to why these attempts failed, if they indeed did, before one ventures to take yet another first step.

There is some truth in his complaint that there is a "psychological craving" in contemporary Indian thought to explain or wish away difference and highlight commonalities. It is, however, not a psychological but an epistemological consensus, of the `secular scientific community' simply to accept the evolutionary model of the progress of knowledge which is that debates must be settled, not nurtured, to be able to make progress.

Nevertheless, Raghuramaraju thinks a possible space for debate will be created through an articulation of differences and he sets up three test cases, which form the main body of the book. The real question, however, is how fundamental, and therefore worthy of debate are these differences. The three modern Indian oppositions he looks at are: Gandhiji and Vivekananda on state and civil society; Savarkar and Gandhiji on politicising religion and spiritualising politics; and Aurobindo and Krishnachandra Bhattacharya (KCB) on science and spiritualism.

He sees Vivekananda's advocacy of materialism to eradicate poverty in India as representing the modern Indian state and Gandhiji as representing pre-modern villages and communities in his otherwise "radical" critique of modern civilisation. The author erases the sheer flashes of clarity he achieves in parts of the book by crowding it with classificatory terms, used loosely with no attempt to develop a consistent vocabulary for analysis. The inclusion of "pre-modern" to characterise Gandhiji's position, to say that Gandhiji and Vivekananda are thinkers who are "not systematic" because they were responding to different contexts and were "field-level thinkers", are only few of the many such loaded terms that go unexplained and un-discussed.

Thus despite his brilliant analysis equating Savarkar's Hindutva programme with the presuppositions

of the European Enlightenment and the modern secular state that according to Raghuramaraju, reject pluralism in favour of homogeneity, he easily lapses into descriptions of apparent and superficial differences that mislead and fail to grasp real issues. He therefore ultimately locates the difference between Gandhiji and Savarkar as lying between politicising religion and spiritualising politics rather than in the fundamental conflict between the presuppositions of civil society and the state.

Then he constructs a superficial Gandhiji-Vivekananda opposition as relating to civil society and the state while they are, in fact, divided on the issue of the relation between science and spiritualism (or religion). Vivekananda, Savarkar and Aurobindo share their simultaneous appreciation of Western materialism on the one hand and Hindu tradition on the other. Vivekananda wants materialism and science for society, Savarkar wants it for the power of religion (Hindutva) and the religion of power (the modern state), and Aurobindo (and Tagore) for the love of 'scientific spirituality', a mechanical "amalgamation" of matter and spirit in a synthesised evolutionary progress from matter to spirit, without experiment in society.

Therefore again, there seems to be no real debate between KCB and Aurobindo except that the former is self-conscious and rigorous about the method of philosophy and science while the latter is loose and well meaning. The key lies in KCB's assertion that science and philosophy, "Both deal with the object understood as what is believed to be known in the objective attitude as distinct from the subjective, enjoying or spiritual attitude." (Emphasis mine.) Raghuramaraju completely misreads KCB's analysis as an approach where "science denies philosophy." He misses the point about their common approach that lies in assuming the distinctness of the subject and object of knowledge or of matter and spirit that is the basis of Western philosophy's brand of analytic rigour. It is Gandhiji alone who recognised that this dualism of the subject and object of knowledge was the crux of the problem, the real basis of modern civilisation, its systematic philosophies, vivisectionist science and imperialist politics.

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