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Dr. Shambhu Dutt Jha
Professor, Department of
Philosophy, Tilka Manjhi
Bhagalpur University,
Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

Some reflections on the nature of philosophy in India today

Dr. Shambhu Dutt Jha

Abstract

The new situation that has evolved after centuries of historical transition and challenges posed by scientific and techno-Logical savolution have brought forth new problems so stupen-coue that they could not have been visualised by an ancient system. The structure of philosophical concepta is by no means rigid and arbitrarily Fixed, such that it may be VALIC for all times and pincnes. Social and intellectual changes have brought forth neu loans and problems to the fore. Contemporary trends kiko Marxism and philosophies of existence are directly pro-ducts of the age in which we live.to philosophy and no values new perennial. Iramon of reference must undergo constant change. Incision philosophy must abandon its indifference to human history, both social and intellectual. It has to show its preoccupation with situational contexts. So dogmas and concepts such as Moksa and the like must be modified by frosh establishments.

Keywords: Techno-jogical savolution, visualised arbitrarily fixed kiko marxism

Introduction

In view of the ostrom complexity, subtlety and long historical span of Indian philosophizing it serums naive and hazardous to determine the nature of philosophy in India to- cay in terms of any set formula. By the close of the sixteenth century all possible view points, such as idealism, realism, naturalism, materialism, scepticism, transcendentalism, absolutism, theism, atheism had been advocated on the soil of Incia. Since then chronologically speaking, no significant development is being visualised in the Indian system of philosophizing till the middle of the nineteenth century. The period spanning from the seventeenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century was precisely the period of stag-nation in the history of Indian Philosophy. But with the emergence of thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan noy, Vivekanand, Tilak, Gandhi, Tagore, kurhobindo and Radhakrishnan the eclipsed philosophical heritage of India was once again revived. These philosophers recovered and reinterpreted philosophy in tuno with the prevailing situation of the time. That is why the period running from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century is called the period of renaissance in the history of Indian philosophy. The thinkers of the renaissance period following the great Hindu tradition conceive that liberation is the ultimate destiny of human life. They nold that man is the maker of his destiny. All the thinkers of this period have given immense importance to the performance of selfless service as proscribed by the Gita. Hmong the stalwarts of this period Dr. S. Radhakrishnan occupied the foremost positive for his comprehensive understanding and erudition, adoption of a modified version of advaita Vecanta and for his impect on other younger philosophers of India's post-independence period. He enhanced the glory of Indian philosophy by making it easily intelligible to the common masses not only in Indie but also abroad. After his exit from this arena once again philosophizing in India came nearly to a halt. The uritings of present day Incien thinkors reflect the varying degrees of acquaintance with classical tradition but with a tinge of the knowledge of Western philosophy. A deop fouling has developed among the thin kers of to-day that there is nothing genuine in the philosophical tradition of India. This is simply unfortunate. Perusal of some anthologies recently published testifies this fact.

According to them no overall unified perspective in the field of Indian philosophy is available NOU a days, as somo of our present day thinkers continue to deal with classical problems of the nature of Brahman and its relation to Jiva and the world or of human suffering and final liberation, while others pick up philosophical problems and puzzles here

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Shambhu Dutt Jha
Professor, Department of
Philosophy, Tilka Manjhi
Bhagalpur University,
Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

and there and adopt the analytical method of ordinary language philosophy following Wittgenstein and Dyle and still others manifest the influence of phenomenology and existentialism in their writings. In this way present day thinkers are involved in constructing their own system of philosophy based on western models but unfortunately this brand of scholars has not so far succeeded in making any notable constructive contributions to Indian philosophical thought in conformity with ancient traditions.

Prof. N.K. Devaraja has rightly pointed out in the book entitled "Indian Philosophy: Past and Future" "The work done over years by most of Thomson amounts to more than a record of stray functions to issues raised and discussions conducted chiefly by Anglo-American philosophers. As a consequence, an observer of the philosophical scene in contemporary India would scarcely come across a work attempting a bold, innovative synthesis, problems or data agitating the minds of contemporary thinkers and their interested readers all over the world."

The above version of Prof. Devaraja does not lead us into thinking that the so-called modern-minded scholars of philosophy are sitting idle doing no writing and research in their own way. What he intends to say in this regard is that they have not been able to make philosophy alive and relevant to the concrete issues of modern India. Potentially philosophical problems have cultural and historical gnosis. Philosophy does not set out from scratch and philosophical problems do not grow in a vacuum. It always starts with an existing set of beliefs, values and attitudes which have been challenged by fresh experience or novel ideas through the ages. This encounter between novel ideas and traditional assumptions, between tradition and modernity gives stimulus to fresh philosophical thinking for a reorganization and reinterpretation of ideas and experience.

The historical Buddha, Shankar, Vivekanand, Aurobindo, Garidhi and Radhakrishnan are obvious examples of creative thinkers who performed such a critical function and forced people to reconsider their fundamental assumptions. Methodologically speaking, philosophy has always been the intellectual expression of the process of social and cultural transformation. This revolutionary urge has been an integral part of philosophical formulation and enunciation. But historical scholars of to-day are at a critical juncture to think as to why Indian philosophy is not moving in new directions with concrete proposals suited to the present day socio-economic, socio-religious and cultural consciousness. To our great dismay even to-day Indian scholars are engaged in the pursuit of scholastic interpretation of classical texts or they are still preoccupied with problems which have hardly any relevance in the existing turmoil of our time, and this is simply a manifestation of some inherent weakness in Indian civilization and culture such as passionate pre-occupation with religious fanaticism causing mere hindrance to fresh philosophical assumptions.

This does not necessitate the rejection of our religion and the acceptance of another faith. The twentieth century Indian philosophy is largely traditional. It reinterprets the classical Indian thought and reveals to us the essential truths of the glorious past in a new form and with a fresh orientation. It exemplifies great appreciation of the values and ideals of life - of individual, social and national life. Its understanding and appreciation of the values of life is influenced on the one hand by the great tradition of India's past and on the other hand, by the great cultural stream

flowing from the west. It abandons certain doctrines and ideals of the past which it considers to be superfluous in the changed circumstances. All the thinkers of this period are profoundly influenced by the Upanishadic philosophy and also by the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. Most of them have written commentaries on the Gita and show its deep influence on their individual thoughts and actions. Some contemporary Indian philosophers show a considerable influence of the modern theory of evolution on their thought.

Sri Aurobindo envisages the possibility of the emergence of a race of supermen or gnostic beings. The emergence of supermen on earth and the spiritualization of man and the world is according to him, the goal of cosmic evolution. And that makes the fulfilment of man's destiny. According to Tagore, Tagore, Ghanchi and Radhakrishnan, man is essentially spiritual. He has to realize his inner spirituality and freedom. Radhakrishnan conceives that if he does not develop his spiritual personality, some creature superior to man might evolve. Therefore man cannot be regarded as the last and the highest product of evolution in the ultimate sense. Tagore maintains that the world is a dynamic creative process. It produces ever novel forms and qualities. The joy of life is therein free movement and perpetual creation. But Tagore is not oblivious of the traditional philosophical view of India, that such perpetual creation is possible only on the basis of the foundational reality which is immovable. According to Tagore ethics is required for the purification and upliftment of human personality. Man can obtain spiritual values by honesty and inner sanctity. He accepts the idea of Karma Yoga as advocated by the Bhagavad Gita. He upholds an activist ethics. Tagore's view of God and man reconciles the extremes of immanence and transcendence.

According to Gandhiji truth, which is also God, is the highest end to be realized by man. But he has not given any rational and logical explanation of this Ultimate reality. He is greatly influenced by the doctrine of Vaisnavism. The great contribution of Gandhiji to the development of humanity lies in his emphasis that mankind constitutes a single unit. He also inherits the religious individualism of the Indian philosophical tradition centering round the concept of 'Moksha'. Individualism and universalism stand strangely balanced against each other in Ghanchi thought.

Thus our exposition of the religious and philosophical thought of the eminent contemporary Indian thinkers has made it crystal clear that they show a deep appreciation of the problems of man's nature and his ultimate destiny. Like the ancient Indian philosophers, the contemporary philosophers also have a conviction that philosophy is not only an intellectual discipline and speculative pursuit but it is also

vitaly concerned with man's preoccupation with empirical and day to day life. The twentieth century Indian philosophers not show any particular novelty or originality in their nature of man or the structure of human personality. View of the their predecessors of the nineteenth century reform movements, the twentieth century thinkers have given legitimate attention. Like any to the social upliftment of humanity, another important contribution of the philosophy of the twentieth century lies in its interpretation of man's quest of life or his destiny. The contemporary Indian philosophers do not preach the negation of empirical life and its activities for the attainment

of one's ultimate goal. Still another distinctive feature of the twentieth century thought concerning the destiny of man consists in its view of the emergence of a higher race of man called supermen in the course of terrestrial evolution. Man to-day is molded by a dynamic spirit which aspires to attain as great development in spiritual life as it has attained in science and technology.

The twentieth century Indian philosophy also shows deep insight in refusing to admit any opposition between religion and science. It has full faith in the utility and necessity of science and technology but not at the cost of its faith in religion. It is however to be mentioned here that contemporary philosophers do not seem to be much concerned with creating full-fledged systems of thoughts. Hence Indian religions and philosophical thought are now passing through a crucial stage in their long and glorious history. Philosophy in India is now confronted with most powerful ideological, intellectual and technological forces. It is faced not only with the challenge coming from the other great religions, but also the new ideologies like Marxism, socialism, democracy, science and technology and the like. Those ideologies are presenting formidable challenges to intellectuals of our country also. Those ideologies have little sympathy with religion and the deeper spiritual truths of life. It goes to the credit of the contemporary Indian thinkers that they made earnest efforts to effect reconciliation between the ancient religious thought and the modern ideologies which do not conceal their hostility towards religion. But it cannot be said that the work of reconciling the two extremes of thought has been accomplished and the conflicts and contradictions between them have been resolved. So, Indian thought or philosophy position is still in the stage of transition. Until now it had held fast to its ancient faith in the spiritual and ontological reality. It is on this basis, the unshakable spiritual foundation and deep experience of life that the philosophers of this century have tried to look at the world and meet the various challenges of the new ideological forces coming from the different directions of the world.

The study of ancient problems of philosophy has no doubt an important historical relevance, but a perusal of such problems of traditional Indian philosophy should not be confused with the study of problems with contemporary relevance.

Philosophy must be intelligible and communicable. If a philosopher speaks a language of his own private and restricted language then his impact on his contemporaries is not felt at all. If he speaks a language that is common place and trivial or universal repeating the stale forms of thought, even then he may not attract legitimate attention. Indian philosophers probably lack the necessary orientation in linguistics. Mere theoretical orientation will not do, and ordinary language philosophy will not serve the purpose. So there should be emancipation from uncritical assumptions behind our cultural traditions. We need more cultural understanding to contribute towards the growth of a global, secular philosophy. Inter-cultural philosophical understanding is, indeed, a fundamental problem for us, as we are attempting to build a new civilization on the foundation of the old. Philosophy can cement friendship between one country and another, tradition and modernity, ancient ideals and material necessity. Departure from tradition sounds ludicrous, and denial of modernity is also a formidable obstacle in dynamic progress, for the present

situation is omniscient of political combination and scientific objectivity. Now the philosopher should be more ideologically oriented. Adequate orientation in linguistics in his native land is indispensable whereas the philosopher in India is linguistically ill-equipped and philosophy in India is also cut off from the situational context.

The paradox of the present philosophical situation is that the student of philosophy is becoming increasingly divorced from his own glorious past and going to decadent present. Owing to faulty national policies, the Indian student of philosophy is not well-equipped either in any one of the foreign languages or even in the classical languages of his country. He cannot read and understand and appreciate the texts at first hand, naturally the quality of philosophical activity has regrettably suffered very much. Philosophy is an empirical discipline. Practical character of philosophy is stressed. More abstraction is idle or sterile. It is practice which is enlightening. Practice in its accepted sense denotes action. Theoretical study is knowledge centred. Different systems of Indian philosophy are liberation centred, but liberation is abstraction, not a material goal, but it is painful that any practical implication is not in evidence. Practical implications and scientific meanings must not go, but value-awareness must be retained. It does not follow from the thesis of the philosophical knowledge that philosophy is not practical. I have simply endeavoured to establish that philosophical knowledge must have practical involvement.

The involvement of philosophy as a part of curriculum at various levels of education seems indispensable since the application of philosophical principles and axioms are bound to leave indelible impact on the study of the other branches of knowledge.

The question arises as to what we should do now in order to bring the present day philosophical thinking on the right track. The following suggestions may be incorporated in the philosophical thinking of India so as to fulfil the revolutionary urges of normative ethics and social philosophy.

1. There should be co-ordination and reconciliation between the traditional Indian philosophy and the philosophical requirements of the modern Indians. Awareness of them can be demonstrated by fulfilling the requirements of liberalism, rationalism and science-orientation.
2. Imitation of western modes of living and craze for novelty or innovation must come to a halt. Emulation of western thought that has contemporary relevance when judged by our present criteria is acceptable, but it deserves sanction otherwise Indian progress can be frustrated and it may face stagnation and dependency.
3. Indian philosophical thinking should be ruthlessly exposed to the actual social function, collective responsibility of the community and national obligation, and the method to be adopted by the present day philosopher should be active participation in such activities.
4. In these anxious days of grim realizations we have only one alternative, that is, intermingling of our superior technical competence with uncompromising commitment to contemporary urges with no infatuation with pure speculation, scholasticism, fanaticism and jugglery.
5. The myth has got to be exposed to stark realities and

- naked truths, for it is historically inevitable, but the quintessence of traditional wisdom should not be sacrificed but for a new orientation.
6. The re-statement and re-interpretation of the Indian philosophical tradition should have practical relevance to living in the face of contemporary challenges. So philosophy should have a wide range of human conduct and be an instrument of social control and economic rejuvenation.
 7. I am not in favour of sovereignty of science. But philosophy must sustain the structure of objects anticipated by reason, that is, a philosopher ought to be a corroborator, for in the changing situational context, any inarticulate presupposition may not be proved a saturated concept.
 8. Philosophy has got to be purged of a bias for caste ridden society, of dogmas, credulity, transcendental reflections, abstruse dogmatic assumptions and scripture monogony and it is incumbent on our part that we should achieve the significance and relevance of tremendous issues of the day by a penetrating analysis of the technique of self-realization and by involvement in change in cultural consciousness.
 9. The nature of philosophy would be such that it should bridge the gulf between the natural and spiritual dimensions of man's existence. The secular life of man, has been enriched, elevated and fulfilled by the spiritual values sustained by material needs. The thinkers of today should lay great emphasis on the emancipation of society accompanied by the freedom of the individual, for the reason that man cannot attain the highest destiny of his life unless the human society as a whole does not enjoy freedom in the secular and spiritual spheres of life. Hence philosophers of the day should not advocate the inauspicious escapism and Daniel of life. Moral elevation, social, economic, political and cultural arena and stability, spiritual realization and the selfless service of humanity should find special place in the nature of philosophy. For the philosophers of the day 'liberation' does not mean simply attainment of freedom from birth and merging oneself into the depths of eternity but also freedom from the pangs and suffering of life as well.
 10. Any discipline has an organic relationship with or relevance to the business of man's living, that is, it should be symptomatic of the deep cultural crisis of our time. So philosophy should reflect this crisis and the pious duty of the teachers of philosophy should be to make others, aware of it by teaching and writings.
 11. Philosophy should come free from aerial existence and ought to be humanistic in cultural outlook sustained by scientific-objective questioning. I wish that our moral endeavour should be to delineate philosophy in a new style by modifying the older conceptions, hence such a modern theory must be inaugurated.
 12. Any search for the essence of man must begin with a study of man in the centre.
 13. Enchantment with age old respectable theories relating to Brahman, Jiva and Liberation must be minimized, and their inner contradictions must be discovered. This is possible only through a comparative study of the philosophies of the East and West. It is very bad and sad that our approaches and sympathies are deficient in responsiveness and purposiveness in the context of human problems, So shift in emphasis and revolution in methodological reflections must be duly incorporated in our thinking and writing.
 14. Whatever the changes in our cultural history, our basic philosophic position should never abandon traditional oriental knowledge and preoccupation with the philosophies of human happiness and the method of attainment of happiness should be a strict adherence to the moral code of conduct.
 15. To-day we are constrained by hostile circumstances to face new challenges—challenges of administration, politics, science and material pursuits. Now our unreserved commitments to creationism, supernaturalism and divine revelation and imagination must be dropped, otherwise we will develop a split personality and consequently we will fall into abyss. In this regard my humble suggestion is that this objective can be achieved by remoulding our mode of living and functioning suited to the needs of the day.
 16. Socially directed responses present vicissitudes which must be achieved to live authentically with personal transformation by new philosophical constructions, by self-discipline, self-assessment and the like.
- The enormous difficulty has also arisen out of a wrong approach to our central problem. It is not denying the fact that conferences and congregations are regularly organized at All India levels with momentous issues to resolve the cultural crisis of the day, but really it is very distressing and unfortunate that target has not been achieved in ample measure. Hence philosopher should come to the forefront with concrete formulas, translate them in their own day-to-day affairs, and persuade the government agencies for implementation thereof in public interest. The method suggested by me is that debates and discussions be sponsored by the Government in collaboration with philosophers and social scientists of the present day to popularize philosophy and to make it responsive and relevant to the masses.

Conclusion

Philosophy may be allowed to be a substitute for common life and concrete issues of the time free from platonic Idealism, subjective thinking and psychological irregularities. But we should never be oblivious of the fact that philosophy in the Indian context has a spiritual meaning, hence what is sacrosanct about it must be retained. Let us be optimistic in thinking that Indian philosophical construction will be in a position in the coming days to give adequate direction to man's life by meeting thoroughly the challenge of the new ideologies with all validity and vitality.

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