

# **RECONSTRUCTION IN INDIAN** **PHILOSOPHY**

Philosophy in India has a heritage much longer and perhaps profounder than elsewhere. The several trends of philosophy such as the darsanas, both astika and nastika have had a long interplay so as to leave us with no pure philosophic system to-day. Whatever darsanas today operate as independent darsanas reveal one significant fact, namely they appear to be abstractions. The consideration of the extant sutras of each darsana reveals the appalling picture of 'cold storage' of the darsanas other than two: namely materialism (carvaka) and Vedanta.

The basic problem of philosophy to which all philosophical thinking has been directed has been the problem of freedom which was recognized as more fundamental in a sense than the problem of reality. Reality and Freedom are the twin fundamentals of Philosophic exploration and attainment. Thus the essential concept of Indian Philosophical thinking (including the hedonistic freedom of the Carvaka) has been Reality-Freedom, (or expressed in the modern language, essential axiological nature of truth. Truth is something not merely to be known but something to be lived and entered into.

This being the general nature of Indian Philosophical tradition, any attempt to separate the two spheres as western Philosophy has been trying to do is foredoomed to failure. Psychologically as well as humanly it is impossible to speak of a reality that is static and is claimed to be dynamic only in the sense of static dynamism of the mechanical view of life.

The mechanistic concept of materialism is unhelpful in solving the problem of freedom. The biological concept of reality is equally helpless though it also reveals some type of freedom only one step removed from mechanistic activity, for there is always a tendency of biological activity to settle down to mechanistic activity. It has been found that even mental activities tend to develop mechanistic tropisms in the field of thought both individual and social. **Stereotyped behaviour is the contradiction of freedom though it is most valuable for the fixed patterns of activity.**

The search for freedom obviously defeats itself at each one of the levels. Like Indra in the great discourse of the Chandogya Up. (8.vii.xv) one discovers that each level though gained through freedom becomes in its turn a bar to higher progress. Thus the attainment of absolute freedom is identical with the attainment of that Reality which does no longer bar a continual progress or experience of liberty – these two being realize to be

synonymous.

This seems to be the ancient realization in India revealed in the twin concepts of Moksa and Reality which are integral to each other.

Our present problem is whether this knowledge is indeed helpful to us at present. There is no doubt that somehow the mechanical or mechanistic conception of reality has caught the imagination of the mass of the people. This is not surprising at all because other factors such as economic security and industrial potential and possibility of economical and social meliorisms through the instrumentality of scientific inventions have changed the attitude towards the problems of Reality and Value. Indeed even this is clearly seen to be linked up with the concept of freedom. It is freedom that is determining the concept of reality and concept of value. Thus it is through the concept of Freedom that we could link up the two great adventures of Reality-Value and Scientifico-Economic-Value. This could be but the reformulation of the ancient dualism of Mukti-purushartha and Kamyartha Purushartha. This duality has the double power of integration and disintegration – the dialectical opposition being the lower integration whereas dialectical subsumption through law is the power of higher integration.

Reconstructions:- Reconstruction can proceed either

from the stand-point of the materialistic mechanistic end or from the idealistic freedom conserving and promoting end.

Of course to-day we are confronted with the double reconstruction. This is something that cannot be helped, for Philosophy aims at a comprehensive understanding of the totality of Reality, however variegated Reality may be in itself.

The spiritual attitude is the experience of the axiological status of Reality as Freedom. The materialistic attitude is equally an axiological one but it is freedom of the materialistic hedonistic life. The concepts of *Iha* and *Para* illustrate the double synthesis that is being sought, through a two fold realization of the value of Reality.

We claim that the goal of Philosophy is the attainment of a consistent explanation of Reality taken as a Whole or Unit. All Vedantas are but formulations of the Nature of Reality. It would be fundamentally wrong to say that there has never been any reconstruction or reformulation, nor need there be any reformulation or reconstruction.

In the fields of Sastras – ethical and social dynamics – we have evidence of continuous reformulations of the ethical codes and even practices. These have not always been in the direction of a superior of morality of freedom – more often they have been dictated by the secular needs of adjustment for survival or the recognition of the

imperfection of man or rather his inability to pursue the 'nisus' of the spiritual.

In Philosophy too, the metaphysical problem unfortunately has been diverted to one of Monism or Absolutism, and Advaita has been exalted to the status of the highest – the other formulations being considered to be the compromises with the imperfect. This necessarily does not follow. The problem of Reality is not the problem of pragmatism. This has been clearly seen by the Vedantic thinkers who have claimed that the other schools of Vedanta have as consistent an account of Reality as any absolutistic view can be – especially when such absolutism is fused with Illusionisms and phenomenalisms.

Philosophy itself has had to turn critical about its own instruments of knowledge. This critical turn is indeed the standing point of pramana-sastra. The fixing of the limits of each pramana, is the preliminary feature of philosophical thinking; a training in them is the condition of all types of knowledge. The relatively present and postulated in respect of the knowledge granted by these different pramanas is not to be taken as affecting the validity of their synthesis a fatal fallacy of the illusionist view being precisely this assertion that truths of the perceptual order are relative truths. Once we grant that they are true within limits, nothing should later be done to deny them that too. Some philosophers have

realized this but others have forgotten this healthy restraint in their generalization of illusion. That is the reason why enthusiastic assertions of the discoverers of the Intuitive Experience have been met by equal vehemence from the methodological realists, who consider that Reality though One is composite of all types of realities, hierarchically arranged and integrated to form a single system directed by the Highest Spirits and maintained and sustained by that Spirit.

The conflicts between the pramanas – and therefore between the premeayas – is referred to the nature of the pramanas themselves – intellect versus intuition, intellect versus perception and perception versus intuition, and intuition versus revelations etc.

The history of Indian Philosophy is a series of movements of thought seeking different formulations if not solutions to the problem of Metaphysics on the one hand and life on the other. Considered in this way it would be possible to reconstruct our entire conception of reality not independent of experience – experience being part and parcel of that reality – but as exhibiting itself in and through the different levels of experience.

It is impossible to accept the view that the last word has been uttered by ancient Philosophy in India and no more attempts are possible. This view is shared by two classes of thinkers; (i) that Absolutistic Mayavada which

considers that Reality being beyond change and all predication not of course limited to the rational approach alone but all approach in the sense that our human reason cannot go beyond and cannot therefore formulate a different type of metaphysical theory than the Identity-view. To this school obviously Professor G.S. Malkani belongs; and (ii) the Dualistic Absolutism of the Dvaitavada which again considers that no other formulation could justifiably or competently or possibly regulate the unity of the dualistic principles experienced and distinguished as such by all. To this school belongs Dr. R. Nagaraja Sarma. The latter writer concedes that a third formulation is possible but is inconsistent metaphysics, such possibilities may indeed be many but not consistent metaphysics. This too is the attitude of the intellectual Reason that revels in a sort of dialectical dualism having its incentive in difference. According to both these classes the tendency to philosophize then at the present movement which is obviously incurable though not a disease is wrong. All that we need to do is to make efforts to realize or experience or abide by the reality given to us by the great teachers of Vedanta (Advaita or Dvaita). Sadhana is necessary, that is all, for we have understood our philosophy. This sounds rather very much like that advice which Karl Marx gave to the diligent Lenin who had mastered Marxism, who had asked him as to what next 'Struggle' was the advice.

Sadhana is the advice here. We should very much incline to this solution even at the cost of philosophy. But here comes the rub.

We have seen that Sadhana involves self-formulations however guided and helped and canalized by the Sadhya:(the goal) and these self-formulations discover the planes and purposes of the different facets of the one indivisible Reality. Philosophizing and Sadhana cannot be compartmentalized and rigidly fixed to theoretical and the practical spheres of Reality. It is precisely this phenomenon that we witness in the lives of the saints as well as Philosophers; their theory and practice weave a seamless garment.

Sadhana indeed helps reorientation or reconstruction. Ages of speculative activity are succeeded by ages of spiritual activity and practical reconstruction of spiritual and economic life depends on this two-fold continuity of processes.

Whether we like it or not there is going on reconstruction of a kind in the field of philosophical speculation. The only question then is this philosophical speculation something subordinate to a *priori* concepts or regulated by the infinite process of subjective experiences, however universal or uniform they may be finally apprehended to be?

The reconstruction of experience has become necessary

not only because of its inevitability, thanks to the constant impact of the two worlds or planes of the theoretical and the practical or ideal and the actual or Jnana and Karma (*dharma*), but also because no concept however eminent can just stand unmodified or unmodifiably during history.

We can show how our concepts (our words) have undergone transformations in connotation and as well as denotation. We could have several papers of research on the several crucial concepts or words used in philosophy such as Maya, Avidya Karma, Sesa, Visesa, vijnana and so on. Our basic concepts of mind, (manas), atman, prakrti etc., also have undergone serious changes or evolution. Indeed the two dominant terms in evolution such as pravrtti and nivrtti have developed a history of their own. Indeed as Dr. Alfred North Whitehead had stated, echoing the words of Wallace: “The use of Philosophy is to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating a social system. Philosophy is mystical for mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unknown. But the purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism not by explaining it away but by introduction of novel verbal characteristics rationally coordinated”. But this is not all. It is impossible to introduce novel verbal characteristics just for the sake of introducing novelty in order to attract individuals to a new jargon. It is precisely because it is

not easy to do so without what we call experience that is basic and real that we recognize a new philosophy as a New System when we recognize that experience.

The charge that such reconstructions with new verbal characteristics could be either old wine in new bottles or self-delusive cannot be avoided in all those cases where there is new insight into reality – a new vision of reality or the perception of a new factor in reality.

For the large mass of mankind insensitive to any new development, trying to adapt the world to their old fangled notions or struggling to adapt to the new world, it is perhaps unnecessary to toy with the idea of philosophies. But we now are witnessing quite a new tempo of human activity and this is universal and inevitable. The shape of the development of the mind has now become such that it is uncomfortable except when it becomes aware of the larger challenges. We cannot dismiss the problem of Reality as the Unreal.

We may yet take our inspiration from the ancient Seer who spoke about the practice of togetherness of contraries (opposites) – vidyan cavidyanca yas tad vedo ubhayam saha: or sambhutimca vinasamca yas tad vedo ubhayam saha – and follow up our spiritual philosophic endeavour.

This will lead to the real Reconstruction of Indian Philosophy.

*Has this been attempted? Has this been successful?*

These two questions are to us very important.

The writers to the volume entitled Contemporary Indian Philosophy edited by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan show us one way by which they had reinterpreted to themselves the philosophies of Ancient India mainly the Vedanta. This reinterpretation though made by the Indian mind was in the main through the western medium of intellectual philosophy. These philosophies are in a profound sense *impact-philosophies* rather than integrative philosophies which draw their sustenance if not inspiration from the depths of inner spirituality – the depths of spiritual freedom sought and chosen as such.

This ‘impact-conscious philosophies’ hardly arrive at a true integral apprehension and thought or what Sri Aurobindo calls the Real Idea of Reality.

The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo can be said to have taken its stand on what we may call the integral realization of the Reality in all its planes of expression and experience. It may well be experienced in a single pulse of Spiritual Anubhava. It is the experience that has been prophesied and inculcated by the Vedic Seer and more. It is not merely a restatement but a reconstruction of the ancient unity of experience of the One-Many, Changeless – Change, Process and Progress and Purpose, Individual – Universal, and Social, Nirguna and Saguna,

Personal and Impersonal, Ethical and the Supraethical, and so on.

The integralism of Sri Aurobindo reveals an insight into the integral Nature of Reality as Existence, as Intelligence and as Delight. It is possible to show that Sri Aurobindo's reconstructive insight is richer and profounder than the best of the modern Eastern and the Western thinkers. Indeed it may well be clear to any one that all the past is conserved and transformed in the context of the Integral Philosophy. Dr. S.K. Maitra (of the Benares Hindu University) had indeed demonstrated the advances and modifications made in the several concepts of Western philosophy by Sri Aurobindo and how it shows the universalism of Sri Aurobindo's thought. It may be possible to show this to be the case with regard to the darsanas (both astika and nastika) too.

Similarly we could clearly see that certain lines of thinking have been advanced by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. The merit of Sri Aurobindo's approach is that this insight is claimed to be derived from the dynamic status of the Supermind. This transcendental concept of evolutionary power and plenitude is lacking in the others, for this power is granted in a transmutive sense to the Ultimate Spirit or Person in the other and earlier philosophies and sadhanas. Prof. Malkani apparently holds that there is no need to assume the Supermind, as the Absolute Spirit or intellectual intuition is enough to explain transcendence,

Intellectual intuition is a hybrid however, since it cannot dispense with the two fold forms of Reality as noumenal and phenomenal.

It would not be correct to create a fundamental dichotomy between intellect and intuition merely because the intellect has taken the route of analysis and the principle of contradiction and has later attempted the synthesis on the basis of dialectic. This is of course inherently a vicious process or as the ancient Indian thought has stated it is intellect that operates on the basic structure of avidya. It is perhaps the greatest merit of Aurobindonian analysis of the human mind to show up this nature as the biological or evolutionary result rather than a fundamental function of the intellect when it operates from the structure of the Supermind. This is definitely to assert that the future of Philosophy lies not in the annihilation of Intellect (and its fulgurative functions – *prapancikarana* or *nisprapancikarana*) but its transformation as the instrument of the Supermind.

It is necessary to emphasize this aspect of the future possibility. The position taken by the exponents of the opposition between intellect and intuition is that philosophy is the attempt to explain reality in terms of the intellect and its accidental mode of finite intelligibility through the logic of the principle of contradiction, coherence and so on. The metaphysics of finite logic has been found to lead one no where. It is a

dragon that slays the action, the creative being. It is necessary to instruct intellect with the logic of the Infinite – the Real – the thing-in-itself – which is grasped undoubtedly by the knowledge of the transcendental *Saccidananda*. But where many see the end of philosophy, (indeed this is said to be the highest of Experience) we have to see the beginnings of a new philosophy reconstructed by the intellect now laden with the logic of the Infinite.

Indeed it was suggested by me several years ago at this Congress in 1947 that what we need is the spirit of philosophizing proceeding from the logic of the Infinite to evaluate and understand the darsanas from the point of view from which they were formulated (namely, the supramental). This mode of evaluation seems to have been lost sight of and finally abandoned by most or all of the commentators of the darsanas, who have left us expositions based on the logic of the finite ostensibly for the purpose of intelligibility to the finite pragmatic mind. It is necessary to reconstruct the darsanas too in the light of the supramental logic of the Infinite.

It must have been some thing of a clear insight into this status of the Intellect that was at the back of the exposition of its nature by Rene Guenon, the French Orientalist, in his *Study of the Hindu doctrines* (p 41). In India also the word Buddhi as vijnana is essentially different from the mental for its activity is a liberating

one; it reflects the Eternal and the Infinite' and goes beyond the limiting and dichotomizing principle of contradiction.

Therefore it is clear that we are today in a position to undertake a careful reconstruction of the Indian Philosophical schools or Indian Philosophy itself that is based on the Logic of the Infinite and the Infinite Experience. Though Vedanta may well claim that all has been said theoretically about the matter, it would yet be necessary to attain the Being that is creative Eternity.

Not merely has Knowledge not come to an end with Being but it is itself Being that is the creative Infinite. This is the inner dynamics of the Supermind. Philosophy in this New Key is yet to be fully articulated.