

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Saju Chackalackal, ed., *Indigenous Philosophizing: Indian Horizons*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2010, pages: xii + 586, ISBN: 978-81-89958-33-6; price: Rs. 400 / Euro 30.**

*Indigenous Philosophizing* is a collection of 30 articles compiled and edited with an insightful introduction and a scholarly evaluation at the end by Saju Chackalackal, the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), Bangalore. The articles themselves are improved versions of the research papers presented and discussed in a national seminar on indigenous philosophizing organized by and held at DVK. What binds these articles together is that all of them are reflections on and evaluations of various attempts to philosophize in the varied contexts of India in the modern times. Hence, the volume is given the apt title, *Indigenous Philosophizing: Indian Horizons*, a collective endeavour by some of the most prominent philosophers of India.

The Indian society, along with most countries in the world, is obviously undergoing fast changes in the modern times. The changes are taking place mostly in the economic, cultural, political, social, and technological spheres of Indian life. However, the field of philosophy seems to be rather static or even stagnant. It is really very doubtful whether any serious philosophizing is taking place in the academic circles in India and whether the Indian philosophers are trying to reflect systematically on the fast changing Indian reality. The philosophical world in India seems to be stuck in the past. The universities, where philosophy still continues to be taught (the faculty of philosophy has been closed down in a few universities due to scarcity of students), remain in the ancient and distant world of Brahminical philosophy, as if the latter has exhausted all the possibilities for philosophizing. Though classical Indian philosophy can take legitimate pride in providing very systematized and refined views of the world, self, and other related realities, we have noticed little evidence of any growth from or building up on what was founded centuries ago, comparable to the ferment in philosophizing that was visible in the West till the recent past. No path-breaking theory or even insight seems to emerge from the labour of modern Indian philosophers. The Christian seminaries and institutes of philosophy seem to be content with the classical Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, with brief, cosmetic

introductions to modern western as well as classical Indian thoughts. It is not probably surprising that the Indian universities dominated by the thinkers from upper castes did not attempt to go beyond what was handed over to them from the Brahminical tradition, leave alone challenge it. But it is quite unexpected that the Christian missionaries who have deep sympathy for the marginalized sections of the society, who have been working among them for many years and whose ministries continue to be mostly among the subalterns even today, did not try sufficiently to examine the unarticulated philosophies and world (and life) visions of these sections of the Indian society, and articulate them. This would have given them not only solid foundations for their own works for the emancipation of the latter but also alternative philosophies that would have reflected the worldview and life vision of the majority in India.

Similar to the above noted neglect of the non-Brahminical thought by Indian philosophers is their present lethargy in philosophizing on the fast changing circumstances of modern India. While rapid changes are taking place in all other areas of life, as we noted above, little seems to be done by the Indian philosophers in our universities and research centres to promote continuous and systematic reflection in the context of the changes both in the outer world and the inner world of human experience. It was in the world of systematic speculative knowledge, viz., in the field of philosophy, that India could boast of some original contribution, comparable to or even more refined than its western counterpart; in all other systems of knowledge like natural sciences, social sciences, technologies, and so on, we have been greatly depending on the west and borrowing from them. So, relying on that unique heritage, the Indian philosophers have to go on philosophizing on the changing contemporary realities; they cannot and should not stop to reflect on the changes in the world outside as well as their causes and effects in human life and the inner world of human consciousness.

The present work is a sign of such a determination to build on the already existing foundations and making philosophy and philosophizing more relevant to modern times. Social and philosophical thinkers were invited to turn their attention to hitherto unnoticed or ignored sources of philosophy. The Faculty of Philosophy of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore brought together a cross section of prominent Indian philosophers to put their heads together and take a philosophical look at the emerging Indian horizons, some of them positive and the others negative – technological growth, impact of globalization, growing

awareness of identity and equality among the subalterns and women, the boiling tensions of communalism, fundamentalism and militancy, etc. So, the themes covered in this volume include philosophical response to discrimination and injustice still prevailing in India and to the growing fundamentalist and militant threats as well as the spreading communalism in the country, Dalit and subaltern thoughts regarding education as well as for transforming the educational system, philosophizing in the context of women's empowerment, philosophizing through contemporary art forms and literature, philosophy and information technology, philosophizing in the age of globalization, philosophizing within a spiritual vision, etc.

Saju Chackalackal, in his introductory essay sets the tone and explains the rationale of the work. It is envisaged as an attempt to investigate some significant aspects of the contemporary Indian life and thought and to propose a philosophical response. The opening essays make an attempt to understand the foundational values of Indian society. Justice Cyriac Joseph addresses the theme "Consciousness of Justice: The Missing Link between Philosophy and Life in India." Swami Agnivesh, giving a philosophical response to discrimination and injustice in India, calls for a radical revaluing of Indian ethical dogmas and assumptions by striking a balance between the habitual otherworldliness and the dynamic of this-worldliness. For this, according to him, religion and religious philosophy should become agents of reform by emphasizing the social dimension of Indian spirituality.

It is alarming to note that, in the recent past, the fundamentalist and communal forces have aligned with political opportunists in India, and together they grab political power, which is used ultimately to the detriment of the people, especially the poor and the marginalised. Against this background V. S. Elizabeth discusses "Communalism and Human Rights Violations in India" and Ashley Miranda on "philosophizing vis-à-vis Communalism and Human Rights Violations." Ambrose Pinto outlines a philosophers' response to the "Political, Fundamentalist, and Militant Forces in India." According to Vincent Kundukulam, the growing hindutva militant ideologies are to be effectively countered for the reconstruction of a secular and religious India, with ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities. Christian philosophers in India are challenged to enable themselves to transcend the narrow boundaries of religious, ethnic, and linguistic interests and to counter communal and fundamentalist forces by adopting an all-inclusive attitude for the greater good of the nation. We need a synthesis of Tilak's assertion of independence, Gandhi's vision of

nonviolence, Nehru's commitment to democracy, and Ambedkar's concern for social justice, as envisioned in the Indian constitution.

The work identifies the tendency among the 'majority' and the 'powerful' to absolutize their viewpoints at the cost of erasing the views of the 'minorities' and the 'powerless'. Alternative thoughts from various Indian scenarios are proposed and argued for the revision of the philosophy curriculum. Kancha Ilaiah deplors the neglect of dalit and subaltern thoughts in the mainstream education in India and tries to show that the thought evolving from the basic experience of productive relations should pave the way for a more egalitarian society in the place of Brahminical thoughts. Complementing Ilaiah, Sebastian Alackapally takes up the issue of educating the young, especially the Dalit youth, for their assertion and equality in the society. George Thadathil argues the case for the re-visioning of method, content and vision from the margins, with the example of the Sri Naryana Guru Movement. V. S. George Joseph proposes *sopana*, the evolutionary principle of Saiva Sidhanta, as an indigenous way of philosophizing. John Peter Vallabadoss brings in the insights from a 'non-philosophical' text, *tolkappiyam*, the earliest existing Tamil grammatical text, as model for indigenous philosophizing. According to Thomas Kadankavil, systematic and informed discussions of subaltern themes are to be part and parcel of indigenous philosophizing. Joseph Pandiappallil responds to the call by Thomas Kadankavil positively and argues for the need for an inclusive and integral philosophy in India. The growing legitimate interest of the local philosophies cannot neglect the global reality of humanity growing together towards the common goal with the values of equality, fraternity and oneness. The philosophical vision should also fight against sectarianism and communalism, and search for and establish the common foundations of humanity.

The problem of the contemplative erasure of women from the mainstream – which largely remains 'malestream' – philosophy is addressed by Kanchana Mahadevan in her essay, "Philosophizing with a Materna/Material Touch." Responding to the legitimate feminist critique, Jose Nandhikkara calls for the recognition and promotion of the feminine genius with the paradigm of partnership of male and female in the Indian Christian philosophical project. Advocating women's experience as a category of analysis, Evangeline Andersons Rajkumar argues for the need of taking 'body' knowledge seriously in philosophical investigations in contemporary India.

The phenomenon of globalization with an exclusive emphasis on economic exploitation of human needs and wants is unique to the contemporary society: it has painted a glossy picture of a new empire and its market-agenda, “the more the better.” Justice – understood either in terms of equality or equity – does not seem to have any impact upon the dynamics of such globalization. Felix Wilfred, in his paper “Social Justice in the Age of Globalization”, analyzes Amartya Sen’s new development index based on the individual’s capability rather than in terms of per capita income or gross national product. He sees a philosophical foundation for Sen’s ideas on economic growth and endorses the view that genuine growth lies in the enhancement of freedom and blossoming of capabilities. Wilfred goes on to address the issues of poverty, social exclusion, gender discrimination, etc., from this angle and cautions that in spite of such a progressive vision, which may be considered radical in liberal circles, Sen remains a neoliberal who, though concerned about the individual’s capabilities, fails to look at them from a social or collective vision. He tries to show that most of the capabilities as well as in-capabilities are group-based, including even the individual’s identity. Keith D’Souza responds to the paper from a philosophical perspective and elaborates critically and creatively to the global scenario and the challenges it offers to the noble task of philosophizing in India. We need to develop a multi-disciplinary, integrated and committed approach.

In the world of globalization Information Technology plays a very crucial role in the social, economic and cultural life and thought of contemporary India. The IT boom in India involves the exploitative strategy of multinational software companies, and distances human beings further from the nature, community and God. George Athappilly, Toji Kuriakose and Raphy Vezhaparampil critically and creatively engage with this changed scenario. Their philosophical investigations on IT-related issues, with the principles and practices adopted, enable the reader to understand the new culture and to respond to the needs of the times.

U. R. Ananthamurthy, a noted Indian literary figure, argues that a partnership between literature and philosophy will be productive in Indian scenario, as literature and art forms have been more sensitive to the plurality of narratives, including that of dalits, tribals and women. According to Paul Kattukkaran aesthetic experience and the path of imagination are tools for, what he calls, ‘total education.’ Sundar Sarukkai underlines the foundational nature of lived experience and the problem of speaking for and speaking about others.

Integrating spiritual vision and philosophical studies is one of the aims of the work and Swami Joseph A. Samarakone, Jolly J. Chakkalakkal and Francis Vineeth address this issue specifically. It is observed that the life and vision of many people, including Christians, are undergoing drastic changes, and are gradually adopting the values of the consumerist society as the 'normal' and the 'modern'. In India, Christian philosophers are to assimilate what is true, good and holy in all other Indian traditions so as to articulate an authentic Christian vision. According to George Kulangara the role of speculative philosophy in Christian religious and priestly formation is at the service of God experience.

Analyzing the various contributions and evaluating the trends that seem to emerge in the philosophical horizon of India, Chackalackal, in the concluding essay, argues that philosophizing in India ought to be indigenous and a new paradigm is already emerging in Indian philosophy. More importance is being given to philosophizing rather than to philosophy, and philosophizing does not mean constructing abstract systems of philosophy but rather developing systematic, interconnected and, hence, wholesome perspectives about life and the world. According to Chackalackal, the classical systems of philosophy claimed universality and finality "because these philosophers pretended to be having a complete grasp of reality – in its totality – while in actuality they were working only on assumptions that could not be proved." He goes on to affirm that "the task of philosophy is only to enable us to have the ability to look at the whole of reality, though we are unable to understand the whole of it, by way of developing a consistent, integral, and meaningful approach to it. It is done by way of developing a perspective that results from continued and repeated looks at the reality during one's lifespan, and such is a philosophy of life in the case of an individual human person" (p 542). He also calls upon the Christian institutes in India, where philosophy is taught, to do philosophizing in the context rather than transmitting it as a finished product.

Thus, the book covers a large space of varied types of philosophizing in India and gives the reader an expansive picture of indigenous thinking that is gradually taking place in the country. For a student of philosophy it is a very helpful door-opener to contemporary philosophical thinking in India and invites the reader to turn his/her eyes and mind to the varied realities of the fast changing contemporary Indian society.

**Jose Kuriedath**