

BOOK REVIEW : II

Bijayananda Kar : *Value Perspectives in Indian Philosophy*. New Delhi. Mittal Publications, 2000.

This book is a collection of philosophical essays. Some of these were read to seminars national and international, some published in India and abroad and some appearing for the first time in the collection.

Whatever the provenance of the essays, a 'common point of valuational importance', as the author rightly claims, 'runs through most of the essays'.

To the present reviewer, the book is topical. It presents a perspective on an issue which has clouded the proper understanding of Indian philosophy as *philosophy*. It is the issue of philosophy *vis-a-vis* religion. The author, rightly according to me, seeks to disabuse one's mind of the notion that philosophy in India has been oriented to religion. To the author, what can legitimately be said is that Indian philosophy has been oriented to *dharma* which is *not* religion in the accepted sense of the word. The author goes on to show, in the various papers, that *dharma* which is a value-*purusārtha*- is essentially related to the mundane concerns of men and has nothing supra mundane or transcendent to which religion is oriented. The book is indeed topical at this junction of our national life when religious bigotries have struck at the root (s) of Indian unity. A wholesome understanding of *dharma*, such as is presented in the book, can extricate our people from religious conflicts and generate a 'liberal outlook' comprehending both one and many and be at once 'holistic' and 'pluralistic'. (p.98) Philosophy, by clarifying our conceptual confusions in life-situations, can generate insight or clarity of vision -*darsana*- and helps in the right conduct of life. Kar is not all apologetic in drawing sustenance from his tradition : he is a philosopher who revitalises and recreates his tradition, not a chronicler of his tradition. Kar particularly draws sustenance from that liberal outpouring of the Indian psyche, viz., '*ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*'.

On two other counts, the book is striking. *First*, it retains its philosophical tenor to the end of the chapter. *Secondly*, never once does it, in its philosophic enterprise, become 'opaque to the cultural heritage' of India : on the contrary, it boldly asserts that 'there is some sort of Indian

approach to philosophising' (p.4). According to Kar, it is precisely by taking stock of its cultural roots that philosophy fulfils its obligation to society. Philosophy is indeed a rational, logical, analytical enterprise, and such enterprise, in spite of its variety, has its distinctive methodology and distinctive consideration (s) in virtue of which it can be identified *as* philosophical. Yet, it appears that Kar, honest both to his cultural tradition *and* to his calling as a philosopher, hints that philosophy, at least in the Indian understanding of it, *must generate some soteriology*. What is more important, Kar-as a philosopher again-explicates the cultural situation that he cogitates on, envisions in his mind's eye the conceptual components of the situation, and seeks to generate an insight into the situation that would be closed to the non-philosopher.

In this connection, Kar discounts the attitude 'in certain quarters' (p.8) to 'look down' upon the task of re-interpreting Indian philosophy on the ground (if, of course, 'looking down upon' something has a *ground!*) that such re-interpretation would be 'hooked' to 'old antiquated ideas' (p.8). Reacting to such derisive attitude to the task of re-interpretation of Indian philosophy, Kar asks 'If Plato could be reviewed by Ryle, St. Anselm's ontological argument can be revitalised as claimed by Malcolm,... why should there be reluctance for reinterpreting Śankara's Advaita from fresh angle? (p.9).

It appears that Kar marks off history of philosophy - to write which is a philosophical task - from history. The latter presents the temporal succession of some events (whose history is to be written), the former the logical development of ideas. It was Hegel who accorded philosophical importance to history of philosophy. Wrote Erdmann in his *History of Philosophy* 'The history of philosophy can be represented ... only with the help of philosophy'. Erdmann of course wrote with a Hegelian preconception of philosophy. But, on our part too, we can say that a critical review of a tradition of thought may amount to philosophy in its own right. And this is how we may view Kar's cogitations on his cultural tradition. Well might Kar claim to have written a *new hermeneutics of his tradition* in the first essay on the present collection on 'A Look on Indian Philosophy - Past and Present'? It is really a *relook* on Indian philosophy through which the past gnaws into the present and the present re-lives in the past.

Essay (2) on 'National integration, Secularism and Advaita philosophy' addresses itself, initially, to the concern to which essay (1) too addresses itself (partly though). Once again, Kar confronts himself with the various divides in Indian life, the religious one being the principal among them. Indeed, religion today perils our integration. Now, emphasising as he does the importance of the valuational perspective of *dharma* not merely in the context of academic philosophy, i.e., not merely to obtain the right theoretical concept for philosophy but also for correcting our lives-, he insists on recognising that *dharma* in Hindu thought primarily stands for the translation of the moral virtues of honesty, integrity and truthfulness in society so that society is preserved and the claims of the individual and the society are balanced (p.24). I should add: Kar here frees the concept of 'dharma' from any doctrinaire or theological trappings. Freed from its theological trappings, *dharma* can weld together people of India. As Kar points out, 'national integration' is a 'political concern', and because-as the philosopher in Kar acutely observes - 'political' and 'religious' are different categories, faith in a balanced rational outlook, in '*samabuddhi*' (p.27) can bring about 'oneness, universality etc. amidst multiplicity' (p.27). And such faith is no psychological state, it has an extra-psychological component in that it is *commitment*, on the part of society, to the *rational order* in which and in which only its individuals can thrive.

It appears that Kar *reads into the Vedānta* - so far as it is understood in the essay under reference - *a theory of reason*. This is indeed *a new theory of reason and a new interpretation of Vedānta*. It is not abstract reason that Kar has in mind but reason that actualises itself in different ways in different contexts of the life of society, rational outlook to which the members of the society are committed to. Man forsakes his right to exist if he abandons reason. Shall we not pay heed to the *sanity of the philosopher who envisions a rational Indian society based on the dharma-principle and marked by equanimity and tolerance?*

Though finally essay (3) on 'Śankara's Advaita on Truth, Reality and Value' leads to valuational perspectives on life, yet initially it deals with some conceptual questions. Brahman in the Advaita system is regarded as '*sattā*', i.e., 'being' and again as '*Satyam*', i.e., 'truth'. Kar asks how the *epistemic concept* of 'truth' can be combined with the *ontological*

concept of 'being'.

Actually, in the Advaita - Vedānta context, 'truth' is *indifferently* an epistemic concept *and* an ontological concept. Kar here rightly points to the Advaita doctrine of *Sattātraividhya* according to which *all* our experiences - illusory or waking or of Brahman - have the mark of 'being' i.e., 'Satta' (pp.32-33). As Radharishnan wrote (in, the chapter on 'The Advaita of Śankara' in *Indian Philosophy*, Vol II.) If there were not a Brahman, there would have been, no empirical being nor empirical falsity'. Indeed, one of the chief points of disagreement between the *asatkhyātivādin* and *anirvcanīya khyātivādin* (i.e., *advaitin*) is that according to the former the illusory content is *nirālambapratiti* whereas according to the Advaita even illusion is located on *sattā* or being (*Brahman*). The *asatkhyātivādin* compares the illusory content with unreal entities like *vandhyāputra* (son of a barren woman) or *khapuṣpa* (sky-flower). The Advaitin replies that unreal entities cannot be presented in experience whereas the illusory content *is presented*. It is not just a no fact but as K.C. Bhattacharya (to whom Kar refers) points out, a 'presented *no-fact*' (emphasis added). So too is the content of waking experience. What the Advaitin wants to convey is that *sattā* (Brahman) is presented in all experience, and as Kar rightly observes, 'something that is true cannot be unreal' (p.36), *sat* may be understood in its contrast with *asat* (p.36). But more importantly, from the Advaita point of view, *sat* is *satyam*, the truth, the value, *śreya* (p.36). One achieves this value through the clarification of one's conceptual confusion as Kar repeatedly points out [Essays (3), 94) and (5)] and as he interprets *adhyasa* to be.

The basic confusion is of 'I' with 'this' ('*adam idam*' '*mama idam*' - cp. Śankaras *adhyāsabhāṣya*). Kar accordingly understands *Advaita* as proposing a revision of our ordinary ways of looking at the world. Such revision is at once epistemic and valuational and ontological.

Essay (5) on 'Mokṣa as Value and jñāna as method in Śankara Vedantā' continues the same thought with particular reference to Kar's teacher, the late Professor G. Misra who was the first to interpret Śankara as advocating linguistic clarification. Following Misra, Kar comes to the conclusion that 'clarification of obscurities does play a significant part in formulating a new view of life', that is, it generates an attitude of balance

or *samabuddhi* (p.53). Lest Kar should not be understood as proposing sterile conceptual analysis, one should note what he writes in this connection viz., that the conceptual analysis 'is no doubt ontological in character... But ...this ontologism is the outcome of linguistic or conceptual analysis already undertaken...' (p.51).

The present reviewer is inclined to Kar's attitude towards linguistic analysis. Philosophy has always been linguistic analysis, i.e., analysis of the different ways of talking about whatever concerns man. And whatever may be the nature of concern theoretical, practical, valuational, scientific, societal, philosophical *et al.* (These again may get interweaved). Analytical activity may generate a clarity of vision in terms of which the philosopher *stations himself* in the situation he reflects on. So analytical activity in the philosophic context is an in-depth reflective enterprise. Philosophers in India took philosophy within the life-spectrum which was analytically or conceptually explored and life's different situations came to be understood, i.e., enlightenment came to be derived by the philosopher. It is to the credit of the late Professor G. Misra to have revived the Indian tradition of 'analysis' in the philosophic context, and again, it is to the credit of Kar to have continued the tradition set up by his teacher.

Essay (6) on 'Karma-yoga in Gita-its Valuational Framework' seeks to understand (i) what makes a proper *karmayogi* and (ii) what is the end of his *karma*. To be a proper *karmayogi* one has to 'purify one's self' (p.57). And one can purify one's self only if one does 'motiveless action' (*niskāmakarma*) (p.56). Kar, then, understands ego-less action as motiveless action, and then he gives *content* to motiveless action in terms of 'social obligations' (p.57) (of one who is motiveless in his actions). It appears that 'sociality' not only gives content to motiveless or ego-less actions but also *frees* actions from their psychological pressures. Free actions then transcend natural or psychological causality, *and* it is this transcendence that orients the *karmayogi* to work for *others*. Social obligations-to the extent they are *obligations* are regarded in India as fulfilment of 'dharma'. So freedom understood in the Indian context is not negative withdrawal from one's naturalistic or psychological pressures but the *positive freedom* to realise 'dharma', i.e., to participate in the giving away of one's ego to others. The merit of Kar's study of *karmayoga* in

the Gītā lies precisely here : ‘pure’ actions or motiveless actions are for him egoless *and* social, and sociality, again, for Kar is not just performing certain functions in the context of pooling the resources of different ego-s but *freely giving oneself away to the yajña for mankind*. Kar’s humanistic interpretation of the Gītā aligns him with the interpretation advocated long ago by Kar’s compatriot viz., the late Pandit Nilakantha Dasa.

The humanistic and social point of view is continued in essay (7) on ‘The Dharma in Jainism’ where it is maintained that (i) *dharma* is primarily a social principle for cohesion, integration etc for ‘balance’ (Kar’s word), (ii) one becomes *arhat* or enlightened when one not only does not do violence to others but preserves the balance in respect of everything. Kar here seeks to situate the Jaina teaching on *ahimsā* in the context of current discussions on ecological balance.

Essay (8) on ‘Karma in Bauddha Darśana’ is Kar’s critical essay on ‘critical’ philosophy of Buddhism. As every student of Indian Philosophy knows, the Buddhists advocate the view that non-substantive momentary reals are the only reals. If things are non-substantive, how then can *Karmavada* be advocaed? This is Kar’s question. But Buddhism is *not inconsistent* here. Kar comes to the conclusion that Buddhism ‘critically views’ (Pp.81) the karma-theory : even the desire to reap the consequences of karma would imply craving for something permanent.

It is by now evident that Kar as a philosopher turns his back at any speculative method of philosophising. Instead, he would analyse the distinctive nuances of a situation (may be political, national, social, religious or whatever) reflect on and explicate, *from within the situation*, the structural concepts or categories which would help understand the situation better. It appears that for Kar philosophical reflection is always context-relative and not speculative. That is to say, Kar would not propose model (s) of interpretation from above (so to say) but would make search for philosophical concepts *in* the different situations the philosopher reflects (or may reflect) on.

For example, reflecting on Gandhi’s approach to Individuality and Social change, Kar maintains that the concept of ‘Democracy’ as formulated

in the West cannot do justice to the individual. If the individual is thought to be *sacred*, then *Sarvodaya* is the concept within which the individual is to be viewed. This substantiates our point that Kar's philosophical procedure is not 'revisionary' but 'descriptive', if these Strawsonian expressions are of any help in the present context.

Dharma, as we have seen, occupies the centre-stage of Kar's attention. But then, Kar throughout gives a human orientation to the content. The point of saying this is that *dharma* for Kar may be understood, not in any theological or doctrinaire sense, but just as a 'balancing principle'. From this viewpoint, Kar tries to understand Swami Vivekananda's advocacy of Universal Religion which may be, indifferently, a religion for *all* or many religions for many persons. Lurking in Kar's thought, it appears to me, is this *concept of conjunctive alternatives of religions*. But given the concept, how would one reckon with institutional and definitional religions i.e., religions that, according to *their* definitions, distinguish between the heretic and the religious? Do not such religions frustrate the human interface of religions? But then, signs are already there of the emergence of a 'Fellowship of Faiths' *a la* Radhakrishnan. If so, Kar may well make the claim to have provided a humanistic foundation to such fellowship. *And talk of such fellowship cannot consistently be made by conceiving Indian unity in religious terms. Kar's consistency in thinking in this context stands out sharply against Radhakrishnan's inconsistency.*

In the essay on 'Radhakrishnan on Intuition' Kar's aim is to be as faithful as possible to Radhakrishnan's intention to bring intuition close to knowledge. Kar rightly notes that Radhakrishnan does not understand intuition as non knowledge. But the 'part - whole distinction' in terms of which Radhakrishnan distinguishes 'intuition' and 'knowledge' is distressing to Kar. Part- whole distinction can be maintained between things belonging to the same discourse type. But Kar finds Radhakrishnan maintaining that intuition is self-knowledge, whereas for Kar knowledge is necessarily object-ward. So part - whole distinction cannot be made between 'intuition' and 'intellect', Nevertheless, it is to the credit of Kar that he accords recognition to Radhakrishnan where it is due. Radhakrishnan makes an attempt to bring 'intuition' close to 'knowledge' as we understand it in ordinary parlance. One must appreciate Kar's temperament which is as

good a thing, if not more than, his analytic acumen.

Once again, the humanistic strain in Kar's thinking becomes explicit when he accords approval to the spirit behind 'commonism' of Professor G.C. Nayak. In agreement with Nayak, Kar maintains that the 'dawn of religious consciousness can be traced anywhere, irrespective of caste, creed or social or economic status'. (p.120)

This essay, apart from its emphasis on the humanistic aspect of religion, has *one particular merit viz., it opposes any hierarchical view in respect of religion. It may provide a good Indian counter to the Hegelian attempt at grading religions.* And this counter is in harmony with the ancient and time-honoured Indian idea of toleration to which we do appeal in spite of all the travails we have been passing through.

To sum up. Here is a book (i) which helps us clear our minds of the misconception that philosophy in India is religious, (ii) which brings out the important and almost central role that *dharma* plays in Indian mind, (iii) which brings out the social implications of *dharma*, (iv) which brings out the idea of justice inherent in *dharma* in virtue of which *dharma* can unite the different faiths which, while retaining their doctrinal differences, may yet put on a *non-denominational face* so that this land of many religions becomes one day the 'ocean of humanity' which the national poet once dreamt of.

K. BAGCHI

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