I

*Pandits and Professors: The Renaissance of Secular India**

IT IS IN philosophy, if anywhere, that the task of discovering the soul of India is imperative for the modern India; the task of achieving, if possible, the continuity of his old self with his present day self, of realizing what is nowadays called the Mission of India, if it has any. Genius can unveil the soul of India in art but it is through philosophy that we can methodically attempt to discover it.[1]

1. Introduction

Philosophy in the West is a highly academic discipline, not often associated with great political and social movements. Philosophy in India has often been associated primarily with religious traditions. Philosophy as pursued in India under the British Raj, particularly that written in English, has had a peculiar reception, typically regarded as either a pale imitation of Western philosophy or as watered-down classical Indian philosophy. It is well worth taking a second look at this body of work and its contribution to Indian culture and to world civilization. In particular, we will argue that Indian philosophy of this period contributes to India what we call "the gift of the secular." We examine specifically a set of strategies that Indian scholars adopted in a range of disciplines—including the social sciences, visual arts, poetics, philosophy, politics, and religion—that led India to a rich an enduring form of secular modernity.

We begin by considering the context within which philosophy was pursued in this period, a context constituted by The British Raj. While Indian philosophy enjoyed a long history prior to the arrival of the British, at least as long as that of Western philosophy, until the late 19th century it was predominantly scholastic. Despite the fact that its *content* was often independent of specifically religious views, its *practice* was closely associated with religious schools.

* We thank Margaret Dodge, Francesca King, Kendra Ralston, and Shama Rahman for comments on an earlier draft of this essay and for research assistance on this project.

1. Bhattacharyya, "Svaraj in Ideas," present volume 106.

The British higher education system and the European discipline of Oriental studies brought the practice of philosophy into the secular domain. Universities brought with them departments of philosophy—for the most part focused on Western philosophy, but with some attention to Indian philosophy as well. These departments were staffed by eminent Indian scholars whose work demonstrates their solid training both in Western and in classical Indian philosophy. At the same time, Western Orientalists introduced a systematic and philological secularized study of classical Indian philosophy, producing critical editions and scholarly studies of Sanskrit classics outside of the confines of the *maths*.

The encounter between Indian and Western philosophy as well as that between traditional Indian academic forms and the British university system generated a new self-consciousness in the Indian philosophical world. What had been regarded as a primarily *religious* activity was secularized; what had been regarded as essentially an *Indian* activity came to be seen as but one of several world traditions, at the same time, Indian identity came to be seen as consisting in part in an intellectual and ideological core, distinct from, but coequal with, that of Western culture. This dialectic between the development of a distinct Indian identity and the demand for an equal role for India and Indians on a global stage emerged as a central theme in the development of Indian self-consciousness.

The development of this self-consciousness was the central ideological project in the Indian struggle against British colonialism. This struggle began the moment the East India Company gained its foothold, and developed focus after the rebellion of 1857. This in turn required the creation of a definition of a national identity that could lay claim to such loyalty, requiring the diverse people of the subcontinent, never comprised by a unified nation since the fall of the Ashokan empire, to come to see themselves in *national*, as opposed to regional, religious, or caste terms. Theorizing and prosecuting this struggle preoccupied Indian civil society until independence in 1947.

The development of a narrative of origins, and of the Indian cultural essence, was a promising strategy and was deployed with great success by cultural icons and political leaders alike. But this was a not a single strategy as much as a meta-strategy, implemented in different ways with different agendas by various influential figures in the colonial Indian intelligentsia. We see three important, and importantly different, implementations in the hands of A. K. Coomaraswamy, Aurobindo Ghosh, and Jawarharlal Nehru.
Coomaraswamy (1909) writes:

> The whole of Indian culture is so pervaded with this idea of India as the LAND, that it has never been necessary to insist upon it overmuch, for no-one could have supposed it otherwise....

> And just in such wise, are all of the different parts of India bound together by a common historical tradition and ties of spiritual kinship; none can be spared, nor can any live independent of the others. (pp. 70–71 of present volume)

In this essay, Coomaraswamy develops a narrative of Indian unity grounded in geographical and cultural identity, an identity that links contemporary (that is, colonial) India to Vedic India in an unbroken continuum. Aurobindo Ghosh develops a narrative of Indian unity and identity in a slightly different register. In "Is India Civilized" (1918/1968), while Aurobindo agrees with Coomaraswamy that the foundation of India's identity is to be found in its spiritual link to its Vedic past, he emphasizes neither geographical continuity nor a history of the interdependence of distinct Indian cultures, but rather a persistent spiritual orientation that expresses itself in each embodiment of actual Indian culture:

> India, though its urge is towards the Eternal, since that is always the highest, the eternally real, still contains in her own culture and her own philosophy, a supreme reconciliation of the eternal and the temporal... and she need not seek it from outside. (p. 6)

These spiritual approaches to a narrative of Indian identity contrast dramatically with the narrative developed by Nehru, despite the fact that Nehru shares with Coomaraswamy and Aurobindo a drive to seek that identity in Vedic roots. In *The Discovery of India* (1946), Nehru develops a historical narrative according to which India enjoys a continuous *national, political* identity from the Indus Valley civilization to the present day. The narrative is breathtaking as much for its creativity as for its rhetorical success. For present purposes, it is important to note that Nehru, drawing on the three decades of cultural development that lie between the work of the early nationalists and his own pre-independence meditations, takes up the theme of historical national identity not in religious terms, but in explicitly secular terms. Inasmuch as the canonical origin in all of these nationalist narratives was identified as Vedic culture, and inasmuch as that culture is articulated through a set of philosophical traditions, philosophy had a central role to play in this project. But inasmuch as this project also required a secular identity in order to unite diverse religious communities, philosophy needed secularization.

The creative juxtaposition, and often fusion, of Indian and Western philosophy thus served several purposes at once. First, it enabled the legitimization of Indian philosophy as part of a global enterprise. Second, it provided a model for a secular Indian philosophy independent of the *maths*. Finally, it

made possible an ideological dimension to the articulation of Indian national identity. This ideology promised to unify disparate communities behind ideas both distinctively Indian and competitive in a global intellectual economy.

It is therefore not surprising that this period is enormously philosophically fecund, in virtue of the cross-fertilization of classical Indian philosophy, Indian religious revival, revolutionary politics and the infusion into India of Western ideas and models of academic life. It is only surprising that the work of this period is not better known.

2. *Methodological Pluralism and Pluralistic Secularism*

It is instructive in this context to consider James Mill's approach to the study of civilizations in his infamous *The History of British India* (1858). Mill claimed to adopt an *objective* approach to the location of civilizations on the cultural spectrum. As a follower of Jeremy Bentham, he took himself to be a man of science, approaching this question from the privileged perspective of the scientific method. He was the dispassionate observer, intellectually and emotionally independent and distant from any particular culture and civilization (including his own!). From this perspective, the issue of whether, to what extent, or in what respects civilizations were equal or unequal was to be settled objectively by the investigation rather than presupposed at the outset. The goal of the investigation, after all, was the ranking.

While the construction of a league table of cultures might appear to be the epitome of comparison, it is not. Instead, is an exercise in *evaluation*. The questions asked are not about similarities or differences of arguments or positions, with the goal of learning what one culture or tradition might contribute to another, or of what range of differences in perspective are possible on a question. Instead, they are questions about relative sophistication, relative distance from the primitive.

The fatal flaw in this application of the 'objective' method, of course, as was recognized even at the time, consists at least in the fact that it relied on the investigators' own intuitions in selecting and then interpreting the data at hand, simultaneously presupposing the *objectivity* of the external observer and his occupation of the highest rung on the ladder of civilization. The consequence of the deployment of such an apparently objective 'comparative' method by Mill was a reiteration and reinscription of British hegemony. Thus, his 'comparative' method amounted to justifying the expansion of a particular view of culture and civilization. It is ironic that James Mill's *History* was taken up, even by Indians, as the definitive account of British India for many generations to come (Mill, 1817/1858).

B. N. Seal's approach was very different. He introduced comparison as a device in the practice of philosophy. From the perspective of the 21st century, comparison seems a bit quaint and dated as a philosophical method, enshrining archaic Archimedean fulcra and visions of discrete cultures. In the context of the colonial presence in India, however, the strategy of comparison had staggering intellectual and political potential and indeed came to play a formidable role in Indian philosophical thought. Indeed, it was radical, in that it presupposed equality at the outset, and it had the consequence of generating an interest in and respect for cultural pluralism and diversity. "Comparison," Seal argued, "*implies* that the objects compared are of co-ordinate rank" (McEvilley, 2002, p. ix, italics added). His point could hardly be missed. Regardless of the fruits of comparison, the very act of comparison in India *presumed* the equality of Indian and Western philosophy, of Indian and Western culture, in effect anticipating what would become the distinctive approach in anthropology as articulated by Boaz in 1893.

This approach, which involved comparison, was the first step toward a cultural pluralism, and toward what we now recognize as a cosmopolitan attitude to cultures. It is significant that this initial move to comparison was a move away from a prereflective assumption of the truth of one's own beliefs, the rationality of one's own rituals and practices, and led to a valuation both of diversity of practice and ideology and of cultural commonalities. For comparison required a focus on the descriptive details of actual beliefs and practices, which in turn led away from transcendent concerns and toward the daily, the practical. This shift in focus thus led to a greater interest in the similarities between the different societies (among particular Indian communities as well as between India and the West) and in turn contributed to the creation of a shared secular space in which the interests of very different religious, social, and cultural groups coincided and in which they could engage in dialogue.

In India the context for this turn away from orthodoxy to secularity was provided in part by the great social reform movements that swept India at this time, originating in Bengal and in the Punjab, the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj. Each focused not only on religious questions—doctrinal, hermeneutic, and ritual—but also on the social fabric of daily life in India. Each rejected practices that they deemed unjust, irrational, and unbecoming to an emerging modern India, such as caste restrictions, child marriage, sati, and so on. Each was simultaneously, almost paradoxically, both modernist and deeply traditionalist. On the one hand, they each drew inspiration from liberal democratic ideas and Protestant religious institutions, and on the other hand, each was concerned to develop and reinforce the narrative of Indian culture as constituted by roots in a shared Vedic past, looking to the ancient sacred texts as a purer and richer source of Indian ideas than the subsequent religious and

philosophical scholastic texts, which grounded the conservative social institutions these samaj movements were concerned to criticize.

Ram Mohan Roy, founder of the Brahmo Samaj, is simultaneously the founder of the comparative method in the social sciences. In his writings and in his social activism, Roy strove to develop a productive interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism as well as a new, rationalist approach to Indian religion. His method was always to develop a neutral space in which theological and philosophical debate could occur (in English—despite his fluency in Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic) absent commitment to any particular religious tradition. In an era of missionary activity and state-authorized communal division, Roy pioneered the idea of the secular on the subcontinent. Roy conducted himself not as a Christian, but as a modern thinker, an equal party in debates with the missionaries. He presented Indian ideas so that they might be considered in their own right in a public dialectical space, not simply so that they might be assessed and evaluated by Christians. Roy emphasizes the unity of humanity as well as the distinctive contribution of Indian civilization to modernity, just as does Seal in his advocacy of the comparative method (Collet, 1900/1962; Kotnala, 1975).

The Arya Samaj movement was a cradle for social reformers. Its emphasis on concrete action and service inspired political theorists such as Lajpat Rai, arguably the founder of the Young India movement. This movement was internationalist in character, with important connections to the Young Ireland movement, and ideological foundations both in liberal democratic theory and socialism. Arya Samaj also delivered to India Mulk Raj Anand. Anand is today best known for his fiction—the politically charged novels such as *Untouchable* and *Coolie*—but his oeuvre is much broader, including systematic work in aesthetics (the field of his academic chair) and art criticism (he founded and edited India's leading journal of modern art, *Marg*). Anand's philosophical contributions and contributions to the Indian art world are every bit as important to the development of Indian thought in the preindependence period as are his literary contributions, as again, they develop in a secular space political ideas that have their origins in the Modernism of Dayananda Saraswati's religious reform movement. Through this social and intellectual engagement, what began one Shiva Ratri as a religious reform movement became a pillar of Indian secular society.

In the rise of comparative philosophy in the academy and in the activity of the samaj movements on a broader social and religious scale, we see the same apparently paradoxical objectives, brought together in the service of constructing a modern Indian identity. Continuity with classical Indian ideas is valorized, but modern liberalism and internationalism are also celebrated. Internationalism and liberalism at once provide a context in which

Indian ideas can be seen as coequal with those of the West and a direction in which Indian ideas can receive a trajectory demonstrating their continued vitality. This curious combination of classicism and Modernism introduced by the samaj movements permeated Indian intellectual life, inflecting politics, philosophy, and the visual and literary arts. An examination of its impact in literature is instructive as a background to our consideration of the role of philosophy in this cultural process.

3. *Tagore's Poetics*

Among the most prominent intellectuals to arise from the Brahmo Samaj movement was the first President of the Indian Philosophical Congress, Rabindranath Tagore, who also enjoyed a career on the side as a poet, philosopher, and educator. Tagore's own explicit aesthetic theory represents a fairly straightforward endorsement of the broad outlines of Abhināvagupta's theory of *rasa* and *bhāva*. His greatest philosophical influence, however, derives not from his academic work, but from his poetry and fiction (Das, 1996). Examining this corpus shows how Tagore, reflecting the ideology of the Brahmo Samaj, contributed to a sense of Indian intellectual and artistic life as at once continuous with a classical tradition and engaged with the modern world.

Tagore's synthesis of the classical *kāvya* structure and rhythm with Whitman's transcendentalism and cadences allowed him to present to the world Indian literary art that could claim to be as Indian as that of Tulsidas, as modernist and as forward looking as that of Whitman, and as much a part of the global mainstream as that of Yeats. In Tagore's enormously popular poetic and musical stage dramas, we find a revival of the *mahākāvya* form, albeit often with contemporary thematic material, demonstrating the vitality of this classical Indian dramatic form during the renaissance period. His revival of this classical form in vernacular Bengali placed classical Indian cultural tropes at the centre of his contemporary culture.

Tagore's place in Indian intellectual history underscores the centrality of language to that history. Tagore's native language, and the language in which much, though not all, of his poetry was originally presented, was, of course, Bengali. This was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it elevated vernacular Indian writing and so assisted in breaking the hold of Sanskrit over high art, helping to usher another dimension of modernity into Indian art. On the other hand, Bengali was a *regional* language, and this meant that for Tagore's work to have *national*, as well as *international* impact, it had to be rendered into what was, ironically, the only *national Indian* language, English. By producing translations of his own work into English, and by writing some

originally in English, Tagore transformed that language from a convenient subcontinent *lingua franca* into an instrument of Indian self-expression.

Tagore hence achieved a very public fusion of the Indian classical tradition, the romantic tradition at the center of highbrow English culture, and the democratic, progressive, and prophetic tradition of the new world. This fusion was apparent not only to a Bengali audience, but to a pan-Indian audience, Indian and British alike. Moreover, especially after the Nobel Prize and the subsequent global popularity of *Gitānjali*, it was apparent to a global audience as well. It demonstrated that Indian culture, continuous with its classical tradition, was not degenerate, but flourishing; that its flourishing did not consist in a mere recovery and representation of ancient texts, themes, or forms, but in its progressive development in dialogue with other contemporary global cultural forms; and that India was not isolated from modernity, but part of it, contributing its own voice to world conversations. The English language is thus no mere instrument of expression, or even of colonial domination, but, in the hands of writers from Roy to the present day, becomes the vehicle that enables a literate Indian engagement with modernity. English, paradoxically, enabled a progressive nationalism, and a nationalist progressivism embodied in literary production.

4. *The Visual Arts, Artists, and Art Criticism*

Revivalism and Modernism, the two major and opposing approaches to art in India, were each motivated by the colonial context. E. B. Havell is the best known of the Revivalists, functioning first as Principal of the Art School in Madras in 1884 and later on as Principal of the Calcutta School in 1896. Havell had very specific ideas about Indian art and art education that captured the core of the Revivalist approach: first, that Indian art was so thoroughly interwoven with Indian philosophy and religion that one could only understand and make Indian art if one were already immersed in these disciplines; second, that traditional Indian art was based fundamentally on idealized images rather than on visual images (Havell, 1964).

Havell's nemesis was the Bombay art school, which, he argued, in adopting the technique of academic realism, revealed a lack of appreciation for the rich and unique heritage of Indian art as it rushed to imitate Western formal painterly techniques. Ravi Varma, one of the Bombay School's most famous alumni, was indicted by the Revivalist art critics like Coomaraswamy and Nivedita on just these points (Coomaraswamy, 1994).

Abanindranath Tagore was the most influential of the Tagores on the Indian visual art scene and a poster child for the Revivalists. This was a form

of Revivalism that was quite self-consciously inflected by Indian nationalism. But while Tagore was a Revivalist both in his writings about his artwork and as a member of the Calcutta school sympathetic to Havell's ideas, many of his paintings reveal a borrowing and blending of techniques and a sensibility that is often rather different from his stated views. In A. Tagore's work, we see what would in effect become the self-conscious aesthetic attitude of the modernists who succeeded him like Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher-Gil, and, curiously, his uncle R. Tagore, who took to painting in a serious way in his later years: a more cosmopolitan view of what constituted authentic Indianness in the realm of the arts. Once again, then, we see this curious use of reference to the classical Indian heritage as a vehicle for Modernism.

While Indian Revivalism initially had an important role to play in colonial India, it had a short life span. Not only art historians, but also other intellectuals, took serious issue with Havell's claim of a radical difference between the East and the West in the field of art and aesthetics. This move away from the notion of radical difference in the arts was simultaneously a move toward a more integrated way of viewing the Indian nation and its relation to the rest of the world. B. K. Sarkar, for instance, argued that—far from being radically different in virtue of being essentially tied to philosophy, religion, and culture—art was in fact subject to its own universal laws of form and color, and the mechanisms of color construction, color harmony, spacing, and grouping are among the universal laws of *rasa-vidya* or aesthetics that one finds both in East and West (1932, p. 167 this volume).

Sarkar therefore encouraged artists to experiment with techniques across the global cultural spectrum and rejected the criticism that this amounted to denationalization, arguing to the contrary that this was the way for India *as a nation* to take its rightful place and be a legitimate player in the modern global cultural arena. While some of his views were and remain controversial, Sarkar's criticism of Revivalism in the art world was shown to be right on target. He showed that Modernism ushered in a very different attitude toward Western techniques and subjects. He saw that these techniques were not a threat to Indian art but sources of its enrichment. We explore these themes in greater detail in "An Indian in Paris," later in the present volume.

So far we have been emphasizing diverse strands of the progressive secularization of classical Indian culture in the context of Indian engagement with modernity during the colonial period. We have seen these processes at work in Roy's and Seal's conception of comparison. The comparative project they initiate anticipates the contributions to secularization we have observed in the visual and literary arts and even in the development of social movements whose sources are explicitly religious. We now turn to the role of academic philosophy in this complex social and intellectual process. We will see that

professional Indian philosophers, although certainly devoted religious practitioners in their private lives, brought the philosophical ideas that emerge from ancient Indian religious traditions into a secular space in the university.

5. *Public versus Private in Practice*

We noted above both the historical association of philosophy with religious practice in India and the importance of the secularization of philosophy in its role in the broader project of nation building. How did this work out in practice? We know from a variety of sources, including public biographical data (Kulkarni, 1986, 1997; Pandey, 1994) and interviews we have conducted with some of their children and students (G. N. Mukerji, interview with the authors, 2007; P. K. Sen, interview with the authors, 2007), that many of the prominent academic philosophers of this period were devout religious practitioners. R. D. Ranade, for instance, in retirement established and led an ashram. He has religious followers to this day. Gopinath Bhattacharyya is well known for his piety and Hindu orthodoxy. A. C. Mukerji was a stalwart supporter of temples and had a reputation as a singer of *bhajans* at religious festivals.

This private piety, however, is strikingly invisible in the published work and in the academic leadership of Ranade, Mukerji, and Bhattacharyya, and in our interviews, their students report that their religious commitments were never expressed in the classroom. Ranade was a great scholar of classical Greek philosophy and Western philosophy of science, as well as an expert on Buddhist and Vedānta philosophy. His approach to the latter is every bit as philosophical, judicious, and critical as is his approach to the pre-Socratics or early modern Western philosophy. Nothing betrays a life that would lead him later to be referred to as the sainted Gurudev (Kulkarni, 1986, 1997).

A. C. Mukerji built his career in the philosophy of mind and psychology and led the University of Allahabad's department in a mission devoted primarily to the study of the history of Western philosophy. While much of his own philosophical problematic derives from Vedānta, that problematic is pursued in dialogue with Western voices and in the pursuit of purely epistemological and metaphysical questions. His interlocutors are philosophers, including both classical sources such as Śankara and Śriharṣa (Mukerji, 1928), and Indian contemporaries and Western philosophers such as Kant, Caird, and other idealists (Mukerji, 1925, 1931), rather than religious figures in the orthodox tradition. Gopinath Bhattacharyya was renowned for his personal religious orthodoxy but wrote exclusively on Western themes in epistemology and the

philosophy of language and founded the Jadavpur philosophy department in Calcutta, for which he designed a predominantly Western curriculum. As Indian philosophy was and is studied in Jadavpur, it is again studied philosophically, not religiously (P. K. Sen, interview with the authors, 2007).

This pattern is common among the major philosophers of this period. Most were personally pious, but academically secular. This double existence can be seen in retrospect to have been valuable at two levels. First, at the ground level, this explicit dissociation of professional Indian philosophy from religious practice was necessary both in order for Indian philosophy to be taken seriously internationally, and in order for Indian philosophy to constitute a unifying force on the subcontinent. If these texts and ideas were to be of more than parochial interest, it was necessary to separate them explicitly from the personal religious commitments and practices of those who were teaching and writing about them.

Their students noticed this. We know this both from memoirs (Kulkarni, 1986, 1997) and from our interviews. Could it be that this double existence itself had demonstrative value? Were these scholars modeling a way of taking up with modernity while maintaining continuity with the Indian traditions in which they were raised? It is hard to know the degree to which this was intentional, but it is hard not to speculate that it was. These philosophers were in the process of creating a liberal civil society, ironically modeled in large part on the libertarian ideas inherited from the British who were so derelict in their conformity to the ideas they bequeathed to India. Their own practice demonstrated the importance of the distinction between the private and public spheres so fundamental to liberal civil society. Given the degree to which so much of the independence movement was dominated by individuals or movements explicitly religious in nature, it was essential to the development of India as a liberal democracy that the academy provide a counterpoint demonstration of the observation of this distinction.

6. *The Jāli between the Math and the Academy*

This distinction, however, was not so much a brick wall as a loosely woven screen, establishing a boundary, but admitting fresh air, and even a bit of unanticipated dust. Much that passed through from the religious side is constitutive of the distinctly Indian character of philosophical work of this period. Our research has revealed that many of the major academic philosophers of the preindependence period, despite their carefully cultivated public secularism, made regular trips to consult with Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, the great

exponent of Advaita Vedānta in the early decades of the 20th century, at his ashram in Pondicherry. We don't know what they discussed, and it is possible that the pilgrimages were purely personal, private religious affairs. But there is reason to think that they were more than that.[2]

As we argue in "Bringing Brahman Down to Earth," in the present volume, one of the distinctive features of much of the most creative Indian philosophy in the preindependence period is the revival of Advaita Vedānta and the development of a conversation between Advaita and various strands of Western idealism, including Kantian transcendental idealism and Bradley's absolute idealism. Aurobindo was largely responsible for popularizing the *līlāvāda*, as opposed to *māyāvāda*, most clearly in *The Life Divine*. It is significant that when we examine the way Advaita Vedānta was advanced by such philosophers as Malkani, Nikam, Hiriyanna, Mukerji, and Indrasen, we see that all adopt an approach that fits much more comfortably with the *līlāvāda* rather than with the *māyāvāda* perspective. And most, if not all, traveled to Pondicherry. While we cannot demonstrate that it was Aurobindo's influence that led them to this perspective, the circumstantial evidence is compelling and gains greater strength from the fact that the Indian Philosophical Congress found it important to host an all-India symposium addressing the question, "Has Aurobindo Refuted *Māyāvāda?*" We return to this in detail in our later essay.

This infusion of philosophy with ideas derived from religious leaders and schools is, of course, nothing new. Philosophy in India has, as we noted above, long been prosecuted as a religious activity. Religious institutions and leaders have always contributed to Indian philosophical dialogues, and religious leaders such as Sri Aurobindo and his contemporary Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission contributed a vision of how to develop Advaita in the modern era, and so, by continuing a long tradition of religious involvement in Indian philosophy, helped to keep Indian philosophy, albeit secular, decidedly Indian.

This transition from attention to philosophical texts and ideas in an explicitly religious context to a more abstract and secular presentation of those ideas is characteristic of the development of Indian philosophy in this period and marks the particular way in which the interplay of classical reference and Modernism in the development of Indian cultural identity works itself out in philosophy.

2. We know, for instance, from an interview with Professor Indra Sen's daughter, Professor Aster Patel, that Aurobindo specifically charged Indersen with the task of mediating between the religious and academic Vedānta communities; it is also significant that all of the participants in the academic symposium held at the philosophical research center at Amalner under the auspices of the Indian Philosophical Congress were visitors to Pondicherry.

7. *The Politics of Young India and the Construction of a Secular Indian Nation*

So far, we have examined the process of secularization as a means for the creation of a public discourse in the arts and in philosophy. But the whole point of a public discourse in the context of a struggle for national identity is the creation of a shared political space. The artistic and philosophical movements of this period are framed by a coordinate shift from the religious to the secular in the political context. Young India, under the leadership of Lajpat Rai, originated as an activist counterpoint to the then more conservative Indian National Congress. Its history, connections with other nationalist movements, such as Young Ireland and eventual rapprochement with the Congress, need not detain us now. We are, however, interested in how Lajpat Rai, in his stillborn masterpiece *Young India*, rhetorically recruits what might appear to be religious movements for secular nationalist purposes. In a chapter entitled "Types of Nationalists," after scouting what he calls "extremist"(1917, p. 141) positions that advocate armed insurrection, Rai shifts his attention to two, what might be prima facie, surprising types of nationalists: the "mother worshippers" and "Vedāntists," (pp. 144–150).

What is significant about taking "mother worship" to be a specifically nationalist phenomenon in the context of the freedom movement? Rai quotes B. C. Pal, another Young India activist: "The so-called idolatry of Hinduism is also passing through a mighty transfiguration. The process started really with Bankim Chandra, who interpreted the most popular of the Hindu goddesses as symbolic of the different stages of national evolution" (p. 144). After a tour of the iconography of Durga, in which Rai, following Pal, maps the different manifestations of Durga onto distinct moments in Indian nationalism, Rai concludes, "This wonderful transfiguration of the old gods and goddesses is carrying the message of new nationalism to the women and the masses of the country" (146). In this transfiguration we see both the choice of popular *religious* imagery as a rhetorical starting point, and the conscious *secularization* of that imagery in the service of the development of national consciousness.

Rai's discussion of Vedānta follows this model, seeing a transformation of a religious movement into a secular nationalist movement. He begins by asserting the affinities of Vedānta to Hegelianism (pp. 146–147), emphasizing its implications for social life. He concludes "[Vedānta] demands, consequently, a social, an economic, and a political reconstruction... The spiritual note of the present Nationalist Movement in India is entirely derived form this Vedāntic thought" (p. 148). In the discussion that follows, Rai explicitly takes on Swami Vivekananda as a political ally, arguing that he inspired "a slow and silent process of the liberalization of the old social ideas. The old bigotry that anathematized the least deviation from the rules of caste, or the

authority of custom, is giving way to a new tolerance. The imperious necessities of national struggle and national life are slowly breaking down, except in ceremonial affairs, the old restrictions of caste" (p. 148).

Once again, Rai's approach, following the lead of Ramakrishna and his followers, is to begin his discourse in the temple, but to end in a public, secular, common ground. Whereas in the case of "mother-worshippers" the transfiguration is iconographic, in the case of the Vedāntists, it is straightforwardly ideological. But in each case, the trajectory is obvious and deliberate. In these discussions, as well as in the subsequent consideration of the politics of the more radical Har Dayal (pp. 151–157), Rai emphasizes constantly the ways in which religious ideas are secularized in the service of nationalism. Indeed, R. D. Ranade, in a bitter screed against Har Dayal, agrees with Rai (who is more favorably disposed) that Har Dayal aims to develop a social theory grounded in Vedānta but at the same time aims to jettison the bhakti tradition he takes as its ground. The kind of secularization Rai applauds Ranade deplores (1956, pp. 166–184). Young India was first and foremost a political movement and an assertion of national identity; although religion played a (complex and problematic) role in the development of this movement, it never adopted religious revival as a route to independence. Instead, it adapted religious ideas to generate secular cultural, literary, and political ideas in order to construct a distinctly pluralistic secular space in the context of British colonial rule.

Despite the plurality of voices involved in the early nationalist movement, a single figure rises to prominence in most discussions of Indian national independence: M. K. Gandhi. Now, it might seem that Gandhi is the obvious icon, not for the *secularization* of Indian philosophy and politics, but for *religious revivalism*. Indeed, he is often read this way, given his regular scriptural references and his justified reputation for orthodox devotion. His central conceptual categories were *swaraj* and *satyāgraha—self-rule* and *insistence on* (or *grasping*) *truth*. Each term has distinctly Hindu resonance, harking especially to the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Despite this religious resonance, however, Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* and the method of *satyāgraha* are more plausibly viewed as constituting a distinctly *Indian*, rather than a specifically *religious*, approach to the problem of truth. Gandhi grounds his political philosophy and his conception of the *political* struggle for *swaraj* in his reading of the account of *individual mokṣa* in the *Gītā*. This account draws both on the importance of *karma-yoga* and on the account of the relationship of the individual to a complex cosmos.

The genius of Gandhi was to take these ideas from a text that was deeply *religious*, and to secularize these as *Indian* ideas in an *Indian* political context. The *Gītā's* vision of the unity of the personal self with the cosmos is transformed in Gandhi's hands into a claim that an individual's identity is bound

up with that of others, and that *responsibility* is hence universal in scope. The theophany of the *Gītā*, in which the universe is revealed as infinitely complex, becomes Gandhi's insight that, while we all aspire to the truth, none of us can claim to seize much of it, and hence that we never have enough to justify violence, or to allow us to ignore the views of others.

While Gandhi insists on the unity of truth, he also insists on the irreducible multiplicity of perspectives on it. *Karma-yoga* is tied in the *Gītā* via *svādharma* to *varna*. Gandhi releases it from this religious mooring and constructs a *universal svādharma*, a fundamental duty to selfless action that derives from our joint political and social situation. Gandhi hence starts from specifically *Hindu roots* but cultivates a distinctly *Indian* form of nationalism available to *all* Indians, regardless of religious persuasion (Gandhi, 1905/2008).

The Bengali polymath Benoy Kumar Sarkar might at first seem like a counterexample to this account of the centrality of nationalism to the development of Indian secularism. After all, in *The Futurism of Young Asia*, he defends a striking *internationalism*, treating with disdain those who would advance the "hypothesis as to the 'Indianness' of Indian inspiration, that is, the distinctiveness of Hindu (or Indian?) genius," (1922, p. 168 this volume) and urging that this would be as bizarre as an Indian physics or chemistry! His consideration of Indian art in the context of his critique of Indian nationalism is intended to articulate a distinctive vision of a secular Indian *cosmopolitanism*. This vision is apparently grounded not in the evolution of distinctively Indian ideas, but rather on a broad internationalism and a concern to see India as a member of a modern Asian community of nations. Where Gandhi saw *Young India*, Sarkar saw *Young Asia*.

Nonetheless, Sarkar's Asia embraces India, and India as a *nation*. Sarkar develops a sustained argument for a conception of a pluralistic India that rises above "subjectivism, pessimism and religiosity" (1922, p. 297). "There is no one India," he writes, "there are Indias" (1922, p. 298). He documents the heterogeneity of Indian historical, cultural, and religious experience; the distinct approaches to modernity in the different disciplines from chemistry, to literature, to politics; and articulates a vision of an India that is united in virtue of, rather than despite, its heterogeneity, in its hopes for its future as a nation. His pluralism, in the end, is not a *counterpoint* to nationalism, but rather a version of a secular nationalism.

Sarkar and Gandhi, despite their difference regarding an underlying Indian *cultural homogeneity*, hence share a vision of a secular nation constructed on the ground of a public space in which none can claim a privileged position. While Sarkar's enthusiasm for Modernism contrasts starkly with Gandhi's suspicion of modernity, they join in a repudiation of Indian parochialism and a commitment to an ultimately secular interpretation of the political ideas they advance.

8. Conclusion

We have argued that India's own intellectuals during the British Raj bequeathed to India the gift of the secular, a secularity that turns out to be an arresting form of modernity. Far from eschewing any link to religion, this form of secular Modernism invites a specific rendering of the relationship of religion to public life and provides an avenue for a religious practice that is as diverse as one might wish for (in one's private life) as it simultaneously facilitates a public discourse that embodies an Indianness grounded in India's diverse religious traditions, but that transcends that very diversity and that religiosity. It is hence a form of secular modernity that is insistent on retaining its ties both to religion and to tradition. The growth of Indian intellectual life consists in a persistent effort to develop what might appear to be parochial insights in the service of the creation of a secular public space.

The cradle of the Indian renaissance is often located in the revival of Vedānta, in the rise of the samaj movements, in the teachings of the great saints of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the art of the Bengal school. This is all right as far as it goes. But Indian intellectual life, as we have seen, quickly outgrows that cradle.

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t the present school explains how, though great poets like Kalidasa endorsed the *Rasa* view by the place of supremacy they have given in their best works, it took so long for theorists to discover that one so.

n brief outline, is the *Rasa* view advocated by what is known as the *na*) school of art critics in India, as distinguished from the 'earlier' We have already drawn attention to one or two important points in eory, in which it differs from the generality of aesthetic views. For rejects the very common view that a poet may, and often does, give to his own feelings in poetry. Here is another point which is far more *viz.*, the discovery that there is an order of poetry which requires a n of appreciation and yields a higher kind of aesthetic experience inarily acknowledged; and in this discovery, we may say, consists one contributions of India to the general philosophy of art.

8

An Indian in Paris: Cosmopolitan Aesthetics in Colonial India

1. Introduction

What is the fundamental question that animates Indian aesthetics during the colonial period? It is the question of authenticity. What makes Indian art *authentically* Indian? And how can one remain authentically Indian while being creative, modern and relevant to the art world as a whole? Discourse invoking the trope of the authentic placed aesthetic and even political demands on artists and their artwork and defined the emerging aesthetic sensibility in the late 19th and early 20th century. In this essay we examine how these demands were met, and also how they were sometimes simply sidestepped.

Race can always be recruited in service of authenticity, and indeed Indian aestheticians, art critics, and artists were happy to do so. The primal fantasy of the racialized authentic is often the tacit presupposition underlying more explicit discourse framed in the more acceptable vocabulary of cultural or national identity. We see this clearly in the Indian colonial context. Indian artists were challenged by the following sorts of questions: Is your art non-Western enough? Is it national enough? These innocent sounding questions often really meant "Is it brown enough? Is it native enough?" Aesthetic discourse then asks how much of each of these ingredients is enough to warrant the seal of authenticity.

On the other hand, artists in India, just as artists anywhere, faced the following questions: Is your art creative enough to be *art*? Is it modern enough? Is it distanced enough? Is it sufficiently universal to be *real art*? And aestheticians in India, just as aestheticians anywhere, asked how much of *these* is enough to warrant the seal of authentic *art*. In the Indian colonial context, these two apparently complementary sets of demands turned out to be almost impossible to satisfy jointly. An artist could be either authentic (authentically Indian but uncreative) or creative (aesthetically authentic but un-Indian). Either way, we are left with one more failed attempt by a local native to join and to address the global public.

There were, however, notable exceptions in colonial Indian art. A chosen few somehow achieved the impossible: they transcended the dichotomy to

become *cosmopolitan* Indian artists. That is, they came to be viewed both by Western critics and Indian *rasikas* as universal: producing art beyond the parochial boundaries of nation, race, ethnicity, and religion. They came to be seen as cosmopolitan despite the fact that their art was recognized as rooted in fundamentally Indian soil. How was this possible? We consider three artists from this period; the reception of each of their works and techniques; and the rich and complicated network of reasons and emotional attitudes that, in retrospect—if not when they lived—established them as great cosmopolitan artists of colonial India.

We consider the projects of Ravi Varma (1848–1906) and Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) on the one hand and that of Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941) on the other. Varma and Tagore (very different from one another in some respects, but in others deeply implicated in the same ideology), we will argue, achieve a certain cosmpolitanism—that is, each of them produces work responsive to global aesthetic trends, and each achieves recognition as an *Indian artist*. Nonetheless, we will show, neither of them succeeds in transcending a racialized aesthetic, and hence neither fully escapes the dilemma scouted above. Their work, while it reveals their cosmopolitan sensibilities, remains rooted in an ideology shared by many Indians and British alike: the colonial fantasy of the authentic that insists on a central role for race in the aesthetic enterprise.

Sher-Gil's aesthetic, in contrast, succeeds in being genuinely cosmopolitan. That is, she succeeds in transcending the racialized aesthetic that traps Varma and Tagore, despite their success in other dimensions. Sher-Gil's own struggles with authenticity have little to do with the colonial fantasy of race. Since she does not get caught up in the ideology of the authentic to begin with, she is freed from its constraint, in her work, and in her sensibility as an artist. This very freedom, however, raises—for a brief—moment—the issue of her authenticity as an *Indian* artist, as we shall see.

2. *Varma and Tagore*[1]

The fundamental challenge for artists and art enthusiasts in India in the 1850s was to move Indian art into the modern era while retaining its Indian character. But how was one to create art that was at once genuinely artistic and authentically Indian? Traditional Indian art was viewed by Indian and Western

1. Portions of this section of the essay appear in our "Whose Voice? Whose Tongue? Indian Philosophy in English from Renaissance to Independence" in the *Journal of the Indian Council for Philosophical Research*. XXV: 2, pp. 89–108, 2008.

aesthetes alike as either "monstrous and barbaric" (Guha-Thakurta 1992, p. 184), guilty of undisciplined excess, as evidenced, for instance, in the paintings of the Kalighat school (figure 1), and symbolic of an untamed Other, or as mere imitative shopwork, as in the case of the Company School (figure 2).[2]

The early work of Raja Ravi Varma (of Kerala), in the period from 1900 to 1907 was initially seen as successfully overcoming this problematic dichotomy. Varma used techniques from the Company School in the style of academic realism but evoked Botticelli and Renoir in style and sensibility. Varma's artwork, in its subject matter, represented Indian virtue (domesticity) and female beauty (figure 3); it was historically continuous with ancient art subjects, depicting figures such as Sita (figure 4), central to the epic *Rāmāyaṇa;* and Indian mythological and religious themes (figure 5). Varma initially achieved enormous success as an Indian cosmopolitan artist, viewed as being both authentic and creative. His art transcended local community boundaries and was immediately popular throughout India (indeed, judging by the frequency of display, he must certainly be rated *today* as the most popular artist in India).

The immense popularity of Varma's art and resonance of the classical themes and values it espoused were, despite the deprecation of certain aesthetes, genuinely efficacious in generating national consciousness and so contributed to the nation-building effort. But his stature—as an artist able to be at once both contemporary and Indian—was ultimately unstable. For an "Indian Renoir" was, in the end, a Renoir manqué *who happened to be* Indian. And so, his art came to be disparaged by most Indian and Western art critics as inauthentic—as mere imitation of a colonial model. He came to be regarded as expressing at best an Indian enthusiasm, that, while genuine, was superficial, *merely reporting* on Indian mythological themes rather than *artistically rendering* them. Thus, Ravi Varma, in the end, was impaled on both horns of the dilemma: incapable not only of being *both* authentic and creative in his work but incapable of being *either*.

This deprecation of Ravi Varma's work went hand in hand with the evolution of a different approach to Indian art, starting around 1910, focused instead on "idealism and spirituality" (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, p. 183) as the key to its authenticity. Art critics such as A. K. Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita explicitly contrast Ravi Varma's work with that of Abanindranath Tagore, arguing that, in the work of Tagore (figures 6, 7, and 8), one finally finds a recovery of genuine tradition, transformed as the exotic, disciplined, ideal,

2. The British set up art schools in the major metropolitan areas (Bombay, Calcutta, Madras) in order to train Indian artists in Western art techniques. Artists who graduated from these schools and/or who deployed the techniques taught in these schools were called Company School artists.

and spiritual Other to the West's realist, practical, and material artistic sensibility as it is imitated in the work of Ravi Varma.

Within this new critical perspective, one grounded in Indian *rasavidyā* as an alternative aesthetic framework to that imposed by Western aesthetes, modern Indian art is revealed not as condemned to *failed representation*, but as capable, in the hands of Tagore, of *successful evocation*. Nivedita (1907) writes, "An Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian... must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way..." (quoted in Guha-Thakurta, 1992, p. 187). Ravi Varma, we now learn, got it all wrong. The buxom female body depicted by Varma is a distraction from divine womanly virtue, evoking, at best, the wrong *bhāva*. Indian purity and spirituality are undermined by Varma's *realistic* depictions of women, men, children—and gods, for that matter—represented, despite their idealization, without the symbolic markers that would lead the viewer beyond the concrete work to a contemplation of the transcendental ideal, the *Indian* ideal. This world beyond appearance, where the ineffable soul of India is revealed by Indian artistic genius, is immanent for the first time in the work of Abanindranath Tagore.

Nivedita's critique echoes the response of Coomaraswamy and Aurobindo to Varma's work. Coomarswamy writes, "... Ravi Varma's divinities, in spite of their many arms, are very human, and often not very noble human types. At best the goddesses are 'pretty': stronger condemnation of what should be ideal religious art would be hard to find.... Theatrical conceptions, want of imagination, want of restraint, anecdotal aims, *and a lack of Indian feeling* in the treatment of sacred and epic subjets are his faults. *His art is not truly national*—he merely plays with local color.... Ravi Varma's pictures... are such as any European student could paint, after only a superficial study of Indian life and literature." (Coomaraswamy, 1981, pp. 78–79). Aurobindo puts it this way "... From the point of view of art, Ravi Varma's images of gods and goddesses are as ugly as the pictures in the Bat-tala novels... such pictures are as repugnant to the sadhu's spiritual sensibility as to the moralist's sense of decency and decorum, as also to the artist's sense of beauty" (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, p. 307). Aurobindo conceives the artist as a *rishi*, Nivedita art as spiritual exercise.

In terms of their artwork alone, it is hard to justify issuing the seal of authenticity to Tagore and withholding it from Varma. It is clear that Varma was appropriating the styles of the European masters in rendering Indian themes and was wildly successful with the Indian *public*, for whom Indian art became salient as the authentic expression of Indian sensibility as never before. (Indeed, there is terrible irony here: it is precisely Varma's success with the Indian masses that undermined his acceptance by the Anglophone, British-educated Bengali elite who came to be the arbiters of high taste, and

of Indian identity.) On the other hand, it is clear that Tagore was appropriating Japanese and Mughal miniature styles in his work (along with French impressionism) in rendering Indian themes. He was wildly successful with the Indian *art elite*, for whom Indian art became salient as the authentic expression of *Indian* sensibility as never before, despite its inaccessibility to the average Indian and its failure to penetrate India beyond the Calcutta salon. Each appropriates non-Indian techniques; each uses them to represent Indian themes; each appeals to *an* Indian public, and indeed Varma's public was arguably *more* Indian than Tagore's.

So why is Varma's work eventually judged to be discontinuous with the deepest Indian sensibility, while Tagore's work is seen as continuous with it? The answer to this question, of course, is not entirely clear. The influential contemporary art critic, A. K. Coomaraswamy (1907), bases his criticism of Varma's work quite explicitly on Varma's training lineage. The Bombay and Madras Schools of Art, on his view, train their artists to simply mimic Western styles, so that while the subject matter of the artwork may well be Indian, it is distinctly "un-Indian" in its style and evocation. In contrast, the Calcutta School, again, on his view, explicitly rejects such mimicry, with a record of seeking newness in Asia, looking to Japanese art style and sensibility, rather than to Europe. But as Guha-Thakurta observes, "[In the end], it was... Orientalist and nationalist propaganda which established him [Abanindranath Tagore] as a cult figure of 'national art' and defined a 'New School of Indian Painting' around him" (p. 189).

We have suggested an alternative explanation. The Bengali Abanindranath Tagore was far more closely connected to the arbiters of high taste in Calcutta than was Ravi Varma, who was an interloper, from Kerala, in the South, and a popular and "cheap lithographer" at that. This explanation suggests that we take seriously the very real possibility that, in the end, matters *extraneous* to the quality of the art itself determine the evaluation of the work. These include matters such as *whose* art lineage is more expressive of continuity with the Indian tradition; *what* subjects are evocative of Indian virtue; *which* forms best express Indian spirituality; *which class* is the appropriate consumer of real art; *which other* is an appropriate artistic reference point, and which is *not;* and, last, but certainly not least, *who* counts as the quintessentially Indian artist. All of these commitments are expressive of political, social, and personal dimensions of the authentic, and it is *these* matters that may explain Varma and Tagore's relative evaluation in the contest for the artist who is most accurately to capture the aesthetic soul, the *rasa*, the essence, of colonial India.

Last, but not least, having noted the ironic role of class in establishing authenticity, it is worth noting another weird irony in the discourse of Indian authenticity, which is replete with racial overtones. Varma draws his stylistic

image from the white race, while Tagore looks to the nonwhite (Asian). Tagore gets to be an authentically Indian by imitating the Japanese. One is forced to wonder about the role of the strange coterie of hybrid aesthetes—the mixed Coomaraswamy in Boston, Sister Nivedita (European by birth but Indian by choice), and the Protestant Anglophone Unitarian Brahmo Samaj reformers in Calcutta—in deciding what it is to be *purely* Indian.

3. *An Indian in Paris: Amrita Sher-Gil*

Let us return to that crucial remark by the influential art critic Nivedita (1907) that set up the artistic challenge for that period: "An Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian... must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way..."

Nivedita is expressing the *invention* of a distinct category of art, of artist, and of audience in India, for the very first time: *Indian* art by an *Indian* artist for an *Indian* audience. The category INDIA is occasioned by the British colonial encounter with a multinational subcontinent but is taken up, articulated, and transformed in the creative Indian response to British rule and to the fantasies that animated it.[3] Varma and Tagore each invented *an* Indian artistic tradition; each was a complex weave of nation, race, tradition, and aspiration to authenticity. Each tried in his own way to be free. But in neither case was their art free from explicit consciousness of this purpose, that is, of the deliberate inquiry into what it meant to be an Indian artist; in each case, it drove their oeuvre and its reception. In neither case did their cosmopolitanism as artists transcend the racialized aesthetic of colonial consciousness.

Sher-Gil's work provides an illuminating contrast. Born in Hungary in 1913 (died at age 28, in 1941), she was of mixed pedigree, with an Indian Sikh aristocratic father and a Hungarian Jewish aristocratic mother. She spent the first eight years of her life in Hungary, moving to Simla, India with her parents for the next eight years. She was trained in Paris in the style of academic realism but was profoundly influenced by Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh (as well as the philosopher-poet Baudelaire). Upon her return to India from Paris, these influences were joined by the Ajanta and Cochin frescoes, the sculpture of Mahabalipuram, and Rajput miniatures. These facts—personal, social, and professional—are all relevant to Sher-Gil's artistic style and sensibility.

Because she was mixed racially, she was forcibly freed from a crucial dimension of the essentialized and racialized authentic in the Indian context.

3. India, prior to the arrival of the British, was not one nation but a number of different principalities. Nonetheless, Jawarharlal Nehru, in his *The Discovery of India* (1946), finds it necessary in the course of undermining British authority to invite his readers to participate, via his own narrative, in an imaginative viewing of India as an eternal unity, both adopting and subverting that of the British.

In her *Self-Portrait as Tahitian* (figure 9) she plays with the category of race even as she undermines its pretensions to essentialist purity. In many of her works (figures 10 and 11), she calls attention to the fact of racial difference, as marked by color (or caste marks), but as a *contingent* topic for artistic exploration, rather than as a representation of (idealized) eternal truth.

Moreover, in virtue of her mixed roots, her *taste* for different traditions arises from the ground up, or *organically*, in virtue of her contact from a very early age with a wide variety of works, peoples, and tastes reflecting different cultural contexts. This is also true of her *training* (Budapest, the Hungarian countryside in Zebegeny, the Latin quarter in Paris and the Beaux Arts school, the Ajanta caves, the Punjab countryside and the trip to South India). This taste and training conditions not so much a reflective and deliberative response as a deeply visceral, mostly nonconscious response to aesthetic variety. In her choices of artistic subject matter, her attention to difference is nuanced, as is her attention to similarity. She calls attention both to ways in which color and form *differ* in figure and landscape in different geographical, racial, economic, and cultural contexts, and to ways in which they are inextricably *intertwined* (as we see in the interweaving of race in her own case, and documented in the body of her work, which is diverse in technique and subject matter). This diversity of form and subject matter (self-portrait, landscape, and European and Indian human subjects, in a variety of attitudes and tones) contrasts with the striking uniformity of thematic content in the work of Tagore and Varma—the former emphasizing the spiritual and ethereal, the latter the concrete and realistic.

Sher-Gil's multiple roots nourish a unique artistic perspective that allows her, in contrast to her artistic contemporaries, a freedom to appropriate styles and to blend them in such a way as to fashion her own artistic signature. Her unique background also provides Sher-Gil with a cosmopolitan lens that allows her to see subjects in their particularity; the multiplicity of categories she invokes, and her awareness of their fluidity, overlap, and even interpenetration prevents her from essentializing them. Indeed, it is this strikingly individualistic cosmopolitan streak that initially rendered Sher-Gil's work simultaneously provocative and suggestive of a promising Indian modernity and suspect as authentically Indian. Even her contemporaries who championed her paintings wondered, for instance, about her fascination with the subjects of poverty and the dark, emaciated body, viewing her choices as at best sentimental and, at worst un-Indian, at best the work of an outsider and at worst a betrayal of her "heritage." (Dalmiya (2006)

It is instructive to contrast the kinds of attacks launched against Sher-Gil with the attack on Varma. Recall that Varma was paradoxically rendered un-Indian in contrast with the standard-bearer of Indian authenticity, Tagore,

because he appealed too much to *Indians* of the *wrong class* (common folk as opposed to sophisticated *rasikas*) and because he borrowed technique from the *wrong culture* (European academic realism as opposed to Japanese inkwash painting). Sher-Gil's critical attention was very different. In her case, it was not a matter of her *appealing to* the wrong class as much as it was *portraying* the wrong class, and in an inappropriate way. She did not portray the Indian body as buxom, fair, and elegantly robed, which was Varma's artistic failing, but instead portrayed it as dark, emaciated, and only partially clothed, emphasizing not sensuality, but deprivation—deprivation of all the prerequisites of material life. This was taken to be equally problematic as an honest depiction of a basic Indian sensibility, replacing Varma's domestication of Indian prosperity and religious imagery with a European exoticization of Indian poverty and mundane life (Sher-Gil, 2007).

One of Sher-Gil's early champions was the art critic Charles Fabri, who rejected the view of Indian art as essentially spiritual: "This search for religion and philosophy, this tendency to interpret all Indian art in terms of spiritual experience stood between the sensitive and aesthetically inclined student and a proper feeling for Indian art like a hazy, misty curtain, that veiled the truth: indeed, hid the sheer loveliness of Indian works" (quoted in Dalmia, 2006, p. 101). Responding to Fabri's concern, Yashodhara Dalmia (2006) approvingly describes the artistic attitude of Sher-Gil as follows: "She [Sher-Gil] melded the Western and Indian idioms and did not, like many other artists of her time, attempt to find an authentic 'Indian' mode or weave together a nationalist agenda" (p. 91). Sher-Gil herself said: "Modern art has led me to the comprehension and appreciation of Indian painting and sculpture. It seems paradoxical, but I know for certain that had we not come away to Europe, I should perhaps never have realized that a fresco from Ajanta.... is worth more than the whole Renaissance!" (p. 43).

It is impossible to ignore B. K. Sarkar's striking interpretation of the statue of Natarāja (see p. xxi, pp. xxi–xxii, present volume) in the context of Sher-Gil's "paradoxical" observation that exposure to Western techniques enriched rather than tainted her insights about the splendor of Indian art. For while Sarkar interprets this quintessentially Indian art object purely in terms of line, color, and harmony of form, using no vocabulary from *rasa theory*, his description evokes a powerful and viscerally immediate *experience* of *rasa* (See "Whose Voice? Whose Tongue?" p. xxi, present volume). Sarkar shares Sher-Gil's cosmopolitan suspicion of nationalist Indian essentialism in aesthetics. But he also shares with her an aesthetic depth, and an understanding that even a cosmopolitan gaze, reflecting an education in the world's aesthetic history, theory, and culture, reveals an artistic object both in its own cultural

context, and in the context of the theoretical framework through which the artist intends to communicate with the connoisseur. In the Indian case, this is the *rasa* theory.

But that anticipation, he and Sher-Gil would agree, neither demands an essentialism with respect to style nor an essentialism with respect to the gaze of the viewer. It would be tragic to interpret Sher-Gil's perspective on Indian art and sculpture or her own artistic production as that of an outsider (the Western-returned aesthete/artist). On the contrary, it is her experience and training outside of India that allows her a freedom to approach the works of art in India without the nationalist frame that was at one level imposed and at another level consciously adopted—though in different registers and with different kinds and degrees of success—by Varma and Tagore.

In much of her work, Sher-Gil explicitly explores the human body and various forms of human intimacy, including both feminine intimacy (figure 12) and intimacy with one's own self (figure 9). Here gender is relevant to her style of cosmopolitanism, particularly when interwoven with her mixed racial heritage. For our bodies—which are inextricably bound up with who we are—are indeed colored, while spirits and minds are not. Sher-Gil takes her physical identity seriously, in her life and in her work. This serious engagement with embodiment and its implications in Indian and in Europe explains in part her interest in exploring this central aspect of human existence in her artwork, not as a voyeur surfing a fantasy or as an outsider interested in the exotic, but as an intimate participant.

Sher-Gil's early training with nude models in Paris no doubt contributes to her interest in this subject (and this is an aspect of her Modernism). But whereas the respective receptions of Varma and Tagore as artists is explained in part by the added dimension of an Indian ideological lineage, in the case of Sher-Gil this kind of ideological lineage is notably absent. Sher-Gil is an individual woman artist, not easily classifiable as belonging to a particular race, nation, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation (though she is of a certain class), and certainly not essentially so. In any case, she attempts in her artwork to make sense of the range of actual experiences she has in the country she loves, India, and with which she so strongly identifies.

This makes her a cosmopolitan artist, but what makes her Indian? At the very least the following two facts. First, she *took herself to be* Indian. This was not justified on grounds of racial purity, nationalist loyalty, or even a continued presence in India but was, rather, due to a host of interlocking causal factors mentioned earlier, not one of which was necessary or sufficient for her being Indian but which together enabled a sensibility and a sense of belonging to the actual and imaginary space of India. Second, India *has come to claim*

her as one of its own. Her works are proudly exhibited in the national gallery in New Delhi, and reports of their sales for astronomical figures are touted in the Indian press as evidence of appreciation of *Indian* art.

IV

Conclusion

This essay explores some of the complex ways in which race and aesthetics are coimplicated in the British–Indian colonial encounter. We have distinguished between Amrita Sher-Gil's art and artistic sensibility and that shared—despite their differences—by Ravi Varma and Abanindranath Tagore, as well as by many of the most influential art critics and aestheticians of colonial India. Specifically, we have argued that their cosmopolitanism embodies a self-consciousness about race, in the guise of a concern for something else, namely,

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FIG. 1. Kalighat Painting (oil, anonymous, n.d.).
FIG. 2. The Bird (Company School).
FIG. 3. Here Comes Papa, 30" x 20," c. 1890s, oil on canvas (Ravi Varma).
FIG. 4. Sita Vanavasa, c. 1890s, oleograph. (Ravi Varma). Collection of the Trustees of the Wellcome Trust, London.
FIG. 5. Radha, Krishna, Rukmani, c. 1890s (Ravi Varma).
FIG. 6. Abhisarika, c. 1900, water color, (Abanindranath Tagore), Indian Museum, Calcutta.
FIG. 7. The Passing of Shah Jahan, 1902, oil on wood (Abanindranath Tagore).
FIG. 8. Sita in Captivity in Lanka, c. 1906-07, water color (Abanindranath Tagore).
FIG. 9. Self-Portrait as Tahitian, 1934, oil on canvas, 90 x 56 cm, (Amrita Sher-Gil). Collection: Vivan and Navina Sundaram, New Delhi.
FIG. 10. Brahmacharis, 1937, oil on canvas, 145.5 x 88 cm (Amrita Sher-Gil). Collection: National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.
FIG. 11. Bride's Toilet, 1937, oil on canvas, 145.5 x 88 cm (Amrita Sher-Gil). Collection: National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.
FIG. 12. Two Girls, 1939, oil on canvas, 158 x 90 cm (Amrita Sher-Gil). Collection: Vivan and Navina Sundaram, New Delhi.

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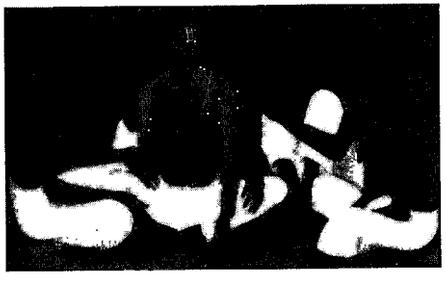

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authenticity. Once race is *named*—as Indian—it begins to get used in a particular way, as a tool that demarcates certain works of art as legitimate aesthetic objects (i.e., as truly expressive of the "race" in question) but excludes others. Here we see that race is not merely expressed or explored but functions instead to patrol the boundary of the aesthetic.

The case of Amrita Sher-Gil reveals another way of being cosmopolitan. In her case, the aesthetic is used to rethink, or at least to situate, race differently in the colonial context. In the case of her artworks, we see race explored, with racial identity functioning as an aesthetic subject to be itself interrogated, rather than as an instrument used to delineate what does and does not count as (authentically) aesthetic. It is ironic that Sher-Gil, arguably the greatest Indian artist of this period in colonial India, was the one who cared the least about being authentically Indian, and who cared the least about an Indian *racial* identity.

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PART THREE

Vedānta

What Śaṅkara is driving at is evidently this that the self *for* which all objects have a meaning, cannot be itself meaningless, though it cannot be defined in the same way in which a finite thing is defined; consciousness *to* which all objects are presented, cannot be meaningless, though it is not itself presented to something else, though, that is, it is not itself a presentation or an idea. To put it in a different way, the self is not a finite thing along with other finite things, and, consequently, it cannot be defined in accordance with the ordinary rule of definition which consists in distinguishing the thing defined from other things belonging to the same genus by means of its peculiar attributes.

The mistake of the Buddhists, it is now evident, lies in the assumption that whatever is not definable in the ordinary way is as unreal as the hare's horn; and, consequently, it is presumed by them that the Absolute, which cannot be defined *per genus et differentiam*, is as good as nothing for us, and has to be, therefore, apprehended through a type of mystical intuition. What is to be urged against such a view is that the rule of definition cannot be applied to the highest genus inasmuch as it cannot be brought under a higher unity, nor can it be differentiated from any other correlative unities belonging along with it to a higher unity. But this does not reduce the highest unity to a mere nothing, it is rather the ultimate presupposition of all subordinate unities. In this respect, it has been rightly urged by Kant that the unity of consciousness, "which precedes any conception of combination," must not "be confused with the category of unity;" and, for an explanation of this qualitative unity, "we must go further back, and seek it in that which, as the ground of the unity of various conceptions in judgment, is implied in the possibility even of the logical use of understanding."[32] There is one conception, he contends in another context, "that we must now put along with the transcendental conceptions contained in the table of categories, but without in any way changing or adding to the table. This is the conception, or, if it is preferred, the judgment, 'I think.' It is easy to see, that 'I think' is the common vehicle of all conceptions, and therefore of transcendental as well as empirical conceptions. As the vehicle of transcendental conceptions it is itself transcendental, but it cannot claim a special place in the list of these transcendental conceptions, because it merely serves to indicate that all thought belongs to consciousness."[33]

All our categories, it is rightly seen by the Buddhists, are relational and conditional. Substance, attribute, cause, effect, etc., are correlative to one another; but this correlativity among the categories presupposes an ultimate unity which cannot be reduced to any one of these correlated categories.

32. Watson's *Selections*, p. 64.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

The categories of existence and knowledge are generally used in connection with the finite things and the fragmentary knowledge-events, and, as such, they are no doubt in perfect correlativity with the other things and the other knowledge-events from which they are differentiated. But the foundational existence and the foundational knowledge cannot be correlated with anything outside themselves. They are rather the ground of all correlated categories, and, consequently, undefinable yet undeniable. Whatever can be *named* has no doubt to be differentiated from things other than itself, but it cannot be urged that the ultimate and foundational principle itself must be differentiated from other things, because that would be to deny that it is foundational. In this sense, therefore, the ultimate principle is beyond speech and thought, and it may so far be rightly urged that all relational categories, such as, "existence or non-existence, one or many, conditioned or unconditioned, intelligent or dull, active or passive, fruitful or fruitless, produced or causeless, happy or miserable, inside or outside, negative or positive, distinct or non-distinct, are inapplicable to the Absolute."[34] But the difficulty of naming the Absolute can be removed when our ordinary categories are used, not in their individual and mutually exclusive meanings, but "in their combined connotation in which the meaning of each controls and is controlled by the meaning of the other." In other words, the categories of existence, knowledge, and infinity, can indicate the Absolute, only when they are not used as relational categories, but as one single principle in which their relational meanings are merged.

> The only interpreter who has emphasised this aspect of Śaṅkara's position aright, as far as we know, is René Guénon. Some of his remarks on the Vedānta conception of Self are of invaluable importance for avoiding misinterpretations of the advaita doctrine. He has, for instance, rightly warned that when the Self is said to be the universal principle, "the distinction between the Universal and the individual must not be regarded as a correlation, since the second of these two terms, being strictly annulled in respect of the first, cannot in any way be opposed to it."—*L'Homme et son Devenir selon le Vêdânta*, English translation, p. 31.

It may be now seen that Bradley's doctrine of immediate experience, in spite of all that has been said against it, has an important value for working out a true theory of self. The "direct awareness" which is taken to be non-relational, must be recognised to be the ultimate presupposition of all relational knowledge. "A relation," he rightly remarks, "exists only between terms,

34. Śaṅkara's *Summary of the fourth chapter of the Ait. Up.*

and those terms, to be known as such, must be objects." Hence we cannot strictly speak "of a relation, between immediate experience and that which transcends it, except by a licence." It is no doubt necessary, while describing this direct awareness, to speak of it as that *for* which all objects exist; but "if all metaphors are to be pressed, then I, and I think all of us, in the end must keep silence." On some matters, it is necessary to use metaphors which, it is added almost in the language of Śaṅkara, "conflict with and correct each other."[35] It is true that Bradley would not agree to use the term 'self' for this "direct awareness" or immediate experience, because he uses the terms 'self' as well as 'consciousness' in the relational sense. The Absolute, he urges, must not be called a self, or *vice versa*, because that would be "to postulate in the teeth of facts, facts which go to show that the self's character is gone when it ceases to be relative."[36] But this is after all a matter of terminology, and we have seen ample justification in the foregoing pages to find the real character of the self beyond all relations. And as a matter of fact he himself does not hesitate to use the term subject for immediate experience, only it is added that the subject is felt, and, as such, "neither itself, nor its actual distinction from the object, can be got out and placed before it as an object."

So far as Bradley's theory of self and his doctrine of absolute experience is concerned, we need not enter here upon any detailed examination of them, as this has been done by many able critics, particularly by Dr. H. Haldar.[37] But we believe that Bradley's critics have not entirely succeeded in avoiding the mistake of throwing away the baby with the bath. It is unfortunate that Bradley should have used the same term 'feeling' for the sub-relational as well as for the ultra-relational experience. So far as the former is concerned, it is surely a hypothetical state, and, as such, there is ample room here for dispute. And it has been, as a matter of fact, a subject of heated controversy in Indian philosophy between the Naiyāyikas and the Buddhists. (It is called *nirvikalpa pratyakṣa* or *ālocana*.) But Bradley means by immediate experience, not only a stage that is transcended, but also the felt subject which is ever present at all the stages of experience, and in which there is no distinction between the experienced and the experience. The latter is the ultimate epistemological presupposition of all relational knowledge, like J. Ward's pure subject which, though last in the order of knowledge, is yet first in the order of existence. It is, in the language of Śaṅkara, *Vijñānaghana* in which there is no distinction between existence and knowledge. "He who would maintain that *Brahman*

35. *Truth and Reality*, p. 196.

36. *Appearance and Reality, p. 497.*

37. See his *Neo-Hegelianism, pp. 247–256.*

is characterised by thought different from existence, and at the same time by existence different from thought, would virtually maintain that there is a plurality in *Brahman*."[38] The truth is that in respect of the Absolute, existence is thought, and thought is existence. (*Sattaiva bodho bodha eva ca sattā*.) The Absolute, so characterised, is not a mere stage of experience which is *psychologically a priori* to the relational stage, but it is the *epistemologically a priori* principle presupposed by the relational experience.[39]

It is of course very misleading to say that thought seeks its satisfaction in an immediate experience in entering which thought commits suicide and where it would be present as a higher intuition.[40] The undeniable fact is that thought wants consistency, it has always a nisus to a systematic whole. Equally unquestionable is its essentially discursive nature; nothing can be thought of, which cannot be distinguished from its 'other.' But, then, it must also be taken as incontrovertible that "I think" is the presupposition of all discursive thinking; that is, I can distinguish between two given terms, only because I am not myself one of the terms that are distinguished. The distinction of 'a' from 'b' has a meaning for me, only because I am the common presupposition of both, and, as such, not identifiable with any one of them. The perplexities provoked by Bradley's doctrine of immediate experience are certainly due, at least partly, to his use of the terms 'self' and 'consciousness' in the relational sense, and his consequent belief that the self is nothing more than an appearance and consciousness is not something original. He should have seen a little more clearly why his fellow-idealists had insisted that the self was the ultimate presupposition of all known and knowable things. If the Absolute is neither a self nor a conscious principle, it cannot surely be distinguished from Kant's 'Thing-in-itself,' in spite of all the efforts Bradley has made in that direction.

But, none the less, he was certainly right in emphasising the need of an immediate experience for a systematic philosophy. Consistency requires that the relation of distinction presupposes a common principle that cannot be reduced to any of the terms distinguished. Even the relation of one particular

38. *S. B. III. 2. 21.*

39. Prof. Cunningham does little justice to this epistemological priority of immediate experience which Bradley intends to signify by his doctrine, though it must be admitted that the latter has made himself open to misinterpretations by the confused way in which he talks of the immediate experience in the epistemological as well as in the psychological sense. Relational experience is self-contradictory, not because a non-relational whole is inconceivable, but because such an experience, when taken apart from immediate experience, leads to the contradiction of an infinite regress, as Bradley rightly contends. Apart from the self as *aparokṣa* and *svaprakāśa*, as put by Śaṅkara, a theory of self must lead to the perplexities of the Naiyāyikas whose doctrine of infinite *anuvyavasāyas* has ever remained as a sad commentary on their logical insight and analytic accomplishments.

40. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 152.

to another is not equivalent to the relation of the particulars to the universal. And when one universal is distinguished from another universal, this relation between two universals cannot be identical with the relation in which both stand to the foundational principle which is their common presupposition. In other words, all distinctions are between objects and objects, and if we speak of the distinction between the conscious subject and the objects we should at least guard ourselves against identifying this relation with any relation between one object and another. The 'I think,' in other words, is the presupposition of all relational categories, and, therefore, as Kant puts it, this conception does not add to the list of the categories through which the objects exist for us.

Some remarks of Prof. Gentile are so pertinent to the subject under discussion that they may bear a reference here. We must not, he insists, put together the unity of mind with the multiplicity of things, because "the multiplicity of things does not stand in the same rank with the unity of the ego, for multiplicity belongs to things in so far as all together are gathered into the unity of consciousness."[41] It is, therefore, contended that the unity of mind which lives in the immediate intuition of the spiritual life is "unmultipliable and infinite unity."[42] Determinateness is "essentially and fundamentally multiplicity, it is the particularity of the determinations by which each is what it is, and reciprocally excludes the others." The unity of the mind, on the other hand, "is infinite;" it cannot be "limited by other realities and still keep its own reality. Its unity implies its infinity. The mind is not a multiplicity; nor is the whole, of which it is a part, multiple, the part being a unity." The conclusion which he draws is: "A unique and infinite thing would not be knowable, because to know is to distinguish one thing from another. *Omnis determinatio est negatio.*"

As the conception of the Infinite is one of the most interesting subjects upon which modern speculations are still divided, a student of the advaita philosophy will naturally feel encouraged to find in Prof. Gentile's contentions an unconscious corroboration by a modern thinker of the advaita theory of self as infinite. The self, as we have seen above, is unlike the finite things which are necessarily determined from outside. Being the ultimate presupposition of all finite things, the self cannot be limited by something other than itself. It is well known, remarks Śaṅkara, that "that is infinite which cannot be divided from anything else; and if the Absolute be a knowing agent, then, it is divided from knowledge and the knowable object, and, as such, cannot be infinite."[43]

41. *Mind as Pure Act*, p. 52.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

43. *Com. on the Tait. Up. Brahmaballī.*

The Absolute, therefore, is Knowledge *within* which there is no distinction. The Infinite, it is said in another context, is that "where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else."[44] The finite, on the contrary, is that "where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else." The infinite (*bhūmā*), as put elsewhere, "is something quite different from all notions of duality."[45] It being the presupposition of all known and knowable things, the Infinite may be said to "rest in its own greatness," or, to put it more strictly, "the Infinite is without any resting place or support." All objects, that is, presuppose the Absolute Self, though the latter has no presupposition.

It does not matter much whether the ultimate presupposition of all knowledge is called the conscious subject, or the unity of mind, or the pure ego, provided it is remembered that it is not itself either one thing among other things or one category among other categories. Without such a foundational principle, every analysis of knowledge will be confronted by the paradox of infinite regress. When, therefore, the ultimate principle is described even as a universal, we must guard ourselves against interpreting this ground-universal in the sense in which a universal is correlative with a particular. Similarly, again, when it is described as immediate experience, we must with equal care avoid the mistake of thinking that immediate experience is one type of experience by the side of all other types of experience. So far Bradley is altogether right in his remark that even the term 'for' has only a metaphorical significance when all relational knowledge is said to be *for* immediate experience. All criticisms directed against the doctrine of immediate experience, in so far as they start with the assumption that the relation of this experience to the objects is identical with an inter-objective relation, must be altogether irrelevant.

The Buddhistic agnosticism, as we have remarked above, arose out of drawing from a true premise a false conclusion. It is certainly true that all our categories are relational and so far finite. But this circumstance by itself does not guarantee the conclusion that the Absolute falls altogether beyond the limits of human comprehension. If it is true that the principle of relativity is called upon by the nihilists in order to destroy all theories and to replace them by "direct mystic intuition," as we are told by Dr. Th. Stcherbatsky,[46] then it must be said, in the words of E. Caird, that if the philosopher assumes prophetic airs or speaks to ordinary men from the height of 'an immediate insight' or 'transcendental intuition,' from which they are excluded, then, he

44. *S. B. I.* 3. 8.

45. *Com. on the Ch. Up. VII.* 24. 1.

46. *Nirvāna*, p. 49.

is pretending "to be of a different species from other men" and is so far "trampling the roots of humanity under foot."[47]

The confusion between Śaṅkara's absolutism and the Buddhistic agnosticism must, it should be emphasised once more, be avoided by every sympathetic interpreter of the advaita philosophy. Yet this confusion was started by no less an authority than Paul Deussen who has done so much for the spread of the Vedānta teachings. And since then this confusion has remained unchallenged, and the subsequent interpreters of Śaṅkara's philosophy have implicitly accepted his interpretation. Recollecting the phenomenalism of Kant, Deussen remarks that the "central thought" of the Vedānta consists in this that the *Brahman* is "theoretically unknowable; because in all knowing, it is the knowing subject, it can never be an object of knowledge for us." It must, therefore, be "grasped practically."[48] We need not here examine Deussen's criticism of "the weakness and frailty of man's intellect" that, according to him, is shared by Śaṅkara with the Greek and modern philosophers in so far as Śaṅkara, like Descartes, could not "go so far" as to see that what remains of the self when all notions of the not-self are withdrawn from it is, not consciousness, but something unconscious.[49] What is suggested here is evidently this that it is the Will and not consciousness which is more fundamental than the other. Such an interpretation, as we have contended in the last chapter, would put Śaṅkara's position in an extremely misleading light. There is an important sense in which consciousness is the ultimate presupposition of all fragmentary and relative experiences.

But what should be challenged in the present context is Deussen's assimilation of Śaṅkara's position to that of Kant. The real value of Kant's contribution to a sound theory of knowledge consists in his insistence that the categories are the logical presuppositions of all objects that we know. But his theory of an unknowable and inconceivable Thing-in-itself has been rightly rejected by all subsequent idealists from Fichte to Bradley. In this respect Kant's position is more akin to that of Candrakīrti and other Buddhist agnostics than to the position of Śaṅkara. The Absolute, for Śaṅkara, is our very self which none can deny; it is the pre-established ground (*svayamsiddha*) of all proof and disproof, though it cannot be known in the same way in which an object is known. The Absolute is like the light which manifests all objects, and which, consequently, does not require another light for its own revelation. To contend, therefore, that there can be no theoretical knowledge of the Absolute,

47. *Hegel*, p. 57.

48. *The System of the Vedānta*, p. 143.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

as it is contended by Deussen, would be as absurd as the assertion that light cannot be known theoretically because it illumines the objects while it itself is not revealed by another light.

These thoughts are put very clearly in the commentary on the Gītā. How can there be, it is asked, a cognition of the Absolute Self? How is the constant meditation of self-knowledge possible if the self as well as knowledge be formless? The answer runs as follows:—

There is a sense in which it is unnecessary to impart the knowledge of the self; because it is invariably comprehended in association with all objects of perception. The *Brahman*, though eminently evident, intimately known, very near, and essentially the self, appears to the undiscriminating people as obscure, difficult to know, remote, and different from the self. But to those whose intellect (*Buddhi*) has been withdrawn from the external things, there can be nothing so blissful, so evident, so easily comprehensible, and so near.[50] All that is necessary, therefore, for knowing the real self is to avoid its false identification with the pseudo-egos, such as, the intellect, mind, body, etc. It is only some self-conceited thinkers who suppose that the intellect cannot comprehend the self on account of its being formless. In reality, however, "the self is not a thing unknown to anybody at any time, it is not a thing to be reached, or abandoned, or acquired. If the self be unknown, all actions for the attainment of an object would be meaningless." Knowledge though formless, must be admitted to be as immediate as pleasure, since objects are apprehended because of the reality of knowledge.[51]

Deussen's misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's theory of Self on the agnostic lines seems to be due to the fact that he construes such phrases as "not knowable as an object," and "unknown as an object," as equivalents of "entirely inconceivable and unknowable." But this would surely be a mistake; and in fact, Śaṅkara anticipates such a confusion of his theory of the Absolute with the agnostic position, and often carefully distinguishes between the two. It is true, he says, that the Absolute transcends all speech and thought, but it "certainly does not mean that *Brahman* is a mere naught."[52] The negative judgment has no meaning apart from a positive background. Consequently, all that the *Bṛh. Up.* means by the negative description of the Absolute is this that it does not fall within the category of object (*aviṣayāntaḥpāti*); for, it is "the innermost self whose nature is eternal, pure and eternally free consciousness."

50. *Sukham, suprasiddham, suvijñeyam, āsannam.—Com. on the Gītā* XVIII. *50*.

51. *Jñānavaśenaiva jñeyamavagati iti jñānam atyantam prasiddham sukhādivadeva—loc. cit. Cp.* also *Ibid. II. 18.*

52. *S. B. III. 2. 22.*

Indeed, the assertion that the Absolute is theoretically incomprehensible would be as absurd as that there can be no theoretical knowledge of space on the ground that all spaces that are ever known are limited spaces, or that light is theoretically unknowable because what is known directly is an illumined object. The truth, on the contrary, is that our knowledge of particular spaces and that of illumined objects presuppose the reality of an infinite space and of the source of illumination respectively. Similarly, the foundational consciousness which is presupposed by all particular conscious activities cannot be itself said to be a mere naught for our thought. The Absolute, in this sense, far from being entirely unknowable, is knowable *par excellence.*

In interpreting the advaita system, it is of primary importance to remember that this particular philosophy is not a mere speculative adventure of purely theoretical interest. On the contrary, it is a practical discipline designed for the attainment of what its founders considered to be the highest state of spiritual evolution. This highest stage was supposed by them to be realised through three stages, known technically as *śravaṇa, manana,* and *nididhyāsana,* each stage being as indispensable as the rest. Misconceptions, therefore, are surely to arise when one of them is taken to be unnecessary, when, for instance, it is said that Śaṅkara fares entirely without logic and has no other evidence for his conclusions than an appeal to the Upaniṣads. It is an equally serious error to think that the highest stage of spiritual realisation, according to Śaṅkara, can be attained without a theoretically satisfactory philosophy of the Absolute. That would be to ignore the importance of the second stage of reasoned knowledge. The fact is that a theoretically satisfactory position reached by refuting all rival theories which excite doubts and suspicions in the mind is an indispensable preliminary to the attainment of the last stage of self-realisation. This, according to Śaṅkara, cannot be attained by the absurd method of proving the incompetency of thought by means of thought itself, as Bradley, for instance, supposed. The anti-rational and sceptical attitude may breed despair, but cannot be a necessary stage in a spiritual discipline.

Śaṅkara's method of knowledge, we believe, is more correctly analysed by another distinguished exponent of mysticism than what is offered by Deussen. In comparing the method of Śaṅkara with that of Eckhart, it is remarked by Prof. Rudolf Otto that their mysticism is "no mysticism in the usual sense of the term."[53] Theirs is the method of an "intellectual and not of an emotional mysticism." Both of them seek to give "a knowledge which is to be translated into a comprehensible doctrine with all the aids of proof, scholarly presentation and keen dialectic."[54] But even Prof. Otto seems sometimes to

53. *Mysticism East and West,* p. 29.

54 *Ibid.,* p. 31.

underestimate the contribution of Śaṅkara to a philosophical interpretation of experience, when, for instance, it is remarked that the "intuitus mysticus" is "a first-hand and immediate fact and possession of the mystical mind" in the case of Śaṅkara as well as Eckhart. So far as the former is concerned, we believe, we have been able to show clearly in the foregoing pages that Śaṅkara's works are full of illuminating analysis of knowledge which will be acceptable to all, and not simply to the mystical minds. The discovery of the *a priori* conditions of knowledge does not certainly require a mystical mind, otherwise we shall have to admit that all the philosophers from Kant to Hegel and the modern absolutists are mystics. There is no doubt a place for mysticism in Śaṅkara's doctrine of self-realisation; but his theory of knowledge, we believe, is free from any mystical element. Reasoned knowledge is an indispensable stage in the advaita method of self-realisation; and no reasoned refutation of rival doctrines can be promoted by an appeal to mystical intuition.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that Śaṅkara's doctrine of the Absolute Self is based on an analysis of experience, and, as such, it is different from the agnostic method of the Buddhists. The self, when rightly understood, is an undefinable, yet perfectly intelligible, principle presupposed by all experience. It is, in other words, consciousness, the peculiar character of which is that here there is no distinction between the experienced and the experiencing. In fact, the whole of Śaṅkara's discussions on the Self may be viewed as an able and comprehensive analysis of *consciousness.*

It will be interesting here to add a few remarks on the place of the negative dialectic method in the development of the advaita philosophy,—a method which has been recently introduced into modern thought by Bradley. A short comparison between Bradley, Nāgārjuna and Śaṅkara may remove what seems to us another misapprehension of the method of Śaṅkara which has particularly led to the belief that the Absolute in the advaita philosophy is a transcendent principle.

Bradley starts his destructive criticism of all appearances in the spirit of Nāgārjuna, which was wrongly infused into Śaṅkara's philosophy by Śrīharṣa at a later age. But while following the same dialectic method, Bradley tried to steer clear of Nāgārjuna's agnosticism by means of the Hegelian doctrine of degrees in truth and reality. But, as has been rightly contended by Dr. Haldar, he has failed to bring this doctrine into accord with his destructive criticism.[55] His transition from appearance to the Absolute is so abrupt that it "takes one's breath away, and savours too much of the incomprehensible process by which the mystic is transported beyond the region of ordinary experience."[56]

55. *Neo-Hegelianism,* p. 250.

56. *Ibid.,* p. 251.

In fact, the mere negative criticism of all the categories of thought must lead inevitably to Nāgārjuna's agnosticism which is equivalent to universal scepticism, and so the Absolute which emerges out of such a negative method must emerge abruptly; and, consequently, Nāgārjuna's *Dharmakāya* as well as Bradley's Absolute must have the appearance of, as put by Dr. Haldar in respect of the latter, being "shot out of a pistol."[57]

We must, therefore, be on our guard when it is remarked that there is a great "family likeness between the dialectical method of Hegel and Nāgārjuna's dialectics."[58] The truth is that this family likeness exists between the dialectic method of Bradley and that of Nāgārjuna, and neither Śaṅkara nor Hegel would subscribe to the position of universal scepticism which follows necessarily from the method of the former. A category, for Hegel, as we have remarked elsewhere, "is no doubt self-discrepant, but this is due to its forced abstraction from the higher category in which the inconsistencies of the lower category are reconciled. For Bradley, on the other hand, every category of knowledge can give us only appearance, and in this regard, one category is as bad as another."[59] And in transplanting the Buddhistic dialectic method on the advaita soil,—which process really began as early as the beginning of the ninth century with Maṇḍana Miśra, and was completed by Ānandajñāna, Śrīharṣa and Citsukha—the advaita dialecticians have put Śaṅkara's position in an extremely misleading light. Śaṅkara, as we have seen, is very definite in his polemic against absolute nihilism. Being, for him, is the most fundamental category, and the world of appearance, howsoever unreal, does not militate against the possibility of a systematic philosophy. The entire complex of phenomenal existence, he admits, is true in a certain sense, and so far there "is no reason why the ordinary course of secular and religious activity should not hold undisturbed".[60] The negative dialectic of the Buddhists, on the contrary, is entirely incompatible with any fixed criterion of truth and reality. Nāgārjuna, it has been rightly urged by M. Anesaki, pursued the negative dialectic "till he reached a complete denial of any definite thought about anything."[61] If then Śrīharṣa fell a prey to the allurements of negative dialectic, he really did a great disservice to Śaṅkara's

57. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

58. Dr. Th. Stcherbatsky, *Nirvāna*, p. 53.

59. See *infra, Appendix.*

60. *S. B. II. 1.* 14.

61. *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. IV*, p. 838.

position by ignoring the fact that the latter had great respect for reasoned knowledge.[62]

It was this incompatibility of the negative dialectic with the genuinely advaita position which was responsible, at least partly, for Śaṅkara's silence over his indebtedness to the Buddhist thought; his silence cannot be attributed entirely to "sectarian animosity" or "extreme hatred," as Dr. Th. Stcherbatsky seems to suppose.[63] And if Śrīharṣa acknowledged his indebtedness, that was because he was actually influenced by the Buddhistic speculations to a degree which was not in harmony with the position of Śaṅkara. While Śrīharṣa thinks that the Absolute can be well established by a negative criticism of all categories and declaring, like Candrakīrti, that he has no particular thesis to prove in respect of the phenomenal world, Śaṅkara begins with the declaration that the object of the Vedānta is to furnish a positive proof for the identity of the individual and the Absolute Self. Such a positive proof would be impossible if he had started with the attitude of universal scepticism. Nor does it appear to be a mere irony that is responsible for Śaṅkara's polemic against the nihilists, as suggested by Prof. S. Radhakrishnan.[64] If we follow the interpretation of Nāgārjuna as offered by Candrakīrti as distinct from what is offered by other Buddhists, such as, Bhāvaviveka, then, the term *'śunya'* cannot be identified with Śaṅkara's empirical existence. The world of appearance, for Śaṅkara, is not entirely false; Being is immanent in the world of appearance. On the contrary, Nāgārjuna's conception does not leave any reality for the phenomenal world which, for him, is as unreal as the horn of a hare.[65]

It is true that the Madhyamaka philosophers employ many terms (such as, *nirvikalpa, niṣprapanca, vyavahāra, paramārtha*, etc.), that are also used by Śaṅkara. But they are used by the latter with very important changes in their connotations. The Absolute, according to Candrakīrti, for instance, repels all predicates, including those of being and non-being; and Candrakīrti complains that his position should have been taken to be identical with the doctrine of non-being.[66] But the difficulty is that such an Absolute can neither be

62. It is a pity that many modern interpreters of Śaṅkara have the tendency to make him consistent by reading into his position the thoughts of his followers who made the mistake of thinking that the position of Śaṅkara could be developed by the Buddhistic method of criticism.

63. *Buddhist Logic, Vol. I*, p. 22.

64. *Indian Philosophy I*, p. 669.

65. This distinction has been accentuated rightly by many, such as, Poussin in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1910, p. 129, and Prof A. B. Keith in his *Buddhistic Philosophy*, p. 261.

66. *Mūla-Madhyamaka-Kārikās*, ed. by Poussin, p. 499.

refuted nor established; and we cannot be said to advance a single step in the way of establishing the truth of the Absolute by raising it entirely above all categories. Śaṅkara's Absolute, on the other hand, as we have seen, is not such a transcendent principle, though it is not definable in the ordinary way; and he seeks to prove its reality by a careful analysis of knowledge and experience.

Ras Bihari Das, "The Falsity of the World" (1940)

Ras Bihari Das (1886–1945) specialized in Advaita Vedānta studies and the philosophy of Whitehead. He was influenced by Hiralal Haldar, B. N. Seal, and K. C. Bhattacharyya. He published commentaries on Kant and Whitehead. This essay reflects his distinctively realistic interpretation of Vedānta, a position often read as idealistic.

I

*The Plato of Allahabad: A. C. Mukerji's Contributions to Indian and to World Philosophy**

1. The Philosopher's Predicament

"I will say that philosophy written in English is not Indian Philosophy. Indian philosophy is not written in English, but in Sanskrit" (Krishna, interview with the authors, 2006). Daya Krishna poses a dilemma here for anyone who wishes to understand Indian philosophy as it was practiced in Indian universities during the British colonial period. For if he is right, there *was no Indian philosophy* in Anglophone universities during the British Raj.

We disagree with the deprecation of the Indian philosophy of this period, and we trust that this volume documents the probity of that disagreement. But we are not the first to have been disturbed by this attitude. The presidential address in 1950 to the 26th session of the Indian Philosophical Congress delivered by the late A. C. Mukerji of Allahabad inspires the case we build against the dominant view expressed above. Mukerji says:

* Thanks to the late Daya Krishna, Arvind Mehrotra, Tapati Guha-Takhurta, and Kapila Vatsyayan and the members of the University of Allahabad Philosophy Department for conversations that generated the ideas developed in this paper. In particular, we thank Professor Narendra Singh for granting us access to the department library and to Mukerji's library and for facilitating our collection of materials and our visit to Allahabad. We are grateful to G. C. Pande for introducing us to the work of A. C. Mukerji, to Francesca King, Jeanette Smith, Margaret Dodge, Kendra Ralston, Shama Rahman, and Thomas J. Leach for invaluable help assembling material for this paper, for discussion of the issues, and for reading early drafts of this paper and to members of the International Vedānta Congress for useful discussion and encouragement. This paper was presented earlier as the Lal Radha Joshi India Lecture at the University of Connecticut in October 2007. We thank the participants in that discussion for useful comments. Thanks also to Richard Millington and Andrew Rotman for valuable discussion of a more recent version. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of a Smith College Faculty Development grant that made this research possible. Portions of this material appear in our contribution to the memorial volume for R. Gandhi and Daya Krishna edited by S. Mayaram.

> I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to give expression to my genuine admiration and appreciation for the work my colleagues in the Indian colleges and universities have succeeded in doing in the sphere of philosophy notwithstanding a hundred handicaps and formidable difficulties. I am fully aware of the general attitude of scorn and contempt, of distrust and discouragement, that has brought discredit upon the contemporary Indian thinkers from within and outside India; but I shall not enquire into the nature and cause of the circumstances responsible for this growing volume of suspicion. Of one thing, however, I am pretty sure and it is this that the adverse critics have neither the inclination nor the courtesy of spending on the Indian attempts a hundredth part of the time and attention they devote to the study of the currents of foreign thought. Philosophical convictions grow through the spirit of cooperation and helpful mutual criticism; it is positively unfair to refuse cooperation and yet wail over languishment. I for one do believe that the philosophers of contemporary India have already given sufficiently convincing evidence of the virility and strength of Indian thought which, given favourable atmosphere, would gradually develop into world views of far-reaching consequences whose value in the context of world philosophy would not be negligible. What is needed is a concerted effort on the part of our countrymen to help the growth of Indian thought rather than harp on the discordant tune. I have long felt that, far from providing an incentive, this apathy and indifference are the symptom of a dangerous disease that produces intellectual paralysis and a moral anesthesia. (S. Dubey, 1994, volume I, pp. 181–182)

At the end of his career, Mukerji gives voice to the legitimate frustration that must have been experienced by so many of his colleagues and also to the deep ambivalence felt by Indian intellectuals regarding the quality of cross-culturally grounded writing, especially works written in English. Mukerji is correct in all respects. Indian philosophy under the Raj was treated with scorn and contempt. And it is at least as true today as it was a half century ago that the critics of Indian philosophy systematically ignore in their reading and reflection the very literature they do not hesitate to disparage. Mukerji's assessment of the genuine strength and creativity of Indian thought of this period is also correct. We endorse his conclusion that to continue to ignore this body of work is both an intellectual and a moral failing.

Mukerji himself has suffered the fate he so eloquently laments in these remarks. Despite the brilliance of his work, few outside of Allahabad have heard of him, let alone have read his work. Mukerji is far from alone in this

fate. Indeed, even those who acknowledge the greatness of particular figures from that period, such as K. C. Bhattacharyya, have often read little, if any, of their actual writing. In this essay we argue that there was in fact a renaissance underway in Indian philosophy during this period, in some ways analogous to the renaissance that occurred in art, although it was not recognized as such. We intend to indicate—through a detailed case study—that Indian philosophy was pursued creatively in English during the British colonial period, and that it represents an important contribution to world philosophy. We do not mean to suggest, however, that this period is monolithic in its character. While we present only a single case study in this essay, this anthology presents a variety of voices, each with its distinctive philosophical view, in dialogue with one another, and in dialogue with a global philosophical community.

In Indian art and aesthetics, a curious dilemma between authenticity and creativity frames the evaluation of art during the colonial period. Nonetheless, Indian colonial art has subsequently been reassessed and this false dichotomy put aside ("An Indian in Paris," the present volume). However, while that same dilemma structures the reception of Indian philosophy during that period, it has not yet been set aside in this domain. In the art case, despite decades of critique, we now witness a resurgence of interest in and appreciation of Ravi Varma, as well as Bengal School and Company School art. There is no parallel resurrection of Indian philosophy. Finally, the discussion and debates so clear in the art community, about what it means to generate a new but still authentically Indian art, are almost entirely hidden from view in the field of philosophy. The renaissance in philosophy is still not recognized.

There were, to be sure, critical differences between the two communities that partially explain this divergence in attitude to the bodies of work produced in each of the disciplines. While the community of artists and art critics were bound by well-known journals and enjoyed a receptive public, there was no analogous visible community of Indian academic philosophers. *Sri* Aurobindo, *Nobel Laureate* Tagore, *Mahatma* Gandhi, and *Swami* Vivekananda all worked outside of the academy, and those within the academy who came into public consciousness, like *Dr.* Radhakrishnan, were few in number, standing as prototypes of philosophy rather than as members of a community of academic philosophers. Not only has philosophy no *public* canon of criticism comparable to that of art, but Indian academia—and a fortiori, philosophy—was subject to a regionalism that structured the discipline during this period. As a consequence, philosophy flourished in microcommunities that were tied to specific geographic regions and to members of philosophy departments in universities of those regions.

Despite these differences between the disciplines of art and philosophy, we find two striking similarities. First, central in each case is the trope of the

authentic versus the creative in colonial India. A philosopher writing in that period faced the following the challenge: how was one to do philosophy at once authentically Indian and creative? How could a Sanskritist engage with Russell? How could a Hegelian draw on Śaṅkaracārya? There is a second similarity: A single genius and perhaps his disciples, and his school, got credited with avoiding the dilemma. K. C. Bhattacharyya was philosophy's Abanindranath Tagore. In his lifetime, and to this day, the one academic philosopher from this period who has name recognition and respect for his philosophical work is K. C. Bhattacharyya (see, for instance, Raghuramaraju, 2006).

In the case of art, we saw that the contrast between the "genius" A. Tagore and the "cheap lithographer" Ravi Varma had much less to do with the actual content of their work and everything to do with a certain national romantic narrative in the context of which that work was appropriated ("An Indian in Paris," the present volume) So too in philosophy. The writings of many other philosophers of this period, such as M. Hiriyanna and A. C. Mukerji, are as creative as the work of K. C. Bhattacharyya. In the narrative of the history of philosophy of this period, K. C. Bhattacharyya gets the genius pass. He alone is imagined to have accomplished the practically impossible task of transcending the dichotomy between the authentic and the creative. As a consequence, as Raghuramaraju (2006) has noted (though in a different register, and for different reasons), the diversity of views in play during this period, and hence the philosophical creativity and fertility of the period, and important contributions go unremarked. And just as a vision of classical Indian culture as available to elite aesthetes issued in the disparagement of art available to the populace, a vision of classical Indian culture as enshrined in a literature only available to a Sanskrit-literate elite issued in the disparagement of philosophy written in English.

There is, however, a striking difference between the ways that the narratives of these two disciplines segue from the colonial into the postcolonial era. While we now give a multitude of artists of that time and of today freedom to work creatively in continuity with an ancient tradition, this has not been the case in philosophy. Further, there is no recovery effort underway to restore to public consciousness the high quality work of other philosophers of that period. And tragically, the dichotomy of the authentic versus the creative as it applies to philosophy is as unbridgeable as ever in the attitude of present-day Indian philosophers. Daya Krishna's lament (see present volume xiii–xiv) is testament to this state of affairs. It is high time to provide a corrective.

We do so by undertaking a study of the work of a contemporary of K. C. Bhattacharyya who worked and taught at the University of Allahabad, A. C. Mukerji. This will provide evidence that there were other philosophers prosecuting philosophy continuous with the Indian philosophical tradition in an

innovative and exciting way. A. C. Mukerji, however, is only the tip of the iceberg. There were many others working in the universities of India during the British period who did not themselves see tradition and innovation as mutually exclusive categories, who creatively and successfully overcame this divide but who were not, and still are not, recognized for their efforts. The perception that the ninety years of the Raj constituted a period of sterility in Indian philosophy is a mere perception. Its inaccuracy has tragic consequences for our appreciation of Indian intellectual life and of the engagement of India with modernity.

2. *A Case Study in Philosophy*

We now begin our case study of the work of A. C. Mukerji of Allahabad who, despite his considerable genius, does not get the *genius pass* in the collective memory of Indian philosophy in the colonial period. Very few remember or have read his work. But in Allahabad, people in the philosophy department still refer to the trio of eminent philosophers who dominated that department for decades—R. K. Ranade, the great mystic; A. C. Mukerji, the Kantian Vedānta scholar; the positivist A. N. Kaul—as the Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle of Allahabad.

We quoted earlier from A. C. Mukerji's presidential address to the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1950. We would now like to explore some of his philosophical work. His corpus is substantial, spanning a quarter century (1925–1950) comprising two books, and about a dozen essays, one of which could constitute a book in its own right. Unfortunately for his reputation, most of his essays were published in *Allahabad University Studies*, a scholarly journal not generally read outside of the gates of Allahabad University at the time, and now, not at all. (This pattern of local publication was typical of this period.) His two books, *Self Thought and Reality* (1933) and *The Nature of Self* (1938), were also published in Allahabad, and are long out of print.

There is of course, insufficient time in a short essay to survey all of his contributions to philosophy. But we want to say enough to establish four claims: First, A. C. Mukerji was a philosopher of great accomplishment and his ideas merit serious attention. Second, while A. C. Mukerji was thoroughly conversant with and attentive to the European philosophical tradition, he was also deeply immersed in the Indian tradition. Third, while early in his career he takes comparative philosophy seriously as an enterprise, in his mature thought he rejects *comparison* in favour of *systematic* philosophy, drawing on Indian and Western sources indifferently. Finally, A. C. Mukerji sees himself first and foremost as an *Indian* philosopher prosecuting philosophical

problems that emerge from a classical *Indian* tradition, but in an international forum; and his frequent use of *Western* material is generally in the service of that global philosophical project. That is, although we will be emphasizing ways in which Mukerji's thought anticipates that of certain important Western figures, we are not claiming that that anticipation is what makes his work important; rather, it is the fact that he develops these prescient ideas—ideas that are clearly philosophically important in their own right—in the context of an articulation of Advaita Vedānta that marks his contribution as a development of *Indian* philosophy.

It is hard to overstate Mukerji's creativity. Most of us would regard Wilfrid Sellars and Donald Davidson (of course along with W. V. Quine) as the most significant exponents of American pragmatist and neo-Kantian thought of the 20th century. We would cite as being among their principal contributions to our discipline, in Sellars' case, the identification of and attack on the "myth of the given" and the harnessing of Kant's idealism in the service of realism, and in Davidson's, the attack on the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes, and of the scheme/content and world/word distinctions. These contributions were made between 1956 and 1980. The circulation and later publication of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (Sellars, 1963) and "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (Davidson, 1984, pp. 183–198) transformed Anglo-American philosophy and set entirely new agendas for generations of Anglophone philosophers. Indeed, some of the most important philosophical books of the last few years are direct descendants of these seminal essays.

Mukerji identified each of these themes and anticipated these conclusions and their arguments long before his better-known American colleagues, and with a distinctively Vedānta motivation and inflection. Advaita Vedānta came to dominate colonial Indian philosophy in the wake of the renaissance for two reasons. First, it was the inspiration that drove the work of Swami Vivekananda of the Ramakrishna mission, as well as Sri Aurobindo, both of whom were prominent religious, philosophical, and national figures. Second, Advaita Vedānta bears a striking affinity to the neo-Hegelianism that was then so popular in England and that was brought to India by British educators. While this school achieved a kind of hegemony in Indian philosophical circles, it was not monolithic, and serious debates within Vedānta, particularly between advocates of the *māyāvāda* and *līlāvāda* interpretations, divided Indian philosophers of this period. (See "Bringing Brahman Down to Earth," present volume.)

In his 1927 paper, "The Realist's Conception of Idealism," Mukerji writes:

> In the thinkers of the Enlightenment, the desire to be clear at any cost grew into such a master-passion that they could not admit the truth of anything except what would stand out with clear-cut features and hard immutable outlines, the consequence being a wide-spread disorganization in the different departments of life. This led Kant to ask for a "further analysis" of the so-called facts. So, if we are to retain the terms Idealism and Realism, we *must give up the old method of contrasting them, and define Realism as he habit of accepting the facts as out there, unconditioned and absolute. Idealism, on the contrary, insists on the conditioned nature of the ordinary facts of experience and holds that apart from their conditions, the so-called facts are reduced to non-entities.* (the present volume, p. 475)

In the defense of Kant that follows, Mukerji develops a sustained critique of givenness. He argues that neither facts about the external world nor facts about inner experience can coherently be understood as self-presenting, or as having factual structure independent of descriptive or explanatory interests and schemes. This, he argues, is the real content of Kantian idealism, and of the idealism of Vedānta. The structure of reality, and hence its factual content, is determined by the faculties of the subject. Nonetheless, he argues, this is not to say that either the external world or the inner world so conditioned is therefore nonexistent, or existent in some second-rate sense. To exist, Mukerji argues, just is to exist in this way. The empirical world as well as the inner world of experience is all the facts there are. There is no "higher reality" lurking behind a veil of illusion.

The idealism he endorses is hence neither individualistic and subjective nor hostile to the reality of the external world. Instead, Mukerji defends a robust realism about the natural world and an intersubjective account of the constitution of our ontology. This intersubjective, as opposed to ego-based, account of the sources of the structure of experience set his own understanding of Kantian and Vedānta idealism apart and reflect the idea that the reality we inhabit is collectively constituted, a joint play of cognitive activity. A quarter century later, he was to return to this theme, saying in his ironically entitled address "Traditional Epistemology" (1950), while exploring the quaint traditions of Western empiricism:

> In reverting to Hume's dualism, and accepting his verdict as final, the logical empiricists, along with the majority of contemporary thinkers, appear to have completely ignored the value of an alternative theory of knowledge, according to which neither the *a priori* nor the empirical knowledge is a species of knowledge by the side of the other species; on the contrary, what is called *a priori* knowledge is nothing more than the knowledge of the universal elements involved in the very existence

of an empirical object or an empirically given event. *If, for instance, it is assumed that sense data are the ultimate materials of experience, our analysis, according to this theory, is defective, for it does not take into consideration the conditions of there being a world of sense data at all.* (pp. 588–589 of the present volume)

Mukerji, anticipating Sellars' own Kantian critique in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" of sense datum theories and the foundationalism they represent, argues in this essay that sense data cannot even be granted epistemic status without taking them covertly to be already intentional objects of conceptually rich cognitive states. That is, he argues, there is no nonconceptual foundation of knowledge. For sense data, for instance, to be such a foundation, other knowledge would have to be deductively derived from it. But inference is always a transition from statements to statements; statements represent structured, conceptualized facts, inasmuch as they must have predicative structure, and sense data, or any nonconceptually given foundations, are presented as unstructured, nonconceptual. They hence would be useless as epistemic foundations.

This view, of course, is closely tied to Mukerji's understanding of idealism and realism we discuss above: the fact that all knowledge is conceptual knowledge and hence that all facts are understood conceptually means that our individual and collective conceptual resources determine the character of even our most basic knowledge. We cannot escape the world as conditioned by our own consciousness. This late essay is also redolent with themes to be developed three decades later by Donald Davidson, including (a) the impossibility of drawing a scheme/content distinction (1984, pp. 183–198), (b) the requirement of broad agreement as a background for disagreement (1973/1984, pp. 65–75) and (c) the centrality of truth to meaning (1967/1984, pp. 17–36; 1977, pp. 199–214), and (d) the impossibility of distinguishing between reality and our accounts of it (1974/1984, pp. 183–198; 1977/1984, pp. 215–225). Mukerji writes:

> *Every theory of reality... lays claim to truth and consequently challenges the truth claim of a rival theory.... That there is a reality which refuses to be represented by conflicting theories is, therefore, one of the common assumptions uniting the new with the old theory. If reality, as philosophical perversity has sometimes claimed, had been in its ultimate nature the subject of conflicting and mutually destructive judgments, there could be neither science nor philosophy.* Even the most radical skeptics or a confirmed misologist, insofar as he claims truth for his assertion that knowledge is unattainable or that reality is inscrutable, makes the unconscious assumption that reality has a positive nature by virtue of which it repels conflicting formulations. Thus, radical skepticism or total agnosticism is a disguised parasite that feeds upon the sap supplied by the parent tree of absolute knowledge.
>
> *One of the results of these considerations is to disclose the utter futility of an unbridgeable dualism of knowledge and reality.* (1950, p. 586 of the present volume)

Mukerji argues that it is incoherent to talk about alternative conceptual schemes or versions of reality standing against a reality with respect to which they represent alternative versions. This, he argues, is because of the centrality of the idea of *truth* both to the idea of reality and to that of representation. Because any version of reality is only a version to the degree that it is *true*, then competing claims really compete. Even to say that there are *two* equally good versions of reality is to make a *third truth claim*, one that supersedes the two it ostensibly vindicates. As a consequence, Mukerji argues, although our conceptual schemes determine the reality we live in, they do so not from outside—there is no dualism of concept and world—but rather from the inside. Concept and conceptualized are one. This is the content of Advaita Vedānta in Mukerji's very modern reading. It is hard to read this material, as well as the rest of Mukerji's corpus, and deny that we are reading the work of a first-rate intellect.

So far, we have been emphasizing Mukerji's conversation with Western thought, and of course his chosen philosophical medium was English. In discussions with contemporary Indian philosophers about their colonial forbearers, we often hear the refrain that the philosophers writing in English during this period did not know their Sanskrit and were not truly conversant with classical Indian philosophical thought. We have found this perception in general to be baseless, and indeed it is false of Mukerji. His two books as well as his articles on Śaṅkara are replete with Sanskrit quotation, copious references to Sanskrit literature, and detailed and nuanced commentary on Indian philosophy. Mukerji was every bit as at home in the Sanskritic tradition of his homeland as he was in the European tradition in which he was also educated. Indeed, this is not surprising, given that his immediate teachers were Bhagavan Das and P. P. Adhikari of Benares, both widely respected as Sanskritists.

In addition to using English as his philosophical medium, as he worked on metaphysical and epistemological problems, Mukerji also used comparison as a method to both illuminate and complicate received philosophical views within each philosophical tradition. It is a conceit of contemporary metaphilosophy that "comparative philosophy" is a phrase of deprecation, indicating the mind-numbing enterprise of itemizing points of similarity and difference

between canonical texts of disparate traditions, the stuff of an undergraduate "compare and contrast" assignment made into a pseudospecialty of our profession in mock deference to excluded others. And indeed much of what goes under that head is fairly so characterized, and we are arguably at a historical moment where the comparative enterprise has passed its use-by date.

It is, however, useful to step back for a moment to the origins of the phrase itself and of the enterprise it denotes. The phrase itself was first used by the patriarch of Indian Anglophone philosophy, B. N. Seal. Seal (1899) writes that "historical comparison implies that the objects compared are of co-ordinate rank" (quoted in McEvilley, 2002, p. ix). Many Indian and Western philosophers followed Seal in this path, preeminently in India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and P. T. Raju. Mukerji's philosophical career, on the other hand, was marked by a persistent critical engagement with the very *idea* of comparison. He opens his volume, *The Nature of Self*, with the following remarks:

> Comparative philosophy has so far been either predominantly historical and descriptive, or it has contented itself with discovering stray similarities between the Western and Indian thought. No serious attempt, as far as I know, has yet been made to undertake a comparative study for mutual supplementation of arguments and consequent clarification of issues. Yet, this alone can suggest the paths to new constructions and thus help the development of philosophical thought. (1938, pp. v–vi)

The book itself, as several contemporary reviews in the Western press note (Pratt, 1939; Schrader, 1936), is remarkable in its systematic eschewal of comparison in favor of the dramatic joint use of philosophical texts and insights for systematic ends. The remarks above indicate the trajectory of Mukerji's concern about comparison: that underscoring similarities in argument or viewpoint between traditions may well have the happy consequence of making a case for equality in value—an important political point—but does not necessarily *supplement* those arguments or push joint thinking in new directions. Serious philosophy that brings together texts from disparate traditions must be philosophy aimed at the solution of live problems, pursued in openness to the contribution of multiple traditions; texts from disparate traditions in such a venture are brought not for the *purpose of comparison*, but for the purpose of philosophical progress.

His 1928 essay, "Some Aspects of the Absolutism of Śaṅkara" ("A comparison between Śaṅkara and Hegel") addresses the methodology of cross-cultural philosophy. In this essay he criticizes the attempts by some philosophers (citing Radhakrishnan most prominently) "to infuse the spirit of the latest systems of European philosophy into the old bodies of Indian metaphysics" (p. 375). He writes instead,

> The object of the comparative study of philosophy, we believe, is to discover the dialectic movement of universal thought; but this will remain a far-off dream or a mere pious wish till the different interpretations are dragged out of their subjective seclusion in the enjoyment of an oracular prestige into the region of objective criticism. [ibid.]

In this essay, Mukerji argues persuasively and meticulously that if there are useful comparisons to be made in the history of philosophy, they require the juxtaposition of entire textual traditions to reveal the dynamics of philosophical dialectic and progress, and not the juxtaposition of individual texts. He writes:

> If...we want to profit by thinking modern problems of European philosophy in Indian terms, without misrepresentation of either and yet with a considerable clarification of both methods of thought, *we must give up the practice of finding Kant and Hegel for instance in the Upaniṣads; these are misrepresentations which do not clarify but confound problems.* (p. 379)

In Mukerji we see an example of a genuine cross-cultural philosopher, adept at philosophizing with Hegel, Śrīharṣa, Kant and Śaṅkara and conversant with the psychology of his time as well. He is no comparativist, not due to isolation, but because he sees philosophical *problems* and not *texts* as the business of philosophy.

Indeed, Mukerji's philosophical agenda, despite his concerted engagement with Western philosophy and his masterful command of English as a medium, is Indian through and through. In keeping with his own proscription on finding the solutions to modern problems in ancient texts and vocabulary, Mukerji builds upon but does not rest content with the conclusions of the classical and medieval Advaita Vedānta tradition. His central project has its origins in the *Bṛhadhāraṅyaka-Upaniṣad* and the voice of Yajñavalkya. Much, though to be sure not all, of Mukerji's philosophical energy was devoted to developing and defending a version of idealism that he regarded as thoroughly *realistic*.

Mukerji's formulation of this problem and the direction of its solution are related to that of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (1961). That is, like Wittgenstein, Mukerji recognizes that any version of transcendental idealism, including the Kantian/Vedānta version he defends, distinguishes a transcendental *subject*—the condition of the possibility of knowledge—from the *objects* of knowledge. The subject must then be unknowable, just as the eye that is the condition of the visual field stands outside of that field, invisible to itself. Mukerji never read Wittgenstein. Nonetheless, there is an affinity here, as Wittgenstein arguably

came to his thought about this problem via Schopenhauer, who acknowledges Vedic and Upaniṣadic sources of his own views about this matter. Mukerji shares these Indian roots. It is illuminating to consider Mukerji's formulation of what he took to be the central problem of philosophy—the problem of the nature of self-knowledge, posed by the idealistic conundrum: the self is at the same time that to which we are most immediately related, and so the best known of all things, and at the same time, in virtue of not being an object, is unknowable. He begins not with Descartes, as one might think on a cursory reading of Mukerji's corpus, but with the Upaniṣads:

> The doctrine that the Self the existence of which none can seriously doubt is yet essentially unknowable through the ordinary avenues of knowledge is as old as the Upaniṣads. The puzzle was started by Yajñavalkya...: That, through which everything is known, he urged, cannot itself be made an object of knowledge, none can know the knower.... This puzzle has remained ingrained in the Vedānta philosophy of a later age, and has found in Śaṅkara one of its most powerful exponents. (1938, p. 22)

Mukerji insists that the proper structure of this problem is not what it is taken to be in much of Western philosophy, viz., to navigate the choice between excluding the self from the domain of knowledge and taking it to be one more object in that domain (e.g., Kant vs. Locke). Instead, he takes up the project of understanding *how* the self is to be known *despite* not being an *object* of knowledge, exploring the possibility of a paradoxical, nonconceptual, inexpressible, but nonetheless primordial, self-knowledge.

In the West, only those few Vedānta-influenced philosophers—Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein—follow Mukerji this far. But Mukerji's thought is more Indian, more Advaita, than even theirs. For in the end, *their* self remains only a transcendental subject and a transcendental agent. The *aesthetic* dimension of transcendental subjectivity remains unexplored by Western protagonists of special self-knowledge, with the exception of a single cryptic remark in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (6.421). (It is ironic that Kant, who denies the possibility of this kind of transcendental *self-knowledge*, but who was deeply respected by Mukerji, is the European figure who devotes the most attention to the transcendental dimension of aesthetic experience in *The Critique of Judgment*.) Mukerji goes further and emphasizes, in his two monographs, the importance of the self as *enjoyer*. His emphasis on the centrality of what we might call the aesthetic dimension of transcendental subjectivity and its role in self-knowledge, consistent with, and possibly influenced by, the *līlāvāda* of Sri Aurobindo, is a uniquely Advaita Vedānta insight.

There is a deeper sense in which Mukerji's project is Indian. His account of self-knowledge is neither agnostic (like that of Kant) nor naturalist (like that of much contemporary cognitive science). Mukerji instead proposes that self-knowledge requires a distinct form of objectless self-understanding to be gained in philosophical reflection, a form of intentionality *toto genere* different from ordinary perception, more akin to *yoga-pratyakṣa* than to any cognitive attitude to be found in the post-Kantian tradition.

For all that, however, Mukerji is not a traditionalist, not an advocate of a "return to the Vedas," or of reviving ancient doctrines in the 20th century. He is sharply critical of this tendency in Radhakrishnan. His use of Śaṅkara, Śrīharṣa, and other Indian sources is like the use a contemporary Western philosopher such as McDowell might make of Aristotle, of a touchstone for thinking in a way appropriate to the present. In particular, Mukerji is a realist about the external world and is deferential to science as a measure of the empirical. His idealism is consistent with realism. He argues that, while consciousness might have *epistemological* priority, as the condition of knowledge, it has no *ontological* priority over the external world. While as *object*, any object of knowledge can be known only subject to the conditions of consciousness, objects do not depend for their existence per se on minds. *This* Advaita position is hence a critique of the transcendent view from nowhere, as opposed to a rejection of the reality of the external world.

3. *The Fate of Mukerji: Pan Indianism versus Regionalism*

What made Mukerji and his colleagues possible? And why are philosophers of Mukerji's stature unremarked today, and indeed why were they of such limited repute even in their own days? To answer these questions, we must recall the pan-Indian context in which academic philosophy was practiced as well as the curious regionalism of Indian philosophy during the period of British rule. We have already referred to a bit of the pan-Indian story. The *academic* philosophers were profoundly influenced by those national intellectual leaders but themselves had more limited spheres of influence. This was for multiple social and logistical reasons, and also due to the prevalence of in-house academic journals to which we referred earlier. As a consequence, there are a host of specific regional stories to be told, each with its own account of influences, central ideas, and political engagement. Mukerji and his colleagues, while working in the context set by Aurobindo and his colleagues, led local lives. So did the Bhattacharyyas of Calcutta, Das of Benares, and Mahadevan, Iyer, Sastri, and Hiriyanna in Madras and Mysore. National interaction occurred

only at annual IPC conferences or at the occasional seminars at Amalner. Such journals as *Allahabad University Studies* (or *Mysore University Magazine*) were never distributed nationally and now exist only in seriously moth- and termite-infested *almirahs* scattered throughout India. This is a reason for the obscurity into which so much of the work of these figures has lapsed, while the work of their nonacademic contemporaries who set their agenda remains so well known. It is also the reason for the urgency of detailed research into their work so that these regional stories can be stitched together to provide a comprehensive history of Indian philosophy in English.

Let us return again to the art world for some final comparative points. First, the disanalogies. In the case of art, we see an active and public critical comparison; in the case of philosophy, whatever public attention gets paid to it is often within a religious context (e.g., its affinity vs. contrast with Christianity, or with Hinduism), with relatively little attention paid to the work of the scholars in the academy (though note the remarks in Mukerji's presidential address that refer to active disparagement). In the case of art, the discourse is contemporary and has evolved to a very different position; in the case of philosophy, the discourse develops much later and has gone nowhere. In the case of art, alliance with a particular social movement is clearly in play; its role in the case of philosophy is at least much more obscure. Nonetheless, there are important analogies, and it is to these analogies that we here draw attention: In each case, a difference is marked between the solitary genius and a run of putative failures; in each case, the failures fail by being impaled on the same dilemma between creativity and authenticity; in each case, for extraneous reasons, the genius is accorded a pass that exempts him from this dilemma. In each case, reevaluation and attention to a broader literature is imperative.

A. C. Mukerji was indeed brilliant, but he was not unique. This period saw many individuals in the academy in a vibrant engagement with philosophical ideas and questions grounded in the Indian Vedic tradition, and reformulated in a modern context. Indian philosophers under the Raj were conscious of that classical history, as well as of the resources European philosophy could supply to its future. Colonial India was home to a creative community of philosophers in dialogue with one another, internally diverse and preoccupied with problems that are at the same time immanent in and transcendent of that Indian context.

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