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POST(-)COLONIALISM AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT :

Postcolonialism started as a movement against the marginalisation of non-Western literatures; secondly, it migrated to literary analysis and then to other fields of study, and got enriched with cultural studies; in its present avatar, it claims itself to be a textual-political practice against all forms of discriminations, including the colonial excesses. Though such phases of development are visible within the discursive practices of the non-Western intellectuals of the West, the Indian scenario still oscillates between the first two phases, without taking up/entering into the third phase of the development of postcolonial studies. Mostly the post-colonial/postcolonial studies operates within the comfort zones of the 'traditions', trying to reclaim the residues of the 'native elitist' traditions buried under the layers of colonial sedimentations. The process of decolonisation is still understood as the reclamation of the native tradition(s), and not as the emancipatory transformative politics against the various forms of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion.

In this paper, I shall attempt to elaborate the notions of two different personalities, namely N. Muthu Mohan and A. Raghuramaraju, who talked about philosophical issues in the context of post-colonial India. Though the selection of these two personalities of philosophical discourses in post-colonial context is arbitrary, it tells about the two different strands of philosophical discourses available within the post-colonial context in India.

KEYWORDS : *Postcolonialism, Indian Philosophy, Oriental and colonial representations, Decolonisation.*

INTRODUCTION

What we mean by postcolonialism today? When we look at the history of the postcolonial studies, we could witness, at least, 3 distinctive phases in its avatar against the forms of colonial discriminations and representations. First of all, it started as a movement against the marginalisation of non-western literatures; secondly, it migrated to literary analysis and then to other fields of study, with the disclosure of cultural studies as a transgression of disciplinary boundaries (LG 2012: 15); in its present avatar, it claims itself to be a textual-political practice against all forms of discriminations, including the colonial excesses (VC 2013: 1-2 & RSS 2006: 25-7). Though such phases of development are visible within the discursive practices of the non-western intellectuals of the West, the Indian scenario still oscillates between the first two phases, without taking up/entering into the third phase of the development of postcolonial studies. Mostly the post-colonial/postcolonial studies operates within the comfort zones of the 'traditions', trying to reclaim the residues of the 'native' (elitist) traditions buried under the layers of colonial sedimentations. The process of decolonisation is still understood as the reclamation of the native tradition(s), and not as the emancipatory transformative politics against the various forms of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion.

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Within the field of philosophical studies, very rarely it has taken upon itself the political practice against discriminative practices, that too not necessarily from the 'mainstream' academic scholars of philosophy but from the Left-leaning intellectuals, using at times the tools of Marxism, Ambedkarism, Periyarism, post-structuralism and other critical theories. Rather, the re-reading of the text from the native standpoint is given prominence (at times using the western tools) and so the postcolonial studies remain as a literary practice, or what Dayakrishna would call as intellectual exercise/game, within the 'mainstream' academic philosophical discourses.

However, in this paper, I shall attempt to elaborate the notions of two different personalities, namely N. Muthu Mohan and A. Raghuramaraju, who talked about philosophical issues in the context of post-colonial India. Though the selection of these two personalities of philosophical discourses in post-colonial context is arbitrary, it tells about the two different strands of philosophical discourses available within the post-colonial context in India. In this sense, this paper is not an exhaustive account of the post-colonial philosophical discussions in Indian context, nor does it explain the entire spectrum of the postcolonial philosophical discourses in Indian context. Due to the spacial and temporal constraints too, the scope of this paper is limited to these two personalities.

POST(-)COLONIAL DIVERGENCES IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

What is 'Indian' in Indian philosophy? Whether the word 'Indian' in Indian Philosophy is inclusive of the multi-lingual nationalities within the Indian territory? This question strikes one's mind when one begins to talk about Indian philosophy. The word 'Indian' in 'Indian Philosophy' is almost synonymous with Sanskrit, except the Buddhist and Jain canonical works written in Pali and Prakrit. Also, the classification of philosophical texts into orthodox and heterodox systems is based on their allegiance to or the repudiation of the authority of Vedas, as if there existed/exists no text apart from Vedas within the Indian territory that can claim to be a 'philosophical text'. Hence, the 'Indian' in Indian philosophy is presumed to form an equivalential chain with Sanskrit and the acceptance/repudiation of the authority of Veda and Vedanta. This, in turn, can be equated with the cultural-national understanding of India as equivalent of Hindi-Hindu-Hindutva. If the indigenous postcolonial theoretical framework of Subaltern studies is applied on the 'Indian' in the 'Indian philosophy', the Indian philosophy would appear only as 'bourgeois-nationalist elitism' (RG 2010: 1-8), as the linguistic minorities, gender and subaltern philosophical schools have been excluded from the framework of 'Indian philosophy'.

Further, the definition of 'Indian' in Indian philosophy emerges within the European Orientalist representation of India, as the German Orientalist, Max Muller, classified the Sanskrit texts as the 'Sacred Books of the East', leaving out, for example, the classical Tamil writings which portray the mundane aspects of reality. In spite of the fact that the British Orientalist, Robert Caldwell, claimed in his book, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, the classical nature of Dravidian group of languages, the native elites co-opted with the German Orientalist in claiming superiority among the natives. The momentous importance attributed to Aryan and Dravidian divide among the natives by the Orientalists, and the co-optation of the native elites with the Orientalist understanding in the selective appropriation of texts as 'Indian', still remain as the colonial residue in the definition of 'Indian philosophy'.

Further I would like to turn the attention towards the existing framework of curriculum for philosophy that is followed in most of the universities/colleges in post-colonial India. Some of the discrepancies in the formation of curriculum for philosophy are as follows: 1) the framework of syllabus assumes or presumes that philosophy is available only in Sanskritic literatures and not in other spoken languages of the Indian subcontinent, 2) the Indian materialistic traditions are always added in the margins of the syllabus, not giving the similar space equivalent to that of the 'non-materialistic' traditions, by naming that the 'Indian' philosophy is an idealist/spiritualist tradition, and 3) the philosophical systems which owe their allegiance to the Vedic-Vedantic-Sanskritic philosophical systems are so systemically included in the main framework of the syllabus, leaving aside the philosophies which questions the basic assumptions of those systems or keeping them as special or

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optional papers. Does it follow the patterns of Orientalist representations which treated the Orient as exotic, mystic-spiritual?

Some of the problems that are plaguing the philosophical activity in India can be summarised as follows: 1) the philosophy should be studied in abstraction, severing its relation with the concrete contextuality, 2) the philosophy in India is more related with identities and idealism than the actuality, 3) the real problems of the masses have nothing to do with 'philosophical enterprise', 4) the common masses have no 'knowledge' or their practical knowledge has no value for 'philosophical musings' but it is the onus of the native elites to 'invent truths' over and above what is existing, 5) there is no possibility for hermeneutical understandings of the text for those outside (native etic?) the 'invented tradition' of the philosophical discourse in India and that the 'knowledge' is singular/absolute/ linear/monolithic, and more so that 6) the physical labouring classes could not have any 'philosophy' as they are not involved in intellectual/mental labour. Can we call it native Orientalism or merely as a native-elitist co-optation with the European Orientalism, which propounds its derivative reactionary discourses against the imperialist forces for its own share in the hegemonic imperialism, on the basis of an 'imagined nationality'? Whether decolonisation itself is understood as a political process directed towards its share within the hegemonic enterprise of imperialism?

With this critical understanding of the definition of 'Indian Philosophy' and the philosophical activities in post-colonial India, I would like to venture into the two different strands of philosophical discourses available within the post-colonial context in India. The selection of two different strands is not exhaustive, but they show the different approaches to postcolonial philosophy.

1) Classical Presences as Postcolonial Philosophy

In this section, we shall attempt to understand what Raghuramaraju discusses about the post-colonial philosophical context in India. In his book, *Enduring Colonialism*, Raghuramaraju discusses about the modernity of tradition as the postcolonial response to the exegesis of the European colonial masters. He says, "While the modern in the West is without survivors from the past…, the uniqueness of India lies in retaining several significant aspects from the past, thereby, maintaining certain amount of continuity" (RR 2012: ix). It is understood as postcolonial gazing back at the West, subverting the very notion of modernity as the continuation of the tradition, though there are continuities of the tradition in the modern Indian context. By way of rephrasing the problem we can say that there will be the relapse or superimposition of traditional aspects in modernity, if one gives undue emphasis to tradition over the ideals of modernity; that the discriminatory aspects of tradition may override the concerns of modernity if there is undue emphasis of tradition without a proper critique of tradition.

The contemporary absences in the philosophical responses to the emerging socio-cultural issues of the post-nationalist period are addressed by him with the classical philosophical presences in the post-colonial context. Being aware of the past, and yet not necessarily returning to the past, in the modern context was informed by the colonialism itself, according to him (RR 2012: 10). Understanding one's past that belongs to an earlier age in terms of the present is accompanied with shift in language from Sanskrit to English, according to him. The reappropriation and critical interpretation of the Indian philosophical past in the language of 'modern' Western thought is a hermeneutical enterprise where two intellectual traditions come together in the act of understanding, in all its creative significance and power, according to him (RR 2012: 11)

Criticising the Saidian framework which treats the Orientalist knowledge as representations of the East, he takes recourse to Sudipta Kaviraj who treats the Orientalist representations as outright ideological rejection of the Eastern knowledge systems (RR 2012: 3). By expunging the relation between representations and power, the problem of the colonial discourse on the native systems of knowledge is treated as an ideological issue of power relations. Whether the complexity of colonial discourses, which hinge upon layers of reality as it is elaborated by Said, can be reduced merely to an ideological issue between the East and the West needs to be tested. Further, by replacing the Foucaldian combination of knowledge/power with ignorance/power, he says, "The body of scholarship available to Foucault is knowledge whereas the same cannot be said to be available with regard to colonial

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scholarship. It is this difference that Said does not take into account" (RR 2012: 4). Elsewhere, he stresses the point, by quoting Vivekananda, that the scholarship was forbidden to the masses by the elites within the native masses through the practice of casteism. Hence, the ignorance which he talks about is not merely rooted in external colonialism only, but it is an offshoot of the practice of graded equality of the caste system based on Varna Dharma too.

Responding to Sheldon Pollock's arguments regarding the 'death of Sanskrit' and the 'reformulation of old problems in entirely new discursive idioms' due to the 'vernacular cultural consciousness' during the vernacular millennium, Raghuramaraju rightly points out that "The mood of morning (for Sanskrit) has overshadowed his recognition of the events of celebration (of the rise of regional languages)" (RR 2012: 6-7). Very interestingly, he finds the modern absences be filled by the Vaddera Chandidas' *Desire and Liberation*, a philosophical text written by the Telugu writer in English. However the text still remains unnoticed and not properly recognised in the larger philosophical spectrum in India, he laments. The classical presences in the modern absences find its replacement in the regional languages, as the regional languages became the carriers of modern responses to the problems posed by modernity in India. This turn of philosophy from the Sanskrit to the regional languages responds to the problem of modern absences in 'Indian' philosophy, yet remain unrecognised on par with the classical presences in modern discourses induced by the Sanskritic literatures. This reminds us of the postcolonial apathy towards the regional philosophical discourses in Indian philosophical scenario.

Though Raghuramaraju identifies the shift to the regional languages for the philosophical discourses as the modern presence which responds to the colonial representations of absences in Indian philosophy, still it lacks in its response to the social subalternity in Indian context. Though the linguistic subalternity is addressed with the shift to regional languages, the social and cultural issues of gender and caste find their absence in the Indian philosophical discourses still.

2) Native Orientalism and Internal Colonialism

H.S. Silverman, while commenting upon the intricate relationship between the philosophy and the non-philosophy, says, "Philosophy is broader than and in many cases, other than the ways in which it is commonly construed, and there is richness and profundity to a whole domain of philosophy that has for a long time operated outside the self-proclaimed mainstream… Our enterprise begins with the question, what is philosophy's relation to non-philosophy? A question that has long awaited an answer… It embraces the relation between philosophy and other discourses as a real problem" (HSS 1988: 1-2). Here the dialectical relation between the philosophy and its non-philosophical *apriori* conditions gets formulated. However, the problem with the philosophical discourses of the Vedic system is that they try to get rid off from their non-philosophical foundations by claiming a status beyond the spacio-temporal realities. In this way, they attempt to gain a self-proclaimed absolute status to themselves and to keep their non-philosophical assumptions beyond the ambit of interrogation, and thereby reifying the authority and power relations. This is the way one enters into the understanding of the cultural politics of traditional India, says Muthu Mohan (NMM 2002: 5). Using the Foucauldian notions of the relation between the knowledge production and power, as is the case with the Saidian Orientalism, and the intricate relation between the philosophy and the non-philosophy, Muthu Mohan enters into the philosophical activities in post-colonial India as a self-critique, subverting the so-called western tools towards an emancipatory politics of transformation.

While articulating the cultural politics of Vedantic philosophy in India, he invokes the shifts of *episteme* from the renaissance epoch to the recent epoch, and identifies the movement of *episteme* from the resemblances of words to the separation of words from things and phenomenon. Consequently, he says that the inter-space between the words and things/phenomena serves as the paradigm for manipulation of knowledge discourses. "It is in this inter-space between words and things that thought and consciousness have achieved their autonomy and have established their republic of re-presentation and even self-referentiality (NMM 2002: 8)." Sociologically speaking, it is the alienated existence which manipulates the space between the words and things to achieve auto-nomical existence. It gets clearly

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manifested in philosophical discourses, especially Advaita, in India by defining Brahman, which insulates and insures itself from the worldly realities terming them as *maya*, only to achieve its autonomy and its non-relatedness with the 'other'. In this process, along with its autonomy, it achieves absolutist self-referential status through the *neti* marga and elevates itself as the non-relative absolute power.

By referring to Foucault's work, 'Madness and Civilization', Muthu Mohan exhibits how irrationality is defined and identified as the 'asymmetrical other' of the rational discourse. "Madness was defined as animality by which it was meant that it was asocial, while reason was equated to human and social" (NMM 2002: 9). Here knowledge discourse gets embodied. Referring to the Advaitic definition of self-referential Brahman, or for that matter any Vedic system of philosophy which raise the Brahman to its absolute status in defiance of the worldly realities – by ascribing *mayic* status to the world and its beings – imposes power over the natural and social bodies. By terming them as *maya* or *jada*, the spacio-temporal realities, the natural and social bodies are ascribed the status of non-existence only to keep alive the existence and the authority of self-referential Brahman. By terming the Brahman as unchanging absolute reality, the aspect of change is eliminated from the real. Interpreting this into sociological terms, it may mean that any attempt to change or revolt against the existing hierarchical/graded social structure will be pronounced as 'unreal'. And by eliminating the change as unreal, the power relations can be kept intact in the social structure. By terming the Brahman as unchanging real and the changing world as unreal, zero-tolerance is maintained towards the 'other' who aspire for change in social power relations. And it is an aspect of non-philosophy entering in the guise of Brahman-philosophy which in turn is imposed on the social and natural bodies. Foucault talks about modern forms of knowledge where reason is understood as a principle which keeps the society active and creative. However, in Indian context, the hegemonic conception of Brahman forbids the reality to be an active principle by eulogising the passivity as absolute truth.

Interestingly, Foucault talks about panopticon-positions in the French prisons. Panopticon is an arrangement to watch the movement and activities of prisoners without their knowledge, by situating guards in the towering structures of the prison. "Panopticon is the technique (technology of power) for controlling large numbers of people in a particular institution, or what Foucault calls discipline. It leads to total power over the inmates. The major effect of the panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and (a sense of) permanent visibility that assures the autonomic functioning of power" (MP 1985: 102). Referring to S. Radhakrishnan's commentary on Brahma Sutra, Muthu Mohan says that the Brahman of Advaita is also constructed in such a way. In his commentary on Brahma Sutra, S. Radhakrishnan makes this role of the idea of Brahman/self very clear. For he says, "Brahman is not the object of any other consciousness. All other things are *drasya* or objects of consciousness, while Brahman is the *drsta*, the pure consciousness which comprehends all objects." Continuing his arguments, he says, "Being (Brahman) points to the power of that which resists non-being *maya*" (SR 1971: 32, 119). The relation between philosophical discourse and the power comes into the open, which is normally hidden under the carpet of philosophical discourse. The panopticon positioning of the idea of Brahman has its social relevance. By usurping and controlling all the aspects of consciousness from the masses, the idea of Brahman achieves its panopticon position. From the panopticon position, the idea of Brahman exerts power over the bodies, controls their movements, disciplines and punishes the bodies and rejects any attempt to change the existing the social structure, by naming it as unreal. The intricate relations of power and Brahman-knowledge of Advaita/other such systems of philosophical discourses become clear here. This is one of the ways in which the power is exerted over the social bodies in the guise of philosophical discourses, camouflaging them as neutral/objective/absolute, in 'Indian' philosophical discourse.

The discourses of Muthu Mohan remind the words of Sartre in his preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. "In order to triumph, the national revolution must be socialist; if its career is cut short, if the native bourgeoisie takes over power, the new state, in spite of its formal sovereignty, remains in the hands of the imperialists... Thus the unity of the Third World is not yet achieved. It is a work in progress... This is what Fanon explains to his brothers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: we must

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achieve revolutionary socialism all together everywhere, or else one by one we will be defeated by our former masters. He hides nothing, neither weaknesses, nor discords, nor mystification. Here, the movement gets off to a bad start; there, after a striking initial success it loses momentum; elsewhere it has come to a standstill, and if it is to start again, the peasants must throw their bourgeoisie overboard" (FF 1963: 11-12). The threat from the native elitism, its Orientalist co-optations and internal colonial designs weigh more in the postcolonial philosophical discussions of Muthu Mohan in post-colonial context.

CONCLUSION

With the pronouncement of postcolonial studies as the localised, perspectival and contextualised reading, the relevance of the universal in the local and regional contexts is conveniently forgotten or wilfully submerged[1]. While giving importance to localised reading practices, postcolonial studies in India not only avoids postcolonialism as a political practice, but it also obstructs the possibility of globalised convergence of varieties of suppressed elements of post-colonial reality in the face of aggressive capital-induced and market-oriented globalisation of the imperialist forces. While the markets blur the borders of nations, the post-colonial forces still operate within the borders of cultural nationalism only to be the subservient of the continuing colonial practices of political economy by the national capitalists.

Being situated as a subaltern within the post-colonial philosophical discourses in India, decolonisation means a two-way struggle here; one is directed towards the external colonialism and the other is directed towards the internal colonialism which still operates, maintains, reifies, regulates and recreates the graded hierarchy among its own people.

It may be interesting to note here that while the elitist discourse subverts the postcolonial discourses and the knowledge paradigms of the West to maintain and strengthen the position of authority and power of the pan-Indian identity invented by the colonial discourses, the subaltern postcolonial discourses use the same as two-sided sword to question both the internal-colonial authority of the 'invented tradition' and representations of pan-Indian Vedic-Sanskritic identity which naturally flows from the colonial exegesis as well as the external colonial mis(s)representation of the native subaltern.

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[1] For further discussions on this issue of converging the forces against casteism and racism and the impediments against it by the nationalist forces, see Balmurli Natrajan and Paul Greenough (*Eds.*), *Against Stigma – Studies in Caste, Race and Justice since Durban*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2009.

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