

## A USEFUL COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

### INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION A READER'S GUIDE

by Bibhu Padhi and Minakshi Padhi

(D.K. Printworld, pp. 414)

*“Today I felt so calm, so Indian.”* Nietzsche

The Muirs (the first English translators of Kafka) and the Durants, are distinguished husband-wife scholar-collaborators and now the Padhis have joined this elect band. Bibhu Padhi teaches English (he has also published four book of poems and a book-length study of D.H. Lawrence) and Minakshi Padhi teaches Philosophy at SCS College at Puri-on-Sea, Orissa.

The authors have taken upon themselves this stupendous task of erudition and produced this admirable book that should surely provide a comprehensive and useful survey of Indian Philosophy and Religion to any enthusiastic reader. To the scholar and the student it offers the varied observations and perspectives of many brilliant scholars and translators on various regions of Indian philosophy. — Das Gupta S.N, Radhakrishnan S., Frauwallner Erich, Hiriyanna M., Sharma C.D., Zahner R.C., Lannoy Richard, Zimmer Heinrich, Avalon Arthur, Winternitz Maurice, Swami Gambhirananda, Bhattacharya Haridas, Sami Sharvananda, Puligandla R., Sastri K.A. Nilakanta, Verdu Alfonso, Thittila Maha Thera U. to name but a few.

To create a continuous and homogenous narrative out of such vast and heterogenous material is surely a fine achievement.

The introductory chapter elucidates competently and briefly the Veda-s, the Upanishad-s and the Bhagavad-Gitā and lays the foundations of this succinct study. The Chārvakā and Indian Materialism (which hardly had adherents to its anarchic attitude in later times) is treated in the next chapter. The well written chapters on Jainism and Buddhism are followed by four chapters dealing with the six classical schools of Indian Philosophizing — Vaisesika and Nyāya, Sāmkhya and Yoga, Purva Mimāmsā and Uttara Mimāmsā. The chapter on Uttara Mimāmsā (Vedānta) deals rather elaborately with Advaita, Vishishtādvaita, Dvaita and other interpretations of Vedānta. The last chapter is a hesitant and cursory account of Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

I have no space to review the chapters individually and so I will use the available space to make some general comments.

The authors statement that they have adopted an objective attitude towards the subject is somewhat misleading. Let me clarify. For a general text of this type on Indian Philosophy there are roughly one of the four attitudes the authors are forced to adopt a priori. 1) The materialist, rationalist, objective sceptical (we may say, the Chārvāka type), 2) The cosmopolitan idealist academic (we may say Radhakrishnan type), 3) Austere, self-contained oriental as Das Gupta is (there is hardly any reference to western philosophers in his monumental work on Indian Philosophy), 4) Mystical fantastic and deeply religious and Yogic as Sri Aurobindo is. In this tentative classification we may perhaps say that Padhis have chosen a cosmopolitan

sympathetic and idealist attitude tending towards the oriental.

The difference between mythology and reality is merely another later mythology in the pre-history of man. In the Indian context All the Philosophical perspectives [not really systems] except Chārvāka considered Divine Mythologies, Divine Mantra-s, Tantra-s, Yantra-s, vast array of microcosmic rituals with macrocosmic relations (Please note the Infinite chaos-theoretic (non-localized) possibilities in the vast universe of perceptions) as a part of their philosophical perceptions. In fact Philosophy was perceiving various levels of mystic consciousness and finally Perceiving the very ultimate reality, the experience transcending all conception of it whether it be Nirvāna, Brahma Jnānam, the State of the Jina or Bhagavat Sākshātkāram (the realization of God). The Kantian “thing in itself” is a speculative concept. Kant theoretically defends “the thing in itself” but the Indian mystics wanted to know realize God, Brahman attain Moksha, Nirvāna, Mukti, the state of being one with the infinite. Upanishad-s are Post-kantian Synthetic a priori and Categorically imperatively and so are Buddha and Mahāvira. Therefore to call any portion of Indian mystical literature, as pre-critical in the Kantian sense of the term as Radhakrishnan says (quoted in the book, p.3) is not fair. Briefly we may assert, Kant thought — Gautama sought and Kant wrote — Gautama Found! Therefore I feel, that the names of recent European academic philosophers like Bergson, Bradley, Husserl, John Stuart Mill etc. have little relevance in this book even as passing references.

The three basic concepts (which the author calls Lannoy’s) the magic power of the Word, the flux of all things and the total identity between the knowing subject and the reality known, certainly indicate the basic spirit of Indian philosophy.

But there are more inherent similarities. The Pranava (Aum) is taken for granted by all Indian schools including the Buddhists and the Jains. The vast expanses of Kāla the Cosmic cycles, the existences of other worlds of consciousness, labyrinth transmigratory existences in diverse worlds, the perpetual concern with death and meta-mortal universes of perception and also the meta-logical category “All” which includes All are some other salient features that run through all Indian philosophizing except the Chārvākas.

The last chapter on Hindu Gods and Goddesses could have been sympathetic to the religious people and thrown some useful light on Indian mythology and religion and their essential stature and relevance in general to Indian modes of philosophizing. But the authors are insistent on a post-Darwinian, post-Freudian ethno-historico anthropological stance on all matters. Look at the following conjectural passages to see what I mean.

“The Brāhmins accomplished this by amalgamating the Vedic *Vishnu* with the chief animals and fetishes worshipped by the tribals ‘dwelling on the fringes of Aryan settlements in the north-west’ as well as the chief heroes revered by the Aryans (in much the same way as the Brāhmins accomplished this, in the case of Saivism, by identifying the Vedic *Rudra* with the demons, the *linga*-fetish and some animals worshipped by the tribal people), thus establishing the cult of Vaishnavism.” (p. 363)

“Before she was drawn into the company of *Siva*, *Durga* was a virgin goddess of the Vindhya mountains famous for her chastity, but delighting in wine, flesh and animal sacrifices (Haydon, 112).” (p. 384)

Compare these with the great Yogi Sri Aurobindo's aphorisms (not from the book under review).

“Sometimes one is lead to think that only those things really matter which have never happened; for beside them most historic achievements seem almost pale and ineffective.”

“They say that the Gospels are forgeries and Krishna a creation of the poets. Thank God then for the forgeries and bow down before the creators.” (Sri Aurobindo—Thoughts and Aphorisms; p. 40,42)

Perhaps the Gods and Goddesses don't yield themselves to cursory reviews. I must also confess that the words “cult” and “fetish” used profusely in this chapter injured the vanity of this religious person.

A little hesitantly I note the following proof-reading errors or are they printer's devils in the book!

book lenght (book length) [book cover back inner flap.]

chatanā (chetanā) [p. 112,1.9]

yogāchā (yogāchāra) [p. 145,1.last]

sollogism (syllogism) [p. 186,1.4]

limination (elimination) [p. 213,1.19]

purusa (puruṣa) [from Das Gupta – History – vol.1, p.273 (p. 217,1.9)]

pres (press) [p.218,1.12]

Thus is cannot be said (Thus it cannot be said) [p. 229,1.18]

We have seek the aid of the Veda (We have to seek the aid of the Veda) [p.251,1.4]

injuctive (injunctive) [p.251,1.35]

Chhāndogya (Chāndogya) [p.266,1.27] [p.381,1.43] [p.382,1.9]  
svaruta (svarupa) [p.272,1.12]  
consciounsess (consciousness) [p.275,1.15]  
deserts (desires) [p.301,1.38]  
deistist (deitist) [p.308,1.32]  
time knowledge (true knowledge) [p.324,1.41]  
Paramātmān (Paramātman) [p.329,1.36]  
fetichism (fetishism) [p.349,1.21]  
Savisim (Saivisim) [p.361,1.27]  
exampler (example) [p.365,1.46]  
Nilakantha (Nilakanta) [p.369,1.29]  
Bāli (Bali) [p.370,1.23]  
too profane (to profane) [p.385,1.28]  
dukhah (dukha) [p.394,1.34]  
hetvāvḥāsa (hetvābhāsa) [p.394,1.47]

“*apratibha*” occurs on page 180 twice, translated as “repetition” and “noningenuity”. Repetition is *āvartana*. “*Hiranyagarbha*” is translated as “germ of gold” (p.356): “primordial luminous cosmic egg” is perhaps a better translation. “Sankara” spelt as “Samkara” and “John Stuart Mill” spelt as “John Stewart Mill” looked strange echoing with unintended punditrik insinuations. I must also mention that a few letters of a few words (though not too many) lie self-obliterated by the idiosyncrasy of the printing machine. In a comprehensive scholarly venture of such magnitude, literary art, accuracy and tenacity these errors are somewhat evanes-

cently disenchanting. Perhaps a brief errata could be appended to the book. The bibliography for each chapter is excellent and the glossary is done with care. But some important words – eg. Om (Pranava), Buddha, Siva, Vishnu, Yoga, Turiya etc. are excluded and the translation of one word *linga* as the “phallic symbol of Siva” is too simple minded. *Linga* in its root sense means “a divine mysterious Sign”. To enhance the value of this book perhaps (!) chapters on the *Bhakti sampradāyā-s*, Indian music, dance, the plastic arts, *Tantra*, modern mystics and Yogis could well be added on for a later edition.

I surmise that it would be appropriate to conclude this review with two parables by two Indian *mahātmās* and an aphorism by another (not from the book). I have taken the liberty to redraft the parables from memory.

“So difficult it is to obtain a human form Ānanda” the distantly voiced Buddha continued, “Imagine an ocean as big as you want it to be. Imagine a little fish about as big as your thumb. The fish swims in the Infinite Waters. Then Ānanda imagine that there is somewhere else anywhere else floating in this ocean, a little ring about the circumference of the fish’s head. The probability of a human birth is as rare as the head of this fish in its labyrinth journey through the never ending ocean of the infinite, entering this ring.”

“*Brahma Jnānam* is like the grains of sand of a vast beach. Ordinary *Brahma Jnāni-s* have picked up a grain or two. Great *Brahma Jnāni-s* like Suka Brahman have picked up seven or eight grains. The rest remains to be picked up.”  
[Rāmakrishna Paramahansa]

“If the Highest Truth is not known , the study of the scriptures is useless: If the

highest Truth is known too, the study of the scriptures is useless.” [Ādi Śaṅkarācārya  
– Viveka Cūḍāmaṇi – Śloka-59]

Blasphemously I close! Om Nama Shivāya!