

I have come to view my life as a writer as a compulsive and desperate quest for the meaning of freedom. Perhaps it is this central concern that lends some consistency to my irregular and fragmented articulations of joy and pain, solitude and society, the surrender of love and the wrath of revolt:

Once in a poem on my birth, I wrote:

*My grandmother was insane.
As her madness ripened into death,
My uncle, a miser, kept her
In our store room, covered in straw.
My grandmother dried up, burst,
Her seeds flew out of the windows.
The sun came and the rain,
One seedling grew up into a tree
Whose lusts bore me.
Can I help writing poems
About monkeys with teeth of gold?*

(‘Granny’, 1973)

This insane business of playing with words whose meanings are interpreted in a variety of ways in a variety of contexts and whose full realization is infinitely postponed, has always given me a sense of the distance I must walk, of the endless births I must take, like the Bodhisattva of the Jataka tales. This strange experience, tense and intense at the same time, is - I hope and fear - the poet’s freedom. It is the pleasant agony of being poured into a thousand moulds, of talking in many tongues and being talked to in turn, of being picked up by a stranger who recognizes himself in my words, which are now his to play upon. It is the feverish ecstasy of ceaseless deconstruction and reconstruction, of dissolution into the myriad possibilities of discourse, into the myriad subjects that readings reveal. It is the realization of the gay relativity of popular carnival opposed to everything that is readymade and finished - to all pretence at immutability, the gaiety of being ever open, ever expanding.

There indeed was a time when I had thought of a poet’s freedom as a cent of land I could call my own, where I could cultivate meanings that would ever be mine. Freedom then was the celebration of the self-indulgent individualist who failed to discern the private appropriation of meaning through an inevitable reduction of its plurality. But experience has taught me that dispossession, and not possession, is the way of freedom. It is a total giving of all the gold that solitude

The Many Meanings of Freedom

K. Satchidanandan

fills me with, when poetry chooses to speak through me. The pleasure of writing, though apparently private and erotic, is really the festival of the collective from whose treasury of signs, symbols, myths, archetypes, rhymes and rhythms, I choose my instruments of perceptual re-orientation through linguistic subversion. My writing room is dense with people. My loneliness gets its tongue from my kin. My inspiration is but an irresistible awakening of the society I carry within. My thematic inventions are only a craftsman’s doodlings of old gargoyles. The most original of my metaphors, even, do not come from a vacuum. Even my attempts at dymythologization only

womenfolk melting like pale moons in their domestic inferno and our children, clipped of their angel’s wings, fall headlong into the monstrous structures of oppression we dutifully build for them. I have seen prisons open like the black Book of Judgement to receive patriots everywhere and sunflowers growing nails and fangs in the conspiracies of the wicked, while mad men sing from the rooftops about the immanent years of wrath. I have watched too revolutions that set out to liberate man turn into tyrannies, as guiding stars vanish and wise men stand tongue-tied before the bloody rituals of persecution.

All this has turned my poetry

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contribute to the mythology of a new world.

This realization has not been without its ethico-political implications. A poet’s freedom today is indivisibly associated with an inescapable awareness of the human predicament as embodied in one’s concrete conjuncture, even with a sense of shame provoked by the unheroic fate of the modern Prometheus, eaten away by worms rather than violated by vultures. My evolution as a poet has meant a gradual socialization of my persistent sense of the tragic and the ironic. The street has taught me its lessons. I have seen men possessed by hunger break upon their neighbours’ hearts for a grain of rice and young men bleed on our highways in vain battles, like rats before a ravaging plague, while our clumsy gods and clumsier leaders pounce on our poor in the twilight hour with their tridents, scimitars and rifles. I have watched our

black with pain and protest, pain that subverts the false optimism that the rulers everywhere try to drug their subjects with, and protest against the colonization of our unconscious by the dark mechanisms of mass communication that threaten to destroy our native ways of seeing and saying. Fighting this intrusion of contradictory consciousness demands the development of a calisthenics of combat, a renewal, and not a repetition, of our varied regional modes of perception and articulation. Such a decolonization of image and significance certainly foresees commitment - which does not necessarily involve an explicit alliance with a specific political formation. It is a broader concern for the sufferings and struggles of one’s people in their different dimensions.

Where does metaphysics come in this ontological quest for freedom? My poetry was profoundly

metaphysical to begin with. In poem after poem I contemplated death and hinted at the possibility of deliverance, deeply inspired as I was by the Upanishads in the existentialist sixties. Time, rather the conflict between time as moment and time as eternity, was central to my poetic preoccupations. Strange as it may seem, it continued into the turbulent seventies. It is quite possible to read my poems of that period of radicalism from a metaphysical point of view, for death continued to obsess me, this time not in its abstract universal incarnation but in its more concrete and tangible forms as the death by the wayside, death in the battle, death as martyrdom, death as suicide - that is, death as choice rather than destiny. The anxieties of ‘Summer Rain’, of ‘Resurrection’ or of ‘The Empty Room’, for example, are also philosophical, not purely social. I remember how, while discussing the script of a film on the martyrs of Kayyur in Kerala, I got bogged down in the question of the validity of martyrdom: how much of it is ontological choice, how much social imposition, how much of it is death and how much life, how much revolution and how much despair? No need to say, the film remained a dream. Those who care for subterranean voices can hear *Isavasya* in ‘Summer Rain’, its quest for resolution, its concern for another peace.

Morphological revolutions in poetry are inane when unsupported by perceptual ones, and perceptual revolutions are ineffective when unaccompanied by morphological ones. Both of them are ultimately spiritual in their import. By ‘spiritual’ I mean that great tradition of agony and revolt that flows from Blake to Brecht and from Tu-fu to Kim-chi Hai, that which echoes Vyasa’s cry for justice in a world torn by conflicting ideals, and still recognizes with Valmiki that there is no enemy like passive grief (*nasthi soka samo ripu:*). This is a spirituality that disbelieves all simplifications about existence and finds itself in permanent opposition to all forms of tyranny, untruth and injustice. The Buddha to me has been a symbol of this philosophical revolt. Perhaps that is why he keeps being born again and again as the sad, the wise and the angry man in my lines. Perhaps, of late, this vein has grown stronger in my poetry. This is not without reason. I have come to believe that purely materialist

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This is the fiftieth year of India's independence.

Besides the ongoing celebration this has also occasioned numerous reflections on various aspects of Indian society. The most important and immediate context of these reflections is the postcolonial journey of a people, a passage which began at the moments of the midnight hours fifty years ago when India 'awoke to life and freedom'. What has happened to the ideas of freedom? What does 'independence' signify today? How do we assess the freedom-discourse in India? In a period of momentous changes, what would be the contours of *swaraj*? Finally, in a society fractured by numerous divisions what is the future of the universal claims of the freedom-discourse?

During the height of anticolonial struggle, freedom or independence of India from the British rule was an important objective as well as a desirable goal for the Indians. As independence approached, two important streams of thought came to be associated with the idea of freedom. First, for the leaders of the anticolonial movement, freedom essentially meant an opportunity of reconstructing and controlling the postcolonial state. With this their freedom-discourse got entangled with the language of modernity in two ways. In a country ravaged by centuries of colonialism this had an important historical role at the time. It helped create, to use Nehru's metaphoric expression, the 'temples of modern India'. Thus, the assertion of freedom got associated with state intervention. It also became integral to the effort of creating a democratic political order in India. Inevitably it meant a codified set of rights for the citizens. This, among other things, presaged the colonial subjects into citizenship of an independent sovereign republic.

The second stream of thought occupied a different discursive space. Unlike the first, its emphasis was not on control but on equity and a just social and economic order. According to this thinking, freedom was an empowering idea which should offer the people at the margins of the Indian society their lost power and autonomy. The idiom in which this discourse clothed itself varied: from *mukti* to *ramarajya*, *swaraj* and so on.

In some sense, history of freedom-discourse in postcolonial India can be interpreted as the contestation between these two streams. It is primarily a story of the confrontation

Discourse on Freedom and Its Challenges

Bishnu N. Mohapatra

and a growing schism between the two. The differences between these two streams should not be seen as those that exist between the negative and the positive conceptions of freedom/liberty, a dichotomy that informs much of liberal political theory since Thomas Hobbes. In some sense both views were goal-oriented and both considered overcoming of constraints essential for the realization of freedom. Yet, for political reasons some of the major constraints such as restructuring agrarian relations, social inequalities were not addressed. As a result, the radical possibilities underlying freedom-discourse were thwarted. The politics, particularly in the last three decades in India, have come to challenge such a limited view of freedom and has forced the idea to respond to the issues of social indignities and equity.

Some of these aspirations were not altogether absent from the minds of the drafters of Indian constitution. As in most democracies, the chapter on rights is treated as fundamental to the Indian constitution. Its justifiable character made the infringement of rights by public institutions and other individuals, at least in principle, punishable by/in court of law. Indian constitution also guaranteed a set of civil liberties for the citizens with which they could participate in the newly-formed democracy. Establishment of a regime of rights always presupposes certain background assumptions. A notion of 'equal concern' is usually assumed, which in turn justifies the creation of a set of opportunities for the citizens. Whether they are able to actually exercise them or not, however, is a separate matter. Individual as the bearer of rights is yet another background assumption. However, immediate realities at the time of independence made the makers of Indian constitution reformulate some these assumptions.

A perceptive thinker like Ambedkar, for example, was well aware of the gap between the formal equality embodied in the constitution and the deeper inequalities that existed in Indian

society. It was also clear to many at the time that to keep the individual as the only pillar of a freedom-discourse would be deeply problematic. It is not surprising then that all the minorities were represented in the special committee looking into the provisions of fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy, and that a minority sub committee was an important part of the deliberations. More than the question of minority rights, the Indian constitution attempted to reconcile the demands of pluralism and the claims of rights. This reconciliation has neither been smooth nor free from problems.

As the logic of democracy unfolded in India, more and more people hitherto marginalized entered the arena of politics. Often the assertion of rights was articulated in a collectivist language and in the last three decades it has fed into large scale political mobilization. Mobilization of castes and communities in recent years has always invoked the rights of the group vis-à-vis societal resources and political representation. To achieve a creative interaction between the individual and collective/community rights is the challenge that the freedom-discourse faces in India.

The National Emergency from 1975 to 1977 was a significant turning point as far as the freedom-discourse in India is concerned. The suppression of civil liberties, undermining of the freedom of the press, and the imprisonment of thousands of political opponent by Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government shocked the very people who took their freedom for granted. The supporters of the Emergency justified the suppression of liberty on the ground of achieving economic transformation. Obviously, it did not work, and in the election that followed, for the first time in the history of independent India, the issue of freedom was made into an important electoral concern. For the first time, public imagination was activated by the issue of political liberty vociferously against the excesses of the State.

The relationship between the

State and individual freedom is a problematic issue in India. One may see a welfare state as the creator of conditions in which citizens can enjoy their liberties in a better way, but to others the increasing power of the State acts against the autonomy of the people. The increasing tide of violence both in public and private spheres in India have prompted people to have a pessimistic view about the Indian State. The growing inability of the Indian State to protect the life of citizens - particularly the vulnerable sections - means that it is difficult to anchor rights and freedom in the structure of state institutions. This has led people to look for different arenas for anchoring their freedom and autonomy. The community and the civil society institutions have tended to fill this vacuum at times. In the context of rights, it is possible to argue that democracy in India has not fared that well. Yet in the sphere of assertion of rights of various groups, it has thrown up newer challenges. It is also true that such assertions have offered a great deal of dignity to the political existence of many subaltern groups in India. This, however, has not translated as yet into a stable regime of rights for these groups.

Democracy, needless to argue, needs a stable domain of rights and it should also have the capacity to expand it whenever the need arises. The effective enjoyment of rights in India, of course, varies from group to group. In a restrictive sense, freedom implies the absence of constraints, and fashioning a sphere of life beyond the interference and control of others. This is important, but freedom discourse should not be reduced to such a limited vision. Freedom is an important ideal in itself. Yet it is also a possession, a resource which is directed towards ideals and goals. The freedom-discourse in India since independence is intimately bound up with two sets of goals. The first set deals with the plural character of Indian society and explores ways in which the enjoyment of freedom is consistent with the living together of people belonging to different identities. The second set focuses on social transformation and its mutual relationship with freedom. These are the two crucial challenges that the freedom-discourse faces in India today.

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An account of how gender has been problematized as a crucial determining factor in men's and women's lives in the last fifty years has to include a celebration of women's initiatives and struggle, the systematic research that has highlighted women's increasing marginalization in the economy and polity, and the gaps and dilemmas that the women's movement and women's studies have to grapple with.

With independence, it was felt that the 'women's question' was resolved since formal equality for women had been explicitly inscribed in the constitution. While this had resulted in some gains, especially for middle-class women in the fields of education and employment, it was not until the seventies that the discrepancy between the constitutional assurances of equality and a socio-cultural environment that systematically denies women such equality came to be visible as a political issue.

Shattering the post-independence complacency was the groundbreaking report of the Committee on Status of Women in India, *Towards Equality* (1974), which was a stark pointer to the decline in the position of women since the early decades of this century. The report provided impetus for a spate of influential studies that drew attention to the demographic trends of the declining sex ratio, the increasing disparity in the life expectancy and mortality rates of men and women and in their access to education, health care and livelihood.

In the late seventies it was the issue of violence against women, whether in the 'sanctuary' of their homes or outside on the streets, in places of work or in custody of the police, that galvanized the women's movement in the country. Violence against women that had been hidden from public view in the name of private life thus came to the fore as an explicit expression of class and gender-based power thanks to the efforts of the women's movement. These efforts also revealed the systematic and distinctive forms of violence that women from various sections in our society had to face - from caste and class violence, violence by the state, to domestic violence and 'modern' forms of violence like female foeticide through technological innovations such as the amniocentesis test.

The first National Conference on Women's Studies was organized in 1981. These years also saw the

Women's Question in Independent India

U. Vindhya

initiation of research efforts in academic institutions, including the establishment of UGC-sponsored Women's Studies Centres. The purpose of women's studies, according to early researchers, was to critically examine and redefine the conceptual frameworks of disciplines and to act as a catalyst in social transformation. The hitherto middle-class bias gave way to focus on poor, rural women and to women working in the unorganized sector, caste and class linkages that devalue the contribution of women to society, and to the relationship between macroeconomic changes and women's status. It was held that women's studies should not be yet

The significant participation of women in post-independence mass movements aiming for a broad political or social change has been an active area of investigation. Struggles such as the anti-price rise movement in Maharashtra and Gujarat, the students' movement in Bihar and Gujarat in the early 70s, the environment movement of Chipko, and the Naxalite movement in Bengal, Bihar and Andhra are a few examples of people's movements that included a deep involvement of women. The fact that women participated in these larger struggles but nevertheless had not evolved their own platform for focusing their issues till the mid-70s

Undoubtedly, an impressive amount of innovative research has been done in feminist historiography, social anthropology, legal studies, the impact of economic policies on women and so on which have not only challenged the dominant frameworks and assumptions of the discipline but have shown revealing insights on gender relations. Despite such work, however, mainstream research and teaching have largely remained unaffected by these attempts.

one more discipline, but the organized knowledge on women and gender has to be enriched through interaction of theory and field experiences.

In the last twenty years or so, women's scholarship, writing and protest have opened up almost every discipline for critical scrutiny. A number of studies in feminist historiography, for instance, have highlighted how gender ideologies and broad social change which include economic and political change, state policies and social and political movements interact with each other to reproduce patriarchy across the ages. The colonial period has been a fertile area of research. This does not mean that Indian traditions before that period were relatively immutable. It only points to the deep and radical rupture in all domains that colonialism entailed and its implications for Indian modernity and the status of women.

has been pointed out by various scholars. It is also important to recognize that although women in these movements have not striven for an autonomous articulation of women-specific demands, their voicing of such issues exerts a pressure on these movements to take heed of the women in their mass base. Such a cognizance of 'women's issues' has been made possible largely due to the pressure generated by feminism and the questions raised by the women's movement regarding the politicization of personal life. Today, there are heartening signs of issues not being narrowly focused as 'women's issues'. Women have comprised a crucial component of those struggling for land and forest rights, for fishing rights in coastal waters, against the havoc caused by construction of large dams, for recognition as urban unorganized labour, migrant labour and rural

workers. In this sense then, no issue is exclusively a women's issue alone, and all issues are women's issues as well.

Studies on economic policies and changes and their impact on women have revealed that the post-colonial model of development being pursued in our country has in fact pushed women further out of the production process. Capital accumulation and inducing dual structures of organized and unorganized sectors have had a displacing effect, especially on women as seen in the decline in employment opportunities or being pushed into the unorganized sector wherein they get mostly intermittent employment and low wages and are not covered by labour laws. Also the access to new skills and technologies that have been part of the modernization process is restricted for women partly because the special responsibilities for child and family care rest exclusively on women and because of the inability of the State and industry to take the burden of some of these functions through the provision of child care facilities and so on.

Although the work-participation rate for women appears to have risen in the last few years, it could be because structural adjustment policies have changed the nature of the work force. Studies have shown that women are paid at least 25 per cent less than a regular employed male worker and female casual workers earn 50 per cent less. A large number of women have been brought into economic production under highly exploitative conditions, sometimes to replace men and sometimes as contract or home-based labour. Therefore, even if more women have joined the work force the overall situation of the family has not improved.

The politics of health has been another vital area of activism where women's groups have opposed invasive reproductive and family planning technologies. The campaign against amniocentesis - female foeticide through modern technology - is an example of protest against new forms of systematic abuse that have emerged as ghastly accompaniments to modernization.

Engagement with law as a critical instrument to change the situation of women has been a major concern of the women's movement and feminist legal studies. Although legal reform of laws relevant to women has been central to the

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Introspection about their own location in society has not been too common among Indian historians. [...] Outside the world of metropolitan centres of learning and research there are provincial universities and colleges, schoolteachers, an immensely varied student population, and, beyond these, vast numbers more or less untouched by formal courses, yet with notions about history and remembrances of things past, the nature and origins of which it could be interesting to explore. What is neglected is the whole question of the conditions of production and reception of academic knowledge, its relationships with different kinds of common sense. We lack, in other words, a social history of historiography.

Certain features demarcate the late-colonial situation quite sharply from the many historical worlds of today. The Asiatic Society and the Anthropological Survey apart, official funding for pure research, detached from pedagogy, hardly existed, and there was very little of today's accelerating globalization which has made trips abroad for degrees, research or seminars an important part of the more prestigious kinds of academic life. Opportunities for any kind of higher education were more restricted and therefore even more class-cum-caste defined than today, given the far fewer universities and colleges. Within this smaller educated community, however, the hierarchical divisions between research/teaching, university departments/undergraduate colleges/schools, metropolitan/provincial universities seem to have been somewhat less sharp. Repositories of books, manuscripts, art objects and cultural artifacts were often built up by autodidacts, gentlemen with access to local resources and antiquarian interests but little formal academic training: a zamindar, lawyer or schoolteacher could sometimes contribute as much or more as a university professor. For Bengal, one thinks immediately of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, many local libraries, and the Varendra Research Society, the latter located in a small North Bengal district town (Rajshahi) yet enjoying at one time an academic prestige which it would be difficult for any non-metropolitan centre to emulate today. Another example of this relative absence of internal

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The Many Worlds of Indian History

Sumit Sarkar

hierarchization within a smaller educated elite is provided by the career of Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958). A Rajshahi zamindar's son, Jadunath's formal degrees were in English, and till retirement he combined research with the teaching of History, together sometimes with English and Bengali, mainly to undergraduate students (at Ripon, Metropolitan and Presidency Colleges in Calcutta, followed by Patna and Cuttack, and then briefly at the Benaras Hindu University). Jadunath became internationally renowned but never went abroad.

Late-colonial histories, then, were generally written by teachers for students or general readers. Very many of the topmost professional scholars also produced textbooks,

of college and school students as well as diffused through other means among the general public. Advanced historical research has come to have as its intended audience one's academic peer-group, research students of the best universities, and increasingly, international conferences. Meanwhile the now very seriously dated historiography of a past generation has kept on getting reproduced and disseminated, in diluted and crude forms, at other, inferiorized and neglected levels. Thus has come to be constituted a 'common-sense' - using that term in the most negative of Gramsci's several different formulations - open to appropriation and orchestration by organizations such as the Sangh

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and most of them published original works both in English and in indigenous languages. There was therefore much less of a gap than is evident now between the best and the worst or even average histories. But it would be dangerous to romanticize: inadequate funding for full-time research, confinement within national or regional parameters in the absence of opportunities for wider contacts, the restrictive aspects of a nationalist paradigm shot through with unstated class and high-caste assumptions (quite often sliding into communalist attitudes), all exerted a price. The 'best' scholarship of those times, with rare exceptions, appears unacceptably limited, parochial and unselfquestioning today.

Post-independence historiographical developments, in contrast, have been marked by a dialectic which simultaneously enhanced standards vastly at elite levels, while paying far too little attention to histories being taught to the majority

Parivar.

An exploration of the social conditions of production of history cannot afford to remain a merely intellectual project. It needs to become part of wider and far more difficult efforts to change these conditions. The paradox of postcolonial front-ranking historiography has been that the affirmation of socially radical values and approaches (unimaginable for old masters like Jadunath Sarkar or R. C. Majumdar, for instance) has been accompanied by more, rather than less, elitism in structures of historical production and dissemination.

There has been relatively little sustained or effective attempt to spread the methods, findings, and values of even more India-rooted, post-1950s Left-nationalist historiography beyond 'higher' academic circles. The spread-effects of History Congress sessions, the possibly more

effective state-level conferences conducted through regional languages, sporadic translation efforts, and occasional refresher courses, remain fairly limited, and the possibilities of democratic dialogue often get further restricted, even within these limits, by the prevalence of hierarchized structures and attitudes. [...] In India [...] with the important and honourable exception of gender studies, which has offered considerable opportunities at times for fruitful interaction between activists and academics, research and teaching tend to remain highly hierarchized even among Left intellectuals.

The contrasting experiences of two efforts at preparing school textbooks can serve in conclusion as indicators of problems - and possibilities. In the schools where they have been in use, the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks commissioned in the mid-1970s from front-ranking (and mostly Delhi-based) historians have certainly helped to eliminate the blatant communal bias at the level of prescribed texts (through not necessarily from actual teaching), and outdated histories have been displaced to some extent by the findings and approaches of post-independence research. But their impact has been reduced by overburdened syllabi, bureaucratic management, and a concentration on providing 'correct' factual information and interpretation rather than imaginative pedagogical presentations. The texts were written by university scholars with little possibility of contact with secondary education: inputs through discussions with schoolteachers, difficult to organize for such a centralized, Delhi-based project, seem to have been minimal.

A decade or so later, the Eklavya volunteer group was able to work out much more interesting and innovative history texts and teaching methods through sustained grassroots work in the not particularly propitious atmosphere of Hoshangabad's small town and village schools in Madhya Pradesh. There were consultations with metropolitan historians (the initiators of the history textbooks project were themselves JNU graduates), but also repeated rounds of discussions with local schoolteachers. Eklavya history texts contain less factual detail than the

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If contemporary Indian Philosophy - rather, more appropriately, philosophy in contemporary India - is to be traced back to its significant period of inception, it is the fifties of this century, roughly the immediately post-independence period of time. It is during this time that the mammoth five-volume *A History of Indian Philosophy* by Surendra Nath Dasgupta, and the two-volume *Indian Philosophy* by Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan are brought out to the knowledge of international scholarship. Both these works are accepted as authoritative sources of reference and understanding for any modern study of classical Indian philosophy.

While Dasgupta and Radhakrishnan are prominent for their exemplary historical-interpretative scholarship on the entire spectrum of the Indian philosophical tradition, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya stands out as a remarkably original and acutely subtle thinker bearing the unique imprint of contemporary Indian philosophical identity. No less abreast of traditional Indian philosophical ideas, Bhattacharya excels his historical awareness of classical thought by creating new ideas, whether in metaphilosophical reflections on 'The Concept of Philosophy' (a classic essay of his) or on the perennial issue of bodily subjectivity (discussed in his major work *The Subject as Freedom*, 1930), all of which are perspicuously indicative of a distinctive pattern of philosophy in contemporary India.

Bhattacharya's *Studies in Vedantism* (1907), apart from being a work that represents his neo-Vedantic identity, is also a sharply critical, interpretative-constructive venture into the Kantian or transcendental conditions of thinkability and knowability. With rare comparative philosophical insight, he is able to weave a new fabric of philosophy, as it were, into which are woven both Kant and Samkara as equal parts of India's intellectual tradition. Furthermore, there are some of the finest insights of phenomenology in his meticulous elaboration of levels of theoretic consciousness and of various grades of subjectivity. What is interesting is that Bhattacharya is a self-made phenomenologist, India's counterpart to Europe's Husserl, and curiously contemporaneous with the latter. Since there is in fact no reference to Husserl in Bhattacharya's published writings, it can justifiably be surmised that this

The Availability of Philosophical Ideas

Sketching the State of the Philosophical Art in Contemporary India

Bijoy H. Boruah

Indian phenomenologist is entirely of his own making.

Even though K. C. Bhattacharya sets the scene for a vibrant trend of imaginative philosophical activity by subsequent thinkers on the Indian soil, the immediately subsequent scenario does not seem to present any such view. Most philosophical works on classical Indian thought appear to be insipid and unoriginal, a degenerate form of scholarship dominated by mere description, classification and almost tautological reassertion of ancient views. It is largely because of such intellectual vapidness that many young Indian minds, in the sixties and seventies and even later, are drawn towards philosophical cultivation in the Western style, whether in the continental European tradition or in the Anglo-American tradition. Exuberant development of philosophical thoughts in the West are perceived as sharply contrasted with the feeling of the near-extinction of the philosophical spirit in the indigenous climate.

The two Western strands that draw Indian attention are analytic philosophy, mostly practiced in the English-speaking West, and phenomenology, which is largely of German and French origin. While some acquaintance with the celebrated writings of the masters of analytic philosophy such as Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein have always been locally available due to India's accessibility to the English language, some ambitious and bright young Indians begin to leave for higher studies in American and British universities to imbibe the spirit of the analytic tradition directly from its finest experts. Foremost among them are K. J. Shah, who goes to Cambridge and studies in very close touch with Wittgenstein, and Rajendra Prasad, who crosses the Atlantic and takes meticulous training in analytical ethics under the ablest supervision of C. L. Stevenson at Michigan. Others, still younger, such as Ramchandra Gandhi and Mrinal Miri, make a similar journey to Oxford and Cambridge respectively, to be

educated by the best living analytic philosophers of the like of Peter Strawson and Bernard Williams.

For quite a while philosophy in India appears to be 'Anglo-Indian' analytic philosophy, marked by an unprecedented enthusiasm for logico-linguistic analysis of any concept embodying significant theoretic content. Ganeswar Mishra, another leading votary of the British analytical tradition and a direct trainee of Alfred Ayer then in London, even goes to the extent of reinterpreting Samkara's Advaita Vedanta in analytical terms. Pranab Kumar Sen, also exposed to Oxford philosophy and the British analytical tradition from Bertrand Russell to Michael Dummett, engages himself in the hard-core analytical themes in the philosophy of language and logic, such as meaning, truth and reference. The latest results of this engagement are documented in his *Reference and Truth* (1991).

Prominent among those who make their transition to the European philosophy of phenomenology is Jitendra Nath Mohanty, who takes his philosophical training in Germany at Gottingen. In the course of prolonged and persistent research following that training, Mohanty has been able to establish himself as a leading international authority on the problem of intentionality and on other kindred issues. He stands out as a contemporary Indian philosopher because of being at once a widely recognized expert in contemporary European philosophy - especially Husserlian phenomenology - and a very insightful critical interpreter of classical Indian thought. The various essays collected in his *Essays on Indian Philosophy: Traditional and Modern* (1993) bear witness to an enviable command over both Eastern and Western thoughts and the ability to illuminate the central philosophical problems such as consciousness, subjectivity, rationality, historicity, freedom and sources of knowledge, from a comparative perspective.

Mohanty has always been intent

on tracing the parallel lines of intellectual progress in diverse traditions and thereby articulating the inner dynamics of philosophical reflection as such. His reflective engagement draws its continual inspiration from within two philosophical traditions - Indian and Western - and out of this deeply disturbing intellectual experience, he strives towards a fundamental unity of rational thinking, that is the possibility of diverse currents of thought in a unitary stream of reflective consciousness. Mohanty believes that this possibility is being actualized in his own case, and suggests, in his prologue to the book cited above, that this unity of rational thinking 'is not what one can begin with, but has to ceaselessly strive towards.'

There are later works of Mohanty's such as *The Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy* (1985), and *Transcendental Phenomenology: An Analytic Account* (1989), which, though primarily works of European-Western philosophy, are characterized by interesting critical allusions to Indian views. These works therefore speak as much to Indian philosophical audience as they do to their primary audience of Western philosophers. More recently, returning to his own cultural roots, Mohanty has delved into the rational depth of Indian thought and articulated his mature understanding of the role of reason in it in his recent book *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought* (1992).

Whereas Mohanty has enlivened Indian philosophical scholarship by the contemporary light of phenomenology, Bimal Krishna Matilal has saved the vapid condition of classical Indian philosophical research from turning into a moribund state by representing classical ideas in the contemporary idiom and insight of analytical philosophy. Matilal combines in a single mind both esoteric expertise in traditional Indian thought and incisive analytical skills acquired through his prolonged and persistent acquaintance with contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Perhaps the greatest contribution of this eminent Indian philosopher (who had held the prestigious chair of Spalding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at the University of Oxford until his premature death in 1991) is his resolute attempt to demolish the Western myth, generated mainly by the Orientalists under the disciplinary rubric of