

10-2013

Remembering Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande: Two Giants of Post-Independence Indian Philosophy

Jay L. Garfield

Smith College, jgarfield@smith.edu

Arindam Chakrabarti

University of Hawai'i

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/phi_facpubs

Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garfield, Jay L. and Chakrabarti, Arindam, "Remembering Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande: Two Giants of Post-Independence Indian Philosophy" (2013). Philosophy: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

https://scholarworks.smith.edu/phi_facpubs/5

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy: Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu

REMEMBERING DAYA KRISHNA AND G. C. PANDE: TWO GIANTS OF POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Jay Garfield

Division of Humanities, Yale-NUS College; Department of Philosophy, National University of Singapore; Department of Philosophy, Yale University; Department of Philosophy, Smith College; Central University of Tibetan Studies, University of Melbourne
jgarfield@smith.edu

Arindam Chakrabarti

Department of Philosophy, University of Hawai'i
uharindam@gmail.com

/

Daya Krishna was the public face of Indian philosophy in the first half-century after Indian independence. Nobody on the Indian scene in that period came close to him in influence or in contribution to the profession. Nobody else in the world thought as hard or as fruitfully about the relation of Indian philosophy to that of the rest of the world, and nobody else dared to think as creatively and even as heretically about the history of Indian philosophy itself. To be sure, the Indian philosophical scene during this period was always a vibrant and creative matrix of thought, and many contributed to that fertile mix, but for all of the talent, diversity of thought, and creativity it comprised, Daya Krishna stood alone as an institutional and intellectual leader.

The range of Daya Krishna's contribution is immense. He wrote dozens of important philosophical articles and books on a wide range of topics, including the philosophy of language and logic, epistemology, ethics, social and political philosophy, the philosophy of history, aesthetics, and the philosophy of the social sciences, as well as on the history of Indian philosophy and on the enterprise of cross-cultural philosophy. He frequently appeared as a distinguished lecturer at universities, research institutes, and major international conferences, and many of these lectures were later published and themselves became the topics of subsequent seminars. He provided years of sage leadership at the University of Rajasthan, contributing to the training of two generations of younger philosophers.

Daya Krishna was a regular participant in cross-cultural philosophical exchanges, both within and outside India. He was a guest at the East-West Center and a participant in several East-West Philosophers' Conferences. But in India he is better known for "the Jaipur experiment" and its successors at Pune, Sarnath, Tirupati, and Srinagar, in which traditional Indian pandits met with scholars of modern philosophy to discuss contemporary philosophical topics from the standpoint of the Indian philosophical

traditions. The best known of his projects along these lines is the *Samvāda* project, which brought Nyāya pandits and scholars of contemporary Western philosophers together in Pune in 1983 to discuss Russell's theory of descriptions and related topics in logic and the philosophy of language. The last decades of his life were devoted to the editing of the "Jaipur *R̥g Veda*," as yet unpublished, which promises an iconoclastic reading of that classical text.

In all of these projects, it was Daya Krishna's aim both to historicize Indian philosophy and to free it from its history. He never saw these goals as being in tension or even as paradoxical. And he was right. On the one hand, he decried the ahistorical approach to pigeonholing Indian philosophers and philosophical texts into isolated, putatively homogeneous *siddhantas*. Doing so, he argues, occludes differences, obscures connections, elides progress, denigrates the progressive and creative nature of commentary, and devalues Indian philosophy itself and the vibrancy of Indian civilization in its intellectual manifestations.

On the other hand, he decried with equal passion the *reduction* of Indian philosophy to its own history. To treat Indian philosophy as an object of primarily curatorial interest, he argued, was also to deprecate Indian intellectual life, to treat Indian civilization as dead and a source not of contemporary ideas but only of anthropological or historical insights. Indian philosophy, he emphasized, is as much a living tradition as is Western or Chinese philosophy, as indebted to its own history as is any other great intellectual tradition, and as progressive and concerned with ideas of current interest as any other philosophical tradition. To study Indian philosophy is hence not simply to be a historian but to be a practitioner. And Daya Krishna was emphatically both historian and practitioner.

Moreover, he argued, the tendency toward ahistorical *siddhanta* theory and the tendency toward reductive historicism suffer equally from the vice of cultural essentialism. In each picture, Indian philosophy stands hermetically sealed from Western and other Asian philosophy, neither contributing to world culture nor learning from it. This view, he pointed out, is doubly pernicious. First, it falsifies the history of ideas, ignoring the frequent and extensive cultural commerce between India and Greece, Europe, Persia, Africa, and Central and East Asia, making it impossible to appreciate the intellectual history of any of these civilizational centers. Second, it encourages a fetishization of cultural purity, leading those who identify, whether culturally or professionally, with any cultural tradition to ignore the important ideas of other cultures, and to ignore the obligation of their own tradition to participation in global dialogue. Daya Krishna had no truck with this kind of essentialism, and enjoyed poking holes in its pretensions.

And of course any assessment of Daya Krishna's contributions would be remiss without mention of his decades of editorial leadership of the *Journal of the Indian Council for Philosophical Research*. He not only edited the journal with great love and erudition, guarding its quality and reputation for intellectual range; he also contributed to it in a constant flurry of short notes and questions for discussion. These were the philosophical precursors of today's blogs, and inspired a great deal of philosophical work.

We referred earlier to Daya Krishna as an Indian philosopher, and we must acknowledge that that is problematic. He himself would at times proudly wear that badge, acknowledging both his ancestry and home as well as one of his great intellectual preoccupations. But he would just as frequently disavow it, and do this in two directions. First, he would often protest that he was simply a *philosopher*, concerned with ideas, texts, and arguments from wherever they hail. Second, to take him to be an *Indian philosopher*, he worried, was to package him as a specialist or, worse, as a curiosity, a fossil, and to license ignoring him.

//

One of the myths about Indian Philosophy that Daya Krishna loved to debunk in lectures, conversations, and published writings was that Indian philosophies are all or mostly ‘spiritual’ in any cogent sense. He always insisted both on the centrality of reason to the Indian tradition and on the importance of religious themes in the Western tradition. Nonetheless, Daya Krishna’s lifelong friend, Govind Chandra Pande—the colleague with whom he traveled to Hawai’i for the historic East-West Philosophers’ Conference to dialogue with Hilary Putnam, Arthur C. Danto, Richard Rorty, and Kurt Otto Apel in 1989—devoted most of his distinguished scholarly life to the *defense* of this very myth. Nobody takes having a college degree in Philosophy as a sufficient condition for being a philosopher, but sometimes it is taken as a necessary condition. By that criterion, of course, neither Ludwig Wittgenstein nor G. C. Pande—to say nothing of Sri Aurobindo or Gandhi—would count as a philosopher. But, like these others, Pande established himself, through his massive oeuvre and profound impact on the field, as a central figure in Indian philosophy. The lifelong dialectic between Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande—deep friends and intellectual adversaries—shaped a half century of Indian philosophy. Pande wrote his major works, *Meaning and Processes of Culture* (in 1972, in English, at the request of Daya Krishna) and *Hermeneutics of Value* (in Hindi, *Mūlyā Mīmāmsā*), deliberately and systematically exploring the philosophy of culture and value.

Pande’s collected works run to over fifty volumes, and include monographs, commentaries, and collections of essays. He addresses topics in the history of Indic, Iranic, Semitic, and Hellenic civilizations, Buddhist logic and semantics, the philosophy of love and beauty, political history, and economic development. But he is best known for his monumental studies of the early history of Buddhism. All of his work reflects his extraordinary erudition and his mastery of a vast literature in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, German, Pali, Bengali, and Persian.

Despite this erudition, despite his status, and despite the succession of high-profile administrative and government positions that Prof. Pande occupied, he was also an unusually warm, natural, unassuming, humble, and generous man who gave freely of his time and thought to younger colleagues and students and to institutions. He is as much missed personally as he is intellectually.

This special issue of *Philosophy East and West* commemorates G. C. Pande and Daya Krishna as philosophers. But we would be remiss if we were not to

acknowledge that Dr. Pande was also an elegant poet, both in Hindi and in Sanskrit. His translations of poetic works are not dry philological documents, but poetic evocations that bring classic texts to life. His reputation was grounded in his pathbreaking history of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. But he went on to produce short but incisive aphoristic writings (in Sanskrit verse, with prose auto-commentary in the style of Dharmakīrti or Udayana) on the Philosophy of Love of God (*Bhaktidarśanam*), Comparative Religion, Philosophy of History, and the Metaphysics of Music and Aesthetics/Philosophy of Beauty (*Soundarya-darśanam*).

His philosophy is grounded both in his religious and spiritual sensibilities and in his poetic voice, just as his extraordinary academic leadership was grounded in his philosophical vision.

“Culture” is a slippery and protean word. T. S. Eliot, whose “Four Quartets” influenced Pande’s thinking about culture, defines culture in “Notes towards a Definition of Culture” in several ways. In its first sense, culture is a certain intellectual, aesthetic, and moral excellence. This, Pande argues, is the role of culture as a ground of “self-realization.” The second civilizational sense permits us to ask questions like “How is Indian culture distinct from Chinese Culture?” Questions like this occupied much of Pande’s thought about culture. In a third sense, closely connected to cultivation, culture is the universal social activity of transforming and perfecting human habits, habitation, and environment, aiming at an evolving set of norms and ideals. From time to time, from society to society and across religious communities, these norms and ideals are interestingly—and sometimes painfully—different, even conflicting.

In his succinct Sanskrit work (the title, translated into English would be: “*Reality is One: Thinker-Seers Speak of it in Many Ways*”) Pande negotiates the tough problem of irresolvable religious disputes. His search for the spirit of tolerance and the celebration of cultural diversity in Emperor Ashoka’s edicts and in the intellectual egalitarianism in Buddhism, Jainism, and Abhinavagupta is marked by both realism and optimism.

Although about a dozen of his English philosophical and historical works have attained the status of classics in their field, Pande’s best work was in Hindi and Sanskrit. Let us try to translate a synoptic passage from his award-winning book “Hermeneutics of Value” where he summarizes his findings after an acute and astute analysis of the positions of Spinoza, Hobbes, Kant, Mill, Sidgwick, and Hartmann on the roots of human morality:

(1) Since moral sense (*naitik bodh*) comes as a response to situational doubts about how one should act, it has to be recognized as cognitive in nature. Certitude in moral matters can only come through discriminative deliberation and reflection (*vivek*).

(2) In such evaluative knowledge, the object of knowledge, a law/rule, and obligatoriness are synthesized in an organic relation.

(3) Because it is intellectual yet not indifferently theoretical (but has to take sides and inspire action), moral cognition is neither perception nor reasoning.

(4) In moral knowledge mental insight, logical reasoning, and linguistic awareness are all fused in one.

(5) Moral sensibility is connected to pleasure or satisfaction.

(6) But, such pleasure is to be distinguished from ordinary sensation of pleasure.

(7) Because it assumes the form of a linguistic knowledge—"I must do this or become this"—it generates moral resolve or decision.

(8) Such moral resolve (*sankalpa*) subjugates the ego to some larger reality (society? God? Ancestors? Tradition? The Other?): it consists in de-prioritization of the ego.

From this standpoint the distinction between good and bad actions is neither intrinsic nor consequence-dependent, but is based on the psychosocial context preceding the action. (*Mūlya Mīmāṃsā*, p. 175)

III

Daya Krishna was self-ironically skeptical, provocatively contrarian, and rebellious not only against all orthodoxy and "Indian traditions" but also against the standard Western forms of dissidence. In his taste and approach to life he was earthy, pre-occupied with the physical and affective dimensions of human life, and regarded mysticism, otherworldliness, and asceticism as mere posturing. G. C. Pande, on the other hand, was idealistic, spiritual, a compatibilist about the so called conflict between mysticism and logic, a syncretic transcendentalist deeply immersed in spiritual practice, and a fearless advocate of both Vedic and Buddhist contemplative culture. Daya Krishna emphasized the continuity of Indian thought with the thought of the non-Indian world; Pande, its distinctiveness. Daya Krishna was enthusiastic, and took joy in vigorous debate; Pande was firm but tender, averse to aggressive disagreement, barely audible when he spoke, infinitely patient and self-effacing in conversation. Their friendship was as unlikely as any in the history of philosophy. Yet, their mutual respect and warm loyalty to each other was legendary. Their friendship was a testament to the spirit of the argumentative Indian and to their joint commitment to the life of the mind and the spirit, however differently they understood mind and spirit.

This special issue of *Philosophy East West* not only celebrates these two sorely missed intellectual giants severally, but also celebrates their impossible intellectual amity in the midst of radically opposed views: theirs was a respectful engagement without surrender.

In this issue of our journal, we continue the dialogue that Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande initiated between the argumentative and the spiritual, the skeptical-individualistic and the traditional-communitarian styles of thinking, self-critical and culture-sensitive on all the practical and theoretical problems that haunt human rationalities and relationships.

Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande were guiding spirits of creative cross-cultural philosophy and in the renewal of classical Indian philosophy in that cross-cultural

context of the postcolonial period in India. Despite a widespread and unjustified view that Indian philosophy died under British rule, the undying spirit of recognition of and respect for the plurality of traditions that was characteristic of the Vedic-Buddhist-Jaina-Tantric-Puranic culture of open public debate was not replaced but rejuvenated by the introduction by the British of English education and European Indology. And indeed Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande were among the few who demanded attention to colonial Indian philosophy.

Since Independence, slowly but surely, in spite of the worldwide waning of the humanities, philosophy in India has flourished, animated by exciting but often underappreciated experiments in which the living classical traditions of Advaita, Nyāya, Jainism, and Buddhism, as well as the philosophy of the contemporary West and the unique developments that emerged from the colonial Indian philosophical milieu, have nourished one another under the leadership of thinkers like Dayaji and Pandeji. That story should inspire a genuinely global approach to philosophical research in which all traditions are taken seriously. This would be the greatest legacy of Daya Krishna and G. C. Pande. We offer this memorial in that spirit.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.