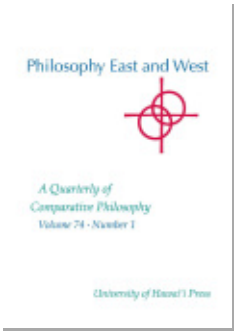
The Making of Contemporary Indian Philosophy: Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya ed. by Daniel Raveh and Elise Coquereau-Saouma (review)

Muzaffar Ali



Philosophy East and West, Volume 74, Number 1, pp. 1-4 (Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2024.a918478*

BOOK REVIEW

The Making of Contemporary Indian Philosophy: Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya. Edited by Daniel Raveh and Elise Coquereau-Saouma. London: Routledge, 2023. Pp. xiii+263. Hardcover £120, ISBN 978-0-367-70981-5.

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Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya (KCB) is more than the seminal essay, "Svaraj in Ideas," through which academicians, politicians, postcolonial/decolonial thinkers and too often philosophers usually identify and fossilize him. That, in my opinion, is the characteristic message of this volume. The message attains significance when calls for decolonization result in the sacrifice of actual philosophical legacy and resources to 'mere polity talk'. KCB, and with him other philosophers, need to be rescued from this 'mere polity talk', and the current volume rightly navigates in that direction. Setting the tone, *The Making of Contemporary Indian Philosophy: Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya* states that KCB is a significant yet unsung piece in the "jigsaw puzzle" of contemporary Indian philosophy (CIP). It rightly acknowledges KCB as the father of CIP, a distinct-yet-neglected genre of Indian philosophy "that draws on both classical Indian philosophical sources and Western materials, old and new" (p. 3). With a focus on KCB, the volume attempts to get back to and deliberate on the spectrum of his philosophy with two aims: a) To rediscover the philosophical significance and novelty of his philosophy where the classics of Indian philosophy and the modern avatars of European philosophy are made to speak to each other, and, b) To re-turn the attention of a global philosophical landscape that remains dominated by classical Indian philosophy and modern Western philosophy towards the present, "the now," of Indian philosophy in CIP, which was set in motion by KCB at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The volume is divided into five sections. The first section, "Entrée" includes Daniel Raveh's "Introduction" and Daya Krishna's essay on KCB. Raveh's introduction classifies KCB's philosophy under three rubrics of decolonization (Svaraj), philosophical reflections (KCB's series of studies), and independent essays (conceptualizations). It also offers a synoptic reading of available literature on KCB, so that the reader can situate his philosophy within the multifaceted discourses that need to be recognized, reconfigured and revisited. Daya Krishna's essay is based on his two separate books so that a joint overview of KCB's notion of subject-object and the three Absolutes can be offered to the reader. The second section, "Lexicography" has three essays where the contributors

Philosophy East & West Volume 74, Number 1 January 2024

investigate, analyse or study a particular concept from KCB's philosophy. Elise Coquereau-Souma's essay focuses on the absence of a specific definition of "demand" in KCB's entire project. To unravel the implications of the concept of demand in KCB, she argues that it, "instigates the movement of KCB's method" (p. 49) to study, understand, and realise the domain of the experiential. Nir Feinberg's contribution underlines given-ness as felt-fact (p. 72) in KCB's contemporary commentary on Śaṅkara's theory of *māyā*. Feinberg argues that KCB innovatively explores the possibility of understanding the reality of the world (otherwise illusory) through the category of feeling, and that knowledge and facts have a limited application to eliminate this feeling of reality. Dor Miller's essay focuses on the concept of *rasa* in KCB's philosophy. Miller argues that KCB considers *rasa* as a "feeling par excellence" that needs to be understood, examined and studied in consonance with other human feelings. KCB thus classifies feelings into "'direct,' 'sympathetic,' and 'contemplative'" (p. 80). The aesthetic experience of reality, Miller tells us, becomes possible through the contemplative feeling whose subject is "impersonal, or universal" (p. 89). Miller claims that KCB's interpretation of *rasa* via the realm of contemplative feelings transcends the traditional commentarial paradigms of *rasa* and may offer a remedy to some contemporary anxieties of *rasa* theorists, especially those raised by Mukund Lath.

The third section, "Philosophical Junctions," includes four contributions and starts with Stephen Kaplan's chapter on KCB's three Absolutes and four aspects of negation. Kaplan is interested in understanding whether a mapping between KCB's fourfold theory of negation and the three Absolutes is possible. Since KCB did not provide any clue for such mapping, Kaplan argues about the likelihood of several scenarios (p. 103). He offers a line-up of the three negations to a corresponding Absolute and identifies each with a philosophical position or school of classical Indian philosophy. Kalyankumar Bagchi's essay focuses on KCB's examination of the notion of bodily subjectivity. KCB, as Bagchi writes, does not consider the materialistic explanation of (embodied and conscious) body exhaustive as it dissolves and side-lines the privileged position of the body. As an alternative, KCB makes a differentiation between the felt body and the perceived body and argues that it is through the medium of the felt body that one makes "the transition from the perceived world to the ideal subjective world" (p. 117). Arindam Chakrabarti's contribution is meant to decipher the meaning of the concept of subject in KCB's *The Subject as Freedom*. Chakrabarti argues that in KCB's philosophy, the subject "is revealed not as what is meant/intended, but as one who means/intends in the speech-acts of a speaker" (p. 122). He highlights the involvement of the perspectives of other selves (other-ascription) in one's understanding of bodily subjectivity (self-ascription). Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield's essay reads KCB's position on the problem of other minds through Abhinavagupta and Daya Krishna. They highlight the difficulties posed by Abhinavagupta's and Daya Krishna's respective perspectives on the problem of

other minds and consider KCB's condition of the second-person pronoun as a "meanable," "public referent" resolution.

The fourth section, "Sāṃkhya and Yoga" includes two contributions. Dimitry Shevchenko's essay focuses on the notion of liberation in Sāṃkhya and how KCB, in visible disagreement with other scholars, argues that Sāṃkhya endorses a notion of "spontaneous liberation" where (unlike other philosophies esp. Yoga) no method, practice or inquiry is presupposed. Quite interestingly, Shevchenko notes, that while this reading of spontaneous liberation may be dialectically opposed to the prevalent positions on Sāṃkhya, KCB's approach manifests a "solid grounding in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and its commentaries" (p. 161). Daniel Raveh's contribution argues that KCB's *Studies in Yoga Philosophy* (SYP) is a unique examination and commentary on the *Yogasūtra*. It offers a brief survey of SYP and laments (as has been highlighted in the introduction of the volume), the non-inclusion of this "contemporary, hardcore philosophical, commentary" (p. 169) in the list of twentieth-century commentaries on the *Yogasūtra*. Once again, we are reminded of the predicaments faced by contemporary Indian philosophers (and their works) within the established canons of global philosophy.

The final section, "Debating Freedom" has three contributions that highlight the creativeness of KCB's idea of freedom or *svaraj*. A. Raghuramaraju's essay critically scrutinizes Gopinath Bhattacharya's (GB) classification of KCB's work. While GB considers KCB a constructive interpreter, Raghuramaraju is of the view that KCB's writing is more inclined towards presenting classical Indian philosophy to the modern audience by "rewriting it in a new idiom" (p. 194). He extends the scope of his critical gaze on KCB and argues that there is an inconsistency between KCB's philosophical trajectory from "Svaraj in Ideas" to "The Concept of Philosophy." The critique of Kant and the modern rendering of Vedānta propounded in "The Concept of Philosophy" are a hallmark of his creative philosophical acumen. However, the pronouncement of "modified Vedānta" as a solution to Kant's problem depicts "reverse colonialism," and runs contrary to his position of *svaraj* (pp. 207-08). D. P. Chattopadhyaya's contribution deals with the "highly original" notion of freedom in KCB in relation to the Kantian, the Vedāntic and the phenomenological accounts, primarily because KCB's engagement with these systems is not documented. KCB, as Chattopadhyaya tells us, is looking to formulate an ontology of freedom which at times is dubbed anti-scientific. Yet, Chattopadhyaya reminds us, that the notion of freedom in KCB is not inconsistent with science. KCB's notion of freedom while emphasizing the "*via negativa* method" puts its focus on a different terrain without being "opposed to science and society in principle" (p. 231). Murzban Jal's essay deals with the "monumental text," titled "Svaraj in Ideas," from a critical perspective by interrogating the claims of authentic Indianness and Indian philosophizing. Jal inquiries about the possibility of freedom for the Indian mind that is not only colonized by the British mannerisms but at the same time by the

burden of caste. For him, rather than any rooted return to the great past, the "talk of caste" is essential for doing authentic Indian philosophy and freeing the Indian mind.

Overall, the volume justifies the goals it sets out to achieve. Not only does it weave dialogues and engagements between contemporary Indian philosophers and texts (Jal reads KCB alongside Chattopadhyaya and Ambedkar; Bhushan and Garfield debate KCB via Abhinavagupta and Daya Krishna; Miller reads KCB and Mukund Lath together and so on); the volume ensures that these engagements and dialogues depict the flavour of CIP. It portrays an equilibrium between the classical Indian philosophical systems and modern Western standpoints (especially Kant and Nietzsche) that the editors construe as fundamental for doing CIP. Since the volume focuses on KCB, the contributions, while seamlessly adhering to the demands of CIP, bring in and explore varied views from Indian and non-Indian perspectives to revisit and reconfigure his place on the contemporary stage of philosophy. Moreover, the addition of contributions from two recent contemporary Indian philosophers (Daya Krishna and D. P. Chattopadhyaya) acts as a bridge between contemporary scholars (living contributors) and KCB. The volume does give rise to certain anxieties as well; the most characteristic of these being the gap between the initial claim that CIP is a neglected domain of philosophy and the way through which these contributions/this volume makes a step ahead to redress that neglect. An afterword, epilogue or conclusion may have been a perfect fit to untie such knots, and the editors have left that option open for the reader, for with KCB, CIP is in the making and not done.

A critic might read this volume as a narrow and disciplinary way of construing contemporary Indian philosophy, as the focus is on an academic philosopher(s). But given the terrain of modern Indian thought and philosophy, which is overcrowded by thinkers with interdisciplinary backgrounds, it is necessary to reclaim the importance of academic philosophers and their contributions in the making of CIP. The volume on KCB may be a beginning, but cannot be the end. It neatly refreshes the new axis of doing contemporary Indian philosophy with KCB and puts the onus on the readers and scholars of philosophy to take this academic moment ahead. The making of CIP, thus begins with KCB, and needs to canvas an entire century of philosophical thought that remains at the margins of academic philosophy. It deserves more constant and painstaking engagements across continents, universities, seminar halls and classrooms so that CIP gets its rightful place within the corridors where philosophy is done and disseminated.