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# **The Phenomenology of the Indian Philosophical Systems**

Being L. S. Doraiswamy Family Endowment lecture delivered by  
**Prof. S. S. RAGHAVACHAR**

at the Indian Institute of World Culture  
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## PREFACE

We reprint here from *The Aryan Path* for January-February 1976 a resume of the address delivered by Prof. S. S. Raghavachar on 8th November 1975, at the Indian Institute of World Culture under the Doraiswamy Family Endowment.

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S. S. RAGHAVACHAR

## The Phenomenology of the Indian Philosophical Systems

[The following paper was prepared by Professor S. S. Raghavachar, former Professor of Philosophy, University of Mysore, on the basis of his lecture on the subject at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore, under the Endowment in memory of the Doraiswamy family, which was given in November 1975. Professor Raghavachar's survey of the evolution of the Indian philosophical spirit provides a valuable broad perspective for students and devotees.—ED.]

I FEEL deeply honoured by the opportunity accorded to me of lecturing at this Institute under the Endowment in memory of the Doraiswamy family made by Professor L. S. S. Kumar. I happened to know Dr. Doraiswamy somewhat. I had met him some decades back to discuss some theoretical questions of great cultural significance. I was impressed by the graciousness of his ways and the scientific and objective temper in which he elucidated for me the perennial problem of the relation between science and spiritual interests. He did direct me to read some great books on the subject, such as J. B. S. Haldane's *Science and Philosophy* and the fascinating little classic *Eternal Verities*. I cherish gratefully the memories of those fruitful meetings. I feel proud to be associated with the Endowment instituted in honour of his memory. There is a touch of sacredness for me in this assignment.

I was considerably closer to Shri B. P. Wadia. I admired his majestic personality and the inspired voice in which he poured forth his prophetic wisdom on themes profoundly elevating and beneficial to all. He used to remind the listener of the imaginative pictures of the great Hebrew prophets. There was deep and quick spiritual perception in his utterances. With all this noble dignity of personality, he was magnanimous in his humanity. I used to meet him for consolation and spiritual strength at a period of great personal sorrow. He entered deep into my situation with wonderful patience and loving words sought to effect my resurrection. A lesser man would surely have been annoyed with me for my inconsiderate calls on him and unconscionably long talks on the theme of my personal woes. But not he, as his spirit was cast in the heroic mould of a spiritual healer. This is a deeply sacred memory for me and I am glad of this opportunity of speaking of it.

It should also be added that Shri Wadia played a noble part in the freedom struggle in those momentous days and it has to be put on permanent record that he was one of the liberators, a fact apt to be eclipsed by the phenomenal contribution to culture and Theosophical work that we owe to him.

Before I address myself to my subject, it would be appropriate to say a few words about Theosophy, of which Shri B. P. Wadia and his earnest assistant, Dr. Doraiswamy, were staunch devotees. I speak with no intimate knowledge, not having had the benefits of Theosophical schooling. Perhaps, this has a compensatory advantage of perspective owing to the very psychic distance.

Theosophy has made four significant contributions to the advancement of our life. It has penetrated deep into the spiritual foundations of all civilizations and unearthed the common primary inspiration of which all the religions are the subsequent ramifications. With the enlightenment thus gained, we ought to end all fanaticism, and to eliminate effectively "the dire heresy of separateness," in the luminous traditional phrase used by Madame Sophia Wadia. Theosophy has imparted to the exposition of spiritual wisdom the methodology, the technique, and the very idiom of science. This is a notable achievement and the science of the

spirit reaches modernism and maturity thereby. Theosophy has actively sponsored all the great causes of humanism and has laboured with the energy and power of constructive persuasion towards the emancipation and unification of man. It has fostered mysticism of the highest level by its emphasis on the ideal of spiritual intuition so gloriously illustrated in the great Masters. A recent conspicuous exemplification of this pathway, I feel, was certainly Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. There is a lower order of mysticism consisting of psychic phenomena, the pursuit of the occult in many spheres. Theosophy has endeavored to furnish this otherwise enervating and morbid obsession with a spiritually healthy framework, imparting to it elevation and philosophical sanity. The occult as sheltered and fostered by Theosophy sheds its proneness to degradation. It is easy to see the pervading influence of Theosophy in all investigations of the empirical evidences of extra-sensory phenomena, even in quarters and in the hands of practitioners not overtly conscious of Theosophy.

Thus Theosophy stands as a modern movement securely advancing the spiritual interests of man.

### *Aunt*

#### The Phenomenology of the Indian Philosophical Systems.

The great German philosopher Hegel announced the orientation of his epoch-making system of Idealism in a work entitled *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In that great work, he set forth what he regarded as the progressive evolution of the human spirit towards the apprehension of Absolute Spirit and described this pilgrimage as a “voyage of discovery.” In this modest lecture I intend performing a similar task, that of discerning the advance of the philosophical spirit in India through the diverse philosophical systems. It is in this specific sense that the term “phenomenology” has been appropriated in the description of my theme. There is a second restriction of subject-matter. I specifically confine myself to the methodologically self-conscious philosophical systems, excluding the direct consideration of the revelation-literature such as the Vedas and Upanisads and also the equally fascinating later literature such as the great Puranas and Agamas. The distinguishing mark of the systems of philosophy named the *Darsanas* is that they develop their philosophical conceptions on rigorously argued-out epistemological foundations. Under such a delimitation of perspective, much that is immensely inspiring may be missed but there is the compensating advantage of definitiveness of intellectual content. A restriction of a similar nature has surely operated in Madhavacarya’s great work *Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha*. I propose, therefore, to review the philosophical systems of India in a broad way and to bring out the characteristics of the decisive stages of our philosophical history. An inquiry of this nature does contribute to the understanding of the heart of Indian culture and also helps to elucidate the contribution of that culture to the solution of the basic problems of human existence, facilitating man’s ascent to a higher altitude of life.

The terms of Professor Kumar’s Endowment indicate that the lectures must be on the improvement of human relations through educational and cultural methods. It may appear that a review of Indian philosophical systems hardly falls within this scope. That would not be a correct impression. There is no problem of man which can be competently and adequately resolved without bringing in the illuminating guidance of philosophy. Such is the justification of philosophy by the father of Western philosophy, Socrates. He demonstrated through his immortal dialogues that a philosophically unexamined life is worth nothing and not one of its problems, however mundane, can have the benefit of a conclusive solution apart from a

consideration of ultimates. In the Indian tradition, the advent of the *Gita* illustrates the same law: that the human situation is such that its crises demand answers in terms of first principles, unless we are feeble-minded enough to suspend our inquiries arbitrarily. There is thus inevitability about philosophy and the issues of life cannot be met apart from the basic wisdom as to what man, God, or reality in itself is. There is no peace for man unless he brings the light of ultimate truth into the cavern of his life. Hence, this concern with philosophy is of vital relevance for the theme proposed under this Endowment.

The earliest intellectually self-conscious systems of Indian philosophy were dominated by the ethical motivation. These were the Jaina and the Buddhist movements. The striking feature of Buddhism is that the great Founder explicitly discouraged metaphysical disputations. To him the human situation with all its frustrations and sufferings was the matter of primary concern. Along with metaphysics he also eliminated the inherited dogmatic religion and with it went all supernaturalistic preoccupations and codes of rituals. The emerging core of Buddhism was the central doctrine of Dharma, with the four noble Truths and the eightfold Noble Path. Jainism did admit considerable metaphysics but in its doctrine of *Syadvada* it endeavoured to abolish metaphysical fanaticism. It too rejected the traditional dogmatic religion and its ritualism. Its orientation also was principally ethical and an old pronouncement of great authority is cited in *Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha* to the effect: "*Asravo bhavahetuh syad Samvaro moksakaranam; Itiyam ahraatidrstih anyadassyah prapancanam*

These two systems, constituting the first major philosophical phase of Indian *Darsana*, are centred in *Dharma*, and *Dharma* here is pure morality not fettered by conventional morality and social codes. Ethical self-cultivation involving ardent compassion is the fundamental principle in both.

There is a marked transition when we pass into the next stage of Indian philosophy. Ethics is subordinated to metaphysics and that metaphysics relates to the *Atman* or the Self. The comprehension or realization of the *Atman* in intellectual intuition becomes the primary concern in this epoch.

The main hurdle to this objective was the Buddhist rationalism which had nullified the metaphysics of being and in consequence rejected the category of a substantial Self. The challenge was faced in a systematic manner by Nyaya- Vaisesika, which built up a solid theory of knowledge and propounded a metaphysics of enduring substances. The broad-based metaphysics provided a fundamental basis for the concept of a substantial *Atman*. The school had posited a plurality of substances, though its chief interest was in the soul-sub- stance. The trend is further perfected in Samkhya-Yoga, which transformed the pluralism into a dualism of Spirit and Matter, *Purusa* and *Prakrti*, thus elevating the metaphysical status of the Self. The Self is also conceived in a non-temporalistic manner and the category of Self is placed in secure eminence. But the spiritually oriented tendency reaches its finality in the Advaita Vedanta of samkara. For this school the Self is not merely non-temporal but also non-dual. There is only one *Atman*. Further, the realm of matter or non-Self is declared to be merely an appearance set up by a cosmic machinery of illusion. The Self is not merely one but is the reality without a second. The atman-metaphysics reaches its ultimate destination in Advaita. The popular theistic God is dispensed with and the *Atman* is the metaphysical fulfilment of what the idea of God aspired after. This is the absolutism of the *Atman*.

Even as the first group of predominantly ethical philosophies comprises Buddhism and Jainism, and the second group propounding *Atman-centred* metaphysics consists of Nyaya-Vaisesika, Samkhya- Yoga, and Advaita Vedanta, the third group, marking the third epoch, is

constituted by a number of theistic systems. The predominant affirmation in them is theocentric. The basic concern is with *Brahman* or *iswara*. Systems such as those of Ramanuja, Saiva-siddhanta, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha, Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and Samkaradeva belong to this category of Darśanas. Barring eclectic and ambiguous formulations, even the Sakta system, with its esoteric ritualism, *Kundalini Yoga*, and adoration of the Supreme as the Mother, legitimately falls within this group. The great medieval devotional mystics, such as the Alwars and Naranmars, and the later minstrels of God, such as Tulasi-das and Tukaram, supply perennial inspiration and emotional content to the tradition. The greater Puranas such as the *Bhagavata* and the greater *Agamas* add mythological and literary material of vast dimensions. Some outstanding characteristics of these systems of philosophy may be distinguished.

For all of them the supreme metaphysical entity, *paratattwa*, is God conceived as an infinite personality. Our source of knowledge concerning this reality is the second-hand mysticism of revelation and the attainable first-hand mysticism of intellectual intuition. Reason, owing to its very limitations, operates in a secondary role: to repel spurious adverse ratiocination. The supreme purport, *mahatattvā*, of all philosophical endeavour is the apprehension of this primeval centre of all being.

This principle is transcendent, not merely in the sense of being supra-cosmic, but also in the more ultimate sense of qualitative magnificence. This qualitative characterization involves metaphysical attributes such as unconditioned actuality and infinite consciousness, moral attributes such as holiness and grace, and also aesthetic absoluteness. The “*Anandamaya*” of the *Tait-tiriyā Upanisad* brings out this aspect of abundance.

For these schools, in general, the natural cosmos is a reality and not an illusory appearance. It is true that it sinks into triviality bordering on unreality, if construed apart from God; but when viewed as located in the Divine Ground, it acquires being, intelligibility, and value. The proper word in this context is *Vibhūti* or *Sakti*. Nature does not limit the splendour of God, for it itself constitutes an element of that splendour. Even as positing a finite reality apart from God would be a limit to him, the dismissal of it as illusory would render him imperfect, as the victim of that illusion.

More or less similar is the status of the personality of man. His individuality does not spring from his psycho-physical appendage but is constitutive of his essential being. But this reality of the individual Self is no limitation of God’s being because it too forms a *vibhūti* or *sakti* of God, in which a glorious fulfillment of Divine teleology has to be worked out by the creative effort of the individual. So neither *Prakṛti* nor the *Puruṣa* is an illusion and neither of them enjoys substantial being without the sustaining immanence of the Divine. They are substances adjectival to the Supreme.

The glory of finite life lies in the conscious and living self-fulfillment in and through a realization of God through work, knowledge, and love. The final point of this spiritual effort is called *Bhakti*. *Bhakti* is both the means and the end. It is no mere emotion but the rapture springing from fullness of understanding and issuing in self-dedication. The understanding in its turn is a maturation of a life of deeds consecrated to God. This elevation of *Bhakti* beyond knowledge is what marks off these schools of Vedānta from the religion of *Bhakti* resorted to for want of readiness for the rigours of Vedantic inquiry. *Bhakti* is no inferior alternative to Jnana, nor is it a preparation for it. It is its fulfilment and consummation. *Bhakti* is the prince of *sādhana*s, “*Rāja-vidyā* and also the *puruṣārtha* of *puruṣārthas* or the *pañcama-puruṣārtha*, as the Caitanya school would describe it.

Such, then, is the general characterization of the third epoch of Indian philosophy.

We may hazard some concluding reflections. The three stages of Indian philosophical thinking have brought forth successively three major interests, ethical, metaphysical, and devotional. It appears that each succeeding phase does not abrogate the earlier one but subsumes it in a larger perspective. The *Atman* metaphysics does presuppose the ethical equipment; and the theistic trend, while exalting *Bhakti*, does insist upon a clear apprehension of the Self in man as a precondition of seeking for self-enlargement in God. The last phase does definitely inculcate ethical and humanitarian activity as a part of divine service.

When looking for a work in Indian philosophy of the pre-systematic period which embodies all these interests and harmonizes them all without the excesses of partial formulations, it strikes one with the force of a revelation that the *Gita* is the one Supreme anticipatory and integrating classic. Its initial and unique emphasis on *Karma-Yoga*, elucidating it in the largest sense of ethical idealism, meets the ethical need profoundly. Its exalted presentation of the doctrine of the *Atman*, particularly in the crucial second and thirteenth chapters, fulfils amply the requirement of the atman-philosophy. No wonder Samkara excels in his interpretation of the thirteenth chapter. Its pervading spirit of *Bhakti* and the metaphysics of the *Purushottama* calling for adoration and surrender have furnished the sustaining authority for all the theistic systems of philosophy. It looks as if the entire evolution of Indian philosophical systems in the three phases constitutes a progressive elaboration of what is crisply and pregnantly laid down in this perennial source. It may be added that the highest contribution of Indian thought to the advance and emancipation of man is this scripture of ever-increasing value. It is a quintessential enunciation of the profoundest truths, which we are re-learning through evolution across the ages. To re-learn the message of the *Gita* is education and culture at their best and has the pragmatic efficacy of improving human relations. What is more, it constitutes the final intrinsic value.

S. S. RAGHAVACHAR

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