

The Philosophical Studies In India

PREM NATH

It is rather doubtful if the pattern or quality of philosophical studies in our country have substantially changed after the Independence despite new needs and new challenges. Although here and there some excellent work is being done both in regard to teaching and research as well as in the matter of the reconstruction of the curriculum, yet by and large the philosophical scene suffers from the absence of freshness and originality. It is even a growing feeling in some quarters that, if anything the standards of teaching have fallen with indiscriminate multiplication of the Departments of Philosophy in Indian universities.

Curricula of philosophy in different universities have not undergone much change during the last two decades when the overall philosophical knowledge has made some breakthrough. The curricula are particularly neglectful of advanced logic and philosophy of science while philosophy of culture, philosophy of education, social and political philosophy and aesthetics are not adequately taken care of. Subsequently the curriculum in itself has practically no potentialities for training the students to be able to recognise modern challenges and to negotiate them competently. While, of course, curriculum by itself need not necessarily inhibit the vital educational impulses, yet in the nature of things, it does set limits to the educational horizons of the students. There is considerable room for the reconstruction of curriculum to make it dynamic. The curriculum must be flexible and cover a wide range without loss of the rigour in philosophical thinking. Above all it must be problem-oriented, leaving sufficient margin for predominantly speculative and metaphysical thinking. This is calculated to lead students to independent thinking and to enable them to identify and correct problems towards successful solutions.

Any worthwhile education must set a good deal of store by adequate if also elegant expression both oral and written. Unfortunately, our stereo-typed system of examination and the language muddle have considerably cut down on the ability of the students to express themselves adequately. This is easily borne out by the declining standards of writing as reflected in university examinations; students shy away from discussions and seminars. The scene is not very inspiring even where teaching and examination are conducted in the regional languages; the

examination scripts do not tell any the better tale. Nor are there sufficient number of standard books in regional languages, whether written originally or translated, for the students to draw on. As for the study of classics in original, it appears, it is only a small minority of teachers and students who go in for them.

Teaching in most of the departments of the philosophy is by the self-same lecture method of old without much scope of students' participation by way of discussions and seminars. Even in the teaching of Indian philosophy which could very well be our strong base no fresh ground has been broken. It is rather intriguing, *inter alia*, that not many scholars are readily available to teach Indian Philosophy, who have a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit. It is imperative that the teachers of philosophy particularly in colleges should be given continuing in-service training by frequently exposing them to wider influences. Amongst other things, this will help make up the gap between the standard of teaching at the graduate level and that at the post-graduate level. Besides, there is no reason why the university teachers should not from time to time do some teaching at the graduate level. This will help strengthen the base to the advantage of post-graduate work eventually. A word may be added here on studies in religion which have hitherto been either in historical perspective or as traditional institutions of society. And generally they have been studied either as a part of history or of a denominational institution. In recent years, however, some independent departments of comparative religion have been instituted in some universities. While they go some way, it is doubtful if they aim to focus their studies and research on the more fundamental aspects i.e. religion as a phenomenon. As such there is great need for introducing the philosophy of religion in our curriculum even if it leads to philosophical rejection of religion or to its complete reconstruction in the long run. Presently only a few universities have such courses.

As for research there is hardly any emphasis at the M.A. level in most of the universities while at the Ph.D. level the research is mostly on the beaten path covering generally hackneyed subjects. There is also evidence of considerable duplication of research indicating lack of awareness of the problems in the new areas and of the direction in which the research need be channelized. It is for want of originality and purpose that philosophy so far in our country has failed to work itself out as a critique of culture. This explains why there is repetition of the routine scholarship in the area of Indian culture and why the study of Indian culture functionally with all the implied values and disvalues has not become a respectable philosophic pursuit in our universities. There is a pressing need to divert part of energies to the philosophical analysis of social problems, so as to change and social action.

It is doubtful if the majority of the departments of philosophy have sufficient number of journals and books which are essential for any worthwhile research. Besides, there is only a small number of journals in

philosophy, not to talk of journals devoted to specific areas. The argument could be that there are hardly any writers to justify a larger number of journals. Possibly correct. But could it not be that a fewer people feel inspired to write for want of sufficient scope in terms of the number of journals. This vicious circle, if so it be, must be broken to give new powers to philosophy in this country. Besides, to give opportunity to research scholars to express themselves there is a great need for at least one journal specifically covering their contributions. With more journals coming into being there will be better exchange of ideas and of the research work being done in different departments in the country, thus leading to better co-operation and co-ordination in work.

Philosophy, to be sure, lends itself admirably to inter-disciplinary approach to the problems of knowledge and yet it is a pity that its resources have not been fully exploited. The comparative lack of commerce between philosophy and the other branches of the humanities on the one hand and the natural sciences on the other does not turn out to be either healthy for philosophy or for other branches of knowledge. At any rate, philosophy is likely to be the more creative for drawing on other branches of knowledge and integrating them into a dependable philosophical thinking. It is, to say the least, an intellectual inertia if not intellectual timidity to face, say, psychological and sociological knowledge by declaring such an attempt contemptuously as 'psychologism' or 'sociologism'. So long as it is a good philosophy with all the sound logic supporting it, it matters not what it draws on and what it makes out. Surely, *when philosophy enters into a fruitful dialogue with other branches of knowledge and turns problem oriented, it improves its chances of being more creative.*

In this context I venture to suggest a new experiment. Taking into consideration the comparatively poorer lot of students joining M.A. classes in philosophy and the new demands on philosophy in this age of explosion of knowledge, a special course in philosophy to be introduced, may be, in advanced centres in philosophy or in some other selected departments. This course should be open only to M.A.s and M.Sc.s in the humanities (other than M.A. Philosophy), and social and natural sciences. A class of this complexion will have all the advantages for higher training in philosophy—specialisation in one area, maturity and inter-disciplinary potentialities. The syllabus and the training requirements of the teachers for this course will have to be thought a new. Of course this experiment can be feasible only, if among other things, the financial and academic interests of the students going in for this course are amply taken care of in lieu of the two years' extra time they spend for the course.

The emergence of the three centres for Advanced Study in Philosophy is a happy feature. So far it appears they are only duplicating the work of any other department of philosophy though perhaps on a larger scale. They have to be more innovative in the matter of programming their

teaching, research and publication and philosophical thinking to be commensurate with the finance and trust invested in them.

While the growing need of most of the disciplines is met by their respective All-India Councils, Philosophy has no such academic guardian. The instituting of a Council of Philosophy is an urgent need for the development and progress of vigorous creative philosophy in India. □

DISSERTATIONS IN PHILOSOPHY*

AN analysis of 643 dissertations in 38 universities in India upto 1971 reveals the following :

63 percent *theses* pertained to traditional *brahmanic* philosophical systems and/or comparative studies.

18 percent dealt with modern Hindu thought including reformist and/or comparative studies.

12 percent were related to the history of Western mostly English philosophy and/or to some Anglo-Saxon individual philosopher including comparative studies with some *brahmanic* traditional thinker.

6 percent dealt with the Buddhist and the Jain systems and/or an individual thinker or religious saint.

Only *six* dealt with Islamic thought and Sufism.

Only *four* with Christianity.

Only *one* with Dignaga's logical system,

Only *one* with 'Psycho-Social Study of Caste.

Only *one* with 'the Problem of Change.'

Only *two* with problems of modern Education.

Only *one* with Religion of Tribes of Travancore.

Only *one* with the Dialectical Materialism.

Only *one* with Karl Marx.

In contrast there were *thirteen* theses on God, and *twenty-two* on Sri Aurobindo.

A further study of the titles of dissertations indicate a dismal lack of concern with socio-political phenomena of our times, and want of interest in the discoveries of scientific achievements of our age.

—Editor

* This study is based on the data provided by the recent scientific publication of Dr. Abdul Rawoof, INDEX TO DISSERTATIONS IN PHILOSOPHY, (Madras : Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, 1974).