

INTRODUCTION

Professor Ganeśwar Miśra, some of whose more important essays are put together in this volume, was born in 1914 and died in 1985. His philosophy education began in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, Orissa, continued in Patna College, Patna, Bihar and, finally, in London University. In mid-fifties, he earned his Ph.D. in London on the basis of a dissertation comparing the monisms of Bradley and Śaṅkara, written under the supervision of Professor A.J. Ayer. The technique that he employed in this early work, and some of its seminal ideas continue, with refinements and some changes, in all his later works.

The present editor attended his lectures on logic as an undergraduate student at the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, India. Although soon afterwards I moved to Calcutta for my philosophy studies, my friendship with Dr. Miśra continued. He was a sharply critical thinker and questioner, and although the sharpness of his criticisms mellowed with age, he combined it with an unfailing kindness and friendliness which made one feel at home despite philosophical differences. Although trained in the analytic philosophy of logical empiricism and ordinary language analysis, he more and more turned to studying the great classical philosophical works of the Indian tradition, especially of Advaita Vedānta. My impression is, that his appreciation of Indian philosophical writings grew with age, and he sought hard to sharpen his analytical tools in order to bring out, not merely the muddles but also the profound insights of the Indian metaphysicians. A couple of years before his passing away, he wrote to me that he was engaged in studying the *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṃgraha* and hoped to be able to finish a manuscript on it. It appears that he passed away before this work was complete. I could not find out if a substantial manuscript on that theme had been left behind. But the essays collected in this volume bear witness to his deep interest in Vidyāraṇya's famed book.

Miśra may well have been the first philosopher to use the techniques of analytical philosophy for the interpretation and criticism of Indian philosophy. When he first started this line of thinking, I well remember, he was severely taken to task by the older generation of scholars in Indian philosophy. He was often dismissed as a young rebel, impatient with the "traditional" understanding of the tradition. But I believe, as he matured (and his critique "mellowed"), the seriousness of his enterprise began to impress upon his critics, and he gained wide recognition as a philosopher and also as an interpreter of the Vedānta.

In this brief introduction to the present volume, I will only state the main interpretive stance that Miśra adopts, particularly in connection with the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara and his followers. The meta-philosophical position that he adopts amounts to the well-known thesis to the effect that philosophy, properly speaking, should be a conceptual analysis, and should abandon the misleading claims to be either psychological accounts (of how experience runs) or advancing our factual

knowledge of things. Miśra extends this conception of philosophy to Advaita Vedānta, and tries to show that at his best Śaṅkara does conceptual analysis and does not offer either a psychological account of experience (ordinary or extraordinary) or a metaphysical knowledge of a transcendent reality lying behind and beyond the empirical world. How does this interpretation go? Here Miśra shows great ingenuity, but also courts grave risk as an interpreter. First of all, it is well-known that Śaṅkara regards the *śabdapramāṇa* to be the unique sources of knowledge of *Brahman*. As it is commonly understood, this means that our knowledge of *Brahman* derives from the scriptural texts—mediated by the processes of ‘hearing’ (*śravaṇa*), ‘reflecting’ (*manana*) and ‘meditating’ (*nididhyāsana*). Miśra construes ‘*śabdapramāṇa*’ as conceptual analysis whereby one lays bare the presuppositions of meaningful discourse, the ground of the intelligibility of our conceptual framework. Philosophical knowledge, then, is not to be had through any so-called mystical experience. It is not speculative proof of the existence of any transcendent reality. It is rather the knowledge acquired through examination of the “depth grammar” of discourse.

A cardinal thesis of Advaita Vedānta—stated in the more familiar locution—is that it is owing to a beginningless Ignorance (*avidyā*) that one superimposes (*adhyāsa*) the world of “name and form”, of plurality, of finite individuals upon the only reality that is there, i.e., the differenceless, indeterminate, one *Brahman* to be understood as pure consciousness, existence and bliss. This thesis is understood either psychologically (‘we mistakenly perceive ...’) or metaphysically (‘the one *Brahman* appears as many ...’). Miśra rejects both construals, as also the familiar locution used above. On his view, the thesis about *avidyā* and *adhyāsa* is a logical thesis, not a metaphysical or a psychological thesis. Let us see how this works.

All empirical knowledge is judgemental. A judgement joins an idea, meaning or concept with a reality. In the long run, we have a singular judgement of the form “This is a ϕ ”. The ‘this’ is a demonstrative which directly refers to a substance, it yields the *svarūpalakṣaṇa*. The ‘ ϕ ’ is a concept, a descriptive word, a meaning, cut loose from existence (*à la* Bradley). A judgement thus combines two entirely heterogeneous elements, the resultant is neither real nor unreal, “a non-illusory, unreal reality”. This is *adhyāsa*—the application of unreal concepts to a reality (*satyānṛtemithunīkṛtya*). *Adhyāsa* is not a psychological illusion, not a perceptual error, but rather the logical structure of a judgement of the subject-predicate form. *Avidyā* is the inveterate tendency to conceptualise.

Here Miśra’s construal of ‘*viśayi*’ as the particular this and of ‘*viśaya*’ as the universal concept is likely to be challenged by philologists. One needs also to make sense of why *viśayi* should be said to be ‘*asmadpratyayagocara*’ and *viśaya* as *yusmadpratyayagocara*. Commentators have insisted that ‘*yusmad*’ (or ‘you’) in this case, includes ‘*idam*’ (or ‘this’). This reverses Miśra’s construal. But what Miśra is doing is to roll together “this” and “I”, both are indexicals, non-conceptually referring to a uniquely particular reality: they both are *viśayi*.; ‘*viśaya*’, then, refers to all universal concepts, descriptive words, general meanings. A singular proposition combines both and so commits an ‘*adhyāsa*’.

It should not be thought that according to Miśra, the Absolute monism of Śaṅkara is based upon taking all judgements as having the subject-predicate form.

As is well-known, this is how Bertrand Russell understood Bradley's monism. Miśra is careful enough to reject such a diagnosis. As a matter of fact, Śaṅkara distinguished between judgements that couple together different elements (*samsargāvagāhī*) and identity-judgements. To the former group belong both subject-predicate and relational judgements. For Śaṅkara, the most significant ones are those of the second group, i.e., identity judgements (*akhaṇḍārthavākyaṇi*) which are not tautologies. Miśra rightly sees that the foundation of Śaṅkara's Absolutism lies not in the subject-predicate analysis of judgements but in the primacy that he accords to significant identity judgements.

At this point, I should note another of Miśra's ingenious interpretive points. Using the familiar semantic notion of 'expectancy' (*ākāṅkṣā*), he argues that in the case of ordinary sentences the meaning-expectancy is interminable, even if their grammatical form makes them appear to be self-complete. Only identity sentences are self-complete, and do not give rise to further expectancies. This is another aspect of the Advaita claim that the Absolute, the *Brahman*, is not knowable in any empirically descriptive sentence but only in and through identity sentences.

Once this point is made, it is easy for Miśra to expose where the real defect of Śaṅkara's thesis must lie. It must lie in his construal of identity sentences as asserting identity of meaning to the utter exclusion of differences. As Frege has shown, it is essential for identity sentences to be cognitively significant that the referential identity be possible in and through differences in meanings. Śaṅkara does not see that difference is essential to identity.

A similar criticism may now be made of the doctrine of *adhyāsa* as interpreted by Miśra. If the point of the thesis is that in every judgement of the subject-predicate form, in the long run, the subject must be an indexical such as "this" and "I" and the predicate a descriptive phrase (naming a universal concept "cut loose" from existence), it appears as if "coupling" these two totally heterogeneous elements must be a logical error—not a factual mistake. Now there are at least three criticisms that may be pressed against such a critique—and Miśra presses them all. First, the theory that the predicate denotes a universal is treating predicate words as though they are names, which is to blur the important distinction between names and predicates. Secondly, the critique regards "I" and "this"—the logically proper names of Russell—to name bare particulars, itself a controversial metaphysical notion. But, finally, the "saturated" name and the "unsaturated" predicate are just meant for entering into the unity of a proposition. The latter has an empty place which the former fills, and one cannot then take propositional symbolism to task for putting them together. The critique would miss the very point Frege made against the traditional understanding of the unity of a proposition.

I have given above the bare gist of Professor Miśra's interpretation and critique of Advaita Vedānta, and have said nothing about his interpretation of the Buddhist logic and *apoha* theory as well as of the idea of negation in Wittgenstein and Vidyāraṇya. However, I want particularly to draw the attention of the readers to the last essay entitled "Spirit, Machine and Man", in which the author rejects the two opposed conceptions of man—of man as a pure, disembodied pure spirit and as a

material body—by an elegant but simple argument, and pleads for the primacy of the concept of person, *à la* Strawson, as a social being, with others and in the world.

These essays bear witness to a keen Indian mind, concerned with traditional Indian thought and profoundly influenced by contemporary western thinking. Courageously and all by himself, Miśra chose this path. It is not necessary that this is the path that Indian philosophers have to choose. It is not also the case that this is the only way Indian philosophers can bring about a rapprochement between their tradition and the western thought. Western thought itself is a highly complex field. Analytic philosophy itself has gone a long way since Miśra began to think. There are other movements in the west—such as phenomenology, Heideggerean ‘Fundamental Ontology’, structuralism and deconstructionism—to each of which Indian thought, at some point or other, bears an inner affinity. Furthermore, it is not certain that some of Miśra’s interpretations of Indian philosophical concepts will not be challenged. But, in all fairness to him, I must say that interpretive possibilities for philosophical concepts need not be closed off, and at many points he has been able to suggest such new possibilities. From this point of view, his essays will continue to be exemplary even for those who may be fundamentally of a different methodological persuasion.

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