

On the Way to Intercultural Philosophy

Abstract

In this autobiographical essay, I will sketch some events which have played a significant role in my intellectual biography. I began my career with a study of Islamic thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries before turning towards a study of Sufism. The exchanges, which took place with colleagues during conferences conducted by the East-West Philosophers' Conferences, proved to be crucial for my further philosophical development. My current philosophizing is marked by a turn towards intercultural philosophy.

In many ways, my own intellectual biography parallels socio-political developments. What began as an intellectual exchange with Soviet fellow philosophers during the heydays of the USSR has matured towards a quest for an intercultural philosophical standpoint.

Keywords

comparative philosophy studies in Russia, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Marxist-Leninist ideology, Muslim philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sufism, East-West Philosophers' Conferences, Eliot Deutsch, Roger Ames, intercultural philosophy.

My life as the life of everybody else has been full of randomness and patterns. Let me share with you just a few events which have played a significant role in my intellectual biography.

I was born in Moscow in an Armenian family. My parents were from Akhaltsikhe, a town located on the border with Turkey. Both graduated from gymnasiums in the Georgian capital. My father moved to Moscow in 1927 and my mother joined him after marriage in 1934. Both of them stayed here till their death. My parents spoke mostly Russian at home (my father could not even read or write in

Armenian). Thus my younger sister and I spoke only Russian, though I could understand very simple Armenian.

After school graduation in Moscow (in 1953, two months after the death of Stalin) I was to make a decision about my future profession. I planned to study humanities, either history of art or Oriental studies. My parents wished that I study in the Moscow Institute (University) of Oriental Languages. I became a student of the Indian department with special training in Urdu.

In the first year, I was happy with the professors and the whole atmosphere at the University. However, on my return to university at the start of the second year I found out that the Institute of Oriental Studies had been liquidated by the decision of the USSR Government. The official authorities had come to the conclusion that the country did not need so many specialists in Orientology. Only one-third of the students were allowed to continue their former orientation in education at the newly established faculty of Oriental Studies of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations which existed under the patronage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I was among those lucky ones. It seemed quite strange to be the only girl in a class with fourteen boys. It meant that for the other girls gender had played its role in their decision.

I graduated from University with honors in 1959. Three chair-holders (Indian literature, history, and economics) proposed that I should continue my studies in graduate school. However, at that time I did not wish to do a PhD. I wanted to get a job which would allow me to visit and work in India, the land of my dreams. I was simply being realistic: being a girl I had no chances at getting a job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Foreign Trade. There was no other option than to consider the vacancies suggested by the State Commission. According to the rules of the Soviet Union, the state was to give a job to every university graduate. I was given three alternatives: to continue education in a post-graduate school; to work at Moscow Radio, division of the programs in Urdu; to become a fellow of the Institute of philosophy, USSR Academy of Sciences.

The Rector of the University, Fedor Rizhenko, was a professor of philosophy. I decided to ask for his advice. He strongly recommended joining the Institute of Philosophy. I had many doubts about that. He assured me that if I did not like the job I was welcome to return to the *Alma Mater* for post-graduate studies and teaching. The Rector gave

me a good advice. I started to work at the Institute of Philosophy in September 1959 and continue to work there till now.

How could a graduate in Oriental studies get a vacancy at the Academic Institute where any graduate in philosophy dreamt to work? The regime planned to introduce changes in the interpretation of the history of philosophy by turning away from a Eurocentric attitude, which Russia had inherited primarily from Germany. While teaching of philosophy in Europe started in the twelfth century, in Russia philosophy was taught only after Peter the Great, following Leibniz's advice given to him in 1724, issued a decree to start teaching philosophy at the Academic University of Petersburg Academy of sciences. By establishing Moscow University in 1755 the teaching of philosophy firmly got the status of a secular discipline. The Russian-German academic relations of that time played the main role in raising the rank of philosophy in its opposition to the widely spread conservative public opinion, in particular, of the clerical milieu.

The general trend in the history of teaching philosophy in the Russian Empire prior the October Revolution of 1917 was characterized by the constant struggle between two opposite trends: one that was oriented towards the promotion of freedom and plurality of views, philosophical in particular, and the other trend (mostly preferred by the authorities) was aimed to maintain and to strengthen the three ›pillars‹ of the ideology – Orthodoxy, the czarist autocracy, and nationalism.

Paradoxically, the October Revolution, in spite of all radical changes it claimed, and in fact brought, smashed the above mentioned pillars but did not uproot them. As a result, these old pillars were replaced by new ones which appeared to be different but, verily, were cultivated from the former roots. Thus, Christian Orthodoxy was substituted by the orthodoxy of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the autocracy of the czars by the dictatorship of the Communist party, and nationalism by Soviet patriotism. In the long run, the results were similar: freedom and plurality of views were limited, intellectual life in the Soviet Union remained very much separated from the outside world.

I would not like to exaggerate and simplify the matter. The above said intellectual ›separation‹ did not mean that foreign writers or philosophers were not translated, published, and studied. On the contrary, the Soviet Union boasted of a very high rate of circulation of books translated from many languages of the world. Yet, it did not mean a genuine openness. There was a strict selection aimed to support the

monopoly of the single ideology – Marxism-Leninism. The philosophical system, which was presented as the most perfect, rested on a number of dogmas: materialism as opposed to idealism, dialectics as opposed to metaphysics, rationality as opposed to irrationality, atheism as opposed to religion, and so on. The contrast between each of these dualisms terribly impoverished the philosophical heritage and led to a distorted presentation of the history of philosophy as such.

Soon after Stalin's death in 1953 things changed, which had their impact on philosophy as well. Thus plans emerged to rethink the history of philosophy. The decision was taken to prepare a new edition of *History of Philosophy*.¹ One of its novelties was »to restore the historical truth, showing the fruitful progressive development of philosophical thought [...] in China, India, in the Arab and other countries of the East« (Vol. 1 1957: 18).²

For realization of the project a special department (in Russian – »sector«) of Eastern philosophies was established. Philosophy graduates had not studied Oriental languages or religious and philosophy traditions of the East. Due to that very reason graduates of Oriental studies, like me, were invited to work at the Institute of Philosophy, the USSR Academy of Sciences. By 1960, when the department was finally established, there was a group of young people working in it. All of them knew the relevant languages, possessed a wide knowledge of history, economics, etc. of China, India, Arab countries, Iran, Turkey, Indonesia, Korea, and Japan. They became a team for writing a chapter for a new edition of *History of Philosophy*. With my knowledge of Urdu, I was requested to write about Islamic philosophy of Indo-Pakistan.

In order to be able to fulfill my duties I desperately needed at least two things. First, be much better equipped with knowledge of philosophy, at least by reaching graduate level. Second, have access to primary sources and literature in the field in which I had to work and write.

The first problem was solved by joining post-graduate courses, which gave me the opportunity to attend the lectures presented by the best professors at that time. It was expected that I study and work at the Institute. After passing exams I should present the PhD thesis

¹ See: *История философии, В 6 томах*, Москва: »Издательство Академии наук СССР,« 1957–1965 (English: *History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1–6, Moscow: »Nauka,« 1957–1965).

² Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.

in four years. The tutor was appointed. But frankly speaking, I could not expect any help from him. He lacked any knowledge in Orientalology, and besides belonged to the generation of very dogmatic Marxist-Leninist philosophers. The young scholars (just few years senior to me) became my real tutors. All of them were graduates from the best philosophy faculty in the USSR: Lomonosov University. They were young and bright, open to ›winds‹ from outside and free thinking. That was the generation of the sixties. In fact, later on they have become the most respected Russian philosophers. I would like to mention just a few names: Vadim Sadovsky (logic), Oleg Drobnitskiy (ethics), Erich Solovyev (history of philosophy), Nina Yulina (analytic philosophy), Vladislav Lektorsky (epistemology).

The second problem I faced was solved unexpectedly. The Institute got the invitation to send its delegation for participation in the work of the Eighth Session of the Pakistani Philosophical Congress. Thus in the spring of 1961 I flew to Pakistan with two senior scholars: a deputy Director of the Institute E. Shorokhova and Editor-in-chief of *Voprosi filosofii*, the main philosophy journal in Russia, V. Semenov. My role was very modest. I was to be an interpreter to the real delegates. I dared to present a paper – »Study of Oriental Philosophy in the USSR«. Unpredictably the presentation was successful, though the paper was quite primitive. Since I could not to speak English fluently then, I preferred to present the paper in Urdu. My knowledge of that language was good enough so that the diploma work was written on Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955), a short story writer who was considered to be like Chekhov or Maupassant in Urdu literature. It was published along with the translation of his stories in Russian. The very fact of my speaking in Urdu brought me extremely warm and friendly reaction of the audience. I was presented with two huge boxes of books and journals, like *Pakistan Philosophy Journal*, *Iqbal Quarterly*, etc. Besides all that I was exceptionally kindly treated by the President of the Pakistan Philosophical Congress Prof. Muhammad M. Sharif as well by Prof. M. Hamiduddin who replaced him later on.

In 1963 I submitted the thesis and got my PhD (In Russia it is called ›Candidate of Sciences‹ degree). On its basis in 1967, my book *Pakistan: Philosophy and Sociology* (in Russian) was published. There was nothing great in that first publication. It carried the burden of dominant ideology at that time in the Soviet Union. Yet, there was something new in it which attracted the attention of the readers both at home and outside.

In 1969 Hans Braker published his *Kommunismus und Islam. Religionsdiskussion und Islam in der Sowjetunion* in Tübingen. To my great surprise he dealt with my modest writings, especially those dedicated to Islamic ethics. Braker compared my approach with the one which was dominant in the USSR, especially with the works of the leading Soviet expert on Islam – Prof. Lutsian Klimovich. This comparison had been undertaken to point out that the new generation of the Soviet scholars was turning away from the aggressive atheistic approach and criticism of Islam.³

The Editor of the *Vostochnaya literatura* publishing house proposed to publish the translation of the book in English. To my chagrin, the Head of the Department on Pakistan Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies (another Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences) Prof. Y. Gankovsky, as soon as he learned about the plans to publish my book in English, wrote a letter of protest to the editor. The letter stated that the publication of my book would damage Russian-Pakistani relations; it would provoke anti-Soviet demonstrations in Pakistan. The editor, Oleg Dreyer, a great publisher with liberal views, informed me about the letter. I requested him to arrange a meeting with Gankovsky so that I could directly respond to him. It was done. I asked him not to worry about the political consequences of the publication and assured him that I would take full responsibility for that. The English translation was published in 1972⁴. The reaction in Pakistan was immediate. *The Pakistan Times* published a very favorable and even flattering review, in which it was said that the book was the first case in which the author follows Marxism and at the same time is able to be »refreshingly sympathetic to the major intellectual trends« in Pakistan society⁵. This review was followed by two other positive ones.⁶

All the above said encouraged me to continue my research in this field and to extend it. In 1966–1969 my husband was appointed to the

³ H. Braker, *Kommunismus und Islam. Religionsdiskussion und Islam in der Sowjetunion, Kommunismus und Wetreligionen Asiens. Zur Religions – und Asienpolitik der Sowjetunion*, Bd. 1, 1, Tübingen: Mohr, 1969.

⁴ M. T. Stepanyants, *Pakistan: Philosophy and Sociology*, Lahore: Peoples' Publishing House, 1972.

⁵ Zeno, »As Others See Us,« *The Pakistan Times*, 13. 10. 1972.

⁶ A staff reporter, »Soviet Academician on Iqbal's Philosophy,« *The Pakistan Times*, 21. 12. 1972; C. F. Qadir, »Contemporary Pakistan Philosophy,« *The Pakistan Times*, 24. 12. 1972.

Soviet Embassy in New Delhi for the second time. That stay did not interrupt my academic carrier. On the contrary, it helped me to access the primary sources and literature which I needed desperately. I became a regular reader at Sapru House and Abul Kalam Azad libraries. The stay in India was of crucial importance since I could be in contact with Indian philosophers. It enabled me to participate in the annual Indian Philosophical Congress Session and in many seminars, round-tables, and regularly publish my writings in Indian journals. In a few years after returning to Moscow, I finished the second dissertation and submitted it for evaluation.

The dissertation was to pass through a series of critical discussions at different academic levels. The first discussion in the department where I worked proved to be problematic. The record of that first discussion I keep as a memory about the Soviet times. There were two main points of criticism. First: the theme chosen for the dissertation had no politico-ideological actuality since »Islam is dead and does not play any significant role in contemporary life.«

The second point of criticism: nowhere in the dissertation is it said that »religion is the opium of the masses.« It means that the author ignores the most fundamental evaluation given to religion by Marx-Engels. The senior, more conservative, fellows voted for disapproval of the dissertation. Fortunately, the junior colleagues strongly defended me and voted for the approval. Hence, the dissertation passed the first stage. In the long run it received the approval at all the levels, and in 1974 I obtained the second degree.

On the basis of the dissertation the book *Islamic Philosophy and Social Thought (XIX-XX Centuries)*⁷, was published in 1982 (in Russian) and then in 1989 in Pakistan (in English). The book proceeds from the basic notion that Islam is not a dogma, one for all times, but rather a religious teaching influenced by political, economic, and social changes. Orthodoxy, modernism, reformation and revivalism are suggested as four main trends in modern Muslim thought.

The term reformation is used in the broad sense of the word, meaning the processes which took place in the Islamic community in the nineteenth and twenties centuries and which were aimed at ad-

⁷ М. Т. Степанинц, *Мусульманские концепции в философии и политике XIX-XX вв.*, Москва: »Наука«, Главная редакция восточной литературы, 1982; M. T. Stepanyants, *Islamic Philosophy and Social Thought (XIX-XX Centuries)*, Lahore: Peoples' Publishing House, 1989.

justing to the challenges of the time. The social and epistemic roots of the reformatory way of thinking in Islam are compared to the Reformation in Christianity. An attempt is made to find out the similarities and differences between the two kinds of reformation.

The reformed attitude to the relations between God and human being is illustrated by ›spiritual pluralism‹ of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), by ›dialectical monadology‹ of Muhammad Sharif (d. 1965), the conception of God by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) and Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958), and others. Untraditional ideas on a correlation between reason and belief, science and religion are demonstrated by the examples of the views shared by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838/1839–1897), Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), Syed Husein Alatas (1928–2007). The differences from traditional views are clearly obvious in the interpretation given to such values as freedom, equality, fraternity, and justice.

Changes in political views are demonstrated by describing the evolution of the concept of nation: Panislamism of Afghani and ‘Abduh, the Muslim nationalism of those who supported the theory of ›two nations‹ on the Indian subcontinent, the secular nationalism of Al-Kawakibi (1855–1902), Amin Rihani (1876–1940), and others. Different conceptions of ›Islamic democracy‹ are considered in detail. Socio-economic conceptions are analyzed. Today I am led to think that I overrated the prospective for the reformation in Islam by underestimating the difficulties which stood on its way.

The publication of the above mentioned book in some way marked the end of the first period in my intellectual biography which was mainly dedicated to the study of Islamic thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I sensed a need to bring changes in my studies even early, when I finished the second dissertation. I felt ›fed up‹ with the field of research which was too closely connected with politics and ideology. I wished to turn to the sphere where I could feel freer and which would enrich my knowledge of the Islamic thought. I decided go into studies of Sufism.

How did Sufism attract my attention? In almost twenty years of research on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Muslim philosophy and sociopolitical thought, I often wondered how to explain the fact that leading reformers such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ‘Abduh, Muhammad Iqbal and Abul Kalam Azad were, at the early stages of their careers, attracted by *tasawwuf*.

And an even more profound motivation to study Sufism was the

desire to deviate from ideological imposed subjects to one that could provide insight into the inner meanings of the Muslim culture hidden behind the coded symbols, metaphors, and allegories.

From 1917, Sufism was practically a taboo subject for research in the USSR. The books and articles written in those years can hardly be regarded as academic. They met, either willingly or unwillingly, the ideological aims of antireligious state policy.

Once again a happy chance helped me. My husband got a new appointment – this time, to the USSR Consulate in Montreal, Canada. I joined him as soon as I obtained my second degree in spring 1974. Six years stay in Canada gave me an occasion to be free in choosing the subject of research and what is more important – to have access to the books in the library of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University. I used the propitious time for self-education and research.

The *Perestroika* (1986–1991) brought changes in many spheres of life. I could now express ideas on mysticism publicly. Hence I published *Philosophical Aspects of Sufism* (in Russian) in 1987⁸. The readers welcomed its publication by making the small book one of the bestsellers of that time. It was, in fact, the signal for running the blockade around the Sufi theme, though my work was not free from some ideological clichés of bygone times, retained partly for censorship considerations.

The book had two English editions: in India (1989) and in USA (1994)⁹. The American edition had become possible due to the support I got from Prof. William C. Chittick, who is best known for his groundbreaking work on Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi, and has written extensively on the school of Ibn 'Arabi, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic cosmology.

Though I have never stopped writing about Muslim thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and about Sufism, yet the third period in my intellectual biography started by the end of 1980s. For the first time one scholar from the USSR was invited to participate in the Sixth East-West Philosophers' Conference (1989) directed by Prof. Eliot Deutsch. The Institute of Philosophy decided

⁸ М.Т. Степанянц, *Философские аспекты суфизма*, Москва: »Наука,« Главная редакция восточной литературы, 1987.

⁹ M. T. Stepanyants, *Philosophical Aspects of Sufism*, New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1989; Sufi Wisdom. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

to send me because since 1980 I was Head of Department on Oriental Philosophies' Studies at the Institute. The Conference made a great impact on me by its high standard of scholarship and the atmosphere of freedom and creativity in expressing and discussing the plurality of attitudes to the main theme of the Conference »Culture and Modernity: The Authority of the Past.« About a hundred and fifty scholars from more than thirty countries participated in the great forum which lasted for two weeks. Among the participants there were world known philosophers: A. A. MacIntyre, H. Putnam, A. Dante, R. Bernstein, R. Rorty, D. P. Chattopadhyaya, R. Gandhi, O. Oruka, K. O. Apel, S. Stoyanovich, A. Heller, B. Matilal and many others. It was truly a »star constellation«! With some of them I stayed in contact and cooperation for years ahead, in particularly with Eliot Deutsch and his »right hand« at that moment Roger Ames. I never expected to be back to these conferences in the future. Fortunately, I was wrong.

Soon afterward the Conference I got a proposal from Professor E. Deutsch to organise a regional conference of EWPC in Moscow. Though the beginning of 1990s was a very hard time for us, yet my colleagues welcomed the proposal enthusiastically. Thus, the first regional comparative philosophy conference hold place in Moscow in July 1990. Eliot Deutsch and Roger Ames brought to Moscow seven scholars including, besides the Americans, those from India, Mexico, and the Great Britain. The theme was »Culture and Modernity: Feminist Issues.«

The first experience was quite successful: all the papers were published in Russian under the title *Feminism: East-West-Russia*¹⁰, while the selected papers were included in the issue of *East and West Philosophy Journal*¹¹. This conference was not only the first Russian conference on comparative philosophy but also the first one on feminism which was in fact almost an »illegal« topic for academic discussions in the USSR.

In November 1990, another international conference was held at the Institute of Philosophy in Moscow. The topic was »Concept of Man in the Traditional Cultures of the Orient.« Its foreign partici-

¹⁰ М. Т. Степанянц (ed.), *Феминизм: Восток-Запад-Россия*, Москва: »Восточная литература«, 1993 (English: *Feminism: East-West-Russia*, Moscow: »Vostochnaya literatura«, 1993).

¹¹ *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 1992.

pants were five French scholars and Eliot Deutsch as well as Roger Ames.

Incredible events in my life continued to happen. I was honored to become the Director of the Seventh EWPC on »Justice and Democracy: A Philosophical Exploration« and then co-directed with Roger Ames the Eighth Conference convened in 2000 under the theme »The Technology and Human Values on the Edge of the Third Millennium.« My role in the next two conferences was to be the Chair, International Advisory Committee and a plenary speaker at the Ninth East-West Philosophers' Conference in 2005 on »Educations and Their Purposes: A Philosophical Dialogue among Cultures,« and, besides chairing the International Advisory Committee, to present the key-note address at the Tenth EWPC in 2011 on »Value and Values: Economics and Justice in an Age of Global Interdependence.«

The impact of the EWPC and of personal links with their leaders (especially, with Eliot Deutsch and Roger Ames) was so inspiring that I suggested establishing an academic series on comparative philosophy in Russia in order to promote the studies in this field. This proposal was supported by the Academic Council. The design of the cover for the volumes in the series incorporated the logo of the *Philosophy East and West Journal* paying in this way tribute to the role played by EWPC and the journal in promoting the comparative philosophy studies in Russia.

Later on, I initiated a kind of European branch of EWPC by launching Moscow International Conferences on Comparative Philosophy. The first conference on »Comparative Ethics in a Global Age« took place in 2002; the second on »Knowledge and Belief in the Dialogue of Cultures« in 2006; the third on »Philosophy and Science in the Cultures of East and West« in 2012. The papers of the conferences were published in Russia and then in USA by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.¹²

The great role in the success of comparative philosophy conferences in Moscow has been played by the contribution of foreign scholars. Some like Richard Rorty and Daya Krishna have passed away.

¹² M. Stepanyants (ed.), *Comparative Ethics in a Global Age*, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2007; *Knowledge and Belief in the Dialogue of Cultures*, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2011; *Philosophy and Science in Cultures of East and West*, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2014.

Others, happily, are alive: Henry Rosemont Jr., H.-G. Moeller, Peimin Ni, Arindam Chakrabarti, Gholam-Reza A'avani, Michel Hulin, Gianni Vattimo. Special gratitude should be expressed to Fred R. Dallmayr, whom I first met in Hawai'i, who participated actively in Moscow conferences and who continues to be my dear colleague and friend up till today.

The tradition of comparative studies is dynamic, sensitive to the changes and demands of the time. A comparative approach is sharply needed to be introduced in teaching philosophy. There is no doubt that cultural diversity as a property of social reality is not too much younger than humanity. However, it is only in our time that it has become one of the main features of the epoch. The transformation of cultural multiplicity from the reality of a social being into a *problem* not only at the level of a particular state, but at the planetary level, is explained by the radical changes which humanity experiences in these days. The »beginning of global history« is fraught with a threat of an enforced unification, of leveling the cultural plurality. That is why there is a vital need to resist tendencies which lead to the elimination of cultural originality, peculiarities in the ways of life, variety in mentality of peoples; in other words, tendencies which aim to subordinate everybody to a single model of civilization.

Consequently, there is a widespread rise of national self-consciousness, a boost of the efforts to find out personal and collective identities. »The era of identity is full of sound and fury. The search for identity divides and separates« (Bauman 2001).¹³ The »anger« easily can be transformed in violence. Education has a great responsibility for any negative consequences of the events.

I mentioned above that some efforts to rethink history of philosophy were undertaken in the USSR in the 1960s, soon after the death of Stalin. However, the publication of the new edition of *History of Philosophy* which was expected to become a kind of a manual for philosophy students had not been very helpful. In spite of claiming that it would restore »justice« by showing »the fruitful development of philosophical thought in China, India, in the Arab and other countries of the East« that had not been done. In their desire to discover at all costs the »line of Democritus and Plato« in ancient India, for example, the authors often identified any anti-Brahmanic trends

¹³ Z. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, Cambridge: Polity, 2001.

of thought with materialism for example, with rejection of *moksa* or with critical attitude to asceticism, etc. Yet, it is well known, that the opposition to *Brahmanism* was not yet a proof of materialist views. Suffice it to recall that the strongest anti-Brahmanic trends were the teachings of the Buddhists and of the Jains.

A real status of and correlation between materialist and idealistic views in India were arbitrarily distorted. The role of *Lokayata-Charvakas* was exaggerated and pushed into the foreground. While, say, four pages were dedicated to the Lokayata, the *Vedanta darsana*, the most influential of the classical Brahmanic schools in India, was mentioned only once and covered one page. Other darsanas (the *Nyaya*, the *Vaisesika*, the *Yoga*, the *Samkhya*, and the *Mimansa*) were considered with the single purpose of finding elements of materialism in them. Since no such elements could be discovered, say, in the *Yoga*, it was negatively and unequivocally defined as an extreme form of »idealism of the mystical variety.«

Things were about as bad in the case of philosophy of Buddhism, which was presented in a simplistic and schematic fashion. The name of the founder of *Madhyamika* School Nagarjuna was merely mentioned and presented in a negative light. He was said to have resorted to »logical trickery« and »speculation« in asserting the relativity of human knowledge.

As a result, the role of idealism in the Oriental philosophical heritage was underestimated, as was its objective significance for the development of human knowledge. In the conclusion to the chapter on »The Birth and Development of Philosophical Thought in Slave-Ownning Societies of the Ancient East« we read: »Under the dominance of slave-owning aristocracy and religious ideology, the best and most fruitful doctrines of the Ancient East were either materialist in their nature or contained materialistic elements« (Vol. I 1957: 71).

The chapters of *The History of Philosophy* dedicated to the East, as well as the majority of the writings of the Soviet philosophers were written with the aim to eradicate a Eurocentric approach to Eastern philosophies. However, while criticizing »bourgeois« Eurocentrism, they proved to be Eurocentric in their own way. The Eastern philosophical systems were considered and evaluated solely in the frames of a vulgar, primitively understood Marxism.

Teaching philosophy in Russia continued to ignore the contribution of non-western peoples in philosophical heritage. A textbook on

non-western philosophies did not exist. I took the liberty to write the first one basing on many years of personal teaching experience.¹⁴

Soon after graduation from University I started to teach Urdu, then for two years I was visiting professor in Russian language at Delhi University, in 1966–1969. With Leonid Vasilyev, a leading scholar in Sinology, I presented an innovative lecture course to the students of my Alta Mater. The course was on the main Eastern religions: Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. It might sound unbelievable but the students of Oriental studies had never before been lectured on religious teachings. That was caused by a strong atheistic stand on education. Our lectures were so unusual that they were attended both by the students and by the other professors. There is no wonder that later on (after the return from Canada) I was invited by the Rector of the Diplomatic Academy Professor (academician) Sergey L. Tikhvinsky, an outstanding Russian scholar in Chinese history, to teach at the Academy. There I got my professorship (1983) and lectured for 15 years (1980–1995) combining with the main work at the Institute of Philosophy. I stopped teaching diplomats when the University of Humanities was established on the basis of the academic institutes, including the Institute of Philosophy. I was requested to be the professor and Head of the chair on philosophy and political thought in the countries of the East. Later on, the UNESCO Chair on «Philosophy in the Dialogue of Cultures» was founded of which I am Head and professor from the very beginning (1996) till now.

My first textbook was published in 1997 (see above). It contained the introductory course and a selection of texts (the Russian translations of the sources from Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, and Farsi). The title of the book was «Vostochnaya filosofiya» which means «Eastern Philosophy.» I explained to the editor that to use the singular noun «philosophy» is wrong, there are a number of philosophies in the East. Yet the editor was of the opinion that the Russian readers were so used to the singular noun that the plural form would have been considered a sign of illiteracy on part of the author! Only in the third edition (enlarged and corrected) of that textbook have I succeeded in renaming it «Eastern Philosophies.»¹⁵ For me it did not

¹⁴ М. Т. Степанянц, *Восточная философия. Вводный курс и избранные тексты*, М.: «Восточная литература», 1997.

¹⁵ М. Т. Степанянц, *Восточные философии. Учебник для вузов*, Москва: «Акаде-

bring any personal advantage, it was rather a victory over the impact of simplified Eurocentric attitude to the phenomena of philosophy. The textbook was translated and published in English and Vietnamese.¹⁶ I deeply appreciate the American scholars for presenting my modest writing to the English speaking readers and in this way encouraging me.

I am not aware how the translation of the textbook in Vietnamese has been met. In any case I am happy that it was translated by my former PhD student Dr. Tran Nguyen Viet who uses it in teaching his students.

It is time now to speak about the fourth period of my intellectual autobiography. The previous three stages slowly but surely lead me to intercultural philosophy. Paradoxically, I started to do the latter long before I heard about the emergence of this trend in philosophy. (The first of my intercultural philosophy writings were dedicated to rationalistic traditions of the East in comparison of those ones in the West; to the concept of justice, and Golden Rule.¹⁷)

I believe that it is a natural evolution of the vast majority of those who are in comparative philosophy. In my understanding since the 1980s East-West Philosophers' conferences, in fact, I have been already doing intercultural philosophy. Yet it was done without conceptualizing the general principles and methods of this trend in philosophy.

In my personal case that progression was also promoted by the position of the Head of Department on Oriental Philosophies' Studies at the Institute of Philosophy, which I hold for 32 years starting from

мический проект, « 2011 (English: *Eastern Philosophies, University Text Book*, Moscow: Academic project, 2011).

¹⁶ M. T. Stepanyants, *Introduction to Eastern Thought*, Walnut Creek-Lanham-New York-Oxford: AltaMira Press, A Division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2002; M. T. Stepanyants, *Triet hoc phuong dong trung hoa*, An do & Cac nuoc hoi gilao. Nha xuat ban khoa hoc xa hoi, Hanoi: 2003.

¹⁷ К вопросу о специфике «восточных» типов философствования (вместо предисловия) // Рационалистическая традиция и современность. Москва: «Наука», 1988; *The Ideal of Justice in the Context of Cultural Dialogue, Justice and Democracy: Crosscultural Perspectives*, Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 1997 (co-edited with R. Bontekoe); *Golden Mean as a Metaphorical Key to Understanding: The General and the Particular in Moral Philosophy, Comparative Ethics in a Global Age*, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2006, pp. 43–52; «Cultural Essentials versus Universal Values?», *Diogenes*, No. 219, Vol. 55, Issue 3, 2008, pp. 13–23.

1980. In that capacity I was expected, besides studies in the particular field of my personal academic interests and abilities, to direct and unite the endeavors of the colleagues to work as a team on some common project. This duty forced me to enlarge the sphere of my own knowledge, to study and to be aware about other philosophical and religious traditions. It was the most difficult task for me when it concerned China, and less complicated in case of India. My university training in Indian studies, the comprehension of Urdu and Hindi, five years stay in India, close cooperation with Indian philosophers, participation in many annual sessions of Indian philosophical congresses and conferences, all that was very helpful. Besides, I studied and regularly published books and articles on modern history of Indian philosophy. The most significant of contributions in that field are two Encyclopedias.¹⁸

For the first time I heard about intercultural philosophy as such from Professors Hans Lenk and Gregor Paul during my short but memorable visit as a guest-speaker to the *Internationale Akademie für nachhaltige Entwicklungen und Technologien* at the Karlsruhe University, Germany in March 2010. I had a chance to learn more while chairing the section »Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy« at the Twenty-First World Philosophy Congress in Athens (August, 2013). I started searching information about intercultural philosophy online.

Unfortunately I cannot read German while the majority of information on intercultural philosophy is in this language. I managed to get the book *Intercultural Philosophy* by Prof. Ram Adhar Mall. Reading Mall and later on *A Dozen Rules of Thumb for Avoiding Intercultural Misunderstanding* by Elmar Holenstein as well as some of the articles written by Hans Lenk and Gregor Paul has definitely enlightened me. I continue my regular studies and writings realizing now that I am doing intercultural philosophy.¹⁹ In March 2015 while

¹⁸ Индийская философия. Энциклопедия. М. »Восточная литература«, РАН; »Академпроект,« 2009; Философия буддизма. Энциклопедия. М., »Восточная литература«, РАН, 2011; М. Т. Stepanyants (ed.), *Russia Looks at India. A Spectrum of Philosophical Views*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research Published in association with D. K. Printworld Ltd., 2010.

¹⁹ »Contribution of Non-Western Cultures to the Ecological Civilization Construction,« *The Second Conference of World Cultural Forum*; »Strengthen International Cooperation to Build an Ecological Civilization,« *A Collection of Paper Abstracts by Experts and Scholars from China and Abroad*, 2013, Suzhou (China); »Becoming Hu-

participating in an international conference and Comité Directeur de Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie meeting in Bangkok (Thailand) I presented the paper on »Intercultural Philosophy as the Imperative of the Time.«

Intercultural philosophy is a concept that is still virtually unavailable in Russian intellectual circulation. It is true that some scholars (not yet the majority) recognize that Western philosophy is not the only one, and along with it there are other philosophies. There is an increasing interest in comparative studies. However, the latter are mainly aimed at discovering specifics of non-western traditions. Little attention is given to finding out the overlaps in different philosophies. On the contrary there is an opinion that the philosophies are so different that they do not possess anything in common. I feel that we, the Russian scholars, urgently need to rethink our views so that to move towards intercultural philosophy.

It is because of those considerations that I have written an article for our main philosophy journal which is to be published in the October issue of 2015 under the title »From Eurocentrism to Intercultural Philosophy.« I am quite realistic about my own abilities to do intercultural philosophy in the highest meaning of that concept (I have recently turned 80). Yet I am optimistic about future developments: intercultural philosophy will go beyond acknowledging the plurality of philosophies and the establishment of mutual respectful relations between them; it will lead far ahead in maintaining the dialogue between different philosophy traditions to the highest stage of rethinking the socio-political ideals, in formulating alternative modernization concepts, in looking for the responds to the challenges of the environmental crisis, in expanding the boundaries of philosophy and science, in presenting the newest scenarios for globalization, etc.

In short, if philosophy stays in cultural isolation it will lose its purpose to grasp by mind the spirit of the times.

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man: Different Cultural Approaches,« *The Symposium of the Steering Committee Meeting »Learning to be Human,«* Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014.