

## My Pursuits in Philosophy

PRADEEP P. GOKHALE

Savitribai Phule Pune University, India (pradeepgokhale53@gmail.com)

*Though I loved Sanskrit, I had a skeptical and heretical attitude towards many beliefs cherished in Sanskrit knowledge systems. I found philosophy to be the right platform to pursue noble ideals without compromising my skeptical and heretical approach. While criticizing Śaṅkara's Advaita-Vedānta perspective, I tried to present a reconstruction of the Lokāyata perspective, which is traditionally identified with Indian materialism, by making it more intelligible and relevant. The orthodox-heterodox division of Indian Philosophy was also important for me for its moral-social implications. Hence, I was interested in Jainism and Buddhism. My research interests in these schools covered their ethics, epistemology, and logic. My studies in Buddhism led me to take seriously the impact of Buddhism on Indian culture, and also the rational and secular reconstruction of Buddhism rendered by the thinkers like Satyanarayan Goenka, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, and B. R. Ambedkar. One of the driving forces in my intellectual journey has been my view that if the Indian social order is to be rid of the caste system and made more rational and moral as well as less superstitious and unjust, the centrality of Brahmanical schools has to be replaced by that of non-Brahmanical schools.*

Key words: Ambedkarite Buddhism; Buddhist ethics; Lokāyata/Cārvāka; Dharmakīrti; Jaina epistemology; Śaṅkara's Advaita; Sanskrit knowledge systems

In 1972 I completed my undergraduate education in Statistics (Major), Mathematics, and Sanskrit from Savitribai Phule College, Pune. But I soon realized that my choice of the major did not suit my temperament, which was attracted more towards literary and socio-cultural issues. I wondered whether Sanskrit would be the right choice for me. Thanks to teachers like A. R. Hardikar and Pandit V. B. Bhagwat, I had developed a liking for Sanskrit literature and was also introduced to the Sanskrit knowledge systems. But I had a skeptical attitude towards many beliefs advocated in the Sanskrit knowledge systems and those cherished by many Sanskrit scholars. In my mind there was an admixture of heretic ideas and noble ideals. Articulation and development of these ideas and ideals was not possible by remaining in the field of Sanskrit studies. Hence, after making an unsuccessful beginning in Sanskrit studies at the post-graduate level, I decided to shift to philosophy. I was fortunate to come in contact with Professor S.S. Barlingay (1919-1997), who was then Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pune, who helped me acquire a flair for philosophy. The department of philosophy led and developed by him provided the requisite atmosphere and opportunities for me to develop philosophically.

### 1 Studies in Lokāyata

In my post-graduate days, the philosophical milieu in many Indian universities was strongly influenced by the schools of philosophical analysis and linguistic philosophy; even Indian philosophy was being viewed from such a modern point of view. At the same time, the hegemony of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta in the field of Indian Philosophy was not questioned by many contemporary scholars of Indian Philosophy. My teacher, Professor S.S. Barlingay, who was a philosopher of a high order, was, according to my estimate, a philosopher of common sense and ordinary language. Common sense

philosophy in the west was known for its anti-idealistic stance. Naturally I was expecting that Barlingay, as a common-sense philosopher, would be opposed to Advaitic idealism. But instead of questioning the idealism of Śaṅkara, he used to re-interpret Śaṅkara's Advaita as a non-idealist ontology by distinguishing between cosmo-centric and anthropocentric world views. Accordingly, to accept the world as it is—as reality (which Śaṅkara called Brahman)—would be the cosmo-centric view, and to think about the world in idealistic terms—that is, in terms of God, soul, rebirth, and so on—would be the anthropocentric approach superimposed on the real world. This was the correct interpretation of Śaṅkara according to him. Another teacher of mine, Professor M. P. Marathe (1939-2015), in his doctoral thesis completed under the supervision of Professor Barlingay, went to the extent of calling Śaṅkara's Advaita “animistic materialism,” by identifying the Brahman of Śaṅkara with the “matter” of the world and by denying the traditional claims that consciousness and bliss constitute the essential nature of Brahman. I was not convinced that such moves towards glorification of Śaṅkara were right. Particularly with Professor Barlingay, I was inclined to appreciate his reconstruction of Advaita as a reflection of his own philosophical position rather than as an authentic interpretation of Śaṅkara's philosophy. On this issue, I was more inclined towards materialist scholars like Debiprasad Chattopadhyay (1918-1993), who were trying to overturn the hierarchical order of Indian philosophical schools by presenting Advaita-Vedānta as the position to be refuted (*pūrvapakṣa*) and Cārvāka-darśana as the position to be justified (*siddhāntapakṣa*). With this view I wrote my Marathi book, *Cārvākavāda Aṅi Advītavāda*.<sup>1</sup> Through this book and a few other articles, I tried to develop my understanding of Cārvāka philosophy. But instead of following the singularist understanding accepted by the scholars like Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya and Ramkrishna Bhattacharya,<sup>2</sup> I followed the line of the Cārvāka scholar Sadashiv Athavale,<sup>3</sup> which I later also found in the writings of Eli Franco.<sup>4</sup> This line claimed that Cārvāka is not just one school of thought but a family of schools. According to me, Cārvāka or Lokāyata cannot be identified with Indian materialism because the Cārvāka family accommodates sceptics like Jayarāśibhaṭṭa (8<sup>th</sup> century CE) along with common sense philosophers like Purandara (7<sup>th</sup> century CE). My studies on Lokāyata culminated in the book *Lokāyata/Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry* (2016), in which I tried to bring out different epistemological, ontological, and axiological doctrines that can be accommodated within the gamut of Cārvāka philosophy.

## 2 The Significance of the Orthodox-Heterodox Division

Another motivating force in my philosophical endeavor has been my fascination for heterodox (non-Brahmanical) approaches against orthodox (Brahmanical) approaches. Scholars like Debiprasad Chattopadhyay and Daya Krishna (1924-2007) held that the classification of Indian philosophical schools into orthodox and heterodox had no philosophical significance. For Chattopadhyay, “Idealism versus Materialism” gives a philosophically significant dichotomization of Indian philosophy, and idealist as well as materialist trends are found on both the sides, namely the orthodox and the heterodox. For Daya Krishna, the category of orthodox schools is misleading because different so-called orthodox schools do not accept the authenticity of Vedas in the same way and in the same sense. However, this classification is significant according to me, as it does have a social-moral significance. Non-Brahmanical schools reject the sanctity of caste-*varṇa* hierarchy and ritualistic practices addressed to other-worldly beings. If the Indian social order is to be rid of the caste system and made more rational and moral as well as less superstitious and unjust, the centrality of Brahmanical schools has to be replaced by that of non-Brahmanical schools.

### 3 Reinterpreting Indian Moral Thought

This approach was helpful to me in looking at Indian moral thought differently. Traditionally the subject matter of Indian moral thought has been largely identified with ideas such as *varṇa-dharma*, *āśrama-dharma*, and *svadharma*. While reinterpreting Indian moral thought, I noted that these ideas cannot be identified as central to it. In response to this issue, some modern Indian thinkers like Professor K.J. Shah and Professor M.P. Rege had underlined the classification of dharma into *sādhāraṇa-dharma* (common obligations comprising universal moral principles) and *viśeṣadharma* (specific obligations which include caste-specific and gender-specific obligations) as found in the *Dharmaśāstras* like *Manusmṛiti*. To my mind, the response of these thinkers was insufficient and also misleading. They ignored the unpleasant fact that the Brahmanical *dharmaśāstras* accepted the framework of caste-specific and gender-specific obligations as constant and primary, while giving a secondary and flexible role to common obligations. At the same time, non-brahmanical systems like Buddhism and Jainism accepted the framework of common obligations, in the form of the rules of right conduct, as primary and relegated caste and gender to secondary roles. I took some preliminary steps towards the reconstruction of Indian moral thought on these lines.<sup>5</sup>

I tried to illustrate through some articles the rational and anti-authoritarian character of Buddhist ethics and the way the Buddhist theory of meditation can be shown to be a part of its theory of moral development and moral perfection.<sup>6</sup> In an article, I dealt with Jaina ethics with special reference to non-violence.<sup>7</sup> While analyzing the centrality given to non-violence by the Jainas, I distinguished between the reductionist and the non-reductionist approaches. Jainas attach utmost importance to non-violence in their theory of values. They generally treat other values such as truthfulness and non-stealing as subordinate to non-violence, but do not reduce them to the latter. However, in the school initiated by Kundakunda (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) and developed further by Amṛtacandra (9<sup>th</sup> century CE), non-violence is regarded as the only value and all other values are reduced to it. This creates an admixture of the two concepts of “non-violence”: the specific vow of non-violence opposed to anger and hatred and the overarching concept opposed to all passions.

This raises the question about the nature of ultimate moral principles and their interrelation. In the D’Andrade Memorial Lecture delivered in Mumbai University in 2005, I presented the view that non-violence can be regarded as one of the ultimate moral principles but not the only such principle.<sup>8</sup> The other such principle would be truthfulness. In fact, the two principles, truthfulness and non-violence, give the mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive classification of ultimate moral principles. These two principles cannot be reduced to each other but all the other moral principles can be shown to be subservient or reducible to them. The duality of the ultimate principles also makes room for genuine moral conflicts.

### 4 Re-understanding Jaina Epistemology and the Logic of *Syādvāda*

My interest in Jainism and Buddhism has not been restricted to moral thought but has encompassed logic and epistemology as well. Let me discuss these areas in some detail now.

In the realm of Jaina epistemology and logic I have dealt with the Jaina doctrines of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and standpoint approach to truth (*syādvāda*). Through my paper on the Jaina conception of *pramāṇa*,<sup>9</sup> I have tried to show that the Jaina concept of knowledge is that of a process which develops from indeterminate perception to inferential or verbal knowledge. I have also tried to show that Jainas present two paradigms of the concept of *pramāṇa*, that of determinate true cognition and that of

holistic cognition. The former focuses on a single aspect of a given object, by ignoring other aspects. The latter, while dealing with a single aspect, takes into account the presence of other aspects as well.

I dealt with the Jaina doctrine of *syādvāda* on the background of the current interpretations of its logic. There were three current interpretations before me: those of deviant logic, modal logic, and conditional logic. Deviant logical interpretation violated the laws of thoughts such as non-contradiction and the excluded middle, which is counter-intuitive. The other two interpretations attribute an uncertain character to the standpoint approach to truth. In an article presented at a seminar in Delhi and subsequently published in the JICPR,<sup>10</sup> I examined these interpretations of *syādvāda* and suggested an alternative interpretation in terms of existential quantifiers, which according to me avoids the defects of other interpretations. Accordingly, the statement *syāt-P* (which means, “*In a way, P*”) would be interpreted as a metalinguistic statement of the form: “There is a standpoint from which P.” This interpretation neither violates the laws of thoughts nor does it attribute uncertainty to the standpoint approach to truth.

## 5 Dharmakīrti’s Contribution to Indian Logic

I was attracted to Buddhist logic long before I developed an interest in Jaina epistemology and logic. One of my concerns in my doctoral thesis (submitted in 1980 and subsequently published in 1992<sup>11</sup>) was to see how Dīnāga (5<sup>th</sup> century CE) and Dharmakīrti (7<sup>th</sup> century CE) have influenced the development of the ancient Indian theory of inference. I was attracted to the logical approach of Dharmakīrti, which inspired me to understand texts such as *Vādanyāya* and *Hetubindu* more meticulously and thoroughly. As a result, I produced annotated translations of these two works of Dharmakīrti with critical introductions.<sup>12</sup> Through these works and a few articles, I tried to articulate Dharmakīrti’s contribution to Indian logic. I pointed out that Dharmakīrti centers his theory of inference around three conceptions of necessity: logical necessity, analytic necessity, and causal necessity.<sup>13</sup> This is how the formal aspect of logic can be traced in Dharmakīrti’s theory. In his work *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*, J. N. Mohanty regarded Nyāya logic as the core of Indian logic and hence had to become apologetic while reconciling Indian logic with western formal logic. I pointed out that one will not have to be so apologetic if one gives a central position to Dharmakīrti’s theory of inference in the realm of Indian logic.

## 6 Ambedkarite Buddhism, Modern Buddhism, Secular Buddhism

The Buddhist concept of three-fold training consisting of morality (*śīla*), meditative concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) has attracted me not only in my academic studies in the philosophy of life, but also in leading a life imbued with peace and happiness. Of course, my interaction with Buddhism has not always been peaceful. Due to antidogmatic and secularist inclinations, I have been disinclined to accept phenomena like life-after-death, rebirth, and a transcendent state of liberation which have been a part of the classical Buddhist doctrine. This was a hurdle for me in whole-heartedly appreciating the Buddhist approach to life. At this stage, two modern spokesmen of Buddhism came to my help. One was Satyanarayan Goenka (1924-2013). Through his discourses on Vipassanā meditation, he urged that one can bracket the belief in *Ātman*, God, or even rebirth while practicing Dhamma at a meditational level. The ultimate goal of life, he stressed, can be achieved in this life itself. The second was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956), who, through his magnum opus *The Buddha*

and *His Dhamma*, presented a rational reconstruction of Buddhism by denying the *Karma*-rebirth framework.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who is well-known as the architect of the constitution of independent India and the leader of the oppressed classes, was also a social and religious philosopher. He presented a powerful critique of the anti-egalitarian caste system in particular and the Hindu religion in general and embraced as well as propagated Buddhism as the alternative form of religious life. On the basis of his rigorous and comprehensive study of Buddhism he gave his rational reinterpretation of Buddhism in *The Buddha and his Dhamma*.

Ambedkar's approach to Buddhism gave me the impetus to engage with Buddha's Dhamma as interpreted by him in more detail. Hence, I took up a collaborative project on the philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar, the outcome of which was subsequently published as an anthology.<sup>15</sup> Through my contributions to the aforementioned project and through other papers, I pursued the philosophical career of Ambedkar with special reference to his interpretation of Buddhism. I argued that Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism can be called his rational and secular reconstruction of Buddhism. I held that the canonical Buddhist literature is diverse and contains apparent inconsistencies insofar as Buddha's message is concerned. Different schools of Buddhism can be said to be reconstructions of Buddhism, which attempt to remove or bracket these inconsistencies. Though these schools differ from each other, they can be called genuine forms of Buddhism because they share a basic common core which non-Buddhist systems lack. Ambedkar's reconstruction of Buddhism can be regarded as a genuine form of Buddhism in the same sense. In fact, Indian philosophical systems have developed through commentarial literature involving reinterpretations and reconstructions of the original systems, and Ambedkar's work on Buddhism can be called genuinely philosophical in this sense.

Ambedkar's reconstruction of Buddhism is not an isolated phenomenon. Different Buddhist leaders in different parts of the world have reinterpreted the Buddhist tradition and sometimes deviated from the tradition in different ways in the last century. It is therefore important to locate Ambedkar on the world map of the modernization of Buddhism. I attempted to do this in the Buddha Jayanti Lecture entitled "Ambedkar and Modern Buddhism: Continuity and Discontinuity," which I delivered in the Madurai session of Indian Philosophical Congress in 2013. I pointed out how Ambedkar's reconstruction of Buddhism is continuous with many engaged Buddhist leaders of the last century and how it nonetheless becomes distinct due to its radical character and its special focus on the issue of caste.

## 7 Impact of Buddhism on Indian Culture

In a way, my interest in Buddhist studies has been two-fold. On the one hand, I have been trying to trace how Buddhism has interacted with other cultural traditions of India, particularly with the social and philosophical traditions. From its inception to the Ambedkarite phase, Buddhism has criticized the caste system in India. This led me to organize a seminar on Buddhism and caste and to edit its proceedings. Among philosophical schools, Buddhism has had a deep impact at least on three schools: Nyāya, Advaita-Vedānta, and Pātañjala-Yoga. Through my doctoral and post-doctoral work, I have tried to show how Indian logic has developed through the Nyāya-Buddhist controversy. I have observed that the Vedāntin Gauḍapāda, who was influenced by the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika variety of Buddhism, gave an idealist turn to Vedānta. I have also observed that the Abhidharma Buddhism of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu had a considerable influence on Patañjali's reconstruction of Sāṅkhya-Yoga, the thesis on which I have been working for the last two years.<sup>16</sup>

The other area of my interest in Buddhist studies has been to explore the way Buddhism can be relevant to a modern person. Hence, my recent writings have focused on the secular and rational reconstructions attempted by Satyanarayan Goenka, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, B. R. Ambedkar, and Stephan Bachelor, and on His Holiness the Dalai Lama's interaction with scientists.<sup>17</sup> I have also tried to show that the possibility of secular Buddhism can arise even in the early Buddhist context.

In fact, I believe that a rational reconstruction of religion is the need of the day and such a reconstruction is most feasible with respect to Buddhism.

In philosophy, I have been generally engaged with what is popularly called Indian philosophy. Indian philosophy is generally described as religion-centric. I take this description with qualifications. To me, religion can be called in a broad sense a way life consisting of a conception of the sacred. But the conception of the sacred need not presuppose God or the soul or ritualism. The rational pursuit of truth and the pursuit of moral perfection themselves can be called sacred and this can give rise to a conception of religion which is quite critical. When I look back, I realize that my philosophical pursuits were also religious pursuits in this sense. I wish that the Indian philosophy may continue to be religion-centric, but it should be so in this critical sense.

**Pradeep Gokhale** was awarded a doctoral degree in 1980 for his research on "Fallacies Discussed in Ancient Indian Logic." He taught courses in different areas of Indian Philosophy and logic for thirty-one years in the postgraduate Department of Philosophy in Savitribai Phule Pune University. He retired as Professor of Philosophy from S. P. Pune University in 2012 and joined the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath (Varanasi) and worked there as B. R. Ambedkar Research Professor for six years. Presently, he is associated with the Department of Pali, S.P. Pune University as an Honorary Adjunct Professor. He is the author of *Inference and Fallacies Discussed in Ancient Indian Logic* (1992), *Vādanyāya of Dharmakīrti: The Logic of Debate* (1993), *Hetubindu of Dharmakīrti: A Point on Probans* (1997) and *Lokāyata/Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry* (2015). Major areas in which his research articles are published are Indian Epistemology and Logic, Indian Moral Philosophy, Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion.

<sup>1</sup> Pradeep Gokhale, *Cārvāka-vāda Āṇi Advaitavāda* (Pune: Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> The author of *Studies on the Cārvāka/Lokāyata* (Delhi, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> The author of the Marathi book *Cārvāka: Itihāsa Āṇi Tattvajñāna* (Wai, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> The author of *Perception, Knowledge and Disbelief, A Study of Jayarāṣi's Scepticism* (Delhi, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Pradeep Gokhale, "Re-Understanding Indian Moral Thought," in *Studies in Indian Moral Philosophy, Problems, Concepts and Perspectives* (Pune: IPQ Publication, Pune University, 2002), 27-44.

<sup>6</sup> A recent version of this view was presented as the Chooko Lingo Memorial Lecture (2015-16), "The Nature of Buddhist Ethics and its Relevance," in the Department of Philosophy and Religion, BHU, Varanasi, India (29 March 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Pradeep Gokhale, "Ethics in Jaina Philosophical Literature: The Doctrine of Ahimsa," *A Historical-Developmental Study of Classical Indian Philosophy of Morals*, ed. Rajendra Prasad, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2009), 194-218.

<sup>8</sup> For the published lecture see: "Ultimate Moral Principles: A Proposal," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 22, no. 4, (2005): 137-61.

<sup>9</sup> Pradeep Gokhale, "The Jaina Theory of *Pramāṇa*: An Overview," in *Pramāṇa: Dharmakīrti and the Indian Philosophical Debate* (Delhi: Tibet House/Manohar Publications, 2010), 59-80.

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- 10 Pradeep Gokhale, "The Logical Structure of *Syādvāda*," *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 8, no. 3, (1991): 73-81.
- 11 Pradeep Gokhale, *Inference and Fallacies Discussed in Ancient Indian Logic with Special Reference to Nyāya and Buddhism* (Delhi: Satguru Publication, Indian Books Centre, 1992).
- 12 Pradeep Gokhale, *Vādanyāya of Dharmakīrti: The Logic of Debate* (Delhi: Satguru Publication, Indian Books Centre, 1993); *Hetubindu of Dharmakīrti: A Point on Probans* (Delhi: Satguru Publication, Indian Books Centre, 1997).
- 13 Pradeep Gokhale, "Three Necessities in Dharmakīrti's Theory of Inference," *Purisuttamanussati-Pavacana-Sangabo (P. V. Bapat Memorial Lectures)*, Somaiyya Publications, Mumbai, 2006, 67-84.
- 14 I tried to juxtapose the two approaches in the paper, "Secularizing Buddhism: A Comparative overview of B. R. Ambedkar's and S. N. Goenka's Approaches to Buddhism," in *Buddhism In Global Perspective*, Vol. I (Mumbai: Somaiya Publications, 2004), 61-9.
- 15 Bhimrao Ambedkar, *The Philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* (Pune: IPQ and Sugava Prakashan, 2008).
- 16 A step in this direction can be found in my paper "Interplay of Sāṅkhya and Buddhist Ideas in the Yoga of Patañjali (With special reference to *Yogasūtra* and *Yogabhāṣya*)," *Journal of Buddhist Studies* (Sri Lanka) 12, (2014-2015): 107-22.
- 17 My two relevant papers in this context are: "Can One be a Buddhist Without Believing In Rebirth?" presented in the International Conference on Buddhism and Society, organized by the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, India (13-15 January, 2013); and "The Possibility of Secular Buddhism," presented in Round Table on "Tibetology and Buddhology at the Intersection of Science and Religion" Institute of Oriental Science, and Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia (9-10 November, 2016).