

Diversifying Indic Philosophical Thinking: Whose Thinking, How, and in Which Spaces?

In this symposium, Sthaneshwar Timalsina proposes that the category of ‘Indic philosophy/philosophies’ be used systematically for the emerging and forward-looking philosophical system that combines historical and cultural insights from the Indian subcontinent to respond to the philosophical challenges that face the world today. This category should, in his view, be distinguished from ‘Indian philosophy,’ an external perspective that presents philosophical activity on the subcontinent in a second language. In engaging his proposal Ana Laura Funes Maderey troubles his distinction of the ‘gaze from within’ and the ‘gaze from without’ from the perspective of, what in Latinx philosophy are termed, ‘border intellectuals’; Sonam Kachru invites Timalsina to elucidate how his thick philosophizing (or philosophizing in the wild) can be conducted today when global philosophy demands intellectual servitude of those who seek to be involved in academic philosophical discussions; Anil Mundra questions whether Indic philosophies can be liberated from colonial frameworks in English and through one single cultural framework, while Sarju Patel takes forward Timalsina’s proposal to suggest a bidirectional approach that will enable professional philosophers to rethink the telos of philosophical thinking, by, for example, engaging thoroughly with Indic philosophical thinking. Timalsina responds by drawing attention to our specific situatedness in this world and at this point in time that enables us to transcend our cultural particularities and singularities.

Key words: Indic philosophy; Indian philosophy; diversifying philosophy; methodological subalternization; liberatory philosophy; border intellectuals; transmodernity; global post-comparative philosophy; global philosophy; intellectual servitude; non-western philosophies; bidirectional approach; subaltern

Diversifying Indic Philosophies

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1 Defining the Field

The last two centuries of cultural dialogue have made the category “Indian philosophy” somewhat recognizable. While remaining an ‘outcast’ from elite university departments, an increasing number of publications in the field give testimony of growing interest in this field. But this trend has also brought to the surface that the modern reading of Indian philosophy is monolithic, broadly mirroring mainstream western philosophy. As a consequence, the use of this category effectively homogenizes broader philosophical concepts. Philosophers working in this area have started noticing this. Jonardon Ganeri (2016) has made a strong case for diversifying philosophy. Along the same lines, Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach (2019) and Purushottama Bilimoria and Agnieszka Rostalska (2023) have appealed for philosophical pluralism, making the case for a post-European perspective. Jay Garfield (2014) provides a good framework for engaging Buddhist philosophy. I do not want to repeat here what they have already said. Taking their arguments for granted, I am exploring in this paper the ways we can actualize the project of diversifying philosophy. Towards this goal, I am limiting my scope simply to Indic philosophical traditions. I am more interested in the “how” question rather than the “why” question on the issue of philosophical diversity.

If we pay attention to the voices we hear on this issue, the need seems to be first felt in western philosophy departments that are sluggish in recognizing the imminent change. In the cosmopolitan culture that we live today, parochial ideas cannot survive for long, even if they linger with the breath of colonialism and the blood of imperialism.¹ Philosophy departments are destined to go global. And this presents to us—those trained within the system and those from without, but all who recognize the value of diversifying philosophy while working on philosophy from the margins—both an opportunity and a challenge. First the opportunity: we are expanding the field by engaging philosophies from non-western cultures. We have a twofold challenge: to justify the need and to engage in dialogue within parameters that are foreign to Indian systems. Studies and conversations in the last centuries have taught us that the process is selective and reductive and will create new hybrid forms, rather than one that allows systems to thrive within their own parameters. Coming to the point, the category “Indian Philosophy” has been reductive, and broadly mirrors western philosophies at the cost of the numerous Indic philosophies that do not operate within the same analytical frame.

Indic philosophy is an emerging field. By “Indic” I mean the philosophy that derives from historical and cultural insights from the subcontinent that is neither past-orientated nor restricted to archiving thoughts from classical India. Instead, I see it as a vibrant philosophical system that faces toward the future, giving rise to new philosophical categories by embracing

new conceptual structures, even while deriving insights from its past. Any emerging system cannot be fully determined or defined. If we understand by the category Indian philosophy what we access today in a secondary language,² we will only have access to a small percentage of the philosophical thoughts that have emerged and evolved in the Indian subcontinent, and that continue to evolve as the global philosophical dialogues move forward. Furthermore, if we define the category on the basis of its recent past, what about its unfolding nature? We will still be working on the Indological project of colonial times, archiving artifacts from the remote past. Selective readings that have defined Indian philosophy rarely engage texts written in languages other than Sanskrit. The literature, for instance, in Pālī or Prākṛt does not carry the same analytical rigor. Marāṭhī, Kannada, or Tāmīl literature have remained out of purview for mainstream philosophers. In essence, our sampling has been very selective, and we are producing a mirror image of western philosophy when arguing on behalf of Indian philosophy.

Philosophers thinking through the lens of Indic traditions have a moral obligation to liberate the philosophies from the Indian subcontinent from colonial frameworks. We then have two options. First, we could consider the category Indian philosophy as loosely defined and evolving and not limit it within the parameters of its European counterpart. Or alternatively, we could introduce a new category of Indic philosophy in order to capture the evolving field and to escape colonial impositions. Here, Indic philosophy could refer to an evolving category that stays focused on the Indic systems themselves without mirroring European ways of thinking and maintaining the 'gaze from within' rather than the 'gaze from without.' We face today the same dilemma as Buddhist philosophers did in the beginning of the common era: to engage in dialogue with Brahminical philosophical systems or to refrain from such dialogues. Fortunately, they chose the first option. Ever since, both systems have developed to be more compatible with each other than with the Pālī Canons. But even in any of these alternatives, we would not be able to engage the lived domain of philosophy. Classical philosophy in India continues to survive, appearing in modified forms: Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Vedānta, Trika, and many other schools continue to shape the lives of many and are not mere objects of historical interest. We cannot restrict this process of unfolding. Not all lived domains of philosophy are encoded in texts or refined with systematic logic. This distinction can help us address both what has been determined and what continues to unfold. And this also saves the Indic system from being itself a colonial product, allowing it to display the expressed modes of life and thinking of the people of the subcontinent. If we need Indian philosophy as a category for departmental needs, we equally need Indic philosophy to address the lived domains that are constantly being renewed and self-determined. In essence, Indic philosophy consists of the modes through which the subcontinent keeps rethinking and redefining itself, without separating itself from its cultural past that spans several national states in the region today.

2 Categorical Limitations

The category *darśana/ānvīkṣikī* is central to the conversation (see Halbfass 1988) for determining the scope and nature of philosophy in India. Since classical times, the category *ānvīkṣikī* has been used for Nyāya, and is not even as widely applied as the first, *darśana*. If we want to go beyond texts and incorporate the lived aspect of philosophy, the category “*jīvan darśan*” is commonly used in contemporary times and translates to “life philosophy.” But historically, even the category *darśana* does not capture philosophies found in regional vernacular literature or those embedded within literary texts. This is not the first time that we are dealing with the problem of defining the field. When doxographers such as Haribhadra wrote *Śaddarśanasamuccaya* or Mādhava wrote *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, they had to select what to include in their compendia. Consistently overlooked in these works are the philosophies of grammar and aesthetics. In the same way, philosophical works embedded in *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava Āgamas* remain regularly excluded from these doxographies. None of these compilations have ever considered including texts written in any language other than Sanskrit. Both internal and external dialogues have placed the Sautrāntika model as the dominant Buddhist philosophy, and the Sarvāstivāda model, for instance, was eventually displaced.³ Even dialogical models of philosophical rewriting did not help, if we are speaking in favor of the plurality of ideas, because the emergence of Navya Nyāya and the application of epistemic and logical structures from Nyāya in every discourse made it impossible for several schools to enter the ring of debate, consequently losing endowments, resulting in termination of these schools. Even if we limit the scope of Indian philosophy to the category *darśana* as it has been applied in the subcontinent since classical times, the parameters in which these systems function are now vastly different, and we would be left broadly with only epistemology when we explore these philosophies comparatively.

Furthermore, if the challenge from outside the culture is to determine the subject matter, the internal challenge lies in making the category broad enough to incorporate all modes of philosophical expression. Therefore, if we make Indian philosophy as a category for the gaze from without, the Indic category can also be used for the gaze from within. Outside of the colonial gaze, Indic philosophy remains a field to address unfolding reflections from within the culture, through which cultural subjects reflect upon observations from within, functioning as an incubator for initiating a global dialogue. The argument is, philosophy from within is not just a subjective response to objectification. Rather, it is a necessity for cultural subjects to be able to retain their internal voices before speech becomes objectified and categories are determined.

This is not to keep the philosophical discourse within the closet. If we learn from history, philosophy cannot survive in isolation. And the fact of the matter is, philosophy as generally conceived is broadly a western enterprise. Not just in the west, even departments in India hesitate to engage Indic philosophies with the same rigor. To tell the truth, philosophy in India is not any less European than in the west.

It will be counterintuitive to make a case for Indic philosophy and advocate for its diversification in the absence of a sustained global presence. And for that, we do need a determinable form for it to be recognized externally. At the same time, if we do not problematize the category Indian philosophy according to the ways it has been determined, it would at best remain as thoughts from the remote past, lacking relevance for contemporary reflection that is not circumscribed by western interests. As we can see, we have conflicting issues that cannot be resolved with a single approach. If we accept Indian and Indic as two distinct categories, where the first is broadly determined and the latter remains in flux, we will open a broader field for future scholarship. Indology as a colonial product has been thoroughly critiqued, but we can give some credit to this genre for its focus on philology and historical approach. While the focus of Indology as a discipline has been about archiving the past, this approach has also brought to our awareness some aspects from classical thinking that had been forgotten. Such forgetting is inevitable because philosophical discourse is dynamic and not all the issues from the past remain relevant in the changing global philosophical platform. The text-historical approach helps us retain the insights from the past in their own pristine form. Indic or engaged philosophical approach in contrast helps us read texts selectively. For example, when we read Mīmāṃsā for addressing semantic issues, we are not engaging the entire commentary of Śābara. Meaning, any philosophical dialogue is selective, as what we discuss must be a topic of common interest. By helping us conserve the heritage, the philological approach provides the platform for engaged Indic approach, which in turn helps us revitalize the thoughts that are meaningful for global philosophical dialogue. With these two separate approaches, we will not only preserve the ideas and artifacts that have historical relevance, but we will also continue to rethink, revise, and keep alive the systems that have global relevance. If we take Mīmāṃsā philosophy for example, the text-historical approach keeps alive the discourse on archaic ritual philosophy, while engaged philosophy can help us revitalize the epistemology and semantic philosophy of Kumārila and Prabhākara. When philosophical issues are dialogically shaped, thinkers are subjected to their own time, and for us, it is essential that while engaging in our own time, we also keep memories from the past alive. And for this, we do need the philological and text-historical approach, just like we need the traditional commentarial model and likewise engaged philosophical model. If we take for example the *Brahmasūtra*, one of the most heavily commented text in Hindu philosophical and theological systems, we come to realize three distinctive stages of dialogical reshaping of philosophical issues in the commentarial traditions. If the lost commentaries that existed before Śāṅkara's time were directly engaging Mīmāṃsā, Śāṅkara is likewise keen to engage Sāṃkhya, Yogācāra, and Mādhyamika systems. Later commentaries demonstrate a shift, with a focus on dualistic and nondual theological traditions. In this example, an Indological approach envisions reading the *Brahmasūtra*, the original text, not contaminated by any latter thinkers. A traditional approach, on the other hand, takes the texts as fluid and open to new interpretation. By adopting the engaged Indic model, we will be doing more or less the same as what the classical philosophers have themselves done to traditional wisdom, commenting upon the texts in our own time, in light of the global discourse on relevant issues.

Now I need to explain why the engaged Indic model differs from the classical *gurukula*-model. Both take the texts as open to interpretation; both relate to their own times; and both engage issues dialogically. However, the *gurukula*-s today do not retain the rigor of redefining *śāstric* categories. Modern-day *gurukula*-s are focused on a narrow reading of texts from the past. Today, in particular, the *gurukula*-s are primarily sponsored by theistic orders which hardly address global concerns. Even if we modernize and redefine the *gurukula*-s, these traditional schools will not be as widely open to the issues of the cosmopolitan culture as the proposed Indic model, as the proposed model is an open system that integrates global experience and reverberates the ethos emerging from within the Indic systems. This is open, dialogical, and rooted on the postmodern awareness of cultural difference. While traditional schools engage texts in their own originality, new dialogical forms of reading can open the texts for new interpretation. If there is beauty in reading Indic philosophy in its pristine form in the original historical context, there is also a need for reading philosophy as transcending historical boundaries so the Indic thinking systems can stay alive and address the issues of our times. The conceptual boundaries within which the historical reading can work do not apply to the reading that demands evading those confinements. To allow an open space for Indic philosophy is to confirm its freedom of self-expression, or to bestow subjectivity and to grant it the power of self-reflection.

From the birth of modern writing, Indian philosophers have found western philosophy as a means to communicate their thoughts, inadvertently creating a new type of philosophy. This tendency is common to almost all the modern writers introducing Indian philosophy, be it K. C. Bhattacharya, B. K. Matilal, or Jonardon Ganeri.⁴ While these works have given voice to some Indian thinkers that work in a broader field of comparative philosophy, the framework in which these works have emerged is not sufficiently broad to allow the Indic thinking system to upgrade itself or to develop the ways classical Indian thinking evolved in the works of their commentators. If we take the range of Nyāya positions as models for example, the leap from Gotama's *Sūtra* work to Vātsyāyana's *Bhāṣya*, or the *Vārttika* of Uddyotakara, or the commentarial work of Vācaspati, we cannot anticipate the same leap in this framework that assumes the western parameters for doing philosophy. Modern writers have to spend most of their time introducing Indic categories and are forced to translate from one culture to the next, often assuming that the philosophical categories are fully translatable across cultures. If there is something original in Indic thinking that cannot be reduced to western modes of thinking, this interpretive model typically fails to address that. As a consequence, philosophy from India remains confined within the western framework.

In the recent times, comparative philosophy has gained some traction. Any dialogical model will necessarily have some comparison, and in that sense, even the classical philosophies are comparative in nature. Śāntarakṣita or Śāṅkara are not writing in a vacuum; neither are Vācaspati Mīśra or Jñānaśrīmitra. But comparative philosophy, as it has been exercised to introduce classical Indian concepts, has been a one-way road, writing for the west. And for this, the philosophy from the non-west has been mapped in the western standard. And this is where the problem started. If the project has been about introducing the non-west, the comparative project has failed to do so. But the model Indic philosophy is asking more: philosophers are not reporters. The comparative

project oftentimes interrupts new commentaries or new ways of thinking, for comparison is possible between the determined systems while new thinking requires foundational fluidity. By definition, comparison is not about innovation but about mapping different domains. Dialogue, in essence, does not engage to erase borders, but rather, to reaffirm uniqueness.⁵ If every culture is unique and if philosophy is a systemic theorizing of experiences manifest in modes of collective cultural expression, philosophy as such cannot be expunged from its cultural parameters. If all philosophies gave us the same perspective, there would really be no need for philosophical pluralism. The aim in doing global philosophy is therefore not to homogenize one perspective with another but about having different perspectives upon the same issue. The objective of Indic philosophy is the same, to diversify philosophy not in name only but also in kind. Philosophical reflection is deeply rooted in language and culture and is therefore not replaceable from one to the other, even when reflections from different cultures attempt to address the same question. Philosophical discourse cannot be removed from its cultural mores and the parameters from which the seminal concepts have emerged. We can consider adding new dimensions to philosophical reflection as a form of dialogue. It is evident that our social existence rests on communication: we communicate our ideas across cultures, and we cannot insulate philosophies from exposure across cultures. What we need then is a multifaceted approach, the model that seeks dialogue across cultures and the model that seeks to sustain a gradual evolution of thought comparable to a biological entity, where the latter should allow philosophical systems to evolve the same way the classical thinkers did by constantly revising and redefining categories. Just as classical philosophers enriched their own positions by means of dialogue across traditions, the same can happen today, given that philosophers are open to engage ideas across cultures while retaining sensitivity towards the irreducible difference of the other. This forces us to reflect on historical modes of cultural dialogue, so that we can derive some insights from very successful past experiments.

We cannot assume any dialogue on archaic categories that does not reflect common parameters for a meaningful conversation. A single project cannot address both the needs of keeping the classical systems in their own pristine forms while also making them communicable across cultures. Take Sāṅkhya categories, for example. Since a large section of Sāṅkhya addresses physical reality, it cannot anticipate a cross-cultural dialogue without modifying its physics. The metaphysics based on *mahābhūtas* or *tanmātrā* does not reflect physics as we know it today. And this applies to any other school, as far as categories that cannot be communicated across cultures. Our knowledge of the physical world today does not match the categories of classical philosophers. However, this is not to say that their categories are groundless. This is why we cannot make a single project of preserving the classical philosophies in their own pristine form and at the same time also applying them to address global issues and bringing them to cross-cultural dialogue. Thinking through classical Indian categories, the objective of doing philosophy is defined in different terms of *niḥśreyas*, *mokṣa*, or *kaivalya*. We are broadly translating them as ‘liberation,’ but these definitions are not reducible to each other. What a Sāṅkhya philosopher seeks by ‘isolation’ (*kaivalya*) is not the “absolute virtue” (*niḥśreyas*) of Nyāya philosophers. Neither is the ‘liberation’ (*mokṣa*) from the veil of *māyā* espoused by Advaita Vedantins the same as the recognition of the absolute (*pratyabhijñāna*) of Trika Śaiva philosophers. This means that the point of engaging in philosophy

from the classical Indian perspective is to transform oneself. If the explicit objective of philosophy as *darśana* lies in ‘seeing’ or recognizing reality, it is implicitly about self-transformation. At this point, we find a common ground between the ancient Greek and classical Indian philosophers. As it comes to contemporary practice, philosophy is moving further and further away from its founding principles. Rather than philosophy remaining the humus of the sciences, it is being reduced to its topsoil. The objective of Indic philosophy also lies in going back to the roots of philosophy as such.

As I have mentioned earlier, philosophies in classical India were lived, rather than being some theories or reflections upon reflections. A philosopher was a sage, a mystic, credited with having deeper insights regarding reality than ordinary people have. Doing philosophy in the classical context is about ‘living’ it: Vedanta or Yoga are not there for intellectual amusement but are to be practiced or applied in life to transform the human condition. Buddhist philosophy, even in its most radical presentation, as in the case of the teachings of Nāgārjuna or Tsongkhapa, is practiced and not merely theorized. We should not understand Nāgārjuna’s rejection of ‘views’ as yet another perspective, but rather a mode of experience emancipated from all the perspectives. Nāgārjuna writes from the perspective of the silence of the Buddha, and by doing philosophy, by removing its background, we are forgetting the very objective of doing philosophy from Nāgārjuna’s perspective. Evolutionary biology teaches us that our perception is ecologically grounded. Meaning, even what we see is not universally identical. Our epistemic systems are rooted on variations in our viewpoints, some of which involves cultural perception. The ways people in India and the west see a dog and a cow are not the same. Our values are constantly interacting in the modes of perception. And likewise, our language does affect the ways we see things. For both of the Sanskrit derivatives, the use of the words “*jala*” and “*pānī*” for water in Nepali language have a different connotation: the same water is referred as *jala* in the sacred ritual context whereas it is called *pānī* in secular contexts. Essentially, what we experience and the ways we interpret our experience are not just simply what our body produces. Philosophy should not be treated as any other descriptive discipline but rather as a process of reflection. The very parameters within which philosophies emerge are diverse. Even the negation of views as advocated by Nāgārjuna is yet another perspective, philosophically. This ‘negation of views’ has provided a worldview for people to live by.

Seen from outside, a philosophical tradition (*paramparā*) appears to have a singular voice. However, if we scrutinize further, we discover that each and every tradition has internal voices, each conflicting with the other. Every philosopher appears to have formulated some new thoughts, rather than dogmatically following what is handed down to them. Thus, even the concept of philosophical lineage needs to be revisited, as this is not just the retention of old thoughts in changing times, but rather modifying thoughts without compromising the core of what constitutes that school as singular. For a meaningful conversation on different philosophies across cultures, we therefore need the openness of perspectives. And rather than reducing philosophy into some other discipline, such as making philosophy be the serviceperson of physics, we can use philosophy as a mode of expression or theorize how other disciplines can open the sphere for us. Philosophy, accordingly, functions best if we liberate it from assumptions and use it for dialogue across cultures.

Rather than applying philosophy to solve problems, this can give us perspectives to live with in the given circumstances. If philosophies are there for theorizing our experiences, *darśana-s* are there for giving new insights on to how to live life.

3 Expanding the Horizon

Thus far, I have attempted to outline the scope of philosophy in the Indic context. In the above discussion, I have stressed the need for different approaches that conserve the traditional modes of thinking while opening vistas for a global conversation. As a byproduct of these readings, a new form of philosophy emerges that cannot be reduced to any particular system. If our original intent has been to diversify Indic philosophy, we can accomplish this project merely by bringing it to global conversation. We will have not only the urge to retain the originality of classical thoughts, but we will also be engaging philosophies from different eras and regions on global issues. These two, as I have argued earlier, are not exclusive to each other but rather are two separate projects. Issues abound. Take for example environmental philosophy or the metaphysics of gender. Likewise, consider the critical philosophy of race, of artificial intelligence, of biosemiotics, of transhumanism, or many other issues that have come to serious conversation only in our times. We do not have an existing response to any of these issues, and this is where our efforts should be focused, if we want to expand the scope of Indic thinking. We should have ready responses to burning issues on sustainability, biodiversity, animal rights, and environmental justice, as well as those of land and water consumption. The very philosophy of consumption deserves a closer look. I believe that the culture shaped with pantheistic ideas and perennial philosophies,⁶ infused with panpsychism and cosmopsychism that remain the dominant models, should have some grounding philosophy to address these and many other issues central to environmental philosophy.

Most urgent are the social issues. Although an emancipatory social philosophy stems from a unique social condition, culture remains one of its determining factors. Besides the historic and cultural construction of social injustice, the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have also demonstrated a new type of social injustice caused by a non-critical application of social theories that emerged in a different cultural environment and were imposed on different societies with radically different values. When universalizing justice, we have paid little attention to its cultural implications. All the dominating social philosophies are western, and the socio-historical contexts these philosophies critique are not the same across the globe. Daya Krishna, one of the key thinkers of twentieth-century India, discusses the lack of social philosophy in India. The Indian subcontinent has faced some of the worst forms of social issues, whether they are related to race and ethnicity, social identity, or migration. The land that gave birth to the philosophy of flux should have some ways to address these issues as well. Rather than considering this a challenge, we can take this as an opportunity and work towards new theories, utilizing what has not been sufficiently theorized. It is not true that there have not been indigenous voices addressing social issues. For example, the

Gandhian experiment provides the platform to address social violence and nonviolence. Arvind Sharma (2006) explores the concept of human rights in the Indian context.

My own approach has been to read key philosophical terms by exploring their wider application and not limiting them to their ritual or religious context. A good example is the concept of power. The term *śakti* can mean power, potency, capacity, and so on, and the term power, for instance, has different connotations in different contexts. If classical texts are utilizing *śakti* in the context of semantic power, or the ritual context of magical power, or that of the divine feminine, they all carry the meaning of power, and I argue that we can read nuances of the category and explore new contexts. This is not possible as long as we are limiting the concepts to their original historical context. This, however, does not mean that we erase the historical contexts, but only that we expand the parameters to address our current concerns. Issues such as subjectivity, otherness, or dialogue are some examples.⁷ And we can learn from other regional philosophers, from the ways they are engaging Chinese, African, or Aztec philosophies.⁸

As discussed above, our need is twofold: we have to secularize and universalize the categories from Indic philosophies so that the broader concepts can be conveyed across cultures. At the same time, this process should not erase the uniqueness of the systems being engaged. This project is different from the project of archiving Indian thinking systems, as our project involves much more than understanding the tradition. It is not about appropriating or appreciating it but about revitalizing the tradition by giving it a fresh breath. And in this process, we can map many ideas across cultures or engage in dialogue across traditions. This understanding rests on the assumption that the dialogical process allows different systems to remove their own archaic ideas and redefine their categories, consequently institutionalizing difference.

Doing Indic philosophy implies that we accommodate new facts and redefine classical categories. This project is thus different from learning the classical systems in their own pristine form. New discoveries have left behind the physics of Kaṇāda or the biology of Suśruta.⁹ We cannot confine the classical systems to their own times and consequently make them irrelevant. As long as it is alive, a system can modify itself, accommodate new ideas, and inject new arguments within the philosophical systems from classical India, with the aim of revitalizing these systems. Neo-Kantians extend arguments beyond Kant, but Neo-Kantian thinking does not preclude reading Kant. The same applies to us. But above all, if new physics were to be introduced to Kaṇāda or new biology to Suśruta, this does not alter the deep existential or metaphysical issues by which we currently live. Our epistemology or semantics does not alter in accordance with the change in our perspectives on physics or biology. The fact that the sun does not rise the way the people in the remote past thought does not stop us from seeing the sunrise.

The above proposal is not something new, but merely a continuity of what the tradition has developed for its continuity. Take the history of Nyāya for example. In each generation it was able to redefine itself and address earlier objections. From Vātsyāyana to Uddyotakara to Udayana to Vācaspati Mīśra, rethinking Indic philosophies cannot be just about applying philosophies from

Indic traditions to address contemporary issues. This has to be about reframing the concepts that are relevant today. While one can argue that this leads to misinterpretation and over-interpretation of texts, this is not a new dilemma. The *Brahmasūtra*¹⁰ of Bādarāyaṇa is incomprehensible without commentary, but every single commentary says something different. The commentarial works of Vijñāba Bhikṣu are broadly known for the imposition of Advaita Vedanta upon other systems. Every single commentator of the *Bhagavadgītā* has something unique to say. Even a single tradition is replete with multiple voices, as each author from classical times has his own perspective. Indic philosophies have been constantly redefining themselves, and I am only arguing for the continuity of this project.

If we spatialize the project of diversification, we can analyze the project in two lines: the vertical line will address its historical development and explore the forgotten domains of philosophical thinking, and the horizontal line will explore new ways for engaging different philosophies on the global scale. Broadly, what I am proposing is giving structure to what is already happening. Historically, many philosophers remain, despite their highly original thinking, buried in the past. Their thinking was either subsumed under a broader umbrella of philosophy or their zeitgeist left them behind, making their philosophy irrelevant, even to their own time. Certainly, these ideas are worth exploring, as the arguments that were deemed irrelevant at one time might reflect differently on our own times. Historical reading also allows us to see the specific schools in their incubation period: take for example the emergence of proto-Sāṃkhya in the *Śānti Parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. If we read *Yuktidīpikā* closely, we will encounter numerous voices within Sāṃkhya. Broader homogenization in the form of ‘school’ was a sustained binary process of proponents filtering selected thoughts and opponents objecting to particular categories. Similar to social organization, the process of determining the horizons, or making the “inside” and “outside” of the systems, is a sustained dialogical process. The *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, within the canon of Majjhimanikāya, lists sixty-two philosophical viewpoints. Dated roughly between third century BCE and second century CE, this text is an articulation of the plurality of views in the early days of philosophy in India. Texts such as *Madhyamakahr̥dayakārikā* of Bhāviveka, the *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* of Haribhadra, or the *Sarvasiddhāntasaṅgraha* attributed to Śaṅkara, are noticeably clear in selecting what they viewed as important schools (Bouthillette 2020). Even though *Sarvadarśanasāṅgraha* of Mādhava goes beyond the six popular schools of Indic thought, it is not an anthology of philosophies but rather a text on Advaita, addressing the centrality of Advaita within other views. A systemic bracketing of ‘Indian philosophy’ from its access to broader perspectives while grounding the category ‘Indian philosophy’ on the basis of ‘*Ānvikṣikī*’ or the “science of reasoning” has two unforeseen consequences: on the one hand, it sacrifices multiple voices for the sake of one standard philosophy, whereas on the other hand, it gives privilege to the stream of thought that has greater resemblance with western analytical tradition at the cost of numerous other voices. The project of diversification also demands reconstruction of classical thoughts that provide an ample field for this thought experiment to expand the scope of Indic philosophy.¹¹

Doing philosophy in classical times was in itself akin to entering a battlefield. If logical rigor helped shape classical philosophy, it also sidelined different viewpoints that failed to find their advocates.

In my dissertation, *Seeing and Appearance* (Timalsina 2006) I have argued that there are multiple streams within what we now call the school of Śāṅkara. This same argument applies to Nikāya Buddhism. Various Sarvāstivāda schools could not survive after the rise of the Sautrāntika-Yogācāra-Mādhyamika dialectics. Basically, internal differences become a moot point when one school is debating against the other. The project of diversification entails bringing to light thoughts that are buried under historical rubble, even when we do not necessarily find any contemporary relevance to some of these thoughts.

For the Indic culture to have its own philosophy implies that it is capable of theorizing world-affairs from within its cultural experience. While some efforts have been made in this front, these contributions have remained marginal and have not come to global attention.¹² These projects are also susceptible to being weaponized for political games. The issue is not about who owns the truth but rather, about diversifying philosophy and treating Indic philosophies with the same respect that the European philosophies command. But most importantly, this is about enriching the departments of philosophy by incorporating global perspectives and liberating them from their current perspectival control.

4 Engaging Indic Philosophy: Challenges and Solutions

The idea of engaging Indic philosophy underscores the assumption that philosophical reflection from the Indic culture retains an explanatory capacity for global affairs. This approach liberates Indic systems from reductive historicization, which is the consequence of the colonial construction of Indian philosophy. At the same time, this also secularizes concepts that are deeply embedded within culture and demand religious sensitivity. One thing is for certain, we cannot have both, the conservative approach while simultaneously considering that certain ideas have universal appeal. The concepts having a global application will also be scrutinized at the same level. The first thing the dialogical platform demands is a commonly shared epistemology, so that our values and convictions are mutually communicable. Classical Mīmāṃsā and Sautrāntika dialogues are a testimony for this requirement. Classical Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain philosophical works are testaments to these systems that have historically been open to examination. While there is some overlap on epistemic claims, issues such as yogic intuition, a category broadly shared by classical Indian philosophers, are not universally recognized. Semantic issues have remained contested all along. Every culture has its own unique categories, and translating those categories or transporting these perspectives into another worldview can be misleading, as can be observed from historical debates on their epistemic systems between disputing schools of thought. We cannot make all categories equal upon examination. Cognitive research has established that some culturally sensitive emotions cannot be shared across cultures. The values that one culture bestows upon something are simply not translatable to the values of the other. Neither can we homogenize cultural values. Meaning, there will always be some aspects that defy translation. And we are not

the first to recognize this problem. Yet again, classical debates across traditions in India underscore these issues.

Some imagine that dialogues lead to erasing difference. If such were the case, no philosophical differences would have survived among the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, after two millennia of dialogues. On the contrary, dialogue allows the parties to refine their categories, to modify their presuppositions, to buttress their arguments, and as a consequence, to institutionalize difference. Even after sustained refinement and concessions, some unbridgeable gaps remain. There are lessons to be learned, again, from the classical Indian experiment. First and foremost is the difference in measuring devices for epistemic verification. For example, the question, “what does it mean to perceive something?” has never been resolved even after fifteen-hundred years of dialogue between the parties thinking through the lens of Dignāga and Uddyotakara. Yes, classical philosophers never came to a singular agreement regarding verbal testimony. And the subtle differences regarding semantic power could never be resolved, even among the Hindu grammarians, the Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya schools. While setting aside these differences, philosophers in classical times were able to initiate dialogues and these dialogues have historically helped the parties to understand the opposing positions and have also allowed the parties to recognize the flaws and limitations within their own perspective. As a consequence, every new generation of writers has produced better definitions and a more nuanced approach to the objections raised by the previous generation.

It is one thing to say that some categories cannot be translated or that some cognitive states are culturally grounded. But it is quite a different issue when we say language as such can or cannot describe the truth. Semantic theories of the east and west are a testimony to diverse ideas regarding the scope of language. However, theories that advocate the ephemeral nature of language cannot silence the world. They themselves use language for their advocacy, as did Nāgārjuna. This ideological difference only makes us aware of the unbridgeable gaps that we need to recognize and resolve while diversifying philosophy. At the end of the day, rather than predicting the epistemic framework or deciding its semantic strength in advance, we have to build courage to trust the system and allow the project to shape its own course. While keeping the currents of thoughts from classical times, the project is about diversifying thoughts, both by engaging ideas in the new platforms, while at the same time refining old concepts and introducing new categories. Even though globalization has implied that all ideas are welcome and play on an equal footing, political and economic power has played a central role in institutionalizing ideas and while remaining meaningful, not all ideas can be given the same primacy or platform for their justification. Hence the need for diversifying Indic philosophies.

I should sum up this conversation by addressing major objections in the project of diversifying Indic philosophy. One, based on the conversation above, we have argued that culture and language are integral to philosophical reflection. At the same time, we are arguing for its diversification, a clear contradiction. While the objection is valid that our experiences and the process of theorizing, including philosophizing, have cultural and linguistic underpinnings, we can still communicate

concepts across cultures without dissociating the cultural and semantic parameters. Therefore, before we sit to theorize certain concepts, we have to meticulously examine the cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We cannot ever have a comprehensive communication where we address all the categories from one system to the next. All our conversations are selective, including philosophical dialogues. I have addressed this issue above by citing the historical example where, through dialogue between multiple schools of Buddhism with Hindu schools, they substantially shaped all the disciplines engaged in dialogue, while at the same time filtering out selected issues, weeding out categories that were deemed irrelevant for the broader conversation. This helped shape the commonly accepted epistemology, the first requirement for establishing any truth claims. In the same way, our epistemic framework will be renegotiated, and some metaphysical claims will be removed. What will emerge from this open space is something new. But I do not mean that this novelty is a radically new emergent property, but rather, the manifestation of tropes that already existed within the depths of the systems in dialogue. What emerges as new is an assemblage of aspects from the past with new insights that address issues that concern us today. Philosophical ideas keep resurfacing, as we are constantly reviewing past perspectives and adding new insights. The quest for truth and transformation remains the same, even if they appear in different forms. Our encounter with our own epistemic boundaries, and skepticism as a consequence, is also not new. From the dawn of civilization, we have all sought meaning for our lives, we have all explored beauty, and we have all felt wonder. What we learn from the very being of these questions and the ways we have endeavored to address them is that philosophy is a process of eternal reflection. We should thus consider philosophy as a discipline of perpetual questioning and being in the state of perpetual wonder. If some of our questions are answered, we will invent new ones. Philosophy as a discipline thrives in this threshold of questioning, as when we have answers to our questions, the conversation shifts from the department of philosophy to that of religion or physics. This consistency of questioning is what separates philosophy from some other disciplines, as this is what makes philosophy constantly modifying itself.

Two, classical Indian schools of philosophy revolve around different ‘traditions’ (*paramparā*). For example, the mainstream Nyāya or Mīmāṃsā philosophies broadly follow the commentaries of Vātsyāyana or Śabara respectively. And this definition makes it difficult for philosophical thinking to evolve. This objection does have some validity, that philosophical reflection in classical India broadly rests on different schools. Even though there are existing and emerging schools in western philosophy such as rationalism, contemplative philosophy, analytical philosophy, or neo-Kantian thinking, they are still more fluid in comparison to classical Indian schools of thought. Nevertheless, philosophical thinking in classical India is not as rigidly tied to the schools as this distinction might suggest. We can open the conversation with Ganeri (2011), who points out that new modes of thinking have emerged, even while being bound to some traditions. Ganeri’s case is with Raghunātha, who modified many of the early Nyāya parameters, initiating a “*navya*” (new) school of thinking through Nyāya. Even though scholastic thinking tied within different schools has its limitations, it is not the case that these schools were under chains, prevented from evolving. Every single new philosopher within any particular school has added new insights and has modified earlier categories, even while situating himself within the broader presuppositions of the

school. Revisions and refinements that we see from Praśastapāda to Uddyotakara, and to Udayanācārya as it comes to Nyāya, or the epistemic divide between Kumārila and Prabhākara in the context of Mīmāṃsā, or the doctrinal differences found from Gauḍapāda to Śaṅkara within the Advaita school are not coincidental. In my dissertation, I have argued that there is not one school of Śaṅkara's Advaita (Timalsina 2006) but rather, the Advaita that is now known as the school of Śaṅkara is, in itself, an assemblage of multiple streams of Advaita that relied on the Upaniṣads. Even though Madhusūdana is one of the most prominent Advaitins in this school, his writings are broadly different from those of Śaṅkara. Many of the issues that he addresses are the consequence of what Śaṅkara maintained. He focuses on addressing objections raised against the position of Śaṅkara. It would be wrong to attribute the temporal gap of centuries for the deviation in Madhusūdana's philosophy, as these differences are noticeable even in the works of Sureśvara, an immediate disciple of Śaṅkara. Contemporary scholars have identified the thinking of Vivekananda as "Neo-Vedanta." By many accounts, Vivekananda's thought differs from that of Śaṅkara. However, this also comes from not knowing the history, that every philosopher in the school of Śaṅkara has maintained a somewhat different position. Regional and vernacular literature has particularly enjoyed an open space, merging different classical teachings. Take the example of Jñānadeva and his commentarial works, or, in particular, his *Amṛtānubhava*. I would argue on this background that thinking through 'schools' has kept classical Indic philosophies focused on selected issues.

Philosophers in classical times were not simply writing commentaries to explain the categories of their predecessors. On the contrary, most commentators made original contributions by adding nuance to some of the most debated issues within their school. But thinking through the prism of each specific school has kept the classical philosophers focused on their arguments. Yes, this has limited the scope of philosophy in classical India, but it has also kept it focused. Doing philosophy in this background becomes a generational project. On one hand, it limits the scope of philosophical thinking, restricting the discourse within the given parameters. On the other hand, it allows a prolonged exploration in the same direction and helps systematize philosophical debate. The debate between grammarians on one hand and the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā traditions on the other has allowed all parties to sustain their categorical differences, defend their position more firmly, and revise the positions that are indefensible. This has also given history to Indic philosophical thinking, as streams of thought have revealed their own biology, as they are not seen as placed in some remote historical past but as gradually evolving through time. Bronkhorst (2019: 38) correctly observes, "[...] Indian philosophy has a history, that it is more than a list of timeless systems that existed side by side. In this history innovations and radical revisions took place."

This traditional commentarial rethinking is not a project that terminated in the remote past either. It is true that very little has been done in the last century as it comes to redefining categories and revitalizing classical *darśana*-s. Nevertheless, every single school of Indic philosophy has been reevaluated and redefined during this current era. Noteworthy among the approaches are Hariharānanda Āraṇya's efforts to revitalize Sāṃkhya philosophy, the works on Advaita by Satchidānandendra Sarasvatī, the *Śakti Bhāṣya* of Pañcānana Tarkaratna, or Śaṅkara Caitanya Bhāratī's critique of Mahāyāna Buddhist and Trika philosophical positions in his work

Darśanasarvasva in order to defend the Advaita position. Badarīnātha Śūklā, an eminent Nyāya scholar, argued for the self as the body while adopting Nyāya, a position which demands rethinking many of the classical categories. Noteworthy among the contemporary rearticulations are also the works of Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya on Cārvāka materialism. Accordingly, the *Paramārthadarśana* of Rāmāvatāra Śarmā is noteworthy for its ambition to write a new philosophy in the classical model, with both *sūtra* and auto-commentary broadly mirroring the classical Brahmasūtra model.

Final objection: Classical Indian philosophy addresses topics vastly different from the majority of philosophical issues today. Further, these streams of thought are infused with theological claims, and the process of separating these issues will amount to another type of cultural appropriation. This being the case, how can Indic traditions be relevant and fully diverse while being true to their traditional ethos? Yes, it is likely that many responses to global issues may be new and may not fall into any existing framework. But this innovative approach, to introduce something completely new, needs to remain a crucial element in the project of revitalizing Indic philosophies. Many of the theological claims can be bracketed from the broader philosophical conversation. If we can read Aquinas or Kierkegaard, or even Hegel or Kant on a secular platform, why would we not be able to read Nāgārjuna or Dharmakīrti or Udayana or Gadādhara Bhaṭṭācārya on a similarly secular platform? The question is not about whether we can diversify Indic philosophy. The question is, what is stopping us from doing so?

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- ¹ Van Norden (2017), for instance, argues that ethnocentrism in philosophy threatens the very survival of the academic department of philosophy.
 - ² The first set of translations of Indic philosophical texts appeared in Chinese language. Before colonial times, both the translation and rewriting of Indian philosophical texts occurred in Tibet. Tibetan rewriting stands both as a continuity of Indic thinking while also as an original contribution of Tibet. A few texts appeared in Persian, such as the *Upaṇiṣads* or the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Contemporary trends of translating Indic philosophical texts began during colonial times. Now, we have texts from Sanskrit and other Indic languages translated into various European languages. Unfortunately, there is no standard in most of these translations. Furthermore, there are many texts in Indic traditions that are not even edited and that survive still in manuscript forms. Even the best of translations is not fully reliable due to the limitations of language itself, of cultural difference, and the process of translation.
 - ³ Buddhist philosophy is not monolithic. Soon after the demise of the Buddha, the Mahāsāṃghika school came to prominence, and in addition, there were roughly eighteen Nikāya Buddhist schools on the Indian subcontinent before the beginning of the common era. The Sarvāstivādins or *pudgala-vādins* eventually vanished from the landscape with the rise of Mādhyamika dialectics in the beginning of the common era. Sautrāntikas, on the other hand, stressed the temporary nature of what exists, emphasized real externals that are inferentially derived. Later, the Sautrāntika school compromised with Yogācāra precepts to some extent, giving complexity to later Buddhist philosophy, such as that of Dharmakīrti (600-660 CE).
 - ⁴ Schreiner (1977) discusses the volumes that came before his time that were written by Indian philosophers addressing the scope of philosophy itself.

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- ⁵ For a conversation on dialogue and culture, see Timalsina (2020a).
- ⁶ Aldous Huxley is credited for the concept of perennial philosophy, referring to the universal and timeless wisdom across cultures. I am using the phrase only in the sense that philosophers from classical India, no matter their language or culture of writing, are grounding a universal theme, the Brahman, Śiva, Śūnyatā, *tathata*, and so on. The mechanisms of *mokṣa* they have outlined likewise rest on their universal applicability.
- ⁷ For the concept of power, see Timalsina (2020b). For social ‘otherness,’ see Timalsina (2011 and 2014). For culture and dialogue, see Timalsina (2020a).
- ⁸ Read Jenco (2017) for problematizing this issue in the context of Chinese thought. See Lamle (2018) or Wiredu (1996) for African philosophy. I find Tedlock (1992) inspirational for engaging Aztec philosophy.
- ⁹ Kaṇāda (300 CE) is one of the early atomists and the philosopher to address gravity (*gurutva*). Even though his categorization of the atom with mass and without mass does not stand today, the very idea of entities having or lacking the mass is noteworthy. Suśruta from around the same time wrote on medicine: he not only addressed some forms of surgery but also examined mental illness. He also wrote on alchemy, including chapters on the use of metals for various illnesses. Nevertheless, their understanding of physics or biology is two millennia old.
- ¹⁰ The *Brahmasūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa (400 CE) is the central text for the development of Hindu philosophy and theology. Several commentaries on this book prior to Śaṅkara are now lost. Based on citations found in other works, we can glean that those commentaries provided some original concepts. We now have many commentaries on the *Brahmasūtra*, including that of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhvācārya, Baladeva, or Śrīkaṇṭha. Even though these philosophers disagree with each other in most of the categories, they have all commented upon this text.
- ¹¹ For example, the philosophy of Bhartṛprapañca is only available through the works of Śaṅkara or Sureśvara. I have explored this to some extent in my dissertation (Timalsina 2006). The nondual Vedic philosophy called Puruṣavāda, for example, is known primarily through its critique found in early Buddhist or Jain texts. I have worked towards its reconstruction (Timalsina 2017). Reconstructing the position of different early philosophers, in my opinion, is a substantive project to diversify philosophies.
- ¹² Jadunath Sinha made an early attempt to reframing Indian psychology (Sinha 1934). In our times, there are too many efforts to count that continue this approach. Sadly, in the discipline of philosophy, sufficient problematization has not happened. The second-last paragraph of this essay gives a few examples of the contemporary efforts in keeping the traditional discourse alive. However, these works do not engage the west but are broadly keeping the classical genre alive.

The Project of Diversifying Indic Philosophies and the Path Towards a Transmodern Pluriverse

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In an article titled “A New Era in the History of Philosophy: The Global Dialogue Among Philosophical Traditions,” Enrique Dussel foresaw that a great part of the twenty-first century would be occupied by “our recognition and acceptance of the meaning, value, and history of all regional philosophical traditions on the planet (European, North American, Chinese, Indian, Arab, African, Latin American, etc.)” (Dussel 2008: 2). This unprecedented historical moment would require an ethical positioning that allowed for the recognition of “all philosophical communities with equal rights of argumentation.” He was convinced—and added “as a Latin American”—that only then would philosophy be able to transcend the “Eurocentrism of Modernity” and avoid its future development from being “jeopardized” (Dussel 2008: 9).

His self-identification as a “Latin American” in calling for an inter-philosophical global dialogue is significant as it underscored the urgency of such a project within that very context as well. For many of us studying philosophy in Latin America during the early 2000s and interested in non-western thought, such a dialogue was difficult to find in our own academic communities. Although the Philosophy program at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) at the time offered some courses in non-western philosophies, as well as a required course on “Mexican Philosophy” that included a module on pre-Hispanic thought,¹ this material was rarely integrated into contemporary debates or treated as a genuine interlocutor. The exceptions came from a few scholars already working toward the decolonization and pluralization of the field, such as Enrique Dussel.

The academic environment in which Dussel was teaching (and in which I was studying) in Mexico reflected a broader cultural context accurately described by Leopoldo Zea as a condition in which Latin Americans “do not feel heirs of an autochthonous [pre-Columbian] culture, because that culture has no meaning for us; and that which has meaning for us, like the European, does not feel as our own” (Zea 1986: 222). In other words, it was a philosophical context marked by its “mestizo situation”²: the product of an identity, cultural as well as racial, constructed within a colonial horizon. This horizon not only veils the Indigenous belonging but makes us distance ourselves from the Indigenous and colonial past, while nurturing a sense of being legitimate inheritors of a “civilized” culture that nevertheless does not recognize us as equals.³

In my case, while being trained to assimilate European and North American models of philosophical articulation, and only vaguely aware (regrettably) of the systematic historical erasure of Indigenous voices by Latin American nation-states, I found in the Indian Philosophy courses

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taught by Elsa Cross an epistemic oasis. These courses opened the possibility for me to explore the mind–body problem through Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*-s rather than solely through analytic Anglo-Saxon philosophers; to interrogate Heidegger’s notion of Being through Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta; and to envision human flourishing through the multidimensional accounts of embodiment found in various Indian philosophical traditions. Yet the legitimacy of such lines of inquiry was frequently questioned both within and beyond the academy. I recall a Brahmin instructor of yoga philosophy at a yoga teacher’s training program asserting that no westerner could truly understand the *Yoga Sūtra*-s after I disclosed that my master’s thesis addressed its philosophy of mind. Later, a member of my thesis committee, a specialist in Indian cultures at El Colegio de México, insisted that I first produce a comprehensive study of the entire commentarial tradition to the *Yoga Sūtra*-s before attempting my own interpretation. Confronted by the impossibility of fully understanding a philosophical tradition because of my cultural non-belonging—while at the same time not fully identifying with the traditions I was presumed to belong to (Christian/western? Indigenous?)—I found myself stuck within a cultural-essentialist view that treated traditions as static, monolithic, and impermeable. Added to this were the Indological demands that constrained me from thinking creatively about contemporary topics from within Indian texts. These tensions ultimately led me to pursue a doctoral degree in East-West Comparative Philosophy at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, rather than in India or Europe.

Studying in Hawai‘i—a place marked by its own situation between sovereignty and occupation—afforded me the freedom (such an important word for the North American context) to engage Indian philosophical traditions comparatively. The program’s structure required a solid grounding in the Anglo/western philosophical background, while simultaneously cultivating the skills necessary for rigorous engagement with traditions beyond it. Under the guidance of Arindam Chakrabarti, this entailed not only acquiring cultural, linguistic, and philosophical literacy in Indian traditions but recognizing them as equal interlocutors in the pursuit of philosophical inquiry.

Chakrabarti views philosophy as an intrinsically comparative and global endeavor, where concepts, theories, and ideas, irrespective of their cultural origin, are mobilized in the service of providing well-argued and truthful answers to philosophical problems (Chakrabarti 2022: 231). There is no question whether one can philosophize from and with traditions outside one’s own cultural heritage. The comparative philosopher, indeed, brings together ideas and views from as many traditions, western and non-western, as deemed necessary and relevant for the inquiry, “while retaining the freedom of treating them as views to be rejected” (Chakrabarti 2016: 232). This type of inquiry entails reflection on how to most effectively engage with non-western traditions to refine philosophical practice itself and, in doing so, enrich the repertoire of resources available for humanity’s epistemic, aesthetic, metaphysical, ethical, and political flourishing.

The articulation of a “global post-comparative” way of doing philosophy by Chakrabarti and Weber (2016, 2022, 2025), also known as “fusion philosophy,” could be seen as the culmination of a process toward what Dussel calls the “rich pluriversity” of a future *trans*-modern culture. Dussel

understands “transmodernity” as a future moment—historical, ethical, political and “trans-capitalist”—that draws *from within* all those philosophical and cultural worlds that were excluded, discarded, devalued, and judged as “useless” by European and North American Modernity to develop their potentialities and possibilities with their own resources and in constructive philosophical dialogue with voices all around the world (not only with the Global North) (Dussel 2008:19).

Taking as an example the work of Arab philosopher, Muhammad Abed al-Jabri, at the University of Fez in Morocco, Dussel outlines different stages in the path of an inter-philosophical dialogue toward a transmodern pluriverse. To summarize, the first stage would involve arguing for the philosophical status and value of non-western traditions of thought, rejecting Eurocentric assessments and categorizations. A second moment would entail a critical reading of one’s own philosophical tradition using resources internal to it as well as those found useful from modern philosophies. Third, the creation of a new way of doing philosophy would emerge from within the tradition, nourished by the dialogue with other cultures, but responding to questions proper to one’s culture. And fourth, the engagement of dialogue with other cultures “by critical and creative philosophers in each tradition, and not by those who simply repeat the philosophical theses that are the traditional echoes of consensus” (Dussel 2008:17-9).

In this sense, Chakrabarti and Weber’s “post-comparative” view of philosophy appears as a utopian project that both presupposes and transcends the stages in Dussel’s process toward transmodernity. The recognition of equal argumentative rights for all global philosophical traditions can only operate effectively in a world where political and epistemic inequalities between interlocutors no longer exist. Yet, as Dussel emphasizes, current reality is far from such equality: it is not the same to be part of an “imperial, central core,” such as the contemporary Anglo-European sphere, as it is to belong to the postcolonial and peripheral world. For this reason, he insists that the latter must irrupt into global dialogue “from the transformative exteriority of that which is always Distinct” (Dussel 2012: 42). As such, it must respond to the challenges of Modernity and “even European/North American post-modernity” from the perspective of its own cultural experiences, whose uniqueness would enable them to offer solutions that could never emerge exclusively from modern culture (Dussel 2012: 43).

Dussel’s emphasis on the importance of traditions outside the Anglo/European sphere to critically participate in the global philosophical conversation from their own distinct perspectives resonates with Sthaneshwar Timalisina’s call in “Diversifying Indic Philosophies” to make the comparative project involving Indian philosophies a two-way, rather than a one-way, exchange (Timalisina 2025a). Timalisina stresses the need to preserve internal voices and “reaffirm their uniqueness”—corresponding to the first stage in Dussel’s outline—in order to resist the internalization of the “external gaze” imposed by Anglo/European categorizations. Much like Dussel’s vision of transmodernity, which highlights elements both “beyond” and “prior to” the value structures of modern European/North American cultures, Timalisina advocates a gaze oriented toward the future yet deeply rooted in tradition— which would correspond to Dussel’s third stage toward the

pluriverse. Whereas a current post-comparative approach might seek to deploy Indian philosophies (alongside other traditions) to address problems already framed in contemporary, often western-derived terms, Timalsina instead aims to reconfigure the very framing of those problems by drawing on the internal diversity and conceptual resources revealed through a “gaze from within.”

Timalsina’s project of diversifying Indic philosophies takes decolonization as a moral obligation (Timalsina 2025a). For Dussel, genuine decolonization of postcolonial cultures requires not only the self-affirmation of one’s cultural legacy but also its critical interrogation (second stage). This critique draws simultaneously on the tradition’s internal resources and on selected elements of Modernity, which the critical intellectual appropriates and redirects toward revitalizing the tradition. Such a process, grounded in a return to the texts, symbols, and myths of one’s culture, should mature into an intercultural dialogue led by “border intellectuals” positioned *between* their culture and Modernity. Dussel insisted that this dialogue must first unfold as a South–South exchange before becoming a South–North conversation (fourth stage).

Following Dussel’s suggestion, in the next part of this reflection, I bring Timalsina’s project of diversifying Indic philosophies into conversation with other diversification efforts emerging from different “Latin American” situations. I do so to explore how a South-South exchange might advance the shared project of intellectual emancipation and the journey toward a philosophical pluriverse.

2

In “Diversifying Indic Philosophies,” Sthaneshwar Timalsina addresses the tension between promoting diversification in western academia and doing so without reducing non-western categories to western frameworks. The label “Indian Philosophy,” though useful for carving out space in western institutions, tends to flatten a vast plurality of traditions into a monolithic, homogenized entity, especially when they are expected to mirror Anglo/European modes of analysis and argumentation in order to be intelligible to western and westernized audiences. Timalsina, therefore, proposes the category of “Indic Philosophy,” which he distinguishes from the older term in two key ways. First, whereas “Indian Philosophy” functions largely as a disciplinary construct within western academia, “Indic Philosophy” foregrounds the internal plurality of India’s philosophical traditions and their ongoing self-critical development. Second, while “Indian Philosophy” is shaped by an external gaze that demands conformity to western categories, “Indic Philosophy” insists on a “gaze from within,” one that highlights the diverse ways of thinking, reasoning, and living philosophy embedded in these traditions themselves. In this way, “Indic Philosophy” offers a framework that resists homogenization, emphasizing Indian philosophies’ continued vitality and relevance from within their own cultural and intellectual horizons.

The “gaze from within,” although historically and culturally rooted, is not past-oriented, nor does it aim at the archival, Indological preservation of inherited texts. This is a gaze that views forward: it opens the possibility of creating new conceptual frameworks by thinking deeply with the multiple traditions of the past while engaging with contemporary discourses to respond to global challenges. From this perspective, India’s philosophical systems (Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, Trika, etc.) are not relics but living, evolving, and self-determining traditions—constantly renovating themselves without delimiting their scope through Anglo/European categories of thought.

In many ways, Timalsina’s scholarship exemplifies this *Indic gaze from within*. His work combines philological and philosophical rigor in the study of India’s classical schools, carefully distinguishing the internal diversity of positions that constitute a given tradition (e.g. Timalsina 2009). At the same time, he is deeply committed to bringing Tantra into dialogue with contemporary discourses in cognition, consciousness studies, philosophy of mind, and western phenomenology, thereby expanding the conceptual resources available for theorizing embodied subjectivity (e.g. Timalsina 2015). Moreover, drawing on the Sanskrit textual philosophical archive, sacred iconography, and tantric contemplative practices, Timalsina addresses philosophical questions about God, consciousness, self, freedom, imagination, healing, and the environment in ways that exceed the categories of western thought.⁴ In this sense, his scholarship resists confinement within a single “academic” area or method, navigating across philosophy, religious studies, Indology, and the living wisdom traditions of India.

Timalsina highlights the self-transformative dimension of Indic philosophies most explicitly in his recent initiative, the Vimarsha Foundation, which he describes as a “modern school (*gurukula*) for teaching and reflecting on the ancient wisdom of rishis and siddhas.”⁵ This project offers a practical response to what could be called the “single project dilemma”: we can focus on bringing Indic philosophies into cross-cultural dialogue, but then we risk altering their original categories; or we can commit to preserving their internal evolution within their own parameters, but then we end up trapped in the incommensurability across traditions. The Vimarsha Foundation seeks to bridge these seemingly incompatible approaches by integrating text and practice (*śāstra* and *sādhanā*), sustaining the traditional transmission (*paramparā*) of contemplative methods while simultaneously cultivating open-ended rational inquiry.

Timalsina’s multifaceted approach to diversifying and advancing the east-west comparative project by acknowledging the gaze from within the South Asian traditions—particularly those grouped under the term “Hindu”—differs from the “post-comparative” model of Chakrabarti and Weber in two important ways. First, Timalsina’s gaze from within resists reducing engagement with Indic philosophies (or any other living tradition) to an intellectual endeavor that would take them solely as new perspectives or theories for problem-solving (Timalsina 2025a). For him, to live and practice philosophy is not just about adding another perspective to the philosophical theoretical toolbox, but to offer a ‘philosophical map’ that could guide the inquirer toward fulfillment and a way of life in harmony with others. Second, this work of diversification is not confined to western academic institutions. Instead, it aims to integrate the strengths of both worlds. The traditional Indic mode

of knowledge transmission through a teacher-disciple relationality is actualized with the help of technology through online courses and meetings where the philosopher-scholar-sage engages in conversations that directly address the individual and collective inquiries of participants from all around the world. At the same time, the academic dimension of the Vimarsha Foundation⁶ incorporates voices from both “gazes from outside” and “gazes from within” in a collaborative effort to appreciate the distinctiveness of Indic traditions while probing the possibilities and limits of east-west comparative dialogue.

East–West inter-philosophical dialogues are slowly, but increasingly, moving beyond the stage of simple comparison or contrast and production conducted solely by experts trained in the European and Anglo-American academy. What marks this contemporary moment is the questioning of the philosopher’s role as ‘expert reporter’ (Timalsina 2025a) or “ventriloquist” (Kirloskar-Steinbach 2023: 188)—roles in which scholars often spoke for traditions while relegating practitioners to the position of “native informants” for those who presumed mastery over non-western systems of thought (Kirloskar-Steinbach 2023: 194). Today, “gazes and voices from within” are asserting themselves in ways that are both creative and self-critical, resisting and reshaping the colonial and imperial “gazes from without.”

The critical consciousness that has emerged in diverse Latin American contexts suggests that advancing toward a transmodern pluriverse (Dussel) or a post-comparative utopia (Chakrabarti and Weber) requires pluralizing not just the philosophical content of one’s own traditions but the very “gaze” that situates itself from “within.” In one sense, this means becoming aware that such a gaze arises already from a situation of “in-betweenness” or from a biculturality rooted in a tradition distinct from European/Euro-American Modernity yet capable of integrating its most valuable elements. As Dussel (2012: 48) notices, the fourth stage in the path towards transmodernity requires “intellectuals of the border” (between their own tradition and the western) who can generate genuine critical intercultural thought, rather than merely affirming their tradition in rejection of western Modernity. In another sense, pluralizing the “gaze from within” entails revealing the many gazes—some also painful and problematic—that such “within” can hold. We can see this being done in articulations of diversification in different cultural areas across Latin America—or Abya Yala, as many decolonial thinkers prefer to refer to the Americas (including the one in the North).

María Lugones (1987), for example, distinguishes “arrogant perception” from a “loving perception.” The former names the modern/colonialist gaze that appropriates, distorts, dismisses, or erases others’ subjectivities, while the latter gestures toward a mode of seeing “with the other eyes” respecting others’ sense of selves within their own worlds. From her position as an Argentinian lesbian intellectual teaching in the United States, she experiences herself as both the object of arrogant perception—when in the States she is seen as “outside” of the mainstream by other white women—and the agent—when in Argentina she fails to love her mother and the maid due to inherited prejudices. Lugones speaks of “world-traveling” as a practice of crossing into other epistemic worlds with playfulness and humility rather than mastery or domination. For her, a

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pluriverse would be possible only when we recognize our own arrogant perception and instead cultivate ways of seeing ourselves through heterogeneous ways of life and “ambiguous” ways of being.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), writing from her lived reality as a chicana mestiza, deploys her “gaze from within” to critically look at her own community and resist both the patriarchal ways running through it and the colonizing forces oppressing it from without. Anzaldúa offers the category of “nepantla” as an in-between space, at times unsettling and painful, of being neither fully on one side nor the other. This liminal position allows her to reimagine the very notion of “mestiza” as a new consciousness able to affirm the differences, even contradictions, from within and construct an identity that is in constant creative movement, honoring otherness while remaining open to its transformational effects in us (Anzaldúa 1987: 80; 2002: 4).

Yaśnaya Elena Aguilar Gil (2020), linguist, writer, translator, language rights activist, researcher, and *ayuujk* speaker from Oaxaca, articulates a philosophy of language and politics rooted in multilinguality. Educated in Mexico City yet grounded in her Mixe community, she embodies the tensions of border-crossing between city and the mountain, between learning Spanish and preserving indigenous languages, between the political exaltation of multiculturalism and the actual erasure of the cultural bearers, themselves subsumed by the State. Her reflections expose how the hegemonic “gaze from within” of the Mexican Nation-State simultaneously veils other gazes (and voices) from within the diverse communities that are the land’s original inhabitants.

As a last example, sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) draws from Aymara and Quechua concepts to expose the contradictions of colonial modernity in Bolivia. Her use of *ch’ixi* as a “metaphor-concept”—meaning “gray” but referring to the illusion created by intertwined white and black spots, like the ones found in granite stones—captures how Indigenous and colonial cultural elements coexist in a heterogeneous, unsynthesized, and often conflictual manner (*abigarrada*). For her, the persistence of such heterogeneity resists nationalist and elite projects of homogenization that co-opt Indigenous discourses for depoliticizing ends. Cusicanqui’s analysis shows that not all “gazes from within” are liberatory, for some may reproduce dynamics that turn themselves into oppressive “gazes from above.” In the recognition of the *ch’ixi*, that intermediate space of friction and malaise, that does not allow unity nor conciliation, that is neither white nor black (perhaps also, neither western nor non-western), Cusicanqui (2020: 81) sees the possibility of weaving together a new epistemology of planetary character that “can sustain our shared tasks as a human species, while at the same time rooting us ever more deeply in our communities and local territories, in our bioregions—so that we may create networks of meaning and cultivate *ecologies of knowledge* (saberés) that are also *ecologies of taste and embodied sensibility* (sabores)”⁷

Attending to the multiplicity of diversification projects in areas other than philosophy, yet coming from “border intellectuals” in different Latin America/Abya Yala contexts, may provide useful critical tools for projects of philosophical diversification, such as Timalšina’s. In its moral commitment to decolonization, the inclusive project of diversifying Indic philosophies cannot

forget that “the gaze from within” may take different forms, sometimes problematic and in contradictory tension with each other: the gaze from within that comes from the traditional *gurukula*; the “within” of Brahmanical philosophies that is a without toward Dalit, Buddhist, atheist, or women philosophers; the scholar practitioner whose “without” becomes a “within” when in learning the language of the tradition can dismantle an argument with *pramāṇa* precision; the “within” of a guru/sage that is, in reality, an “above” everyone else and with whom it is impossible to establish a real philosophical debate; the “within” that goes “without” into South-South dialogues; or the bicultural, multilingual, frontier thinkers “within” the tradition that can listen lovingly to others and move fluidly between worlds. Examples from Latin America/Abya Yala remind us to remain critical of the very category “within,” asking always “which within,” “whose within?” As Timalsina acknowledges (2025a), Indic philosophies have continually redefined their own canons, transforming insides into outsides and vice versa “organically” often through fierce debate. Yet the examples he provides to illustrate how “every single school of Indic philosophy has been reevaluated and redefined” remain largely confined to works in Sanskrit and, moreover, to male authors (Timalsina 2025a). If so, the very “gaze from within” that Timalsina seeks to affirm still requires further pluralization. A critical “gaze from within” is itself plural; it must remain attentive not only to historical shifts in canon formation but also to the voices and perspectives excluded from within the tradition itself.

On the other hand, recognizing the plurality of the “gazes from without” is also vital for advancing toward a philosophical transmodern pluriverse. Dussel urges us to expand the east-west dialogue to “South-South” ones because, “as a Latin American,” he is invoking the specificity of that cultural milieu and its differential relation with the West, compared to Asian traditions. The Latin American context complicates the diversification of the east-west comparative project because a philosopher shaped by a “mestizo situation” engaging with eastern traditions should not be categorized simply as “western.” Despite working through Anglo-European methods, such a thinker remains, in some sense, always “at the border.” Thus, much remains to be uncovered also in the “gaze from without” toward Indic philosophies that emerges from contexts such as Latin America, Africa, other Asian contexts, the Pacific, and even Eastern Europe.

In adhering to the moral responsibility assumed by “post-comparative” and “trans-modern” projects to do justice to *all* non-western traditions, Timalsina’s project of diversifying Indic philosophies emphasizes the need to do so also by acknowledging their internal heterogeneity. However, the specific cases of diversification I have provided above invite us to remember the heterogeneity of both the “gaze from within” and the “gaze from without,” and to be aware of their strategic uses and tensions, so that we can move closer to a pluriverse where there will be “just philosophy.” In Chakrabarti’s double sense (2025: 3-4 and 2022: 169-174), shared also by Dussel, this means: 1) recovering ignored and previously devalued universes of meaning, freeing them from external categories, and restoring their liberating potential of any political and spiritual oppression; and 2) affirming philosophy as truth-oriented, rationally driven, culturally and linguistically grounded, yet open to anyone willing to do the work, in other words, what Leopoldo Zea (1969:61) once called doing *filosofía sin más*.

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- ¹ The module was mainly on Nahuatl thought without mention of the philosophies of the other sixty-eight officially recognized Indigenous communities.
- ² See the description of this situation in Zea 1978, which is a philosophical reflection on the “extraordinarily complicated case” of the Latin American mestizo identity.
- ³ Enrique Dussel narrates how, as an Argentinian, he had no doubt of his belonging to the “Western culture,” until the moment he disembarked from the ship in his first trip to Europe in 1957, when he became aware of being a “Latin American”: “the differences were obvious and could not be concealed” (Dussel 2012: 28).
- ⁴ See the many articles he has written on these topics (URL: <https://www.vimarshafoundation.org/writings>; last accessed on August 28, 2025).
- ⁵ Vimarsha Foundation, *About-Us*, Vimarsha Foundation (URL: <https://vimarshafoundation.org/about-us>; last accessed on August 28, 2025).
- ⁶ See <https://www.vimarshafoundation.org/talkseries-registration> for the most recent series of academic talks engaging multiple views, methodologies, and areas of expertise, addressing topics of contemporary relevance from Hindu philosophical perspectives (URL: <https://www.vimarshafoundation.org/writings>; last accessed on August 28, 2025).
- ⁷ My translation from the original in Spanish: “[...] que nos habilitará en nuestras tareas comunes como especie humana, pero a la vez nos enraizará aún más en nuestras comunidades y territorios locales, en nuestras *bioregiones* para construir redes de sentido y “ecología de saberes” que también sean “ecologías de sabores.”

Epistemic Loss (and Power): The Lessons of Philosophy in India¹

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Sthaneshwar Timalsina invites us to pursue *Indic Philosophies* (sometimes singular)—his desired alternative, supplement to, and even antidote for “Indian philosophy,” the disciplinary way in which philosophy from the subcontinent is engaged by philosophers in contemporary analytic departments, when engaged at all—as a recognizable way of going on which is continuous in content and method with their own form of intellectual activity.²

We need a different way, Timalsina urges, because the engagement encouraged by Indian Philosophy carries epistemic costs. Timalsina is “more interested in the ‘how’ question [in connection with diversifying philosophy] rather than the ‘why’” (1), as am I. And I share his sense, by no means new, that something is awry in the kingdom of global philosophy.

Let’s not deny it. All too often it feels as if, ever since Colebrooke introduced what he called Hindu Philosophy to the Royal Asiatic Society of London (Colebrooke 1824) just over two hundred years ago, our entire intellectual practice is reduced to having to “re-introduce” philosophy from India to generations of bemused European philosophers, their institutional memory ranging from poor to non-existent. Naturally, we have also had to reintroduce Indian philosophy to generations of university-educated Indians in whom a colonial education and its hangovers have enacted a more deliberate variety of amnesia. Even our successes are forgotten, such as the collaboration which made ‘testimony’ a topic for anglophone philosophy on the basis of Indian philosophical precedent (Chakrabarti 1992; Matilal and Chakrabarti 1994).³ What is successfully incorporated, like assimilated immigrants, must speak without an accent, as it were, jettisoning their provenance and history. For various reasons, then, each re-introduction, each successful venture or collaboration, is constrained, valiantly, quixotically, and often without the irony of an episode of Monty Python, to make the case for Indian philosophy again, thereby offering “something completely different” each time.

It's not merely exhausting, one wants to say, if one must lose even when one wins. But mercifully, Timalsina has not given us yet another introduction or justification. It's far too late for that anyway, given the state of our polis, planet, and yes, our universities. No call to action can address all that, but I'm glad to say that Timalsina's proposal does have something important to say. But what it teaches me might just put me at odds with the trajectory of its recommended solution.

Timalsina's essay underscores what I have come to think of as one of the more valuable lessons of the history of philosophy in India: its acknowledgment of a dialectic to which philosophy as a quasi-professionalized cooperative disciplinary academic project is subject. Not only does the dialectic hold lessons for the construction of academic spaces of collaborative inquiry, including

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cosmopolitan philosophy, the history of philosophy in India also shows us what it might mean to quit. “My guru,” the fourteenth-century yogini and poet from Kashmir, Lalleśvarī, said, “taught me one thing—from outside, come back in.” For one should not seek for the right kind of knowledge in the wrong place. I am afraid Timalsina has taught me something like this as well, though in the other direction. To adapt Lalla to our subject, Timalsina may have given me reason to see the value of going from inside (the academy) back out—to doing philosophy in the wild, so to speak. The point will be that professionalism and diversity not only do not mix all that well, perhaps we should not have ever become too comfortable with either. But I’ll explain by beginning with why I am none too enamored with diversity as an institutionalized goal, despite all that may be said on its behalf as an intellectual virtue.

1 Now for Something Completely Different

Timalsina says that he is “exploring in this paper the ways we can actualize the project of diversifying philosophy” (Timalsina 2025a).

Imagine a world in which Jagaddhala university, in our world now entirely in ruins, still exists, and that its philosophy department is among the most respected in the world. In this mirror world, Jagaddhala became what Oxford did in ours.⁴ For some, this would be a pure land, a world of bliss.

Jagaddhala’s professors in this other world are not sure that the English word “philosophy” is the equivalent of the intellectual practice in which they engage (call it X), even if practitioners of philosophy rank themselves with respect to departments where X is studied and publish in journals with titles like *Anvikṣikī* or *Parikṣā*. But these are exciting times, a report to the Dean of Admissions suggests, citing efforts at diversification. Some enlightened professors have begun to hear of the word “philosophy,” rumored to have a long history, though they also know that “serious” departments (Oxford or Yale or Harvard, for example) teach X, and they have condescended to invite scholars who specialize in philosophy (or, regional X) to their department. Thus, the inaugural Xuanzang Global Philosophy series, in honor of one of the first cosmopolitan philosophers, whose first speaker, an Englishman, attempts to motivate the idea of X in Europe before civilizational contact.

As the talk is about to begin, one person turns to another, saying “I will have nothing to offer myself, but I am sure that whatever he is about to say is absolutely false.”⁵ His confidante shakes his head. “That’s a terrible attitude. I’ve read the paper. There are arguments he cites that look just like the ones on reflexive awareness in our own Moksākaragupta’s twelfth-century textbook.” The first speaker shakes his head. “Why do we need it then?”

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The talk begins. A few leave the room, others remain. Not many from the department are present. No graduate students. “You can’t blame them,” one professor later says, making a long arm for the samosas and chai. The speaker, trying to listen, wistfully looks about for a glass of port. “They don’t see any reason to work on niche areas.” But the talk went well. In a few days they will even vote to approve a new search. The job advertisement, when published, invites comment on social media. For the call advertises their commitment to diversifying the department; the letter of the ad has them searching for someone to teach *either* the testimony chapter of Gaṅgeśa’s *Tattvacintāmaṇi*, or English X, from Anaximander to Williamson.

2 Learning from Mirror World

Scenarios like this can be entertaining, like the skit in *Goodness Gracious Me* in which a minority white representative in the Indian Broadcasting Corporation requests that there be a little more white programming on the not unreasonable grounds that not all “White English” are Morris Dancers. Of course, the sketch is only entertaining as momentary catharsis and possibly for its diagnostic function, the relief and humor bound up with the clear-eyed acknowledgment of the all-too real injustice of the world and the consequences of a naïve emphasis on representation and diversity within it. To appeal to “diversity” in such rooms cannot be recommended, nor can one condone what taking the role of representative for “all white people” would mean, a kind of “elite capture” (Táíwò 2022) which K. C. Bhattacharyya, in the context of uncritical adoption of European philosophy, had warned about in terms of the creation of a new class of social and epistemic elites incarnating new kinds of inequity. Such rooms it is more dignified to leave.

From where I am today, I think I would prefer the outright ridicule of the desi board members of the Indian Broadcasting Corporation than I would the accommodation of some of the faculty of Jagaddhala, or universities in our own world acting under the (always reversible) political vicissitudes of representation, though I don’t know that I have the self-respect or courage to wish this were I *in* such a room.

Where one is matters. I will grant that were one entirely situated within the mirror world I described, then of the two professors in Jagaddhala it could very well seem that the one aware of the overlap of Mokṣākaragupta’s arguments and the speaker’s was in some sense admirable. And were he not, then perhaps the visiting speaker, the globally minded English philosopher who makes a case for European X, might be thought a model for the kind of person we wish to invite onto the board of a global or cosmopolitan philosophical journal. But wouldn’t that be disappointing? Don’t you just want to take the speaker aside and say “Why? Why be ashamed of the legacy of Socrates? There is more under the stars of the world than is imagined in all the departments of X.” Both the enlightened professor and the visiting speaker need to hear that the measure of the worth of an

argument is not whether it is found in anyone's textbook way of going on. Not in their world, nor in our own.

3 Epistemic Loss

To be sure, global philosophers do not seek out mere diversity, though they know the value of it. Philosophers working in Indian philosophy think, rightly in my view, that ignoring the existence of twelfth-century textbooks of philosophy from Jagaddhala or analytic essays on negation from Navadīpa is a shame and just plain wrong. It is also self-hobbling, if we are trying to get at anything like confidence in the generality of our results of analysis. Philosophical analysis ought to aspire to the achieved scope of climate science, not merely that of a local weather report, notwithstanding how important such reports can be.

And there are just too many terrific arguments and too many instances of subtle analysis left out of our classrooms, textbooks, and publications. Timalsina knows this, and in knowing this, knows what a lot of otherwise well-intentioned supporters of diversifying the contemporary philosophical curriculum do not. That there is such a thing as analytic Indian philosophy; there are arguments and even essays that could be translated into contemporary idiom quite easily; and that a lot of it even in stilted translation reads like analytic philosophy before there was analytic philosophy. And what's more, we have valued it for many reasons, and not because the Europeans taught us to value reason. This is important to appreciate because Timalsina's worry stems precisely from the *availability* of philosophy in an analytic mode. "[T]he category "Indian Philosophy" [...] broadly mirrors western philosophies *at the cost* of the numerous Indic philosophies that do not operate within the same analytical frame" (Timalsina 2025a; my emphasis).

Indian Philosophy, the discipline and academic object, leaves too much out: Basically, "we would be left [...] with only epistemology" (Timalsina 2025a). The cost of success in translating Indian philosophy for analytic audiences has been noted before (Mohanty 1992). But Timalsina's emphases are useful. The success of Indian philosophy involves a variety of self-defeating consequence, not unlike Max Weber's diagnosis of the costs of scientific rationalization. Indian Philosophy loses sight of the conditions and considerations which give philosophical praxis meaning: the goals of freedom and self-transformation, the continuity of philosophy with life and value and circumstance, the motivations and contexts in which philosophy is meaningful, the loss, in a word, of the humus of philosophy for the sake of superficial topsoil, in Timalsina's image (Timalsina 2025a). What's more, the contemporary focus on philosophy in an analytic mode limits us to theoretical genres in Sanskrit, leaving out the multiple languages and genres in which people have engaged philosophy in India and through which such engagement was available and meaningful.

This is an important point to make. We have lost many worlds of philosophy, and thereby ways in which philosophy has been practiced and made a difference in the world. The point can be made within the horizons of Sanskrit. Balgangadhar Tilak, taking time out from concrete political decolonizing, once argued that even if the tradition of Nyāya be treated as logic, it should not be reduced to “decid[ing] what conclusions can subsequently be—drawn by inference from some desired or given data and which of these inferences are correct, and which wrong, and why (Tilak 1935: 203). Philosophy is neither merely the science of reasoning nor scorekeeping with respect to inferences. We want to keep in view the world that’s being analyzed, and we need to philosophize in normatively rich ways, using, Timalsina believes, culturally specific vocabularies and distinctive metaphysical schemes in multiple genres. Call that philosophizing thickly.

4 What’s the Story

The idea would be that we ought to want to philosophize thickly. And Indic philosophy would be a way to do so.

It’s worth noticing just how fickle professional norms can be. While today we try and convince our anglophone colleagues that philosophy in India was or could be analytical, and in an effort to reach them bracket out the normative contexts and contents which are difficult to translate, there once a time when Indian philosophers had to convince their English counterparts of just the opposite. Before analytic philosophy was born, the complaint was that Indian philosophy was just too dry, too “scholastic,” too analytical (Mookerjee 1984: xxxviii-xxxix). One just can’t win.

Tying philosophy to what it would take to please European (or anyone else’s) variable fashions can be a mug’s game. But so too may (forgive me this horrible word) further *arealizing* the corrective. “Indic philosophy” may give too much to the idea of “methodological nationalism,” the idea that the contexts in which this knowledge is meaningful is an area, a nation or proto-nation or super-nation (Pollock 2016: 915). Neither our sources nor the study of it should assume a nation as an object, and thickening philosophy—with the help of normatively rich conditions of meaningfulness and ungeneralizable vocabularies and genres—need not involve framing philosophical praxis and their worlds in terms of nations, proto-nations, or their infrastructural academic surrogates, cultures or civilizations. It may be right to say with Timalsina that “philosophy as such cannot be expunged from its cultural parameters),” but I do not grant that it follows that therefore “[...] philosophy is a systemic theorizing of experiences manifest in modes of collective cultural expression” (Timalsina 2025a). I don’t think the entailment exists, and in any event, I think that tying philosophy to *weltanschauung* or anything structured as one is neither descriptively nor prescriptively apt.

Let's think strategically for a moment. As Timalsina recognizes, what Indian philosophy leaves out is not unique to Indian philosophy. And recovering Indic philosophies, therefore, can be a way of recalling philosophy as such to itself. Just as Europe is not the only source of rigor, we are not alone in having to suffer the amputation of the meaningfulness of our practices, and we should not let our epistemic grief for what we have lost, our continuity with our past and our confidence in its worth, insulate us. Consider what it might look like to frame the recovery of philosophy from India intersectionally and transregionally. Consider, for example, that women and the genres in which they have been forced to create philosophy have been disappeared from the history of philosophy. Not alone in Europe or India. Framing things like this might suggest new avenues for academic and citizenly solidarity and it might help us to see things a little differently.

To take what is of interest to me here, the story of epistemic loss may involve more than colonialism. Neither "Indian Philosophy" nor the disciplinary corrective "Indic philosophy" will help us see what we need to see—there is story to be told about the creation of professional spaces in which a certain kind of philosophy can be practiced, a story with roles for non-Europeans to play, roles which our complaints against colonialism elide.

There is, firstly, the story of the multigenerational construction of institutional spaces in South Asia involving the creation of a kind of cosmopolitan dialogical space we today profess to want. That it happened in India is why the affinity of analytic philosophy and philosophy composed in Sanskrit is not a mere accident.

And there is the story of the forms of philosophical life and practice which resist or elude it, not accidentally, but deliberately. We need to learn not from our epistemic losses alone, but from the history of institutional capture and institutional exit. The story of exit helps bring the story of institutional forms into view.

5 Institutional Capture

It is not news that Saraha critiqued institutional Buddhism, particularly intellectuals, noting that, "Some are seen to have dried up through having a mind full of thoughts".

The commentator Adhvayavajra gives us the context, referring us to those monastics who spend their time "reflecting on the letters of canonical texts and trying to correct them" (Mathes and Szántó 2024: 216)⁶—it is philology, that is, *avant la lettre* (if you will forgive the pun) that comes in for special censure. And philosophy, which causes them to "dry up the mind and become sick." For "when they [only] analyze with logical arguments, ascetics and the like do not attain [...]" what is worth attaining (Mathes and Szántó 2024: 219). I find this striking, given that Indic philosophy

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as an academic subject is inseparably bound up with philology and philosophy. But the main point lies elsewhere.

These are not criticisms of disciplinary form alone, but institutionalization, a point reinforced by the fact that the critique of the disciplinarity is linked to critiques of monastic structures of law, ritual, and hierarchical form. The critiques are well known, but when confined to mysticism may miss the true force. Even if not revolution with a capital “R,” Saraha and personas like his are used by those who would engage us in the transvaluation of institutions and the institutional capture of imagination, anything that keeps us from realizing our true existential and experiential possibilities. Saraha’s insight in this verse is that intellectual and sociological form may relate in complex ways, prestige need not entail value, and disciplinarity may sculpt and constrict consciousness and our being in ways we no longer can see. Above all else, he reminds us, it is the contexts, and not only the contents, of philosophy which matter.

6 Dialogical Platforms

The forms of life and awareness which Saraha would enjoin on us emerge as refusals of the disciplinary form of philosophy undertaken as a certain kind of project. Such a discipline did not happen to exist, as if by chance. Philosophy as a trans-regional, trans-traditional space of reasons had to be made. “Classical Mīmāṃsā and Sautrāntika dialogues,” Timalisina writes, “are a testimony for this [...] Classical Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain philosophical works are testaments to [...] systems that have historically been open to examination” (Timalisina 2025a).

But such transparency, being open to examination and engagement in a collective and shared discursive space, comes at cost. “What helped shape the commonly accepted epistemology,” Timalisina writes, underscoring what he calls the first requirement of such a space of reasons, involves “filtering out selected issues, weeding out categories that were deemed irrelevant for the broader conversation” (Timalisina 2025a). Only thus, and with recourse to a (ostensibly) presupposition-free vocabulary, could one find oneself in a position to engage one another’s truth claims or frame theses.

It is striking to me just how very much the space of reasons in Sanskrit exemplifies a kind of cosmopolitanism, involving just the kind of “common discourse in which [philosophers, East or West] can participate” (Mohanty 1992: 401), a discourse Mohanty discerned as the dream of philosophers like Matilal. And what I have learnt to appreciate from Timalisina’s manifesto is that epistemic loss is a structural consequence of the desire to engage in any such intellectual project, up to and including the academic project of Indic philosophy.

What causes the epistemic loss is not mere exclusion, but a norm and vision of inclusiveness.⁷ When Timalsina says that “[w]e cannot assume any dialogue on archaic categories that does not reflect common parameters for a meaningful conversation” (Timalsina 2025a) he could have been talking for the Buddhist and Nyāya philosophers who, along with others, cooperated to make the space of reasons in Sanskrit. And when he writes that “the first thing the dialogical platform demands,” speaking of his desired academic goal of Indic philosophy, “is a commonly shared epistemology, so that our values and convictions are mutually communicable,” he could be speaking as well of either the Sanskrit space of reasons or the common discourse dreamt of by practitioners of global philosophy: a space of reasons, methods, and problems, in which multiple agents from different traditions may engage, in a common vocabulary, according to common norms in a shared project. But Timalsina’s own description of the fate of Sanskrit philosophy shows that no such space could ultimately redress epistemic loss—for the loss of normatively specific, contestable, thick features in culturally specific vocabularies, is a feature, not a bug. We cannot, then, obviously *use* dialogical engagement as a solution for disengagement in the academy or cosmopolitan philosophy.

We must acknowledge, instead, what Timalsina’s learned essay has helped me to see: the dilemma to which the dialectic of professionalism in an unjust world will subject us. Here it is. To bring in a foreign tradition of philosophy as an academically respectable genre means either meeting those in power on their terms or building new and common ground with them. The former risks epistemic injustice and epistemic servitude; the latter, epistemic loss of the kind Timalsina has warned us about.

7 Dialectic of Professional Philosophy

To avoid the dilemma by not taking on the task Timalsina envisages could, were we to look at it from a vantage point inside the academy, mean invisibility and irrelevance (if we refuse to bring in our subject as an academic topic) or the opacity of our topic and work if we do and fail to professionally engage our colleagues. That would be a heavy price to pay. And it is not as if there are no reasons to embrace the dialectic, as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, who recognized the emergence of a space of reasons in Sanskrit as a formal, academic, co-operative research paradigm, saw.

Chattopadhyaya thought of the space of reasons as involving the dialectical co-operation of traditions in arguments, among whose epistemic benefits were increasing rigor, new analytic tools, increased co-operation in a shared academic endeavor across generations. The cost, however, was that such progress enacted in thought the variety of social abstraction which Chattopadhyaya believed to be the precondition for any such space. A space of reasons like this required institutions

which could be kept apart from social orders, insulated from life-worlds, free from economic concerns having to do with means of production (Chattopadhyay 1964: 130).

Again, the *contexts* and not only the contents of philosophy matter; but we might also soften the sting of the dilemma by allowing that institutions are not the only context in which philosophy may be done, nor institutionalized forms the only forms in which philosophy is worth pursuing. Let us ask: Is introducing Indic philosophy as a subject within compromised spaces of higher learning worth it?

A wide-ranging historically informed, global conversation about the possible forms and meanings of academic and non-academic philosophical praxis has yet to be undertaken.⁸ Here too, the history of Indian philosophy could teach us a lot. There is, for one thing, the rather quixotic phenomenon that it is one and the same intellectuals who championed analytic philosophy in Sanskrit as well as the institution-challenging, consciousness expanding antinomian critiques of institutional form; there were intellectuals like Kṣemarāja who wrote formal philosophical works for those without philosophical education; and in all of this variety, we must not forget what the history of women philosophers (sadly not emphasized in Timalsina's essay) can teach us. The first generation of female Buddhist philosophical teachers not only aspired to join communities in which they could live freely, but they had to build them—literally by putting their money where their beliefs were, donating to the institutions to which they belonged. What communities, within or outside the academy, does Timalsina imagine we will make by pursuing Indic philosophy? What will it cost and what are we willing to give to make it happen?

8 Where Does That Leave Us?

We must remember who and where we are in order to aspire wisely. Global philosophy as an academic enterprise in our world asks different things of different people. For some, it asks for cognitive flexibility, the willingness to entertain that there is philosophy outside of their textbooks. For others, it requires morally significant psychological contortions. How could it not? Global philosophy requires that some play the part the visiting speaker did at Jagaddhala in the mirror world, that of a supplicant. The fundamental *asymmetry* which many of the more reflective of cosmopolitan philosophers have found to be troubling has not gone away. “For Western philosophy,” Mohanty again, “is not studied, expounded, and critiqued from the point of view of Oriental thought” (Mohanty 1992: 404), as if to answer Bhattacharyya's question, posed sixty-four years earlier: “How many of us have had distinctively Indian estimates of western literature and thought?” (Bhattacharyya 2011 [1928]: 108).

Accepting the historically contingent asymmetry as if it were inevitable or natural, continuing to internalize “an entire system of ideas and sentiments” and allowing it to “possess one without

comparison or contestation, our estimation of theirs” produces epistemic servitude, a variety of subjection or slavery of the spirit (Bhattacharyya 2011 [1928]: 101).⁹ And that is intolerable. But if philosophy requires freedom from servitude to an internalized hierarchy, adapting the Buddha’s sense of the fruits of philosophical life and for which he used the example of the slave who recognizes that his master is not a god, we must also be honest and clear-eyed as to what freedom will require of us.

Even if we did not work in a world colonialism has shaped, the dialectic of professionalism would still obtain. Curricula and disciplines seem to encourage a kind of world-blindness, becoming worlds unto themselves. This is what the Buddha warned about in the *Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*, speaking of those who (in my translation) “will teach, dwelling on the plane of reasons, with arguments and canons, constrained by habituation to the infelicities in their own philosophical theories.”¹⁰

Timalsina has taught me a lot. But beyond all talk of curricula, were I to be honest, what I would really like to know more about is the kind of philosophical teaching he offers in the Vimarsha foundation. Timalsina has experience philosophizing thickly, not without rigor, and with transformative intent for non-academic audiences. (We should remember not just what, or where, but also *for whom* we philosophize, and every variety of *sambandha*, or meaning-preserving connection, which the commentators in Sanskrit always want us to bear in mind when setting out to philosophize.)

I appreciate his wariness in connection with the pedagogical model of the *gurukula*. I share it—we surely don’t need more “gurus” (in the pejorative sense of this word) in the university, the academic-celebrity-variety being bad enough. But we lose nothing by acknowledging the power in traditional pedagogical practices. Was not Socrates, after all, a kind of guru? I want to learn more from Timalsina about philosophizing in the wild, and how to philosophize, as it were, as if our heads were on fire—like it mattered, as if our goal were to ensure that it still remains possible to experience the life-changing connection with text, concept, and argument which philosophy, at its best, provides. For the time is long past when we could philosophize as if we were gods, as if we had all the time in the world. We just don’t. The question is: where shall we philosophize, with whom and how, in the time that is left.

¹ I want to thank Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach for the invitation to engage with this manifesto; thanks to Sree Kala, and the faculty and students who attended the talk on this topic at the Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady; this response is also perfumed by traces of conversations: with Pardis Dabashy; Noreen Khawaja; Nancy Levene; Katie Lofton; Jane Mikkelson.

² In this essay it is easier to presume that we are dealing with analytic philosophy when speaking of Anglophone philosophy. This is not because all departments are uniformly analytic, nor because Indian philosophy has not also engaged continental philosophy at different times. It is certainly not

because the problems do not arise because of some singular cosmopolitan openness on the part of those who orient themselves with respect to canons of philosophy considered continental. In my limited experience, the focus on textual canons, genealogy, a blinding commitment to a fatal necessity tying concepts, history, world and style of thought together with the singularity of European experience (whether to praise or blame it), effortlessly continues the Eurocentric commitments of philosophers like Hegel, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida (van Norden 2017, 25), and even Richard Rorty, for whom, however otherwise capacious, non-European philosophy is likely a non-starter (Rorty 1989; Tartaglia 2014). For what personal experience may be worth, I've often found it easier to introduce Indian philosophy into contexts determined by canons of problems and solutions, rather than texts—a fact which may not be unrelated to the dialectic of professionalism discussed below. Note as well that Rorty's ethnocentrism was linked to his commitment to philosophy as a variety of culturally specific praxis, which is worth keeping in mind for any philosophical project which aims to think thickly (Tartaglia 2014).

3 For an excellent new attempt, follow the fate of 'absence' as a cosmopolitan disciplinary topic (Vaidya et. al 2016). I am unable to resist the joke, poor as it is, that we will need some such account of absence to describe Indian philosophy in contemporary humanistic education.

4 I ask you to remember some facts about our world. Jagaddhala is where Mokṣākaragupta wrote his *Introduction to Buddhist Epistemology (Tarkabhāṣā)* in the twelfth century; and where, in anticipation of its secular counterpart in this other world I will now describe, Dean Vidyākara compiled the anthology of Sanskrit (sometimes erotic) lyric, *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*. I do not find it hard to imagine disciplines of philosophy and comparative literature or literature developing from here.

5 Transworld identities are hard to establish; transworld ironies no less so. But omniscient beings will note the sublime irony in the fact that what the Jagaddhala professor says echoes what G. E. Moore said of Surendranath Dasgupta in the 1920s: "When the Indian philosopher Surendra Nath Dasgupta read a paper on the epistemology of Vedanta to a session of the Aristotelian Society in London, Moore's only comment was: 'I have nothing to offer myself. But I am sure that whatever Dasgupta says is absolutely false.'" (Van Norden 2017: 15). The irony is sharpened by awareness that arguments developed in Indian philosophy on the *sahopalambhaniyama* would have helped Moore on the issue of transparency of mental content and the distinction between vehicle and content.

6 The translators chose "words" instead of what they note is the more literal "letters." I have reversed this.

7 And more than mere epistemic loss. For we must speak of sociological death of traditions and the kind of epistemological loss this can entail. "Even dialogical models of philosophical rewriting did not help," Timalsina, writes, "if we are speaking in favor of the plurality of ideas, because the emergence of Navya Nyāya and the application of epistemic and logical structures from Nyāya in every discourse made it impossible for several schools to enter the ring of debate, consequently losing endowments, resulting in termination of these schools" (Timalsina 2025a).

8 Such a conversation might take several forms, with different concerns and criteria available for us to emphasize depending on time and place. In medieval India, one could query the consequences of entirely identifying oneself with any institutional rôle at the expense of more radical, more truly embodied varieties of freedom, and ask whether the institutionalized forms of traditions did not falsify the animating goals of the traditions they were dedicated to fostering. In our present moment, we can ask after the value of diversification. Our classrooms and our academic disciplines are richer

for having Sebastian Purcell's translation of the *Huehuetlatolli* (Purcell 2024), but at the same time there are possibly self-defeating consequences were we to become mere consumers of diversity in a settler-colonial capitalist space (Betasamosake Simpson 2014). And some reasons might resonate across centuries. Would it not be resonant with Sarah's concerns and our own disciplinary situation to acknowledge that even if it were true that some texts might not survive without the efforts of philologists, should we not worry about the effect of possibly killing the spirit while preserving the letter?

⁹ Of course, even as one needs to acknowledge asymmetry, one has to also allow that the current layout, on which it seems self-evident that there are these area-defined regions, without cross-cultural, cross-linguistic vectors, is also an illusion. A historically informed cosmopolitanism would not take the current asymmetry, or its interpretation in light of history, at face value, and might even question our area-based imagination. In a way, a cosmopolitanism could not argue for Indian philosophy, in a just world that is. I had earlier thought that it is enough to say that the historically informed cosmopolitanism is not what is at issue here; but I think it is better to say that such a cosmopolitanism is likely not possible in the current environment of our institutions.

¹⁰ *yuktyāgamaistarkabhūmau vartamānāḥ svadr̥ṣṭidoṣavāsanatayā nirdekṣyanti / evameva mahāmate bālapr̥thagjanāḥ kudr̥ṣṭidaṣṭā viṣamamatayo 'jñaiḥ praṇītaṃ sarvapraṇītamiti vakṣyanti* (Vaidya 1963: 19; cf. Suzuki 1932: 37).

Anglophone Indic Philosophy

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Being myself also engaged in the project of philosophical analysis of South Asian thought—and being an appreciator of Timalsina’s work—I am certainly on board with the call to “diversify Indic philosophies.” Timalsina is quite right to begin with the acknowledged—yet very much unfulfilled—need for academic philosophy in the west to diversify itself by taking South Asian thought (among others) seriously as philosophy. And as his discussion exhibits, this goal cannot be achieved without a corollary one that has gone largely unacknowledged: discussion of South Asian philosophy itself needs to be internally diversified. Indian philosophy is in fact not monolithic and ought not to be treated as such. Not only can we, as Sanskrit discourse traditionally has, differentiate various schools of thought that often disagree widely on many fundamental issues—schools such as Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, Buddhist, Jain, Mīmāṃsā, and so on—but scholarship must think even beyond these traditional blocs to recognize differences between particular authors and texts at different times and places, even when they are said to belong to the same school. This specificity has perhaps always been standard in modern Indological scholarship, but has not always percolated to its presentation in western philosophical circles.

Although I have, as Timalsina does, talked of what is “western,” this is not in fact an accurate label for the locus of this inquiry. What we are really talking about here is Indian philosophy in the *Anglophone* academy, that is, in scholarly discourse conducted in *English*, wherever it may be done geographically or temporally (be it Victorian England, pre-independence India, late-twentieth-century North America or Australia, twenty-first century Europe, or anywhere else). This fact is a brutally obvious one: Timalsina’s paper and its responses are written in English, and the very phrase “Indian philosophy” is an English one. But its consequences are as pervasive as the water in which a fish swims, and naming it helps to deepen our inquiry into the challenges and possibilities for diversification.

Of course, sheer language does not entirely explain the problematic tendency of “mirroring mainstream western philosophy” (Timalsina 2025a). There is at least as much influence from the “colonial frameworks” that dictated the use of English in the first place, and I fully agree that we have a “moral obligation to liberate” Indian philosophies from them to the extent possible (Timalsina 2025a). However, the only reason for the widespread use of English to study Indian philosophy is colonialism and its after-effects. This genealogy is admittedly a contingent fact, not a necessary one—as Timalsina points out, there have been various Indian philosophical discourses that spun off into foreign languages independently of colonial projects. But given that this is how events have transpired in our world, I would like to ask: how and to what extent is liberation from colonial frameworks possible *in English*?

Timalsina’s exposition seems to confront us with this question as a double bind: “[W]e have argued that culture and language are integral to philosophical reflection. At the same time, we are arguing

for its diversification, a clear contradiction” (Timalsina 2025a). Can this be right? Is the diversification of Anglophone Indic philosophy really a contradiction in terms, and therefore hopeless?

I hope not. I submit that such a contradiction obtains only if a culture or language is taken to be monolithic. But if post-colonial theory has demonstrated anything, it is the post-structuralist thesis that all culture and all language is riven with difference. This “Difference Thesis,” as I will refer to it, already dispels Timalsina’s paradox by pointing out that culture and language are not only consistent with diversity but are constituted by it. On the other hand, there’s another important lesson of post-colonial theory: the hegemonic hangovers of colonialism linger persistently, even and especially in the attempts to retrieve a supposedly authentic precolonial purity. I will call this the “Post-Colonial Hegemony Thesis.” (Those who need convincing and further reading on either of these theses will do well to start with Prakash 2000.) The Post-Colonial Hegemony Thesis troubles attempts at historical-philosophical retrieval; but the Difference Thesis points in directions that liberate us from the need for any strict retrieval in the first place, as I will explain.

The project of historical retrieval of Indian philosophy is what Timalsina attributes to the discipline of Indology, a project governed by classical philology. He grants this project a better chance of success with its own aims than the Post-Colonial Hegemony Thesis is wont to allow: “The text-historical approach helps us retain the insights from the past in their own pristine form” (Timalsina 2025a). But he still contrasts and prefers what he dubs “Indic philosophy,” which is more “open, dialogical, and rooted on the postmodern awareness of cultural difference” (Timalsina 2025a). The “-ic” suffix seems to indicate that this is not purported as a revivification of exactly the philosophical discourse that has ever been traditionally practiced in the Indian subcontinent, but that it is rooted in and grows out of and beyond that soil.

The metaphor of Indic philosophy as growing out of Indian soil suggests an intimate connection between this new, more open discourse and Indian traditions. And yet this is just the connection that Timalsina persistently problematizes as contradictory. “[W]e cannot make a single project of preserving the classical philosophies in their own pristine form and at the same time also applying them to address global issues and bringing them to cross-cultural dialogue” (Timalsina 2025a). Even when he allows the respective possibility and even cohabitation of these two projects, he insists on their independence from one another: “We will have not only the urge to retain the originality of classical thoughts, but we will also be engaging philosophies from different eras and regions on global issues. These two, as I have argued earlier, are not exclusive to each other but rather are two separate projects” (Timalsina 2025a). He proceeds to picture this independence vectorially, as orthogonal axes on a Cartesian plane: “we can analyze the project in two lines: the vertical line will address its historical development and explore the forgotten domains of philosophical thinking, and the horizontal line will explore new ways for engaging different philosophies on the global scale” (Timalsina 2025a).

I propose instead that philosophy inhabits only the interior of this Cartesian quadrant: that the axes are pure abstractions, nowhere to be instantiated in actual philosophical practice. As I will argue, retrieval of historical thought is never entirely independent of dialogue with present concerns, nor is the latter ever entirely free of the former. That's not to say that we ought not conceptualize these two axes separately: any given study will lean toward one or the other, and it is useful to be able to distinguish the proportions in which it leans either way. But the two projects are always in fact a single one, in some proportion or other.

Although my stance might appear to oppose Timalsina's claims above, I do not think we actually diverge much. I quite agree that historical retrieval *would* be an entirely different project from cross-cultural dialogue if either of these *could* be instantiated philosophically in isolation from the other. The problem is with his stipulation of the project of "preserving the classical philosophies in their own pristine form." Even before the Post-Colonial Hegemony Thesis, a century of critiques of historical positivism rendered such pristine preservation highly questionable. There is no pristine form to be preserved—philosophy is always engaged in a dialogue with heterogeneity. And conversely, dialogue is never conducted without presuppositions—it is always located in and inherits historical traditions and discourses, albeit various heterogenous ones. Timalsina's own articulation of the horizontal axis as "bringing [classical philosophies] to cross-cultural dialogue" (Timalsina 2025a) clearly betrays the inextricability of antecedent interlocutors from any act of dialogue. The two projects, then, are only asymptotic axes; both of these dimensions are always in fact found intermixed in a single project.

This interdependence of historical retrieval and present concerns is implied by the sheer fact of writing about premodern non-English texts in modern English, the issue with which I began. More generally, as theorists from Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004 [1982]) to Donald Davidson (1973) have shown, interpretation of any kind involves an interplay between the source material and the interpreter's own language, ideas, interests, and beliefs. The same basic considerations apply to any linguistic material produced by humans, whether the source is written text or speech and actions unfolding in real time, historical or living, in a different language or in one's own native language. When it comes to meaningful description of human expression, as I have argued at length elsewhere (Mundra 2017), there is no possibility of capturing the "pristine form" unsullied by the normativity of the interpreter. Historical interpretation is not qualitatively different from cross-cultural (or any other) dialogue in this respect: in both cases, one is expected to faithfully reflect the expressions engaged and yet also cannot help but do so at least partly in terms of one's own questions and concepts. When explicating Indian ideas—which developed entirely in non-English languages for millennia until about the last two centuries—in English, one cannot help but bring these ideas into interaction with at least some concerns and ideas current in this global lingua franca. Indology—"archiving the [Indian] past" (Timalsina 2025a), insofar as it involves any translation at all—is thus always, to some extent, what Timalsina calls "Indic philosophy," and vice versa. Even though he stipulates that Indic philosophy is primarily "neither past-orientated nor restricted to archiving thoughts from classical India" (Timalsina 2025a), this doesn't mean that it is entirely unmoored from the past: it is "a vibrant philosophical system that faces toward the future,

giving rise to new philosophical categories by embracing new conceptual structures, even while deriving insights from its past” (Timalsina 2025a). I am arguing that engaging the past always involves present concerns, and that present ideas are always informed by the past.

I must hasten to add that this does not necessarily condemn Anglophone Indic philosophy to a perpetual colonialism, an imperialistic domestication of South Asian intellectual culture into an Anglophone one. If neither pristine historical retrieval nor a presuppositionless universalism are viable options, they are much less the *only* options: just as engagement with the other is always inflected by one's own historically-conditioned frame, that engagement will also often impel the adjustment of one's own frame to improve the faithfulness to what is engaged. One's preunderstandings are always revisable and should be rectified if they fail to fit what one is attempting to interpret (cf. Kapstein 2001: 1 and Arnold 2005: 7-9). There is always the risk of a whole spectrum of translational failures—domestications, mistranslations, untranslatables, and so on—but this risk does not amount to inevitable doom for translation, nor does it mean that we should (or even can) dispense with it altogether. The risks must be faced and minimized as much as possible, through a fallibilist and meliorist process of constant hermeneutical revision.

One might well object that some translational approaches do doom us to failure: that, for example, there is little scope for such revision within certain domesticating approaches to translation like the Quinean model upon which Davidson's radical interpretation is based. Following the critic Michael Warner, Amy Donahue criticizes this approach as reposing upon a “continuum model of language,” an “ideology of public expression” that “posits a seamless continuity between causally, historically, and spatially unique contexts of 'face-to-face argumentative dialogue' and abstract spheres of normal, communally representative linguistic behavior” that “unproblematically yield fields of ordinary, common linguistic anticipation and behavior” (Donahue 2011: 67). Together with a “global incorporation thesis—the assumption that individuals cannot know unless they are recognizable as members of transparently established linguistic or communal frameworks” (Donahue 2011: 132), this approach is “epistemologically violent” (Donahue 2011: 111) insofar as it assumes “that bodies of authoritative social convention unproblematically appear to individuals” (Donahue 2011: 74) and so it excludes non-normative individuals from knowledge and communication as authorized by a given dominant social order.

Does the normativity that I have posited as inextricable from all linguistic interpretation then entail what Warner and Judith Butler call “normalization” (Donahue 2011: 82)? That is, does the inevitability of bringing one's own prejudgments to the interpretive encounter doom one's interpretation to a violent domestication of the other? In the case of Anglophone interpretation, does it entail a colonial normalization that denigrates and excludes all subjects outside of the hegemonic imperium? Does it not allow for either any faithful retrieval or any creativity beyond colonial constraints, as Timalsina calls for? On the one hand, according to Donahue, “Butler accepts that all linguistic contexts, and not only those that are shaped by modern discourse, rely on practices that exclude certain others. Communication everywhere, including in non-modern societies, demands acts of social control” (Donahue 2011: 86). On this view, apparently, all

communication is inevitably violent. And yet, on the other hand, Butler acknowledges the possibility of a “process of epistemological engagement” of so-called “cultural translation,” which does not presume that languages are “enclosed, distinct, unified” and allows the process of translation to “*compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other*” (Donahue 2011: 111 quoting Butler 2004: 38; italics in original). Even Butler, despite indicting all communication with a tendency to normalize the other, allows that the other might yet exert a force of transformation upon the normative prejudgments of the interpreter. This results from recognizing that languages and conceptual systems are always already in dialogue with others, and constituted by this heterogeneity.

I am not myself able here to offer a formula for a decolonizing method of translation. I only want both to remain mindful of the normative preunderstandings that any interpreter brings to the encounter with the other, and at the same time to maintain openness to the interpreter's own transformation through that encounter. Briefly put, genuine learning must be possible, even if it requires a ground prepared by some proleptic preunderstanding. Recognizing the possibility of communication does not require a vicious and homogenizing “normalization,” “continuum model of language,” or “global incorporation thesis.” It does not doom the study of Indian philosophy to be perpetually “reductive,” in Timalsina’s word for the way it has hitherto “broadly mirror[ed] western philosophies at the cost of the numerous Indic philosophies that do not operate within the same analytical frame” (Timalsina 2025a). Radical interpretation, regulated by the interpreter's own normativity, is consistent with heterogeneity and queer notions of what constitutes an individual, a subject, a language, a conceptual scheme. Total intersubjective agreement is not required; all that is required is *enough* agreement for difference to be detected and appreciated such that one's own ideas might be intelligibly challenged at specific places: new concepts generated, different categories inspired, taken-for-granted boundaries pushed, novel questions asked.

I take it that this is what Timalsina wants from Indic philosophy as a “vibrant philosophical system that faces toward the future, giving rise to new philosophical categories by embracing new conceptual structures, even while deriving insights from its past” (Timalsina 2025a). Just how does he himself propose “to liberate the philosophies from the Indian subcontinent from colonial frameworks” (Timalsina 2025a) that have historically hemmed them in? He first outlines two options, both of which seem to amount to dismissing the “colonial impositions” (Timalsina 2025a) by fiat, wishing away rather than effective purgation. As my language-based analysis above has shown, wishful fiats will not serve the desired purpose for Anglophone Indic philosophy after colonialism. Although he doesn't say so, this may be why Timalsina immediately turns toward a third alternative: engaging contemporary South Asian “lived domains of philosophy,” not all of which are “encoded in texts or refined with systematic logic.” This seems at first to be a promising move, and one that may escape the strictures of my translational critique. However, at second look, we have to acknowledge that modern South Asian life and society are themselves suffused with English and heavily inflected by the legacies of colonialism. So, it is not at all clear that this alternative “saves the Indic system from being itself a colonial product” (Timalsina 2025a). We

would need to know more about just how this approach would proceed. I, for one, would be very eager to hear more about what Timalsina has in mind here.

Part of what seems to underwrite this turn to “lived domains of philosophy” is Timalsina’s understanding that such an orientation coheres with the facts of the history of Indian philosophy: “philosophies in classical India were lived, rather than being some theories or reflections upon reflections” (Timalsina 2025a). I would again like to know more about just what it means that classical Indian philosophies were “lived,” and what this would be opposed to. But to say that they were uniformly not “theories or reflections upon reflections” seems to me a reductive limitation of the varieties of classical Indian philosophies. Admittedly, they were not *all merely* theoretical, and it does seem right to say that they were generally “not there for intellectual amusement but are to be practiced or applied in life to transform the human condition” (Timalsina 2025a); but this does not mean that there was no pure theory on offer from some thinkers at some times. The pervasive philosophical discourse that Timalsina mentions on “the question, ‘what does it mean to perceive something?’” (Timalsina 2025a) would seem to be precisely “reflections upon reflections.”

Perhaps Timalsina’s next sentence gives us a more adequate portrayal of “lived” philosophy in classical South Asia: “A philosopher was a sage, a mystic, credited with having deeper insights regarding reality than ordinary people have” (Timalsina 2025a). We must be careful with this generalization, however, which comes dangerously close to the essential and essentializing Orientalist trope of the “mystic East” over against the “rational West.” It is arguably not universally true of classical Indian philosophy: as Timalsina himself notes, “yogic intuition, a category broadly shared by classical Indian philosophers, [is] not universally recognized” (Timalsina 2025a). The authoritative Śvetāmbara Jain philosopher Haribhadrasūri, for example, pointedly problematizes certain appeals to a mystical yogic intuition that would insulate such knowledge claims from the ordinary structures of object-cognition and their everyday means of validation (Mundra 2022: 156). For him, the ultimate criterion of knowledge is accessibility to the common sense of ordinary people (Mundra 2022: 144-55). And others, such as some early Vaiśeṣikas, seem to have been quite oblivious to the whole matter (Balcerowicz 2016: 51). This is then another instance of the importance of Timalsina’s advice to diversify Indic philosophy. Unfortunately, though, it does not bring us closer to a methodology for engaging it beyond the reductive bounds of linguistic colonialism.

Part of Timalsina’s call for diversification is itself linguistic in nature: to look at Indic philosophical production beyond Sanskrit (Timalsina 2025a). He correctly notes that South Asian traditions of philosophy (understood as *darśana*) have themselves contributed to constructing Sanskrit discourse as an echo chamber (Timalsina 2025a)—although it should be noted that there has been influential and rigorous Jain philosophy done in Prakrit such as the works of Kundakunda and the *Samṃaitakka* (Sanskritized as *Sanmatitarkaprakaraṇa*) of Siddhasena, which could help to diversify Indic philosophy if attended to more broadly. But Timalsina implores us to look beyond classical languages to include vernaculars within the purview of “Indic philosophy,” a lacuna that has undoubtedly impoverished the same. And yet, as he himself notes, translation again poses

limitations here. Although many people know both English and a South Asian vernacular, few know both well *and* have philosophical training; and fewer still have philosophical training and competency in English together with *multiple* South Asian vernaculars. This means that the rest of the “Indic philosophy” community will rely on translations into English. And therein, again, lies the rub: “Even the best of translations is not fully reliable due to the limitations of language itself, of cultural difference, and the process of translation” (Timalsina 2025a). To include multiple vernaculars in a single philosophical conversation, then, poses a multiply difficult challenge. I would like to think that this is a challenge that will prove generative (although the present rapid eradication of language programs in the United States, at least, does not bode well for such polyglossia). Nevertheless, it is a challenge that should be faced with clear eyes.

One point of emphasizing vernaculars, of course, is that they are the languages of living people and thus provide some access to the desired “lived domains of philosophy.” Although my invitation to clarify this category remains, I grant the basic notion that these philosophical domains “continue to shape the lives of many and are not mere objects of historical interest. We cannot restrict this process of unfolding” (Timalsina 2025a). This, to me, is the crucial point. Indic philosophy as Timalsina asks us to engage it must be *constructive*. Although the phrase “historical interest” is what stands out in contrast to the “lived domains of philosophy,” I would say that the more operative phrase is “mere objects.” A purely objectifying scholarly gaze need not have any ethical ramifications for the life of its objectifier; in this gaze, the object stands on its own in a brutally causal nexus that can be understood without any normative involvement of the subject. However, to interpret human thought as meaningful and potentially valuable for oneself is to allow it to exert claims upon oneself. This is to be vulnerable to its claims, and also to be invested in elaborating its claims in any number of directions informed by one’s own interests and sensibilities. One’s own interests and sensibilities are necessarily constituted by an array of idiosyncratic influences that, in our globalized world, will not be limited to a single circumscribed tradition. As far as I am concerned, this is what it means for philosophy to be “lived,” and this is what matters most in doing Indic philosophy.

Philosophy as Thinking for Oneself

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1 Subaltern Philosophies

In “Diversifying Indic Philosophies,” Sthaneshwar Timalcina limns the contours of an emerging field called “Indic Philosophy.” This field addresses the historically provincial gaze of its kindred “Indian Philosophy.” Timalcina finds that in advocating for Indian philosophy, we are “producing a mirror image of western philosophy.” To redress this state of affairs, Timalcina suggests, “we could introduce a new category of Indic philosophy [...] an evolving category that stays focused on the Indic systems themselves without mirroring European ways of thinking and maintaining the ‘gaze from within’ rather than the ‘gaze from without’” (Timalcina 2025a). What results from a “gaze from within” is not, however, an archeological approach whereby Indic philosophies are to be excavated and preserved in a pristine manner—an approach sometimes symptomatic of what Spivak and others have termed the “we have been there before you” syndrome. Instead, Timalcina proposes an “engaged Indic approach” that is not only guided by and builds on the fruits of a “philological approach” but, more importantly, has as its *raison d'être* interpreting and re-interpreting texts (à la classical Indian commentators) in view of issues of one’s own time: in our case, pressing issues such as artificial intelligence, sustainability, and animal rights. In so doing, the approach grapples with the fruitfully paradoxical prescriptions of sustaining “uniqueness” while “seculariz[ing] and universaliz[ing]” (Timalcina 2025a).

A central issue that Timalcina’s essay seeks to shed light on and remedy is the problem of selective reading: “selective readings that have defined Indian philosophy rarely engage texts written in languages other than Sanskrit”; such texts have therefore “remained out of purview for mainstream philosophers” (Timalcina 2025a). This problem is not unique to our discipline. It lies in the same neighborhood as a problem that has affected the discipline of history, which Dipesh Chakrabarty flags in his use of the term “subaltern pasts.” Chakrabarty introduces the term in *Provincializing Europe* to mark “moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional history” (Chakrabarty 2000: 101). He observes that two norms govern the discipline of professional history: narrativity (can a story be told?) and rationality (does the story allow for a rationally defensible point of view?). The disciplinary dominance of these norms spawns ‘subaltern pasts’—“pasts that cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian’s own position.” Of the two norms, rationality plays a comparatively more significant role. As the adage goes, “a madman’s narrative is not history,” which is to say that not *all* authorial positions are rationally defensible (Chakrabarty 2000: 98).

The problem of selective reading in Indian philosophy hinges on the unspoken assumption that not *all* Indic philosophies can be given a seat at the contemporary philosophical table. Just as Chakrabarty observed that the norms governing the discipline of history restrict which pasts are recognized as historical, so too such implicit gatekeeping may be understood as a symptom of the belief that Sanskrit philosophical literature is uniquely “philosophical,” while philosophical literature of other languages is ‘intractable.’ These latter philosophies are, in effect, “subaltern”.

But subalternization is not merely linguistic; it also operates at another, subtler methodological level. If linguistic subalternization afflicts Indian philosophy, a methodological aversion to commentary as philosophy has afflicted the larger discipline of philosophy. The commentarial mode of philosophizing, which permeates Sanskrit philosophical literature, remains ‘intractable’ inasmuch as it is understood as simply advancing an interpretation of the original text without contributing anything new of *philosophical* value. Under this view, the exercise of interpretation (rather than, say, conceptual analysis) does not mean progress in the relevant philosophical conversation; at most, commentarial works are, as Larry McCrea and Parimal Patil phrase the characterization, “tools for exegesis rather than [...] important works in their own right” (McCrea and Patil 2006: 304).

“Subaltern pasts” are an outcome of a hierarchy where certain narratives are labeled as “minor” and “inferior” compared to “major” narratives. The minor narratives are “minor” because they are, to reuse Chakrabarty’s (2000: 101) Kantian allusion, “instances of human ‘immaturity.’” Timalsina’s invocation of “analytical rigor” is evocative of the treatment of non-Sanskrit subaltern philosophies as immature, or not quite philosophical, with some such philosophies being minimized by way of labels such as “theology,” which only consolidates their epistemological foreignness to “philosophy.” For these philosophies to be taken seriously, they must speak in two other tongues. First, they must be able to ‘speak in Sanskrit’—that is, be proven to share some concrete relation with Sanskrit philosophical literature. The problem is not that such a relation is sought, but that, if no such relation is found, the non-Sanskritic thought is relegated as beyond the pale of philosophy. That is, when the Sanskrit-speaking requirement is wielded to justify the inclusion of some philosophies, not others, it becomes problematic. Second, these philosophies must speak in a language whose vocabulary is legible to a western conversation partner. Again, the problem is not about putting Indic philosophies in conversation with contemporary philosophical traditions, often a fruitful endeavor. The problem is rather when philosophies are overlooked because they seemingly lack a connection with the prevailing discourses of the contemporary philosophical scene.

One way the voice of the subaltern can be heard, rather than neglected or silenced, is to consider how subaltern or minor philosophies could be germane to our own life-worlds (Chakrabarty 2000: 112). Timalsina’s essay highlights this potentiality: “If our [...] intent has been to diversify Indic philosophy, [...] [w]e will have not only the urge to retain the originality of classical thoughts, but we will also be engaging philosophies from different eras and regions *on global issues [of our times]*” (Timalsina 2025a; emphasis added). The potentiality is of global and cross-cultural dialogues that

engage with “burning issues” of our time while at the same time “institutionaliz[ing] difference” and recognizing the ineluctability of “unbridgeable gaps.”

There are several ways to respond to a nuanced and fecund piece such as Timalsina’s, which subjects itself unreservedly to the “perpetual questioning” that characterizes philosophy in its view. Continuing the questioning that Timalsina begins, this response asks: if Indic philosophy is to transcend the European boundaries of ‘Indian Philosophy’, must not the very category of philosophy that centrally features in both fields be subject to critical attention? A key upshot of Timalsina’s approach is diversification: “explor[ing] the forgotten domains of philosophical thinking” and finding “new ways for engaging different philosophies on the global scale.” To sufficiently motivate serious attention to philosophies otherwise deemed irrelevant, it is productive to ask and re-ask questions such as the following: can history of philosophy *be* philosophy? For it is a negative answer to this question that, I believe, contributes to the more pervasive of the subalternizations discussed above: methodological subalternization. One way of diagnosing why Indic philosophical traditions may be implicitly deemed not quite philosophical is that their commentarial mode of philosophizing seems to fit the mold of *history* of philosophy, not philosophy. A caricatured rendition of the thought may be: ‘these traditions are engaged in what the historians in our field are: commenting on philosophy, rather than doing it.’

Assuming *arguendo* that Indic philosophies are doing history of philosophy, I argue that they are doing *philosophy* in doing history of philosophy. This view is partially at odds with received wisdom. For instance, eminent epistemologist Timothy Williamson (2018) critiques just such a conception of history of philosophy that blurs the line between claims about what theory a historical philosopher held and what theory is true. He argues that this line should not be blurred—that historians of philosophy should, qua historians, be specifically concerned with “what theory the philosopher held, not what theory is true” (Williamson 2018: 99). Under this view, the utility of history of philosophy is largely instrumental: revealing our assumptions, expanding our set of philosophical resources, and making the track-record for philosophical ideas available to us.

In response to Timalsina’s call for diversification, this essay first argues that history of philosophy can be philosophy. Specifically, the claim is that the commentarial mode of Indic philosophies aligns with an important necessary condition of philosophizing: ‘thinking for oneself’. After sketching what it means to think for oneself (§2), I examine a specific instance of Indic commentarial philosophizing where such thinking features: a section from chapter 8 of tenth-century Indian philosopher Vācaspatimiśra’s commentary on Maṇḍanamiśra’s *Vidhiviveka* (Investigation of Injunctions) entitled *Nyāyakaṇikā* (§3). While this essay thus explicitly addresses ‘methodological subalternization’, it should be emphasized that a parallel effort is required to address the issue of ‘linguistic subalternization’. In its discussion of passages from Vācaspati’s commentary, the essay foregrounds what historians of Indic philosophies have already observed: as Ganeri puts it, in these texts “reading philosophically is a way of thinking philosophically” (Ganeri 2010: 201)

The essay concludes by returning to Timalsina's "engaged Indic approach." I bring to the fore a problem that Timalsina acknowledges *en passant*: "rethinking Indic philosophies cannot be just about applying philosophies from Indic traditions to address contemporary issues." Because of the nature of its engagement, an approach focused on the socio-historically specific "global issues" of our time may largely be unidirectional in its emphasis. Might this focus not risk partially obscuring problems that the Indic philosophies themselves saw as relevant? I end by suggesting that Timalsina's approach may be extended in addressing this worry of unidirectionality.

2 Thinking for Oneself

What does it mean to think for oneself? I seek here to only offer a working explanation of this phenomenon sufficient for our purposes, as a fully fleshed out account is beyond the scope of this essay. This essay understands thinking for oneself—and, by extension, philosophy—by looking to what Indic philosophies have variously termed '*manana*' in the Upaniṣadic context and '*cintāmayīprajñā*' in the Buddhist context. In particular, I draw on *manana* as it is described in the following passage from a Gujarati text of the nineteenth-century Swaminarayan Hindu tradition, the *Vacanāmṛta*:

manana is said to be thinking through (*vicār*) talks using one's mind, and discarding those which are fit to be discarded and accepting those which are fit to be accepted.¹

In the context of the *Vacanāmṛta*, the Upaniṣadic context, and the Buddhist context as well, this act of thinking is meant to follow an initial encounter with scripture. More generally, the point is that whatever one has heard or seen is to be thought through using *one's own* mind and then discarded or accepted based on an assessment of whether it is fitting or not. This process is at the heart of 'thinking for oneself'. Here, there are two meanings of 'for oneself'. The first is thinking through something *by oneself* and then accepting or discarding it. The second meaning is equally crucial: thinking through something for one's own benefit. In the contemporary scene, our philosophizing is less often aimed at this second end, but it bears emphasis that it is this end, largely a soteriological one, that 'thinking for oneself' is primarily aimed at in these traditions, with the first end never being an end in itself. I return to this idea at the end of this essay.

We can productively compare the phenomenon of thinking for oneself to seeing something for oneself. Even when we come to know something second-hand, we often desire to *see* things for ourselves. Commenting on this phenomenon, Duncan Pritchard (2016) adduces the example of a scientist satisfied merely with listening to the results of experiments, despite having the means and time to partake in their own experiments. There is something importantly lacking in the intellectual virtuosity of such a scientist. Pritchard concludes that the desire to see things for oneself, insofar as it is possible and feasible to do so, plays an important role in being intellectually virtuous.

To bring the discussion closer to philosophy, note that there is an intellectual analogue of perceptual seeing. For example, given that one is curious about the movement of tides, one will probably not be satisfied by coming to know merely that they are governed by the moon's gravitational pull on the Earth. Rather, one may want to gain an *understanding* of, or an explanatory grip on, precisely how the moon's exerting a gravitational pull on the Earth causes tides.²

Even if all inquiries are not aimed at such understanding for oneself, philosophical inquiries are or ought to be. More pointedly, to merely restate philosophical results that others have arrived at is to be deficient qua philosopher. To think for oneself is to be intellectually autonomous. It is to take cognitive responsibility for the views that one voices. This is not, as Pritchard clarifies, the same as epistemic individualism:

Intellectual autonomy [...] is [...] not wedded to a kind of *epistemic individualism* which eschews any epistemic dependency on others. Instead, it is entirely compatible with epistemic dependency on others, particularly when it comes to experts. The point is that in seeking understanding one is gaining an intellectual grip on things which is one's own—i.e., which one can take epistemic responsibility for—even though the means by which this intellectual grip is attained might be highly epistemically dependent on others (Pritchard 2016: 40).

This final point is particularly relevant for us because it places in sharp relief that philosophy is not mutually exclusive with exegesis, whether of a *sūtra* text or the *Upaniṣads*. Grounding this discussion in more concrete material, I consider an instance of exegesis in the Mīmāṃsā school, known for its fidelity to its root text, the Veda, to highlight how it features thinking for oneself. The goal is to emphasize what historians of philosophy studying these schools already know: to study commentarial work is to study philosophy.

3 History of Philosophy as Philosophy

Chapter 8 of Vācaspati's *Nyāyakanikā*, his commentary on Maṇḍana's *Vidhiviveka* (Investigation of Injunctions), intends ultimately to refute the possibility of omniscience, affirmed by their Buddhist epistemological opponent. I focus narrowly on an earlier part of the commentary where Vācaspati is bolstering the position of his Buddhist opponent. We see him defending omniscience against an initial objection that hinges on the relationship between instruction and conceptualization. Notice, in particular, that the commentarial nature of Vācaspati's engagement with Maṇḍana's initial statement does not preclude a mode of thinking for himself.

Maṇḍana begins the chapter with the following statement, speaking on behalf of the opponent who affirms an omniscient being:

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Let there then be an enjoiner who is to be followed [by] all beings,³ who has directly apprehended the scriptural means of realizing the highest good,⁴ who desires the welfare [of all beings], [and] who is omniscient.⁵

Vācaspati dedicates space, of course, to elucidating Maṇḍana's brief statement, glossing and motivating each part of it. He sees himself more importantly as a participant in a philosophical debate whose topic Maṇḍana has just introduced: the possibility of an omniscient being. Vācaspati thus spends far more space engaging with objections *he* considers significant. We will consider one such objection, which Vācaspati himself addresses on behalf of his Buddhist opponent, that hinges on the premise that instruction and omniscience cannot obtain together:

The fact of the composition of an instruction itself serves as a rebutter of knowledge of all things (i.e., omniscience). This is because instruction has as its cause a conceptual cognition, and a conceptualization is false because it has as its object something superimposed. The cognition of the Buddha cannot be so. Thus, insofar as [instruction] is the effect of a conceptual cognition that has as its object something superimposed, which is contradictory to the knowledge of all objects, i.e., what is to be rejected, such an instruction is the means of establishing the non-existence of the omniscience of the Buddha and other beings because of the apprehension of an effect (i.e., instruction) that is inconsistent [with the presence of knowledge of all things]. Alternatively, given the absence of instruction, the establishing of [omniscience] would be in vain. Or, if one accepts that injunctions such as that of venerating *stūpas* have been emitted from the walls and such through [the Buddha's] mere presence, there is no confidence [in that].⁶

The basic thought is as follows. Instruction relies on conceptualization (*vikalpa*) because it involves speaking (*vacana*). For the Buddhist epistemological school, only the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) arrived at through perception, which is purely nonconceptual, is real. So a *vikalpa* comprises a superimposition and thus does not represent reality as it is. Importantly, a *vikalpa* is involved even in expressing a Buddhist truth like “there is no *self*.” And it is precisely at this juncture that the opponent of omniscience comes in, demanding an answer to his objection that instruction, which involves *vikalpa*, and omniscience cannot obtain together. That is, insofar as an omniscient being's awareness of all truths cannot be conceptual, and beings like the Buddha do say things like “there is no *self*,” they cannot be said to know all things. Here is the response Vācaspati considers:

That is not true because there is no contradiction in a conceptualization's being the cognition of an omniscient being. For there are two kinds of conceptualizations: 1) one that is preceded by error, and 2) one that is not preceded [by error]. Among these, the [conceptualization] preceded by error belongs to subjects whose knowledge is this-worldly (i.e., ordinary, non-omniscient folk like us). The one that is not preceded by error belongs to the exalted omniscient being. It is certainly not the case that [the omniscient being] is in error even insofar as they possess a conceptualization. Rather, having known the expanse of the truth

about all things, with a mind overcome by compassion, [the omniscient being], desirous of instructing those who are suffering, superimposes [conceptualization], while knowing it to be untrue, because [instruction] is not possible without speaking and because speaking is not possible without conceptualization. As an example, [consider that] he rejects the self in a manner that [involves] something superimposed by conceptualization—“there is no self”—even while knowing the truth about the non-existence of the self. Further, [consider that] the best among the grammarians is not the user of ill-formed words, even as he is mentioning words such as *gāvi*, while still knowing that they are ill-formed, with the desire to instruct unenlightened people.⁷

Vācaspati's response distinguishes between two kinds of *vikalpas*, and argues that only one of them—that which *is* preceded by error—cannot belong to an omniscient being insofar as they do know the truth about everything. But they could still possess a *vikalpa* that is not preceded by error.

We do not have the space here to carefully tease out the different lines of thinking that undergird the objection and response. I seek to highlight that the philosophical nature of this exchange is not precluded merely by dint of the commentarial trappings of its expression. For Vācaspati is clearly thinking for himself—at multiple levels. As we have already noted, he has here anticipated how a Buddhist opponent might respond to an objection to their account and is thus thinking for himself about omniscience. But, in doing so, he is also thinking about the pedagogical value of *vikalpa* or, more broadly, untruth. Indeed, bracketing its relevance to omniscience, his discussion vindicates the use of imaginative and narrative approaches to pedagogy that hinge on the use of metaphor and analogy.

In dwelling on the commentarial mode of philosophizing exemplified by Vācaspati and other Indic philosophers, we realize that engaging in the history of philosophy creates space for the historian to reawaken a debate by inhabiting the position of the historical figure (in Vācaspati's case, Maṇḍana). And it is not incompatible with the spirit of Indic philosophy for the contemporary reader to think for oneself by leveraging *contemporary* philosophical discussion.

An important concern here is that references to contemporary discussion in work that professes to be historical may be seen as anachronistic. The worry, in short, is that such references introduce terms foreign to the historical period of the work in question. Although anachronism can be problematic, it need not always be.

The criticism of anachronism assumes that certain concepts are uniquely modern and, because of their modern construction, inappropriate to earlier periods. But, of course, such an assumption may be questioned. In “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality,” David Halperin questions the constructionist claim that homosexuality is a modern construction and proposes “to rehabilitate a modified constructionist approach to the history of sexuality by readily acknowledging the existence of transhistorical continuities but reframing them within a genealogical analysis of (homo)sexuality itself” (Halperin 2000: 90). Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici

note in a similar vein that scholarship in trans studies has already countenanced “trans temporality” and “transgender time” as a means of transcending traditional chronology in “identifying echoes of transgender” (DeVun and Tortorici 2018: 521). Ania Loomba (2009: 502) recognizes the problem of anachronism in the context of race, noting that “it is still common to hear that it is anachronistic to identify racism in the premodern European world because, at that time, human differences were understood to be rooted in ‘culture’ rather than in ‘nature.’” She argues that “comparisons between that moment and ours can illuminate crucial historical connections that can help us understand many of our present discourses of race” (Loomba: 2009: 506). Such work illustrates perhaps the more general possibility of building on close reading of textual materials to notice conceptual continuities across temporal (and, one might add, geographical) spaces, while avoiding the unreflective superimposition typically connoted by anachronism.

Perhaps then it is time to not only read and translate the innovative commentators of Indic philosophies but embody their methodology. McCrea and Patil’s (2006: 358) prescription might apply as much to contemporary commentators as it does to the Indic commentators’ texts themselves: “We must move away from the approach to commentaries and quasi-commentarial literature that treats them either as exegetically reliable and therefore philosophically uncreative guides to the real meaning of the root text, or as exegetically wrong and therefore of limited interest.” Rather than merely adopting the role of a guide, who renders a historical text accessible to a broader audience, contemporary readers might think for themselves in their engagement with Indic philosophical texts, just as these texts are doing vis-à-vis preceding texts. The innovation baked into the Indic commentarial tradition need not be merely a historical phenomenon, confined to the past by worries such as (but not limited to) that of anachronism. Of course, sufficient reflexive attention is necessary to ensure that we are not misreading texts and inadvertently imposing our own thoughts thereon, for this is just philosophical malpractice. What is not malpractice, but perhaps history of philosophy at its best, is when a contemporary reader first judiciously reads an Indic philosophical text, attempting to bracket what *their* interests are; notices after doing so that the text they are reading is engaging with a “contemporary issue”; and takes this as an opportunity to temporarily and partially bridge the divide between the philosophical past and present. For as Peter Strawson has noted, “no philosopher understands his predecessors until he has re-thought their thought in his own contemporary terms; and it is characteristic of the very greatest philosophers, like Kant and Aristotle, that they, more than any others, repay this effort or re-thinking” (Strawson 1959: 11).

All this is, however, not yet to address the worry of anachronism completely. Insofar as we are attentive to contemporary issues, the risk is that *our* problems no longer remain merely our own: they also, anachronistically, become the problems of the historical Indic philosophers. On the one hand, just as the concepts we use need not be uniquely modern, so too issues facing us globally might be shared across temporal boundaries. On the other hand, in focusing on what matters now, we might prevent historical works of philosophy from forcing us to confront categorically different problems or, more subtly, to frame our own problems differently.

I conclude by considering one way in which Timalsina's "engaged Indic approach" might be extended in more actively enabling Indic philosophical works to influence how we engage with contemporary global issues. For Indic philosophers, philosophy cannot be divorced from transformative practice, as Michael Allen (2022) has recently emphasized in his study of a vernacular Advaita Vedānta work. Understood as *manana* or *cintāmayīprajñā*, philosophy ultimately has as its telos, as Birgit Kellner (2020: 42) puts it in relation to Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākramas*, a kind of meditative cultivation whereby "the true nature of reality reveals itself directly and vividly."

Consider, in contrast, the following toy example to notice the plight that philosophers treating their thinking as separate from how their life is lived may find themselves in:

Ethics Professor. As an ethics professor at a world-class institution, Smith self-avowedly sees it as his job to do his part in helping reduce structural problems like racism in the world. For instance, he writes papers and prepares talks arguing for why racism is unequivocally bad. His colleagues, however, are less convinced that he actually believes what he argues so vehemently for. For everything from small talk with his colleagues to judging the work of tenure applicants evinces to them his racist beliefs. Once, a colleague asks, "do you *really* believe that racism is unequivocally bad?" Missing his colleague's point, Smith asks himself, "do I have evidence for the truth of racism's being unequivocally bad?" Rehearsing to himself the arguments on which he lectures, he responds, "yes, of course."

If the way we approach philosophical thinking makes us akin to Smith in relation to *our own* problems, should not our mode of philosophical thinking change? In a study on the behavior of professional ethicists, Eric Schwitzgebel (2014) finds that they behave no differently from non-ethicists of similar social backgrounds. He articulates the perspective a misbehaving ethicist might have: "it would not be fair to expect me to live to higher moral standards just because I am an ethicist. I am paid to teach and write, like my colleagues in other fields; it would be an additional burden on me, not placed upon them, to demand that I also live my life as a model. Before accepting such an additional demand, I would require additional compensation" (Schwitzgebel 2014: 63).

My claim is not that Indic philosophers were all fully successful in escaping Smith's plight. Rather, the claim is that the Indic philosophers' approach to philosophy intends to escape it. In our discipline, thinking for oneself is not ancillary to another methodology more basic to its practitioner's endeavors; rather, it *is* the methodology and often the very telos. Perhaps, however, one methodological fruit of a *bidirectional* approach to Indic philosophies is that we rethink the very telos of philosophical thinking.

If our approach is to embody bidirectionality, the study of Indic philosophical works must feel an end in itself and engagement with "global issues," in contrast, more serendipitous—an afterthought, even—and less a guiding light. Otherwise, the gravitational pull of "global issues" may lock us into

a familiar orbit, forcing us to prioritize certain Indic philosophies and philosophers, who are deemed relevant, and thereby overlook others that are not.

¹ *vārtāno mane karī vicār karīne, jeṭālī vārtā tyāg karyā yogya hoy teṭālīno tyāg kare ane jeṭālī vārtā grahaṇ karyā yogya hoy teṭālīnu grahaṇ kare, tene manan kahīe.* (Vacanāmṛta Sarangpur 3; I accessed this text from the following source: <https://anirdesh.com/vachanamrut/index.php?format=gu&vachno=81>; last accessed on September 17, 2025)

² This example is due to Pritchard (2016: 33).

³ Literally, the *bhūtānām* means “of all beings,” but I take it to be a subjective genitive, which can also be less simply translated using ‘on the part of’-phrases. Further, *bhūtānām* can also be construed with *hitakāma*. Although I follow the *Nyāyakaṇikā* in taking it with *anuvīdheya*, because it can also be construed with *hitakāma*, I have added “of all beings” there too in brackets.

⁴ More literally: “for whom the scriptural means of [realizing] the highest good has been directly apprehended.”

⁵ *astu tarhyānuvīdheyo niyoktā bhūtānām sāṅgātṛtānuśravikaśreyaḥsādhano hitakāmaḥ sarvajñaḥ |* (Stern 2023: 280). All translations are my own.

⁶ *upadeśapraṇayanam eva bādhaḥ sakalavastutattvadarśanasya | tathā hy upadeśo vikalpavijñānayoṇiḥ | vikalpaś ca samāropitāgocaratayā mithyeti | na tathā tathāgatavijñānaḥ bhavitum arhati | tad ayam upadeśo niṣedhyasarvaṣayatattvavijñānaviruddhasamāropitāgocaravikalpavijñānakārya iti viruddhakāryopalabdhyā buddhādīnām sarvajñatvābhāvasādhanaḥ | upadeśābhāve vā vṛthā tatprasādhanaḥ | tatsannidhānamātrād vā caityavandanādicodanānām api kuḍyādiniḥṣṭatvābhyupagame nāśvāsa iti cet |* (Stern 2023: 285-86).

⁷ *tan na vikalpasya sarvajñavijñānatvāvirodhāt | dvividho hi vikalpaḥ | viparyāsapūrvah | atpūrvāś ca | tatra viparyāsapūrvorvāgdṛśām | atpūrvāś tv atrabhavataḥ sarvavedīnaḥ | na khalv asau bhrānto vikalpavān api | api tu viditasamastavastutattva[F66v]vistāraḥ karuṇāparādhīna[E43r]mānaso duḥkhina upadeṣṭukāmo vacanam antareṇa tadanupapatteḥ vikalpaḥ vinā ca tadasambhavāt | tasyātattvikatvaḥ vidvān api tam āharati yathā nairātmyatattvaḥ vidvān api vikalpasamāropitam ātmānaḥ niṣedhati | nasty ātmeti | yathā vā vaiyākaraṇapravaro gāvyādiśabdān asādhūn jānānopi pṛthagjanapratipīḍayaṣayā prayujñānopi nāpa[D45r]śabdakārī |* (Stern 2023: 286-87).

Further Reflections on Diversifying Indic Philosophies

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I am happy to greet my fellow travelers on this arduous journey of self-realization, both individual and collective. This realization is not of some self that is bereft of culture and civilization. For we cannot conceive of our self-identity that excludes our embodied modes of being in the world. And I take it that sometimes we share the same songs, and other times our preferred songs are different. Our being is the being unique to each of us, and our quest for alternative modes of thinking, philosophies from Indian culture to be specific in this conversation, is not exempt from this inherent originality. I will neither attempt to homogenize these voices and concerns nor reduce their significance by subverting each underlying voice. Doing so would not be any different from what we are confronting in the broader conversation. All I can do in this scenario is to add some *rāgas* or fine-tune some broken *rāgas* so that we can savor this symphony of thoughts.

The conversation on diversifying Indic philosophies is no longer a search for new epistemologies or longing for different ontologies, but rather the quest for a voice, as is evident from the scholarly reflections of the esteemed scholars. The insights shared in these reflections are diverse. This is quite fitting since the issues problematized in my initial reflection are not restricted to reading Indic systems. Our problems are a mirror-image of global problems, and our solutions are likewise globally applicable. Meaning, just as the voices of the misrepresented cultural insiders from India help us reframe our arguments, the insights from the models of experiments from South America or Africa are equally valuable for us to move forward. Fortunately, there is a global appeal to the issues that we are addressing. Unfortunately, the world we are engaging with, and the worldviews we are speaking for, have been marginalized for so long that even the modes of self-expression often end up being a simulation of the empire. We have to be willing to encounter the other in such ways that the other is radically different from us. As it comes to philosophical conversation, this radical difference often appears to be a lost voice. Insights from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, or the experiences gleaned in dialogue among different traditions, all have something to teach us, and all give us the voice that we are searching for. It is not possible to engage in the project of pluralism without reading and engaging the philosophy of difference, even if our scope is conceptual or philosophical rather than social and political. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Can the Subaltern Speak*, demands,

With no possibility of nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her own consciousness (or consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary training), so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent, does not freeze into an 'object of investigation' or, worse yet, a model for imitation (Chakravorty Spivak 1988: 24).

There is actually no dearth of methodology. Husserl's phenomenological reduction underscores the same scientific methods for grounding objectivity by directly accessing what consciousness reveals when the subject and their predispositions do not obstruct it. Our problem, I believe, is not the lack of methods. Rather, it is an overflow of perspectives, with each philosopher determining reality as revealed through their prisms. We have lived in the era of professional philosophers assuming the voice of the voiceless, further silencing the real subaltern. We have yet to fathom the depth of irony when we say, "Let me speak for you." Moving beyond the manufacturing of voice, I envision a world where the philosopher or historian of Spivak's position relinquishes their subjectivity, lives a life of the repressed, experiences their metaphysics, and transforms their episteme so that, in the name of giving voice, they are not engaged in the epistemicide of the repressed.

There are several nuggets of deep reflection in Sarju Patel's comments. Since this conversation is on diversifying Indic philosophies and the very category philosophy has been called into question, we must say something on this. This, however, is a much-debated topic, and I have hardly anything original to add. Halbfass (1988) makes it clear that the categories *darśana* or *ānvīkṣikī* and philosophy are not identical, even if they have substantial overlap. But if we map the journey of the very category, 'philosophy' in the west, this has always remained a fluid category. Flowing from the vistas of the Stoics, the questioning of Pyrrho of Elis or Diogenes of Sinope, or the issues that drive Frederic Nietzsche or Wittgenstein, we are all aware of the range the category has covered in its journey in the west alone. At times, it feels like the category philosophy has lost its flavor, particularly when we see it being used as a service for other disciplines. Rather than being a torchbearer of new insights, many offshoots of philosophy today are seeking space at the table of other disciplines, wearing their poorly stitched mantels. Again, the issue is twofold. On one hand, we need a global dialogue, we need some mutually recognizable categories, while at the same time, we also need to be mindful of the authenticity of categories. I have therefore envisioned two different projects, first where the internal or Indic systems keep rethinking through their own internal categories, including the very overarching category of *darśana*, and second, the approaches of doing Indian or comparative or fusion philosophies that come in many names, will continue to engage in the global philosophical sphere.

One of the peculiarities of Indic philosophy is its commentarial tradition. If individual philosophers are primary to the western modes of thinking, classical Indic thinking is generational and stresses "tradition" (*saṃpradāya*). This makes commentarial literature irreducible. Commentaries here are not a mere exposition of the primary texts but rather further reflections and oftentimes, responses to the objections raised by the opponents. Commentaries come in many forms, with different flavors. *Bhāṣya*, *Ṭīkā*, *Vārttika*, *Vyākhyā*, *Ṭippaṇī*, or the commentaries that come with some other names, all claim to clarify the original intent of the primary author. However, every single commentator leaves behind their imprints. There always is some originality in thinking if we read the commentaries closely. The commentary of Vācaspati Miśra upon the *Bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara upon the *Brahmasūtra*, for example, is not merely an elucidation of what Śaṅkara said, but rather a negotiation between the two towering non-dual philosophers, Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana Miśra. The

Vivaraṇa of Padmapāda paves a separate path of analysis while remaining a commentarial work. The history of Nyāya Śāstra is all the more colorful if we engage the commentarial category. Every single commentator is an original philosopher. And at the same time, each writer is broadly following their predecessor. Originality, in this regard, comes through the margins. If we are seeking total newness in originality, we face a contradiction here. I do believe that every commentator is an original thinker to the extent to which they introduce new concepts or modify the old ones. And this does not demand that they rethink the entire platform upon which they are exercising their philosophical reflection. This is not different from our own works, where our writings are historically grounded, and we are borrowing and engaging concepts from our predecessors and yet we claim some originality.

Before getting used to the inside/outside paradigms and rethinking through inside, Sonam Kachru reminds us of something valuable, the margins between professionalism and thinking “through the wild.” I like the vocabulary of the wild rather than the mirage of the ‘home,’ for the home is no more a home, as it is infested with vermin of the extreme, and the issues that are purely academic are diluted and sold in the political brothel. And the so-called home is a theater for replaying the game of empire, and like in the world of Borges, the actors there are busy mirroring mirror-images ad infinitum. Whether the argument comes from the wild or from home, reclaiming subjectivity should be a primary concern for all of us who think and write on philosophies that cross the boundary of what my esteemed colleagues have called Anglophone philosophy. Subjects present themselves. Objects are presented, or represented, and often misrepresented. And some objects are simply denied their being. A total silence. They are not talked about. They are not even misrepresented. They are simply wiped from the screen of memory. This is where I find Lalla’s path a valid means, for Lalla is not just a female philosopher, but a rebel. Very few of us dare to walk out of our comfort zone and discard the recognition that comes when walking alongside.

Ana Funes Maderrey explores several contemporary models and diverse approaches to engaging Indic philosophies. Every single model that is addressed brings a new approach and makes some contribution. Philosophical issues are global, and there is no denying that as we evolve into a global family, we will equally move towards fusion models, and even doing philosophy will no doubt be “global post-comparative,” as Chakrabarti and Weber (2016, 2022, 2025) have argued. There is no argument that philosophies writ large are seeking to address similar questions, and our approaches are destined to find common grounds. While Funes Maderrey has correctly identified conceptual pluralism from within, I am, on the other hand, seeking difference. And this comes from the recognition of a fundamental difference. The marginalized and the marginalizing, the empire and the subaltern, act in opposite ways: if the center of power seeks to assimilate identities and create a homogenous voice, the marginalized ones find their identity in the periphery by means of claiming difference.

Every philosopher endeavors to capture the lifeworld from within. Our experiences are not homogeneous. Cultures and languages influence the way we experience. And what is philosophy but experience reified. Philosophical difference is an expression of inherent cultural and linguistic

differences. And therefore, to erase philosophical difference is equivalent to erasing cultural subjectivity. Even though we all inhabit the same world and we share similar biological predispositions, our inherent cultural difference is woven within our subjectivity. And for this reason, I am seeking to acknowledge these factors when I argue for inherent difference. Philosophical difference is the refined product of the differences that we live by, the differences we encounter in our life-worlds. What I find integral to philosophy is practice; doing philosophy is not just about adding or refining some categories. It needs to be lived, and reflections need to evolve through an embodied process. Philosophy as lived practice is not unique to the hermits and Rishis in ancient India, but also sages from ancient China. This is also the case with the early Greek thinkers. Yes, philosophy has been global, but we also see how we have let the originality of philosophy die in its new incarnation. Funes Maderey reminds us of the value of the “gaze from without” in shaping the ways we do philosophy in India.

Rather than claiming this project of diversification that I have undertaken is a toolbox with answers, I would like to suggest that it is merely a call to likeminded scholars to think beyond what is said. Rather than agreeing or disagreeing, each of us or all can actually ‘do’ something, whether by bringing a qualitative change in modes of thinking or in transforming departmental boundaries today, so that we can dream of materializing the project of diversification. What makes me delighted and also what gives me hope is that all my colleagues commenting here share the same vision that philosophies in India exist, that they deserve scholarly attention, and that they offer unique perspectives. We agree that there is something unique to Indic modes of thinking, and we ought to move beyond the colonial project of archiving the past and keep these modes vibrant and animating for the future.

There are several lacunae in the original proposal. Kachru has pointed out the issue of gender, for example. Tracing a few female philosophers, such as Gārgī or Maitreyī to compensate for the absence of feminine perspective will be ironic, not because their voice is not rigorous enough, but because they are encased and subjugated in the very texts that they appear and are historically marginalized, only presented as *prima facie* viewpoints, the women philosophers who were deemed aberrations and are silenced in the dominating voice of Yājñavalkya. But this lack, as I have maintained earlier, is an opportunity for thinkers who can extract relevant issues from the lived domain, who can separate their voice from the chorus of repeated narratives and offer some new insights and new perspectives by reading the vernacular, by rereading the classics, and by modifying or reinterpreting the mainstream philosophies. Like Bollywood movies, modern scholarship is so repetitive that you can predict the conclusions before you finish the first paragraph. Fresh readings from classical literature have the potential to give us new insights. We just need to be mindful that our originality is not diametrically different from that of classical commentators who left behind some new insights while primarily repeating the old ones. For this, all we need to do is to liberate ourselves from the shackles of contemporary thinking, the same way we have freed ourselves from the classical modes of thinking. This does not mean that we walk outside of texts for fresh thinking. All it means is we question our convictions with equal rigor and make thinking a fully democratic process.

What Mundra identifies as the Anglophone academy and what I have broadly labelled as the western approach, we all can agree, is a colonial product. But beyond colonialism, the very materials that the Indic civilization offers are puzzling for someone outside of the cultural milieu. One either tends to read it too logically or attribute it to the mystical domain. The different approaches of Vallée Poussin and Theodore Stcherbatsky epitomize this difference. The introductory books, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* of Max Muller (1916) or *History of Indian Philosophy* by Erich Frauwallner (1974), have broadly shaped the minds of early Indologists working on Indian philosophy. Their approach resembles the tendency of reducing philosophies in India to six *darśana*-s, which is not a colonial project but rather an attempt of classical Indian doxographers to organize Indic thoughts in selected schools of *darśana*-s. The colonial impetus of the scholars facilitated by the British Raj and the missionary zeal of the Danish-Halle Mission converged in the agenda of reading India. They were, in some sense, writing an epitaph for a culture they were working to erase. Modern India has indeed found its voice in English, and we are broadly addressing the works written in English. And of course, in the same medium. Nevertheless, our awareness of the ways language shapes experience and our bilingual modes of thinking, I believe, place us in a unique position to reflect and write, transcending particular cultural or linguistic parameters. This freedom can be crucial even for the continuity of thinking from within, as newness does not emerge without extending one's own worldview, and this global exposure ensures such possibilities.

Our reflections, commentaries, and modern scholarship in English, no doubt, have their own life. We are thinking through English and are acutely aware of the historical contexts of the categories that we discuss. This, I believe, gives us a unique opportunity. This new genre of Indic philosophy has the same possibility as the Buddhist or Jain philosophers enjoyed when they adopted Sanskrit as a medium for doing philosophy. Nevertheless, I do hope that writing in Sanskrit and the vernacular will continue, and new insights and new commentaries will continue to emerge, without compromising the cultural parameters.

Mundra has correctly pointed out the concerns I also share when reading the term “lived philosophies.” What we call ‘lived’ may already be superimposed. And we, the readers, might already have our flawed presuppositions, wishing to seek something that is not there, and as a consequence, end up imposing something new, something not integral to the cultural organism that is being read. The entire history of anthropology is riddled with these problems. At the same time, there are several examples of anthropological research that extend to the restoration of culture. For example, credits go to Fritz Staal for his groundbreaking research on the Agnicayana ritual, which led to restoration of this almost extinct ritual practice. Are there contemporary western imprints in the reading of Aztec Philosophy by James Maffie? I think so. But does it help us fathom some original insights by liberating ourselves from the western parameters? I do believe so. Funes Maderay has helped us in this regard by introducing several contemporary approaches to Latin American philosophy. Fortunately, or unfortunately, ours is not the only story out there. The entire globe is striving to liberate itself from the projects of colonialism, and we can borrow

experiences from the rest of the globe while sharing with them our own narratives. Kwasi Wiredu, in his edited volume, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, embarks on the journey of treating African philosophy more than “ethnophilosophy” (Wiredu 2004). *Philosophy, Culture, and Vision: African Perspectives* by Kwame Gyekye and *Foundations of African Philosophy* by Godwin Sogolo, accordingly, seek to ground African philosophy beyond ethnography while keeping the originality of what constitutes the African in African philosophy (Gyekye 2004; Sogolo 1993). Many more works seek to ground this alternative paradigm. The same goes for Chinese philosophy. And we can learn from their experiences just the same.

Europeans were not the first readers of Indian culture. China, Tibet, and Persia have all invested in translating and understanding Indian philosophy and literature. The Chinese or Tibetan translators are no less rigorous in their work than modern Anglophone scholars. What I find unique to the attempts of reading Indian in pre-colonial times is that the primary drive of those efforts seems to be the urge to understand the culture, its literature, and philosophy. Some translations made during the colonial period may be far more accurate than some of the historical attempts in Chinese or Tibetan. However, the colonial project is entirely different. Clearly, we may be speaking the same language, but we are not speaking the same voice. Mundra correctly raises questions and gives alternative and creative solutions for many of these problems that we are attempting to answer.

For me, every insight, every conscious event, is inherently dialogical. Some are internally construed, and others, based on intersubjective interactions. What we know today is thus an outcome of the past dialogues. Our co-travelers, no matter what the objective of their journey is, are contributing equally by simply making this topic a matter of conversation. I am not seeking some inside vs. outside, indigenous vs. western paradigmatic divide in determining the field. When we investigate embedded biases and false presuppositions, our objective is to rectify those mistakes and not tar the subjects or groups for such mistakes. There are some types of mistakes the cultural outsiders make, and there are other types that the insiders are prone to make. We are subject to our own linguistic and cultural boundaries in our modes of thinking.¹ Above all, I do believe in scientific methodology, no matter how utopian that appears in today’s culturally charged climate. And the study I have in mind as it comes to cultures, is that of organic entities, and not of some artefacts from some alien cultures. And this is possible only when we, as scholars, live the life of the culture that we represent and not pose ourselves as reporters of some lifeless fossils.

Now, finally, returning to my nostalgic *gurukula*, we must accept the word guru as polyvalent, for there is not even a remote resemblance between modern-day cosmopolitan gurus running quasi-spiritual corporations and the gurus with whom I studied. My gurus knew Shastras and never mocked them. My gurus were open to questioning within socially acceptable parameters. My gurus were neither God or Brahman, nor self-claimed, self-realized beings. They were humble and dedicated to the path of self-realization. Realization, to them, was constantly unfolding in the discovery of meaning or in the addition of new categories. I am pleasantly surprised that my esteemed colleagues are aware of my small effort of Vimarsha, a modern-day *gurukula*. Through

Vimarsha, I do not just want to keep reading Shastras but also want to compose new Shastras. And if dreams were to come true, I want my students to compose new Shastras, add new categories, and redefine the old ones. In essence, the goal is to keep Shastric thinking alive.

But Vimarsha is also a rebellion against the corporate control of knowledge systems. Universities are the sites not just of knowledge dissemination but also of knowledge production. But if we are to deconstruct the institutionalization of knowledge in modern times, universities also actively play a role in knowledge repression and subordination. We are liberal enough to express our concerns, but only as much as the architects of the modern institutions have allowed. We are wise enough to teach and write on issues that follow norms of the mainstream. We are deluded slaves of the corporations, claiming to be masters of the knowledge that we produce. Peter Fleming (2021) argues, neoliberal market forces are destroying the heart of higher education, where students are compared to customers and academics to 'knowledge workers.' I dream of *gurukula* as distinct from the 'zombie institution' of Fleming that is driven by the logic of profit. What about the ideas that cannot be commodified or cannot be sold for profit? I know the efforts of a single person would have no chance to survive. But what if many of my colleagues were to declare that they each are the institutions? My gurus were the institutions. Their gurus were the institutions. They did not belong to any schools. Schools belonged to them. We identified ourselves not through the institutional certificates but with the name of our gurus. If our knowledge production is structured and maintained by the empire, can we still think outside of it? And if so, we are all rebels, claiming our subjectivity to be outside of the control of the corporations. What if established institutions never allow new voices? What if the difference we embody is so radical that the mainstream can never engage with it? I believe institutions are not above us, and we, scholars, have a moral responsibility to live these ideas and breathe new life into them, and give these ideas a new world that is yet to come. Finally, to evoke the ethos of the female philosopher Lalla, we all should keep some rebel inside of us alive, and we all should show courage to walk out of the house, even if just for a venture.

¹ For cultural difference in thinking, see Nisbett (2003).

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