

## Editor's forward

It was in September 2005 that Daya Krishna (henceforth DK) was invited to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla, as a visiting professor by the then director of the institute Prof. Bhuvan Chandel. DK sustained warm relations with the IIAS ever since his 1967 lecture-series in the institute titled 'Social philosophy Past and Future', which was published in a book under the same title by the IIAS Press in 1969 (second edition in 1993). The title which he chose for the 2005 lecture-series was 'Civilizations Past and Future', wherein both title and subject-matter correspond with and at the same time broaden the scope of the lectures delivered back in the sixties. DK's Shimla lectures, old and new, are closely intertwined. Their structure is similar: now, as then, DK constructs a double-sided mirror through which both the Indian and the western civilizations reflect one another and are reflected one by the other. Now, as then, he emphasizes thinking about action; he is interested in the interlacement between action and knowledge, between what the Indian tradition refers to as *karma* and *jñāna*. Now as then, he expresses his conviction that a philosophical inquiry cannot be complete if it excludes the 'active' dimension encapsulated in the social, political and economic realms. Focusing on the Indian civilization, DK further suggests that 'active values' are as significant as 'contemplative values'. He was mutually interested in the profound and the profane, in the ideal and the actual. Moreover, he believed that the Indian civilization had been anaesthetized by its own spiritual tendencies, hence firmly rejected notions such as *duhkha* and *māyā*, 'suffering' and 'illusion', with reference to life and living in the world. Finally, in both lecture-series DK speaks of past and future, nostalgia

and utopia, pleading his listeners to rise up to the challenges of the now, as the present consists not merely of past achievements but also of the yet to be achieved goals of the future. The continuity between the two lecture-series, despite an almost four-decade gap between them, illustrates DK's belief that 'thinking' is an ongoing dynamic process, contrary to 'thought' as its tentative 'final' product. Thinking for him is therefore fresh and creative in essence, always aiming at the not-yet known, always producing new questions and 'problems', always heading forward.

In 'Civilizations Past and Future' DK corresponds not merely with himself in the earlier lectures, but also with his dear friend Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya (henceforth DPC), the founder and chairperson of the Centre for Studies in Civilizations, New Delhi, and the visionary behind and general editor of *The Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture*, to which DK contributed two books: *Prolegomena to any Future Historiography of Cultures and Civilizations* (1997) and *The Development of Indian Philosophy from the Eighteenth Century Onwards* (2001). In fact, DK's recent Shimla lectures took place when the *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* (JICPR), the editorship of which he inherited from DPC, was approaching its twentieth year of publication. The two editors, past and present, toyed with the idea of publishing a special issue on 'The future of philosophy in the postmodern age'. In a letter to DPC<sup>1</sup>, dated 12.8.2005, DK explains that according to him, 'the special issue cannot be confined to persons proficient in philosophy alone, but we should invite other 'concerned thinkers' in their own fields'. His attempt to expand the

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I am grateful to Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya for his kind <sup>1</sup> permission to quote from the letters sent to him

breadth of the discussion finds further expression in the new title he suggested for the journal-to-be in another letter to DPC, dated 3.9.2005. 'The Future of Philosophy in the Postmodern World' is alright', he wrote, 'but why should we not think about 'The future of civilization in the postmodern world', which seems to be the basic issue confronting all societies and polities now'. The new title reflected DK's vision not merely of the special issue, but also of his forthcoming Shimla lectures which he saw as partaking of the same effort. In yet another letter to DPC dated 8.7.2005, DK delineates his vision for new directions which philosophy must undertake to remain 'relevant' in today's 'postmodern world':

I feel that the task is to think of the 'future' in the context of the 'present'. It is, of course, true that we stand on the contributions that the thinkers of the past have made and on what civilizations have achieved in the understanding of man, nature and society and the 'reflection' on them which goes by the name of 'philosophy'. But the very foundation of the edifice of knowledge in the past is being questioned and rejected by the practitioners of knowledge on the one hand and by a host of thinkers starting from the late nineteenth century till the modern period whose thought has now become explicit in the context of postmodernism on the other hand. The rejection of existentialism and 'foundationalism' had started right from the time when non-Euclidian geometries came into being resulting in the replacement of axioms by postulates. The study of atoms and elementary particles in nuclear physics questions the notion of substantive entity called a 'thing' or 'substance' and replaces it by the concept of 'force' which has properties very different from the older conception of matter. Wittgenstein rejected even the notion of 'ostensive' definition and Quine, as is well known, made ontology relative to the values of bound variables permitted under the quantification rules of a particular system. This, of course, occurred long before postmodernism appeared on the scene and rejected the notion of logo-centric thought and thus the thinking based on

it. In one stroke, it rejected the notion of logos and the notion of 'science' based on it. The writings of Derrida and many others have articulated this in a literary fashion peculiar to the Parisian intellectual life, something which had already been done by thinkers and writers earlier. Derrida enacts the theatre of the absurd in philosophy, as done by Beckett, Ionesco and others on the stage. The absurdity of the human situation was of course also 'argued for' powerfully by French existentialists such as Sartre and Camus in their literary and philosophical works. Today we have reached a position which I would like to call 'postmodern modernity'. Philosophy functions as the 'cognitive conscience' of all the realms of 'knowing', 'feeling' and 'action', and has to come to terms with it. The challenge which we have to address ourselves to, if we are to relate ourselves to contemporary concerns, is how to deal with this situation. To put the same thing differently, philosophy as it has developed up till now has become irrelevant to the emerging situation where 'engineered transformation' of all reality, including man himself, life in general, along with the exploration in space are questioning everything. The 'earth-centricity' and 'bio-centricity' of man has determined his thinking. In the realm of nuclear physics, new forms of matter are being created with properties which question the old notions of matter, space, time and causality. In the field of economics and to some extent of politics the situation is even more alarming. The basic parameters on which the science of economics and sociology were based are in jeopardy, as the notions of land, labour, capital and organization have gone a sea-change as they are not there as something 'given' or as a constraint, but instead as something which can be overcome by human ingenuity and effort. This is the challenge to philosophers, as I see it. Whether we can come to terms with it in any meaningful way is difficult to say, but we must become aware of it and try to deal with it so that our thinking may be relevant to the incoming generation which increasingly finds all past knowledge irrelevant to their 'living' concerns.

In retrospective, these lines are an overture to the lectures delivered by DK in Shimla shortly after; an overture, in the sense that

he touches on most of the points which he later developed in Shimla. His genuine concern, expressed in his letter to DPC and underlying his Shimla lectures was that philosophy, as we know it, is becoming irrelevant; that science has overtaken philosophy and left it far behind. Nevertheless, DK believed that philosophy remains essential in the emerging 'global world', a world of atomic energy, genetic-engineering, cloning, artificial intelligence and internet; a world in which 'east' and 'west' are no longer isolated one from the other. He genuinely believed that the 'postmodern world' needs the philosopher's critical eye, and that philosophy can and should accept the challenge and think the world as well as the institution of 'knowledge' anew. Hence DK's concern was not about the future of philosophy as a discipline or a 'professional guild'. Rather, a world without philosophy was the focus of his concern; a world whose philosophers are in love with Plato and Descartes, Yājñavalkya and Śaṅkara, with the past, with 'the wonder that was', to the extent that they are deaf and blind or simply unaware of the consequences of the developments around them. In a Q&A session following one of DK's lectures in Shimla, which focused as the whole series did on a 'new philosophy' for a 'new world', one of the listeners, a 'classical pandit', was trying to protect the familiar and the known, quoting at length from the *Mahābhārata* and drawing extensively on Bhīṣma. 'Why don't we forget about Mr. Bhīṣma', told him DK, 'and concentrate on contemporary physics, technology, cloning, internet etc.?' His response and especially the phrase 'Mr. Bhīṣma' shocked quite a few listeners. DK, who at the time was already working on his last grand project, *The Jaipur Edition of the Ṛgveda*, putting the classic of classics under his magnifying glass, contemplating on-, being

absorbed in- and devoting most of his time and intellectual capacity to rethinking the Vedic tradition, was not 'anti-traditional' as some of his listeners might have thought. Instead, he wanted to awaken his listeners and readers, in Shimla and elsewhere, from their 'dogmatic slumber' and make them think anew. 'Mr. Bhīṣma' was a speech act intended to free his listeners from the bonds of the past, or as he himself puts it, 'to free one's conceptual imagination from the unconscious constraints of one's own conceptual tradition'<sup>2</sup>. As the Shimla lectures imply, DK believed in the necessity of continuity between the past and the present for the future. Continuity, in the sense that the past should be acknowledged, not indulged in; that one should not be obsessed either with the past or the future, but instead 'travel' freely between them.

In his Shimla lectures, DK tried to sketch a prolegomena for 'postmodern philosophy', but not in a Derridian or a Rortian sense. He referred to their work in his lectures as 'the theatre of the absurd' and considered it as reaction-and-response to the rejection of western 'modernist' attempts to 'change the world' in terms of democracy, secularism, liberalism, 'reason and values'. The fact that these attempts were rejected by non-western thinkers as colonialism and exploitation, resulted, according to DK, in guilt which led to licentiousness and total abandonment of ideals such as universality and objectivity. Critical as he was toward postmodernism in its 'standard' denotations, DK felt - as his letters to DPC, his Shimla lectures and his last articles indicate - that the 'new', 'postmodern' world deserves, even requires

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<sup>2</sup> Daya Krishna (1989) 'Comparative Philosophy: What is it and what it ought to be?' in G.J. Larson and E. Deautsch (eds.) *Interpreting across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 83

'new' 'postmodern' thinking. In his lectures as well as in the letter quoted above, DK mentions thinking in terms of 'forces' instead of 'substances' or 'things' as an instance of exploring thinking anew. He tried to develop the notion of 'thinking without things' in his last, uncompleted article, on which he was working when he suddenly passed away last October, intriguingly titled 'Thinking without things, without identity, without non-contradiction, and yet thinking still'. For DK, Derrida and Rorty epitomized 'postmodern sophistry' contrary to his own vision of 'postmodern philosophy'. Therefore he was more than surprised upon reading Derrida's *Eyes of the University: The Right to Philosophy* to discover that his French *pūrva-pakśin* shared his own concern about the future of philosophy in the postmodern world. He enjoyed the metaphor of philosophy as the 'eyes of the university' and was deeply worried about the phrase 'the right to philosophy' implying that just like him, Derrida felt that this 'right', the 'right' to reflect, to question, is under danger. Shortly before he passed away, DK accidentally encountered a passage from another of Derrida's works, titled 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', stating that philosophy is dead 'like a dead heliotrope flower put inside a book to be relived any time'<sup>3</sup>. 'Derrida proclaims a death sentence on philosophy', DK told me with a smile, 'and in the same breath revives it'. A 'dead' flower kept between the pages of a book is very much alive. Its beauty prevails and its scent is always there to be enjoyed whenever one opens the book. Philosophy, agreed DK with Derrida, is a flower. Philosophy, agreed DK with what he

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', in Jacques Derrida (1982) *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Allen Bass, Brighton: The Harvester Press, pp. 271

read or wanted to read between the lines of Derrida, cannot die.

Recently I came across one of Richard Rorty's - DK's other 'postmodern *pūrva-pakṣin*' - latest writings, an essay titled 'Philosophy and the Hybridization of Culture'<sup>4</sup>. Like DK's Shimla lectures, Rorty's paper is 'futuristic' or rather he attempts to face the 'brave new world' in which we live instead of clinging onto pasts. DK would certainly not agree (to say the least) with Rorty who suggests that 'we would do better to think of philosophy as a genre of cultural politics than as the search for wisdom'<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, Rorty shares DK's feeling that times are rapidly changing, that 'east' is no longer just east and 'west' is no longer just west, that something new is happening, hence we should view the world and ourselves in the world differently, afresh, innovatively. 'I do not see any point in mourning the likely disappearance of many distinctive local cultures and languages any more than in deploring the loss of those that have already vanished', writes Rorty and adds: 'A hundred years from now, the term 'cultural difference' may have outlived its usefulness. If nuclear war has somehow been avoided, and if the sociopolitical changes we lump together under the rubric of 'globalization' continue, our descendants may no longer have much use for it. They may think of both differences between cultures and differences between currencies as inconveniences that afflicted their benighted ancestors'<sup>6</sup>. Rorty's point corresponds with DK's third lecture, 'Civilizations - Nostalgia and Utopia'. Like Rorty, DK refuses to indulge

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Richard Rorty, 'Philosophy and the Hybridization of Culture', <sup>4</sup> in Roger Ames and Peter Herschok (eds.) (2008), *Educations and their Purposes: A Philosophical Dialogue among Cultures*, University of Hawaii Press, pp. 41-53

Rorty (2008) p. 41<sup>5</sup>

Ibid. pp. 41-2, 44<sup>6</sup>



in nostalgia. Unlike Rorty, he visions the emerging 'global civilization' as something more pluralistic, attentive to a wide spectrum of different voices, negotiable, and less American and English-language centered. The over-dominance of English or 'the burden of English' as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak beautifully puts it<sup>7</sup>, was a major concern for DK. The problem, he suggests in his Shimla lectures, is that in too many ways, to exist, today, is to exist in English, and moreover, that this limited mode of existence jeopardizes the autonomy of other cultural identities. Drawing attention to the over-dominance of English and its consequences, DK's concern was not expressed merely from an Indian or non-Western point of view. He was as worried about the French and German language-identities. His concern urged him in 2004 to publish a book in Hindi (after a long break) titled *Bhārtīya Darśana: Eka Nayī Dṛṣṭi* ('Indian Philosophy: A New Approach') and to consider inaugurating a Sanskrit section in the JICPR. This initiative, intended to promote an alternative to the hegemony of English, was never fulfilled in his lifetime and still awaits realization.

Another concern of DK, shared with his listeners in his Shimla lectures was the urgent need to rethink what I referred to above as 'the institution of knowledge'. This concern he touched on in a recent article titled 'Knowledge: whose is it, what is it, and why has it to be 'true'?''. Here he suggests that if thinking is a dynamic, ongoing process, it must 'result in' or facilitate 'knowledge which is subject to continuous revision, modification, extension and emendation. Hence the discussion [about knowledge]', he argues, 'has to take a new

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Spivak, G.C. (2001) 'The Burden of English' in Gregory Castle <sup>7</sup> (Ed.), *Postcolonial Discourses*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 53-72

turn as the discussion up till now rests on the assumption that reality is there, finished and completed to be known, and that human action has nothing to do with it'<sup>8</sup>. DK, then, was not confined to 'classical' formulations of 'knowledge' as trikālābādhita ('ultimate', 'irrefutable'), but rather included in his reflection contemporary institutions, methods and technologies of knowledge, newly created, invented and even commercially manufactured. He invited his readers to rethink knowledge in terms of constant change, plurality and the constant interaction between different types, multiple types, of knowledge.

The special issue of the *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* on 'The future of civilization in the postmodern world' was never to materialize. The project was dropped due to DPC's tight schedule and endless responsibilities and DK's insistence on the indispensability of his friend's editorial presence in the issue he had in mind. Nevertheless, it did materialize - or at least this is my feeling - if not in a journal format, then in the Shimla lectures compiled here. To share with you the atmosphere at the IIAS when the lectures were delivered, I would like to name or 'introduce' some of DK's interlocutors during those stimulating two weeks. Among us were Vivek Data, DK's 'fast friend' from their 'ancient' college days in Delhi and an independent scholar-poet-experimentalist; Bettina Baumer, Kaśmīra Śaivism scholar, comparative philosopher, translator and adherent of Swami Abhishiktananda; Neelima Vashishta, DK's beloved cousin and art theoretician; S.C. Pande, Allahabad based Sanskrit scholar and an Alankāraśāstra specialist; Doodhnath Singh,

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Daya Krishna (2005), 'Knowledge: whose is it, what is it, and why has it to be 'true'?' in: *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* XXXII No. 3, p. 187

writer and literary theoretician; Yogendra Singh, sociologist; Sushil Kumar, political scientist; Ishwar Singh, Journalist, media-person and political-philosopher; and Francis Arakal, an Advaitic Christian and Sanskrit scholar from Kerala. We used to have our lunch together under the tree near the dining hall, and gather in DK's room in the evenings to further discuss the innumerable questions he had raised in his talks. Daya and Vivek went for afternoon walks in the woods, holding hands and giggling like the college boys they used to be. We often visited the Indian Coffee House in Mall Road for old time's sake and for a dosa or sambar-vada. Coffee (a 'postmodern' espresso or cappuccino) we had at Barista next door. It was perhaps an illustration of the abovementioned 'free travel' between past and future.

When I sit down to reread and finally prepare the Shimla lectures for publication, three years after they were delivered and almost a year after DK's untimely death, Jiddu Krishnamurti (whom DK never met) suddenly comes to mind. Krishnamurti used to open many of his public talks with the following words, here quoted from a talk at Benares in 1981:

The speaker is not giving a lecture. You are not being talked at or being instructed. This is a conversation between two friends, two friends who have certain affection for each other, certain care for each other, who will not betray each other and have certain deep common interests. So they are conversing amicably, with a sense of deep communication with each other, sitting under a tree on a lovely cool morning with the dew on the grass, talking over together the complexities of life. That is the relationship which you and the speaker have – we may not meet actually; there are too many of us – but we are as if walking along a path, looking at the trees, the birds, the flowers, breathing the scent of the air, and talking seriously about our lives; not superficially, not casually, but concerned with

the resolution of our problems. The speaker means what he says; he is not just being rhetorical, trying to create impression; we are dealing with problems of life much too serious for that.<sup>9</sup>

This is how I felt with DK in Shimla. Amidst the beautiful natural surroundings, he took each of us on a 'philosophical walk'. He wanted to think *with* his listeners, not to lecture *at* them. It was indeed a DK type of *saṃvāda*: open dialogue, discussion and (often severe) debate. He constantly encouraged his interlocutors to ask questions, to raise objections, to take issue with him. His contagious enthusiasm about philosophizing affected all those who were fortunate enough to attend the lectures. None of the listeners remained unmoved, untouched, untransformed. He addressed the participants as 'friends' and as he was sharing his thoughts and concerns, as he verbalized his thought-stream, he tended to exclaim 'imagine!' -

'Imagine! Even the Buddhists and the Jains had to write in Sanskrit in order to be considered not merely knowledgeable, but to pave their way to the central arena of discussion in this country'

'Imagine! We live in language'

'Imagine! The attempt to find consistency and completeness through proofs, failed!'

'Imagine! When a person tells her name, so much is hidden in it, layers upon layers of memory and hope'

'Imagine! Even today people are called Bhardwaj, Bhargava etc. Can you imagine such continuity?'

'Imagine! When Alexander came to India, what was he requested by Aristotle? To bring back to Greece a wise man from the east, from India!'

'Imagine! With this one word, *vyavahāra*, you reject everything. But Friends, the *vyavahāra* matters!'

These are just a few of the 'imagines' which you will encounter as you read the transcribed lectures. The phrase 'imagine', in my reading,

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Krishnamurti, J. (1984) *The Flame of Attention*, San Francisco: <sup>9</sup> Harper and Row, p. 32.

indicates DK's endless curiosity and deep involvement in that which he was talking about. Often in the lectures he says: 'I cannot go into the details' or 'this is another story which I will not go into today', only in order to go into the details despite his former 'excuse'. He simply could not resist the temptation; he was too interested; he felt that it was worthwhile calling the listeners' attention to several vital issues even if they were not the central focus of the discussion. He was communicating with his listeners in several channels simultaneously and invited them to join him in a multifaceted all-embracing interdisciplinary conceptual inquiry.

Special effort has been made to keep the Shimla lectures 'untouched' as much as possible, to enable the reader to 'listen' to DK instead of reading a heavily edited volume. I hope that the dialogic, samvādic spirit in which the lectures were delivered is aptly conveyed. For 'lay' readers unfamiliar with the 'language of the gods' I added footnotes 'translating' or explaining Sanskrit terms interwoven with DK's language. So please imagine that you are sitting around the long wooden table of the seminar room in the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, the chairperson inviting Professor Daya Krishna to deliver his lecture, and Dayaji in his perpetual kurta-pajama and chappals rising up, taking his place at the podium and proclaiming: 'Friends!'

Daniel Raveh  
Jaipur, August 2008