

Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge

Daniel Raveh (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 216 pages, ISBN 9781350101616 (hardback), ISBN 9781350101609 (paperback).

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Daniel Raveh's *Daya Krishna and Twentieth-Century Indian Philosophy: A New Way of Thinking about Art, Freedom, and Knowledge* is not an intellectual biography about Daya Krishna. Instead, it is an invitation to read Dayaji by offering extracts from his work in context with his contemporaries, leavened with Raveh's analysis. Krishna's work is now housed for free at Open Library (<https://www.dayakrishna.org/>).

Raveh adopts Krishna's dialogic method when he argues for broadening the list of scholars that philosophers have traditionally been in dialog with, so as to do philosophy without borders. Instead of only examining the works of scholars like Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Gayatri Spivak, he argues for engagement with the ideas of scholars like Krishna, Mukund Lath, and Ramchandra Gandhi.

Due to space constraints, this review will only attempt to get others interested in reading Krishna's work. In addition, although Raveh introduces Krishna's work within the context of his conversational partners in twentieth-century Indian philosophy, I will focus on Krishna. I begin with a short biography of Krishna and then pick out highlights from each of the four chapters of Raveh's book. The hope is to provide a sampler of Krishna's work that will serve as enticement to further explorations of twentieth-century Indian philosophy, using Raveh's work as a guide. All citations are to Raveh's work.

DAYA KRISHNA

Krishna was born in Meerut (near Delhi) in 1924. He completed his PhD at the University of Delhi in 1955. His dissertation, titled *The Nature of Philosophy*, is a dialogue

and critique of European philosophy as it was read in India before the 1950s. He taught primarily at the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur. He wrote twenty books and two hundred articles. His most prolific period of writing was from the late 1990s to 2007. He died in 2007. His major works include the following: *Political Development: A Critical Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1979); *Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1991); *The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society, and Polity* (Oxford University Press, 1996); and *The Nyāya Sūtras: A New Commentary on an Old Text* (Sri Satguru Publications, 2004).

CHAPTER 1: TOWARD A NEW PICTURE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

One of the enduring contributions of Krishna's work is his (arguably provocative) critique of assumptions about "Indian philosophy." I will focus here on his critique of three assumptions.

The first assumption critiqued by Krishna is that Indian philosophy can be neatly classified into nine schools. The main supposed division is between those schools that accepted the authority of the Vedas (orthodox schools) and those that didn't (heterodox schools). Supposedly there are six orthodox schools of philosophy, such as Nyāya and Vedānta, and three heterodox schools, such as Buddhism and Cārvāka. Krishna critiqued this pedagogical assumption by pointing out that two foundational texts, Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* and Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, both contain passages that reject the authority of the scriptures, such as at YS 1.6-7 and SK 2. As a consequence, the idea that the orthodox schools outnumber the heterodox schools and are thus the dominant schools of Indian philosophy is also challenged.

The second assumption that Krishna critiques is pervasive, partly due to the work of the politician and philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The assumption holds that Western philosophy contributes rationality and pursues rational thinking, in particular through scientific thinking, while Indian philosophy contributes spirituality and pursues spiritual practices, such as through yoga. While it is true that Western philosophy has rationality in it and that Indian philosophy has spiritual practices in it, Krishna challenges the idea that there are no spiritual practices in Western philosophy and no rational thinkers in Indian philosophy. As Krishna points out, one need only look at the way in which Western philosophy is often taught, by excluding medieval thinkers that discussed spirituality, and at the way in which Indian philosophy is often taught, without much engagement with, for example, the philosophy of language. Given the wide belief that rationality is superior to spirituality, Indian philosophy is thus often ignored. Krishna worked to change what he held to be a false dichotomy.

The third assumption that Krishna sought to dispel was that doing comparative philosophy in India was primarily about comparing classical Indian to Western philosophy. Instead, he saw comparative philosophy as a means for various Indian traditions, including Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Kashmir

Shaivism, Bhakti, and Indian Muslim, to be in contemporary dialog with each other. The Saṃvāda Project, inspired by Krishna's contemporary Krishnachandra Bhattacharya, was one that Krishna pursued for two decades. The topic of the first Saṃvāda, for example, was "what is the status of propositions in the philosophy of language?" Saṃvāda meetings were held all over India on a number of philosophical topics. Raveh offers an interpretation of the situation:

[T]he project is not about negotiating classical Indian philosophy with modern Western philosophy, but about establishing a dialogue between two groups of contemporary Indian philosophers, which he refers to as "Western" and "Classical." The Saṃvāda meetings enabled each group to become acquainted with the intellectual world and the philosophical toolbox of the other. For [Krishna], as a member of the "Indian Philosophy: Western" group, the Saṃvāda Project is not about reaching out to classical sources in Sanskrit instead of Kant and Russell. It is about different methods of philosophizing. (43–44)

Using Bhattacharya, Raveh argues that Sa vāda is about breaking down "caste" in a new sense. Bhattacharya says:

We condemn the caste system of our country, but we ignore the fact that we, who have received Western education, constitute a class more exclusive and intolerant than any of the traditional castes. Let us resolutely break down the barriers of this new caste. (44)

Raveh says:

It is exactly in order to break the boundaries of this "caste," that the Saṃvāda Project came into being, as also to invite the pandits to examine their own boundaries and ways of seeing, and understanding, through their "other," namely their brothers and sisters trained in Western philosophy. (44)

And later:

The Saṃvāda Project, then, is not an encounter between "contemporaries" and "ancestors," but between two groups of contemporaries, with different training and tools, but nevertheless with a common denominator, a sense of "Indianness," and a mutual past preceding the "bifurcation." For the Western-trained participants, for Krishna after Bhattacharya, the project was a matter of creating a new language for philosophical discourse. (44)

Raveh's interpretation helps one see that what on the surface can look as if it is just another iteration of a common form of philosophy is, in fact, striving toward self-understanding of the complexities of "Indianness." Quoting from the work of Elise Coquereau-Saouma (whose dissertation is on Krishna's understanding of Saṃvāda), Raveh endorses her claim that Saṃvāda is about "breaking the ice between

thinking-communities, overcoming prejudices, and letting go of frozen pictures" (29).

Raveh also discusses a controversial statement made by Krishna to the philosophers Jay Garfield and Nalini Bushan, where Krishna states that a philosopher who writes in English is not an "Indian philosopher," including those working in India in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Garfield and Bhushan, in their work *Minds Without Fear* (Oxford University Press, 2017), use Krishna's statement to them as a convenient foil to argue against the claim that if you write in English, you are not an Indian philosopher, even though they were aware that Krishna did not literally mean it. In an explanation of Krishna's statement, Raveh holds that Krishna was merely taking on the role of the *pūrva-pakṣin*, the opponent in a debate that raises an objection. Krishna's goal was to provoke Garfield and Bhushan, through a counter-perspective, to develop their project in a way that shows how the opposite could be true. Krishna was asking how to make sense of their work, given the imposition of colonial ideas that broke the continuity of the traditions that existed before colonialism.

CHAPTER 2: THINKING CREATIVELY ON THE CREATIVE ACT: A DIALOGUE WITH KRISHNA

I once complained to my friend's twelve-year-old daughter, Simone, that I wished I was more artistically inclined. Simone responded by saying, "Philosophy is art." Raveh points out that, for Krishna, this is absolutely true. He says:

If Bharata, author of the *Nāṭya-śāstra*, the root-text of art and aesthetics in India, dated "somewhere" in the first centuries CE, focuses on theatre, and his great commentator, Abhinavagupta (10th century, Kashmir), writes on art and thinks primarily of poetry, then Krishna's model of fascination, the art-form closest to his heart, is the philosophical text and the thinking-thread that binds it together, what he refers to as "the art of the conceptual." (77)

According to Raveh, Krishna rejects the reduction of art to emotion, asserting instead that art and aesthetics cannot and should not be reduced to any single dimension. Raveh further states that, for Krishna, "[art] 'exists' in a space and time of its own, that unstitch the ordinary, day-to-daily time and space, and enable us to go beyond them" (85). Raveh gives the example of film as one way in which one can be transported out of their actual space and time and into, for example, the court of the sixteenth-century ruler Akbar. Raveh uses the example of film to illustrate his point about Krishna's conception of space and time in art. However, because of Simone's comment, it occurred to me to also ask: do philosophical texts exist in a time and space all unto themselves that take us beyond our own space and time? In other words, in addition to trying to arrive at timeless truths, can we also see philosophy as a means to transport us in time and space?

Raveh repeatedly points out that one of Krishna's core drives was not only to move away from merely examining the products of thought, but also to include the process.

For Krishna, the process of producing philosophical works is never finished. Krishna holds that when you see a philosophical text as finished, you will fail to understand it. For Krishna, unless one is intellectually dead, one repeatedly walks alongside various interlocutors. By always seeing philosophical works as essentially unfinished, philosophers are released from what could end up becoming a paralyzing quest for an ultimate truth and the finality of a mathematical argument. However, Raveh also criticizes Krishna's view of the role of process: "While Krishna emphasizes process he also emphasizes the objective world and the material aspects of life that spiritually focused Indian philosophy is often seen to drive us away from" (87–88).

CHAPTER 3: FREEDOMS

In his "An Attempted Analysis of the Concept of Freedom" (1952), Krishna writes:

Man is the only Being who can choose not to BE. Therein lies his greatest freedom: the freedom from ends, from Life, from Conscious Being. He is the only animal who can commit suicide—a self-conscious annihilation of itself. Still, the self-conscious annihilation does not present itself as a "must." It merely presents itself as a choice—a choice that is the ultimate foundation of freedom in man. . . . If death is merely seen as external or internal necessity, man can only submit to it—whether with a protest or not, it does not matter. It is only when Death is seen as choice, as the self-conscious annihilation of one's own *Dasein*, that it appears as Foundational Freedom. (102)

Raveh refers to two kinds of suicide. There is one where "life fails to fulfil one's expectations, and one drowns in suffering and frustration" (102–103). This kind of suicide is not a free choice. Rather, it is something that is compelled by circumstance. The second type of suicide, as expressed in the passage above, is one where "one chooses Death, if one really decides to choose it, not because life has failed him, but because, well one chooses it" (102). Krishna endorses a view under which death can be a matter of choice. As Raveh says, "If one chooses not to die, not to commit suicide, despite the possibility, not the hypothetical but the actual-existential possibility, one's life is no longer 'given' but is a matter of choice" (103). Raveh also discusses Krishna's disdain for "spiritualists" who talk of "not dying" or "release from death." Krishna thinks this is a delusion.

Freedom as disengagement and freedom as omnipotence are notions of freedom that are extracted from Patañjali. Both notions are related to the notion of ultimate freedom, which is freedom from any constraint whatsoever. Raveh points out that Krishna argues against the notion of ultimate freedom. Instead, Krishna is interested in the notion of foundational freedom, which, according to Raveh, is the freedom of the human being to stand naked before himself with all his vulnerability. Raveh points out that, for Krishna, "empirical freedoms' in the social and political domains of the world, are not only as significant as [fundamental freedom], but even more significant, applying as they are to the collective sphere, to 'us,' not just 'me.'"

Using the frame of analytic philosophy, my reading is that Krishna is not interested in the problem of free will as it is discussed in contemporary analytic discussions, where free will is linked with the principle of alternative possibilities and is understood as bestowing "the ability to do otherwise." While Krishna's analysis of fundamental freedom relies on the principle of alternative possibilities, his main aim is to show that we must be freed from the illusion of a "given" freedom – ones we are born with as part of our nature. He urges us to embrace a contextual and situational freedom that is always changing along with the human situation.

Although the chapter is primarily about freedom, Raveh includes a discussion of a new model of knowledge championed by Krishna: knowledge without certainty. Raveh quotes from Krishna's "Knowledge: Whose Is It? What Is It? And Why Has It to Be True?":

Knowledge does not belong to anybody, even though one may say "I know" . . . knowledge is a collective, cumulative affair of mankind, and if it had to be regarded as "belonging" to anybody, it would be to mankind as such, and not to this or that "I." But mankind includes not only those who lived in the past, but those who will live in the future also. . . . knowledge is an ongoing human enterprise, a collective *puruṣārtha*. . . . A *puruṣārtha* is a matter of seeking, perennial seeking, as perennial as time itself, and hence not something that can be possessed, or meant to be possessed. (124)

Raveh explains that, for Krishna, no one should be excluded from knowledge because it does not belong to anyone. Krishna thinks of the idea of excluding someone or a group from knowledge as a case of epistemic injustice. Krishna's account stands in opposition to Śaṅkara's account of knowledge of Brahman as the only true form of it. Krishna's account involves inherent uncertainty:

What is known is not only incomplete, but full of inaccuracies, inadequacies and errors, about which one knows nothing, except that they must be there, if the enterprise of knowledge has to go on, as it must. (126)

Krishna also says,

The attitude to knowledge is nowadays determined by governments, large companies, industrialists. They determine what will be done with it, and how it is to be produced. Knowledge is no longer independent of the purposes which we want to derive from it. And the purposes are only two: economic profit and military. Knowledge today is funded and controlled. It is controlled by big corporations, big business centers, or funded for military purpose. Power or profit! This is, to my mind, a very dangerous game. (128)

CHAPTER 4: CONCEPTS AND ACTIONS: DAYA KRISHNA AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Raveh points out that if the narrative of Indian philosophy is all about renouncing worldly matters, then social and political philosophy will not appear to be central to the history of Indian philosophy. Indeed, works written on social and political philosophy, such as Kautiliya's *Arthashastra*, don't find a large following even amongst Indian philosophers. With respect to social and political philosophy in Indian thought, Krishna says:

[N]ot . . . much attention [has been paid] by those who have written on Indian philosophy. . . . It is in the social, political and legal thought of India, that one may find a counter-picture to the still prevalent one that has been developed around the centrality of the renouncer tradition. (136)

Krishna rejects the renouncer model based on the idea that the human condition is suffering. Raveh points out Krishna's position on the issue:

Denial of the world, of matter, and of one's responsibility towards the world (these lines are written as Brazil's Amazon rainforest is in flames), is for Krishna a sign of ungratefulness on behalf of the yogin, the aspirant of beyondness. Withdrawal and return, with emphasis on the return, Krishna endorses wholeheartedly; denial and repudiation, he totally rejects. (137)

In his work *Socio-Political*, Krishna offers a narrative which is in contrast to the typical picture, according to which there is the omnipresence of the renouncer model with discussions of liberation and salvation through spiritual practice. Krishna argues that virtue, rather than birth, is how caste should be determined. In addition, he argues that Brahmins should not be thought of only as the priestly class. Instead, given Brahmins are immune from punishment, they should also be seen as having the duty to make sure rulers live up to the norms expected of them, as well as take on the duty to protect free speech. According to Raveh, Krishna also critically discusses an issue that bothered him a great deal: the emphasis in social and political philosophy on karma theory. Krishna holds that karma theory leads to moral monadism, the view that karma is only self-regarding and not other-regarding. Krishna spends a great deal of energy critically engaging moral monadism.

OVERVIEW

Raveh's work is a helpful introduction to twentieth-century Indian philosophy and to Krishna in particular. While many scholars have focused on exploring the work of figures from prior stages of Indian philosophy, there is a dearth of scholarship engaging such works produced in the twentieth century. Scholars working in other traditions have risen to the challenge of doing so, and it is time for Indian philosophers to do the same.