

PHILOSOPHY IN PAKISTAN

(*Book Review*)

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Dr. Naeem Ahmad, Chairman, Philosophy department at the University of the Punjab, Lahore has edited a collection of writings on philosophy in **PHILOSOPHY IN PAKISTAN**. The book consists of eighteen articles by scholars connected with philosophy in Pakistan in one capacity or other in addition to a long introduction by the editor. When one goes through the content of the book, one reaches the sad conclusion that there is hardly any philosophy in Pakistan other than that informed by religion. This point has been tacitly acknowledged by the editor in the very beginning when he restricts Philosophy in Pakistan to Philosophy by the Muslims in the Sub Continent.

Bertrand Russell in his world famous "History of Western Philosophy" has remarked; "Philosophy is something intermediate between theology and science. Like theology, it consists of speculation on matters as to which definite knowledge has, so far not been ascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than authority, whether that of tradition or that of revelation. All definite knowledge - so I should contend - belongs to science. All dogma as to what surpassed definite knowledge belongs to theology, But between science and theology and science their is No Man's Land, exposed to attacks from both sides, this No Man's Land is philosophy."

Philosophy emerged as a distinct discipline separate from religion only in the beginning of the first millennium B.C. This was the period when agricultural activities had developed greatly due to the introduction of iron tools. The society had advanced enough to support a leisured class that did not have to work and that could devote itself fully to speculate freely about questions concerning being, cognition and human life. This class of thinkers appealed to reason rather than to authority, whether that of tradition or that of revelation. Prior to them, the questions they raised were answered by theologians with the authority of tradition or revelation.

Philosophy developed almost at about the same period and almost along similar lines, in South Asia, China, Persia and Greece. However, it is the Greek philosophy and Greek philosophers that we know the most about. It is only in recent decades that we have come to learn about the philosophy in South Asia, China and Persia. An empirical fact that comes out very forcefully from history is that philosophical activities enamate, develop and prosper in societies that largely consist of city states dominated by merchants and artisans. Thus, the flowering of Greek philosophy happened in the city state spread out along the Aegean coast, in Miletus, in Athens, in Syracuse. However, when these states were incorporated in the empire founded by Alexander in the late fourth century B.C, philosophical activities slowly died out. Aristotle, the tutor of Alexander was the last great philosopher that the Greeks produced. The next eighteen centuries produced little that was original. Philosophy was subsumed in religion. Christian fathers St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas adopted Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and made them part of Christian dogma. The Philosophy that survived was the philosophy of the scholastics. The fate of the

philosophy in Muslim ruled areas was similar. Genuine philosophers like Kindi, Farabi, Ibne Sina and Ibne Rushd were criticised and persecuted.

Philosophy regained its earlier glory again in the sixteenth century with the flourishing of trade and industry in central and West European cities. A new class of merchants and traders challenged the superemacy of the old land owning ruling elite and eventually replaced them in most of Europe. The intellectual environment for their rise was created by philosopher; Francis Bacon and Hobbes in late 16th century, Galileo in the early 17th century, Descartes, Locke, Leibnitz in late 17th century. They were followed by Berkeley, Hume, Kant and Rousseau, in the 18th century. Ninteenth century witnessed the flowering of philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Bentham, James and Dewey. The present century has witnessed the development of postivism, logical postivism, symbolic logic, existentialism, structuralism and presently deconstructivism. As western society became transformed into a urban and industrial society it developed empericism, scepticism, utilitarianism, pragmatism that in turn generated their antitheses in the philosophies of the romantics.

South Asia has been home to great religions as well as well as to great philosophical systems. But it is the religious thought that gets all the attention and recognition Philosophical thought gets suppressed and deliberately neglected. Thus in South Asia we hear of Hindu Vedanta, Buddhist Mahayanay, but little of Lokyatas of Charvakas.

However, great advances in the evolution of Western philosophy have been accompanied by great social, political and economic upheavals in Western Society. Between the

fifteen and seventeenth century Europe had a renaissance followed by a fundamental changes in its social and economic life. A new merchant class challenged the old feudal order for political superemacy. It first gained an upper hand in England through Cromwellian revolution and then in Holland. The merchant class gained an upper hand in other West European countries. The first ever industrial revolution was ushered in England in 1760s, that later spread to rest of Europe and America. Eighteen century first witnessed the triumph of American war of independence from Britain and then the French revolution. By the middle of the 19th century the new class of merchants, traders and industrialists the so-called bourgeoisie had established themselves as the dominant class in most of the Western Europe and America. The re-emergence of philosophy as an independent discipline free from religion has been associated with the transformation of agrarian society to an industrial one. The society in South Asia though greatly transformed during the colonial period remained pre dominantly agrarian. Most of the technical and institutional changes were brought about by the colonial authorities. They introduced new Western literature, science, technology and philosophy. South Asian intellectuals responded to the challenge either by growing inward looking and regressed to past or tried to adopt all that the rising bourgeoisie was offering. The former were represented among the Muslims of the South Asia by the intellectuals of Nadwat ul Ulma while the later were close associates of Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh University. When Pakistan appeared on the world map, this conflict among the intellectuals was replayed. While the state promulgated education policies that called for the setting up of a largely modern education system along the lines that existed in Britain and the USA. The universities in

Pakistan follow the same syllabi and curricula that are largely taught in British and US universities and colleges. This system has largely be followed without much problem in scientific and technical subjects but has created tension in subjects like psychology and philosophy. Thus there have been attempts to introduce so called Islamic psychology at several universities. The subject of education has also been crudely tampered with in institutions where influence of religious political parties is strong. The subject of philosophy has been a major victim of such attempts. In the name of philosophy religion is being taught.

The book under review reflects this tendency very forcefully. The first contribution by the eminent M.M. Sharif, titled "The Philosophical Interpretation of History" after reviewing the concepts of history by various Western philosophers ends up by offering an Islamic view of history. He ends his essay with a totally unsubstantiated hypothesis that the culture of the future will be a synthesis of East and West centred either in the Indo-Pakistan continent or in America! Second article is by another stalwart Khalifa Abdul Hakim. It is titled "One God, One World, One Humanity". The author gives his vision of a future world united under Islam and practising a theistic socialism. The next article by Qazi M. Aslam deals with a discussion of the preface to Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam by Iqbal. The author repeats the same mistake that Iqbal made about understanding the new physics of Einstein. This could be forgiven in Iqbal as in the 1930s understanding about new physics was rudimentary among non physicists. But is not to be so easily condoned in the times that the article was first written. First three articles do not carry any references or bibliography. Next article by C.A. Qadir is a detailed description of the intellectual journey that the author undertook in his quest for a philosophy that

appealed to him. He ended up as a logical positivist. Prof. Qadir is among the few rationalists that Pakistani universities have produced. Next article by Saeed Shaikh is titled "Philosophy of Religion". It is a review of the views of various Western Philosophers of religion. Javed Iqbal, the son of Allama Iqbal, presents Iqbal's views on the material and spiritual future of humanity. Abdul Khaliq, discusses his views on the function of Muslim Philosophy in the next article. Intisar ul Haque then presents his personal view of philosophy. He makes an interesting through controversial observation that is "understanding the Quran through books of Ahadis and old fiqah misleads us" he pleads for drastic change of our socio-legal system paying no heed to so called ulama and maulvies etc. "God, Universe and man" is the title of a article especially written by Muhammad Hanif Nadvi for the book. The article recapitulates various arguments advanced through history by various religious philosophers for the existence of God. Waheed Ali Farooqi has described his personal philosophy in an article entitled "From Anguish to the Search for Truth". It is a highly personal account of author's quest for truth that lead him to his religious faith. Two more articles one by Khwaja Ghulam Sadiq titled "God and Values" and other by B.H. Siddiqui titled "Knowledge: An Islamic Perspective" are also in similar vein. The article by Absar Ahmad titled "The Nature of Mind" consists of a summary of the perennial debate about the mind, matter problem and ends up in the extreme idealist position. "I am philosophical, therefore I do not exist". The last article "Quantification and Opacity" is based on author's Ph. D. thesis at the MIT. The author is based in Canada and his article is based on mainstream philosophy. As such it is totally distinct from all other articles in the book. The articles by Manzoor Ahmad on "The Notion of Existence",

by Kazi A Kadir "On Sense and Non Sense", by Shahid Hussain on "Descartes Concept of a Person" and by Abdul Hameed Kamali "Knowledge of other Minds" are distinct from the rest of the essays as they deal with their subject matter in traditional philosophical manner.

The impression that one gathers from the book is that philosophy is very much a neglected field in Pakistan. Philosophers have yet to make their mark on the academic horizon in Pakistan. The importance of philosophy is not recognized even by the academicians. Recently an attempt was made to close down the department of philosophy at Government College, Lahore by asserting that there is not much of an interest in the subject. The departments of philosophy at universities and colleges are understaffed and suffer neglect. If Pakistan has to advance as a prosperous, industrial society, philosophy will have to be cultivated with care. It should be developed as a discipline independent of religion. The courses of study in Philosophy ought to be updated and revised to bring them in line with the discipline of philosophy in any reputable university anywhere in the world. The subject of philosophy ought to be taught and practiced as any other academic discipline like physics, economics, sociology or law. We do not talk of a Pakistani physics, why should we restrict philosophy in Pakistan to just to a justification of our religious beliefs and prejudices.

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