

BOOK - REVIEWS

(I)

Barlingay , Dr. S. S. : A MODERN INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ETHICS - (My Impressions of Indian Moral Problems and Concepts), Delhi, 1998, Penman Publishers, pp. viii + 183, Price Rs. 320/-

This book has been posthumously published very recently in 1998 but all those who were present at the World Philosophers' Meet held in MIT, Poona during the last week of November 1996 will reminisce that radiant occasion when the book was publicly released in the very presence of the Late Dr. S.S. Barlingay, the author of the book. They will also recall the very elegant speech made by Prof. John R.P. Mayer de Berncastle of Brock University, St. Catharines Ont. Canada, reviewing the book in superlatives and arousing thereby very high expectations about the contents and their treatment. The matter printed on the cover page 2 of the book articulates these expectations and makes rather tall order of claims about the book. Surely those lines have not come from the pen of Dr. Barlingay. The author of the book introduces the subject-matter with no overtones for what he has achieved, nor does he withhold his apologies to readers for not having been able to incorporate all his findings on extensively vast literature which he claims to have studied very carefully. He claims that it is an incomplete presentation based on the literature ranging from Vedic times down to Panini's *aṣṭādhyāyī*, Patanjali's *mahābhāṣya*, Bhartṛhari's *vākyapadīya*, some portions of *Mahābhārata*, *Bhagvadgīta*, *Anugīta*, *Smṛti* literature, and moral tales comprising *pancatantra* and *hitopadeśa* etc. He states clearly that the study could not lend him a genuine satisfaction that he was aspiring for. It's not sheer modesty that makes him say so. He draws our attention to the fact that in order to attempt a fullfledged study of Indian Ethics, one will have to work on four other segments of ancient Indian literature: 1. Whole of *mahābhārata* omitting *Bhagvadgīta* and *Anugīta*, 2. *Bhagvadgīta*, *Anugīta* and *Smṛti* literature, 3. Bauddha literature, and 4. Jaina literature. May it be noted that Dr. Barlingay is not limiting the scope of such study to merely dārśanika works but referring

to literature in general. As per his own averment, this study is to be regarded as preliminary to a very ambitious project and all that he has done is to enlist his observations and reflections on them. The phrase 'introduction' in the title is thus justified inasmuch as the author intends his readers not to expect a very neat and systematic presentation of Indian ethical doctrines and theories as such. One of the reasons that he adduces for the imprecision that characterises his work is that although he had himself clearly realised the 'ethical message' contained in the literature mostly available in the form of stories, it is not possible to formulate it in moral and ethical principles clearly and distinctly. These stories were written to authenticate some or the other accepted and established code of conduct, an '*ācārasamhitā*'. We do not know how those *ācārasamhitās* were themselves formulated, nor do we have any historical evidence showing how they came into existence at all. Moreover the stories contain, says the author, several statements that are mutually inconsistent. Even *Bhagvadgītā* and *Smṛti* literature contain many assertions that contradict one another. Naturally, one is faced with the problem of easing out these contradictions before one attempts a 'structuring in' of any moral view or theory. The author deserves sympathies not merely for exasperation he feels at the stupendity of the project but also for the forbearance with which he would like to encompass within it a very vast expanse of ancient Indian literature full of diversity, variety and richness of cultures. The author is attempting a task which is seemingly impossible, nevertheless, worth attempting.

The whole book has been divided into ten small chapters. There are three appendices. The first chapter is introductory, leading upto the second chapter which depicts the entire philosophical background that is essential for appreciating the approach of Indian thinkers to the moral problems posed by the social milieu in which they lived. Rise of the moral concepts is covered in the third chapter. The fourth deals with social reality and moral order. In the fifth chapter the author takes a close look at the grammar of moral concepts and indicates the possibility of metaethical level of discussion in Indian ethics. The Sixth chapter brings out the theme of 'virtue and value' and the seventh one develops the crucial topic of Karma and Karmabandha. The difficulties faced in organizing the Indian moral thought into a system or systems are highlighted in the eighth, thereby suggesting why the prospects of presenting Indian moral thought are rather dim. The ninth chapter deals with preconditions of morality

as conceived by Indian philosophers. The final chapter contains conclusions based on earlier discussions. The first appendix lists important quotes and passages which, it may be presumed, will be useful for research scholars in the field. The second appendix presents Dr. Barlingay's own reflections on the nature of freedom in the context of individual and society. Though small, it broaches an all-important issue in the sphere of public and private morality. Third appendix acquaints us with the Buddhist concepts of Duhkha, Tṛṣṇā and Vaira. This review, without making any reference to the three appendices, will focus its attention on the main body of the argument in the book.

At the very outset of his presentation, Dr. Barlingay expatiates on his view of philosophy as a cultural discipline. Though difficult to specify what exactly is the significance of this characterization, it may not be after all impossible to get at what Dr. Barlingay is implying thereby. Philosophy is construed in modern times as intellectual exercise in argumentation on basic issues and concepts used in various spheres of human knowledge, or as mere conceptual analysis, or again as linguistic analysis in the direction of clarification and dissolution of philosophical problems. But more than that, according to Dr. Barlingay, philosophy is a product of an anthropocentric world constructed in abstract plane on the basis of cosmocentric world. Such a product cannot remain completely immune from the influences of the culture in which the thinkers live and breathe. Philosophical reflection then mirrors the form of life and cultural patterns of any society in which it takes place. It's only through such an approach to philosophy that one can understand the tissue of moral thought that developed in Indian society. In the texture of any human culture, a few philosophical beliefs always get ingrained and human beings carry on their routine life and even special deals on the basis of such beliefs. Their decisions and actions just flow from them as a matter of deontic necessity. So far as our land is concerned, we have various kinds of societies and the diversity sometimes exists even in diametrical opposition. In the history of unknown times, this process of consolidation of philosophical beliefs has taken place in India for over a very very long time. One does not know how to account for the legitimacy of such concepts as Rta, Satya, Rna and Karma in Indian philosophy. Same is the case with Buddhistic notions of Vaira, Tṛṣṇā and Duhkha. All these become lively in significance only when related to the cultural forms lived by the societies of those times. Dr. Barlingay presents from this angle an analysis of Purva

Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya and Uttar Mīmāṃsā which is plausible and revealing. He points out to the entire gamut of thinking in Pūrva Mīmāṃsā on Karma as emanating from the culture of 'sacrificial fire'. There should be then no scruple whatsoever over the predominance which Karma takes, procreating the entire Karmakāṇḍa in accordance with *vidhīs*. Fire became the symbol of various celestial deities to whom the offerings are made in the form of 'arghya' and 'āhuti'. The whole life then became a matter of rites and rituals. Mantras were composed for being uttered with great accuracy in pronunciation and purity in persons and their surroundings. No mantra was thought to be efficacious unless it was uttered systematically and accurately. Dr. Barlingay discusses at length the Sāṃkhya and Uttar Mīmāṃsā systems and shows how the different interpretations with regard to those systems are ultimately rooted in the cultural differences within the different forms of Indian society. He even goes to the extent of suggesting his hypothesis that Sāṃkhya, Uttar Mīmāṃsā and Bauddha darśanas may be regarded as revolts against the Karmakāṇḍa culture of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā. One can notice linkages between the philosophical shifts from Karmakāṇḍa to Jñānakāṇḍa in Indian philosophy and the cultural transformations that have taken place in the Hindu society. The relationship is essentially of a cultural type. It is the view of Dr. Barlingay that all darśanas in India believe in the reality of cosmic universe, of knowing self as a constituent of it though distinguishable from the rest and the capacity of the knowing self to attain knowledge of the universe. In an endeavour to come to terms with the cosmic universe, the Indian society has thrown up diverse cultural forms of life of which the respective philosophies are integral part. This cultural transformation is an on-going process and has continued till this date.

In the same vein Dr. Barlingay addresses the body-soul problem in the context of human beings and throws a good deal of light on the systems of Indian philosophy. His discussion is thought-provoking and has immense potentialities for further reflections. Relying on Śaṅkara's oft-quoted remark, *Śatyāṇṛte mithunīkr̥tya.....naisargiko ayam lokavyavahārah*', he defends reasonably well the contention that all our moral problems belong to the world in which we live and that they have nothing to do with any other-worldly domain. They are the problems of 'here and now' which we have to face. They are universal in the sense that they can erupt anywhere in the human world. However in the West, these problems have received due attention of the thinkers to

culminate into sophisticated philosophical theories and reflections, while in India, no systematic effort seems to have gone into exploring and formulating moral theories. Though Dr. Barlingay expresses great regret over this situation in India, he seems to entertain a few scruples about it. He thinks that in the ravages of times, much of the philosophical writings which dealt with our moral problems and reflections over them may not have come down to us. He supports this contention by citing that famous stanza from Bṛhadāraṇyaka, viz., *Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya, mṛtyormā amṛtam gamaya, asato mā sadgamaya*. He unravels the great and the deep significance of the morals that must have led poets of ancient past to compose such a fine and philosophically pregnant verse. Thus the glory of our past, so far as ethics and moral philosophy is concerned, has remained and will for ever remain, lost to us. Since the records are lost, we cannot even remotely say about their contents. Lots of changes have taken place since then. These changes have taken place not through free and frank discussions (i.e. democratically) but through the hegemonies of certain powerful groups in the society. Only a few people who wielded power politically or sociologically used to frame injunctions and decide for the entire society as to what its members should do or should not do. This is how '*ācārasamhitās*' were framed and hence they had a mandatory character. The prescriptions used to be binding on every member of the society and any departure would be met with severe punishment. It is through such *samhitās* that we meet with the rise of the moral concepts of *satya*, *ṛta*, *anṛta* & *ṛna*. Dr. Barlingay's discussion of these concepts as arising from the *ācārasamhitās* is illuminating. It shows how as the human thought in India moved from cosmic structure of the universe to the anthropocentric structure of the human society, the moral concepts get more and more enriched by moral import and significance. He draws our special attention to the Indian concept of *ṛna* as carrying equally rich moral import as the concept of 'ought' in the West, if not more. Similarly he maintains that the advocacy of the four *puruṣārthas*: Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa has by way of implication a very sound and rich moral reasoning, which unfortunately has not come down to us or was never systematically presented by our thinkers. All the moral concepts are, as it were indiscreetly, embedded in the *ācārasamhitās* framed from time to time. So long as they lie embedded in the prescriptive form, it is obvious that they will not lend themselves to moral reasoning which mainly focusses on criteria or reasons for their acceptability or rejection. Dr. Barlingay seriously

complains that while Western thinkers necessarily make distinction between 'desired' and 'desirable', the Indian thinkers do not ever make such a distinction and consequently fail to produce moral reasoning or theory as such. I see that this is debatable, but if it is true, that will throw some light on the moral debacle in which we find ourselves presently in all walks of life. According to him the concept of 'puruṣārtha' is *bhavya*, which means 'having potentiality of coming into existence in future'. He indulges in a few basic scruples about the moral teachings of the *Bhagvadgītā* and emphatically suggests that the paradox of the immoral man and the moral society, which was true of those ancient times, is true of today perhaps even more fiercely.

In the chapter on 'Social reality and Moral order', he first expounds the notion of Dharma which is central to Indian Moral Philosophy, then refers to the three-tier distinction between morality, normative ethics and metaethics and finally comments upon the notion of freedom as it was handled by the Indian thinkers. Basic philosophical issues, he maintains, emerged here in India as a result of man's confrontation with the universe. The concept of 'Dharma' covered within its scope all such issues - material, metaphysical and moral. Dr. Barlingay takes the expression 'Dharma' in this context as standing for the ultimate goal of human existence. Dharma means 'abhyudaya' and 'nishreyas'. The real meaning of 'Nishreyas' is to become completely identical with the ultimate reality which may be either Nirguṇa Brahma or material Prakṛti or what we call 'Nature'. If we take this seriously enough, then the objective of morality can be nothing else but 'abhyudaya' i.e. prosperity in this world inhabited by us. We must aim at prosperity in this world, no matter in which direction and dimension we work. Barlingay feels strongly that our ancient forefathers had this insight. Mantras available in the literature of those times and which are sung quite often even today - the mantras like 'Sahanāvavatu' and 'sarve api sukhinḥ santu' etc. - are indicative of the predominance of such insight then. Prosperity is a human concept basically. He unfolds its intimate relationship with all the four *puruṣārthas* and presents an analysis of that concept which speaks for an exceptional analytic mind the author had. His reflections on 'soul', 'rebirth (punarjanma)' and 'karma' and reactions given to the views in their respect expressed by Pūrvamīmāṃsakas, Uttarmīmāṃsakas and Bauddhas are noteworthy and original. He points out that if we take into account the quintessential teachings of Advaita Vedānta then there is absolutely no place for

cāturvarṇya and *varṇāśramadharma* as structural canons of human society. The concept of 'karma' (as passing from past life to present life and from this life to future) results from ignorance. But because our ancient thinkers did not consider all this carefully, the concept of 'abhyudaya' in the sense of prosperity during this life on this planet did not take root in our society. Instead, otherworldly objective described as 'pāralaukika niśreyas' (something to be achieved not in this world but beyond it) dominated thinking of the people at large. Keeping performance of rites and rituals at the centre, the notions of soul, its immortality, karma, karmabandh, pre-birth, re-birth, swarga and narak, etc. together with God as moral governor - all this brought into existence the 'cāturvarṇya' structure in the society and allowed it to culminate into a steel-framework that made free movement of thought and ideas impossible. Dr. Barlingay complains that the teachings of Gītā on the notion of Karma have not been fully appreciated in our society. This complaint is genuine but one fails to see why 'abhyudaya' - the thisworldly prosperity - could not serve as a *summum bonum* of human life in India if the moral world, according to author's basic contention, is anthropocentric and not cosmocentric. If the story of Indian ethics is different from the story of the West, one must develop a perspective which can account for such difference. Dr. Barlingay's perspective is certainly laudable because it opens up the possibilities of new and revealing investigations. He opines that G.E.Moore certainly gives a linguistic turn to moral issues in the form of meta-ethical inquiries, but never goes to the roots as to how the moral issues emerge in human life. It is his contention that in Indian ethics, all the discussion that has taken place in respect of the concepts of ṛta, ṛṇa, bhavya and dharma is in the context of issues arising in moral sphere of man and it has bearing on human prosperity (abhyudaya) which is linked up with preyas and sreyaś. But this discussion got off the right track due to bewitchment caused by the false but immensely enticing notion of other-worldly *niśreyas*. A human being, no matter where he belongs, is going to return to the dust from which he sprang. Nothing of his own as such is going to last after him. Most of the moral problems arise because we do not take into account the true nature of our destiny. Attachment that originates in man's egoistic sentiment and selfishness strengthens its grip of him. He comes to develop strong attachment for such things in his life as do not really belong to him. Till the end he fondles this attachment so vehemently that the thought of separation from things he possesses

becomes painful. Death is going to put a full-stop to that attachment. Mokṣa or nirvāṇa are not distinct from this. It's an absolute return to the absolute reality. This realisation will render man's life less painful, if not happy.

The chapter ends with reflections on the concept of freedom - a key concept of the moral sphere. Freedom to act is considered by Indian philosophers as fundamental and *sui generis*. But freedom is also the goal and as such a value in itself. The whole human existence is bound up with manifestation of freedom. Indian philosophers, especially Advaitins, consider freedom on two levels: one on individual level and second, on the level of universe in which the individual moves. In one sense man is free on both the levels. On the first level, individual is architect of his own future and thus is responsible for every act he performs. He is free to choose however. He has freedom to decide what action or actions he will perform. While choosing and exercising freedom, individual comes to realise that after all his own existence is a part and parcel of the total universe. The feel that I am different from that totality is an illusion. Freedom consists in getting over that illusion and in relieving oneself from the egoistic complex that limits one's own life to oneself. Mokṣa really means such freedom. Though the physical body gives one a personal identity, with its destruction is lost the consciousness, self-consciousness and the entire mental make-up. Dr. Barlingay is expressing a very profound truth when he says "Freedom in the sense of Mukti then is complete annihilation of man's individuality. It is not freedom; it is freedom from being bound to a particular organization called man". (p.70)

The fifth chapter of the book under review deals with the Grammar of moral concepts. It is of a technical nature and will require acquaintance with the grammar of Sanskrit literature. One might therefore think that this chapter is addressed to grammarians and linguists. But it is not so. Though the main thesis is not clearly formulated, one can sense the philosopher's concern with the moral language that prompts Dr. Barlingay to bring to light the meta-ethical considerations that lie hidden underneath the grammatical formulations of commands, injunctions, and moral laws, etc. If the attempt in the direction indicated by the author succeeds in showing that the discussions held by Indian thinkers in the area of moral philosophy had reached the heights of meta-ethical level - a matter of further research, then the possibility of there being a few moral normative theories receiving attention of the Indian thinkers cannot be

excluded. Dr. Barlingay's discussion of the concept of 'vidhi' from this approach is certainly enlightening but inconclusive.

The sixth chapter deals with 'Virtues and Values' in the context of Indian Ethics. He focusses his attention on the discussion regarding these in the traditional systems of Indian philosophy, Buddhism and Jainism. He informs us that in most of the philosophical literary tales such as *Hitopadesh* and *Panchatantra*, *Mahābhārata*, *Ramāyaṇa*, various stories in Purāṇas, in *Yogasūtras* and *Yogavāsiṣṭha* not only are virtues mentioned but they receive high prominence and weightage.

Virtues have been classified mainly under two heads. Munīs, Sanyāsins and Bhikkhus are expected to cultivate one set of virtues very rigourously with all the detachment for worldly pleasures. Ordinary people have to cultivate a different set of virtues that are less rigourous and are not necessarily opposed to worldly pleasure and happiness. Virtue needs to be distinguished from Vratavaikalyas. In the onward march of tradition, these distinctions have not been always meticulously observed. Virtues have also been bound up with pursuit of *puruṣārthas*. From all this it would follow that like ancient Greek Philosophers, Indian philosophers laid emphasis on promoting strength & sturdiness of human character by pursuing the path of virtues which is strenuous and straitly. All systems of philosophy in India look upon moral discipline as a necessary condition, implying thereby that philosophy is a way of life and not merely an intellectual exercise. Ethics of virtues was formulated as a code of conduct in which injunctions are issued asking people to do certain things or to refrain from doing certain things. Dr. Barlingay presents several classifications of virtues given in different systems, such as Nyāyā, Yoga, Bauddha and Jaina and unravels very deep and profound significance of the concept of virtue as conceived by Indian philosophers, together with his own insightful observations. If the ideal of mokṣa or nirvāṇa is the same as the nisreyas in the sense in which he takes that expression (which every human and non-human living being is destined to end with), then we should be able to make out a reasonable case for the pursuit of virtuous life as against the path of vice for attaining prosperity (i.e. abhyudaya) in any human society. Unless we are able to show that there is some kind of a *priori* necessity that would make happiness follow inveterately from every act of virtue, the task of a moral philosopher is not going to be an easy one. If in the

history of Indian thought and culture we find the notion of prosperity, both individual and social, being not given due prominence, it would be an index of the absence of sound and just level of moral philosophy.

In the Seventh chapter, Dr. Barlingay comes to the crux of the issue, as he discusses the notions of Karma and Karmabandh. Both these notions have been viewed in the wrong light by the ancient thinkers in India, according to him. Indian Ethics lays stress on the doctrine of Karma, Cāturvarṇya composition of society and the Āśramadharmā. He does not speak anything about the ethics of āśramadharmā, presumably because there is none behind it. However he draws our particular attention towards Karmasiddhānta as a stronghold base of Cāturvarṇya structure of the Society. The theory of Karma was pressed into service as a pivotal ground in defence of that social structure. Divine sanction was also espoused. We must however note that the Cāturvarṇya structure by itself cannot be said to be a direct logical consequence of Karmasiddhānta. If it were so, the Bauddhas and the Jainas would not have subscribed to Karmasiddhānta and supported it strongly. It is more comprehensive and not confined to merely āstika darśanas. Dr. Barlingay draws our particular attention to its original formulation by the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and thinks that that formulation is philosophically innocuous and that it would not have done much harm to the Indian society were it to continue in its old original pristine form. In the course of history, however, the doctrine underwent radical modification so as to bring within its fold such beliefs as cannot be easily justified. This is not the only worry that he expresses. When we consider all the beliefs covered up by this doctrine as a whole, it leads to plain logical contradiction. Dr. Barlingay thus sees that the doctrine loses all its rationality. His comments on the notion of Karmabandha are original as they trace the trouble with that notion as lying in separating those aspects of human action which can be only distinguished by us in our thought.

In the eighth chapter, Dr. Barlingay pinpoints the difficulties in presenting Indian moral thought in the form of moral theories as such. Linguistic difficulties would be obvious but his main complaint appears to be that the whole thought is characterised by relativity of groups, cultures, and diversity of metaphysical beliefs. In brief, Indian society was never one society to place before itself one common good to be pursued by its members. This would explain why there

wasn't concerted effort on the part of the Indian society as such to realize the objective of prosperity for all in the land. Moralities seem to have developed placing at the centre only self-anchored reasons and not the society- anchored reasons. The chapter ends with a note on 'Social and Moral' in which Dr. Barlingay casts his cursory glance over the relationship between society, law and morality. The issues he raises are certainly important and are quite relevant to modern times. One does not have means to know whether those issues were of much concern to ancient thinkers. In the last but one chapter, Dr. Barlingay reflects over the expression 'moral' to trace distinguishing marks, if any, that would render a certain action moral. He brings out the significance of 'chodanā' according to Pūrvamīmāṃsakas in this context but it is doubtful if he succeeds in overcoming all the difficulties in this context. The last chapter is a sort of summing up of the views expressed in the book.

The subject matter of this book viz., Indian Ethics, is of a complex nature. Its span is also vast. Dr. Barlingay's study is only an introduction to an ocean of moral phenomena on the continent of India. It seems that most of the moral phenomena found expression in Indian society at customary level of morality and never rose to reflective level. The social realities that have come down to us reveal lack of fairness and justice to feeble sections of the society - the untouchables, the poor and the downtrodden, the ignorant and the illiterates. The treatment meted out to our women-folk does not speak of any high level awareness of moral principles. If at all, it is an indication of the prevalence of what Hegel calls 'master-slave' relationship in its ignoble form. It is to be hoped that Dr. Barlingay's work provokes us into undertaking further deeper studies of our traditions in moral spheres and exposes us to their merits and demerits to refine and reform the moral texture of our society.

S. V. BOKIL