

A. Raghuramraju. *Enduring Colonialism: Classical Presences and Modern Absences in Indian Philosophy.* Oxford University Press 2012. 164 pp. \$35.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780198081708).

As its title suggests, the primary aim of this book is to examine why some of the most important discussions in classical Indian philosophy—discussions of topics ranging from the origin of the universe to the sources of knowledge—almost cease to exist in the colonial period, and continue to be absent even in post-colonial times. In the book’s introduction, Raghuramraju begins by juxtaposing the ontological nature of presence and absence. He points out that while all ‘presences are constitutively particularized, the absence in its constitution is boundless’. In other words absences by nature are not self-constituted or pre-given in the way presences are. Having juxtaposed absence and presence, he sets out to chart the agenda of the book as a discussion of ‘three interrelated themes: classical presences that are absent in the modern times, sensitivity to the contemporary, and a new philosophical text or a system’.

Raghuramraju points out that there are three main strands of thought on this issue. First is the view, promulgated by orientalist, Marxists, and Weber, that there never was a proper philosophical system in India, and that what existed instead were certain discursive practices which were reflected in the social fabric of that period as well. Next, there are thinkers who believe that there were full-fledged, robust philosophical disciplines that existed in India from antiquity until the colonial period, when they started losing momentum because the language of their audience or readership had changed. The language of philosophical work, Raghuramraju points out, depends not only upon the writer but more importantly upon the reader or the audience. Sanskrit, which was the main language of classical Indian philosophy, died rather prematurely due to the rise of English during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Rejecting the first thesis completely, Raghuramraju accepts from the second the idea that the absence of the classical presence could be attributed to the death of its language, but he refuses to accept the specific reasons advanced by its defenders. Raghuramraju sides with a third view, defended by Sheldon Pollock, that the death of Sanskrit cannot be attributed to the advent of Islam or colonialism, but instead has many causes.

In the second chapter, Raghuramraju gives an exposition of the views of different classical Indian schools of thought on the notion of substance. He begins with a discussion of *Nāśadiya Sukta* which exemplifies what are probably the earliest surmises on the notion of non-existence. From here he moves on to a discussion of the idea of non-existence in the Upanishads and different orthodox and heterodox schools of Indian philosophy. As a part of this exercise, Raghuramraju explains an important distinction between two sorts of absence: absence prior to the origin of an object and absence as a result of an object’s destruction. In the second half of the chapter he moves on to a discussion of the notion of desire. He points out that whereas permanence is associated with pre-existence and post-existence in Indian philosophy, rationalists in the West associate it with reason. Whereas Hume sees reason as subservient to desire, Descartes views it as permanent and in control of desire. Having prepared this long background in the first and second chapter, Raghuramraju turns to Chandidas’s book *Desire and Liberation* and situates it in relation to the aforementioned debate.

In Chapter 3 Raghuramraju explains how the work of Chandidas, while not giving up the search for permanence, identifies it with what he terms ‘underlying existence’ (57). In this context he gives an exposition of the distinction between the ontic and the ontological. Against the

background of this distinction he gives an explanation of how Chandidas ‘presents a new metaphysics by identifying contradictoriness, which never rests, thus foreclosing any possibility of permanence, to be the core of reality’ (57). In the next half of this chapter Raghuramraju discusses Chandidas’s idea of contradictoriness and elucidates associated ideas like process and creativity in order to highlight ‘the magisterial nature of desire’ (58).

Chapter 3 of the book analyzes the aesthetic aspect of desire in terms of creativity. Raghuramraju places the notion of creativity in binary opposition to psychological inclinations toward difference on the one hand and permanence on the other. Whereas most philosophies understand aesthetic experience in terms of these two ‘psychological types of human behavior’ (83), as Raghuramraju calls them, ‘a range of possibilities’ between these two binaries remain to be explored. In the second half of this brief chapter he contrasts the views of Eliot, Deleuze, Foucault, and Bersani with the views of Chandidas, concluding that ‘for Chandidas creativity is both novelty, which is a functional feature, as well as repetition, which is a structural feature, is both making and perishing, is multi-directional, is intensification, and is dreality...a term coined by combining dream and reality’ (92).

Moving on from the aesthetic aspect of creativity, Raghuramraju studies the same topic from the cosmic perspective in the next chapter. He discusses two main strands of argumentation presented in classical Indian philosophy. *Satkaryāvāda* propounds that reality is just a manifestation of the single original source, and thus the newness that is the hallmark of creativity is associated only with form and not with substance. *Asatkaryavada*, on the other hand, presents the view that all that is produced is a new creation in terms of its prior non-existence. In other words, everything that is produced is a new entity since it negates its prior non-existence. In opposition to both of these theories, Chandidas expounds causality as a product of intellection much along the Kantian line. This chapter is one of the longest in the book, and Raghuramraju touches upon a wide range of issues, including time, evolution, and cosmology.

In the next chapter, entitled ‘Desire and Liberation’, the author reflects upon Chandidas’s book of the same name, discussing it in relation to Bersani, Deleuze, and Nussbaum, among others. He points out that ‘in contrast to Hume, Chandidas does not privilege desires or emotions as declaration’ (128). He further states ‘Chandidas depicts desire as not transitory but in fact continuous, which is sustained by contradictoriness. It is contradictoriness which denies any move towards final permanence and sustains reality continuously’ (129).

In the book’s concluding chapter, Raghuramraju tries to elicit the contemporary relevance of Chandidas’s work. He compares Chandidas with Ambedkar, who embraces Buddhism because it rejects permanence, without which ‘it is not possible for hierarchy, which is structured inequality, to grow’ (139). He further points out that, ‘bereft of permanence, which is the core idea in Chandidas’s philosophy, not only the effect of power comes down considerably, the non-availability of power does not enable any hierarchical systems to grow in the first place’ (138). Raghuramraju further states: ‘In addition to displaying this sensitivity to the contemporary, this text (Chandidas’s book *Desire and Liberation*) can fulfill the void created by death of Sanskrit’ (140).

Overall this book is a good one which not only presents an exegesis of Chandidas’s philosophy but also tries to place him in dialogue with some important philosophical developments that have taken place in the West in the past few decades. The book follows an interesting trajectory from an exposition of different views of the death of classical philosophical traditions to the question

of how Chandidas could be viewed as an important torchbearer of this tradition in recent times. Raghuramraju achieves this task with remarkable dexterity. But the work makes a certain absence felt very conspicuously: namely, that of any scholarly non-comparative work on Chandidas's ideas. Without this, it seems this book has come a bit too early.

Ajay Verma, Jawaharlal Nehru University