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14	Address	Singapore, Singapore
15	Organization	Yale University
16	Corresponding Author	Division
17	Address	New Haven, USA
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24	Organization	University of Melbourne
25	Division	
26	Address	Parkville, USA
27	e-mail	<a href="mailto:jay.garfield@yale-nus.edu.sg">jay.garfield@yale-nus.edu.sg</a>
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## **A. Raghuramaraju, Philosophy and India: ancestors, outsiders and predecessors**

**New Delhi: Oxford University Press. (2013). pp xi+152. Rs. 495**

**Jay L. Garfield**<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup>

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Professor Raghuramaraju offers us a tantalizing, but frustrating book on an important topic. The book is tantalizing because it offers us so many insights regarding the genealogy and state of contemporary Indian philosophy, drawing on a complex web of conditions. The topic is important because the inattention to Indian philosophy during the colonial and immediately postcolonial period is shameful on its face and undermines our understanding of Indian history but and of contemporary Indian philosophy. The book is frustrating because despite offering a plethora of interesting insights and beginnings, it is far too brief to accomplish its many goals.


The book, *Philosophy and India: ancestors, outsiders and predecessors*, is divided into three sections. The first canvasses and criticizes a series of attempts to reverse a standard Orientalist trope, that of seeing the West as providing solutions to Indian problems. These reversals, as Raghuramaraju notes, attempt to portray developments in classical or contemporary Indian philosophy as Indian solutions to Western problems. The second section considers the complex relationship between classical and modern Indian philosophy, and the third considers the relationship between Buddhist and Hindu Indian traditions, and the ways that this relationship has been theorized in the context of Indian nationalism. That would be a lot to accomplish in any single volume, and to attempt it in the scope of about 150 pages is probably not a good idea.

Q2

✉ Jay L. Garfield  
jay.garfield@yale-nus.edu.sg

Q1

- 1 Yale-NUS College, Singapore, Singapore
- 2 National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore
- 3 Yale University, New Haven, USA
- 4 Smith College, Northampton, USA
- 5 Central University of Tibetan Studies, Uttar Pradesh, India
- 6 University of Melbourne, Parkville, USA

In the introduction, Raghuramaraju characterizes his mission this way:	29
...[T]his book makes a critical evaluation of contemporary Indian philosophers.	30
While identifying how contemporary Indian philosophers re-wrote their ancestors, and responded to outsiders, this work identifies important themes that philosophy in India might take up for further discussion, and thereby extend its purview while enriching its resources (xvi).	32 33 34 35 36
This is in fact not what the book actually does, however (although it does quite a lot that is valuable). Many of the characters in Raghuramaraju's drama are giants of the independence period and of the recent past (AK Coomaraswamy, Mohandas Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Vivekananda, BK Ambedkar). Others are important academics such as Daya Krishna, S Radhakrishnan, KS Murty, TRV Murti, Akeel Bilgrami, Bimal Matilal, and Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya. The problem Raghuramaraju intends to solve—the neglect of the academic philosophers who did so much to prosecute the Indian philosophical problematic, to mediate the intellectual engagement with the West, and to ground contemporary Indian philosophy—is an important one, and this book is a welcome step towards solving that problem.	37 38 39 40 <b>Q3</b> 41 42 43 44 45 46
The volume opens with a discussion of KC Bhattacharyya's engagement with Kant. Again, what Raghuramaraju says about his project is slightly at odds with the actual project. He promises to “present Bhattacharyya's critique of Indian solutions to the Kantian problem” (4). In fact, he properly <del>present</del> Bhattacharyya's own Indian solution to what he sees as a Kantian problem—the problem of the knowability of the self. Raghuramaraju takes “the concept of philosophy” as his target text. This is an important essay, but it would have been nice to see  attention to Bhattacharyya's more sustained engagement with this problem in <i>the subject as freedom</i> .	47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55
An example of what I mean when I say that the volume is frustrating in its insufficient pursuit of the interesting ideas it offers is in this chapter:	56 57
Bhattacharyya's diagnosis of the Kantian problem is novel. Other philosophers, such as Brentano, Meinong, and Husserl, who largely toed the Hegelian line in understanding and overcoming the Kantian problematic, have not seen this problem in Kant the way that Bhattacharyya did. They tried to overcome the problem by naturalizing the self or offering formulations such as <i>being-in-the-world</i> , <i>a la</i> Heidegger. Apart from these developments within the phenomenological tradition, within the analytical tradition, it has been sought to overcome the solipsism of the modern self through Wittgenstein's well-known thesis of ordinary language argument (5).	58 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68
So much of the history of Western philosophy in four sentences! There are interesting ideas here, and a lot of truth, but no development or analysis, and when Raghuramaraju turns to contrast Bhattacharyya's own approach to Kant with all(!) of these, the discussion is disappointingly superficial as a result of this thin engagement with the material he addresses. Raghuramaraju gallops at a similar pace through Bhattacharyya's own complex account of thought and of the self, with the result that, unless one is antecedently familiar with Bhattacharyya's	69 70 71 72 73 74 75

thought, much of it is opaque. In any case, it is far too thin an account to sustain the comparative work that Raghuramaraju asks of it.

This chapter could also be much more focused. Raghuramaraju takes us on interesting, but distracting byways, noting, for instances parallel to Gandhi in his engagement with Jainism and into theological interpretations of Kant. At the end of the chapter, he tells us that he has “shown that there is a need to disclose the divinity that is disguised in Kant and take him back in time to the traditional discourses of theology...” (14). Not only has he not done this, but this is not what this chapter promised at the outset. Raghuramaraju concludes by saying, “One way of making these contemporary Indian metaphysical writings available to the community of philosophers is to read them seriously.” I agree, but this chapter falls short of that aspiration.

The second chapter, on Bilgrami’s reading of Gandhi, is similarly packed with insight, but thin on analysis. Here, the task is to develop a critique not of Gandhi’s thought, per se, but rather of Bilgrami’s appropriation of Gandhi as an Indian solution to the failure of Western ethics. Raghuramaraju opens with a very compelling critique of Bilgrami’s program. Bilgrami argues that Gandhi presents an alternative *approach* to ethics, one eschewing the *theoretical* approach in the West in favor of an *exemplar* approach.

Raghuramaraju levels two convincing attacks on this use of Gandhi. First, he points out that Bilgrami neglects the fact that pursuing ethics by offering exemplars is present in the Western ethical tradition as well, noting the roles that Socrates and Jesus play in the Western ethical imaginary and the way they deployed their own lives for ethical instruction. Moreover, he points out that Gandhi was quite happy to universalize his own prescriptions and offers an ethical account that is patently theoretical (22–23). Second, Raghuramaraju notes that to adopt such a strategy would be patently un-Gandhian. Gandhi argued that just as European solutions to Indian problems are inappropriate, India is not in the business of solving European problems.

This is good stuff, but then, it ends. The entire chapter is nine pages long (exclusive of notes), and there is no time either to develop the detailed arguments to sustain these claims and to anticipate replies or to make use of these insights to develop any more general philosophical thesis regarding Gandhi’s own role as an ethicist or Bilgrami’s approach to metaphilosophy. After a delicious appetizer, we are sent away from the table with no main course.

Raghuramaraju takes on BK Matilal’s account of the role of Indian epic literature in Indian ethics in the final chapter of part I. He develops a very important point in this discussion: epics are not only national, but regional, and are often vernacular texts. This regionalism is important, as often the unity of Indian culture, history, and, in particular, philosophical community is overlooked in the name of nationalism, and the role of vernacular languages is overlooked in the privileging of Sanskrit in the history of Indian philosophy. Unfortunately, Raghuramaraju does not take the discussion in that direction and the reader is left wondering why we went down this path in the first place.

Another important insight Raghuramaraju offers us in this rich chapter is that it is wrong to map a European intellectual history in which the pre-modern always antedates the modern onto Indian intellectual history. Now, it is not clear that

Matilal is guilty of this transgression, but this context does give a reason to raise this issue, as it concerns the connection of pre-modern epics to modern ethical sensibility. Raghuramaraju argues that recent Indian history cannot be periodized so neatly and that often the pre-modern and the modern are commingled. A sound insight, but once again, not enough is done with it, and the details are omitted in a too brief discussion. While Raghuramaraju opens up important issues concerning regionalism and complex intellectual development, he neither resolves nor deploys them in the service of a larger project.

The second part of this book opens with a very interesting discussion of Daya Krishna's *Samvāda* project and the earlier "Jaipur experiment." Raghuramaraju accurately presents the outlines of these projects, their inspiration, promise, and sad demise. His analysis of that demise is compelling. He argues that the difficulty in dialogue, and the lack of motivation for continuation, derives not from the gulf between Indian and Western vocabulary or problematic. It derives instead, he argues, from the fact that *classical* Indian texts were brought into dialogue with *contemporary* Western problems and that *pandits* were brought into dialogue with contemporary demics.

Raghuramaraju argues that this reveals both blindness to the disruption in the Western tradition affected by the enlightenment, with a consequent discontinuity between classical and contemporary *Western* thought, and a lack of awareness of the presence in India of a recent and contemporary literature that might be a more appropriate partner in dialogue with the West. Now, I think that Raghuramaraju understates the continuity between the classical and the contemporary in both traditions, but that is a matter of detail, and the general outlines of the critique are perceptive and valuable, demonstrating the unfortunate consequences of the elision of recent Indian philosophy even in the Indian philosophical consciousness. However, this chapter is about seven pages long, and in many ways, it is the heart of the book. There is simply no space to develop these ideas in any truly satisfying way.

The second chapter in this section is even less satisfying. Raghuramaraju gives us a kind of book review account of KS Murty's *Philosophy in India: traditions, teaching and research*. Ironically, Raghuramaraju writes, "The central issue with Murty's work is that...it makes an index of contributions that lie outside the subject but fails to analyze them" (78). I would say the same of this chapter. It offers a good summary of Murty's own work but falls short in analysis.

The final section of the book comprises two chapters addressing understandings of the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism. The first is very interesting, addressing Coomaraswamy's construction of national identity. Raghuramaraju notes correctly that Coomaraswamy makes heavy use of Buddhist art history and rule in his own account of Indian national identity, despite arguing for an essentially Hindu nation. Raghuramaraju is correct to draw our attention to that conflation. There is more to this story, however, including the intriguing connection that John Keays has noted to the project of the British Archaeological Survey of India and its role in constructing an account to the identity of the Indian nation, using the extent of the Asokan empire to justify that of the British domain. Attention to this nexus would complicate the picture, and once again, the essay trails off too soon, stopping just after the conflation is demonstrated and drawing no further conclusions.



The final essay continues this investigation of the conflation of Hinduism and Buddhism. In this discussion, Raghuramaraju canvasses the accounts of S Radhakrishnan, TRV Murti, and BR Ambedkar. He argues convincingly that each of these influential exegetes is guilty of significant conflation and distortion of these distinct but related traditions. However, their strategies and motives are different, and neither these differences nor the upshot of their shared error is adequately explored.

This is a volume that repays careful reading. It is full of insights and draws our attention repeatedly to important phenomena in the history of recent Indian philosophy that are too often ignored. Even when Raghuramaraju is frustrating in his brevity, he is rewarding in his insight.

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