I AND THE OTHER: A HERMENNEUTICAL STUDY OF THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL MODELS AVAILABLE IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: The quickest of our actions presupposes and involves some minimal ontological conception of the object towards which our actions may be directed. Even our reflexive actions can only be understood in terms of some minimal sub-conscious understanding of the object that it may be aimed at. Thus all our actions deliberate or reflexive are in a certain sense influenced by how we view the Other at the receiving end of that action. This would further mean that problem of understanding actions has a hermeneutical side to it. Once this hermeneutic link between our notion of the Other and its epistemic influence on our actions is admitted, it would have inevitable bearing upon our conceptions of collectivities as well. In terms of its importance for our study of different societies and polities in the world, it may present to us new interesting predicaments. In the following presentation I attempt to survey some of the epistemological approaches suggested by different schools of Indian philosophy to make sense of an entity as such and examine them for their rigidity or flexibility vis-à-vis questions regarding individuality and collectivity. In the light of these findings I try to assess which of these philosophies should be considered better suited for the social milieu of the contemporary multicultural societies of the world than certain others.

"Either one understands self-understanding as a sort of understanding of the other, or one understands understanding of other as a sort of self-understanding."
J. N. Mohanty.

The notion of the Other is implicit in any non-reflexive notion of action. Even self-aware reflexive actions require objectification of one's own self in a certain way. Actions are constituted, shaped and guided by our understanding of the other. This is especially true of Indian philosophy where there is a conspicuous interconnection between the epistemology and the stereological programs proposed by different schools. Broadly divided there are orthodox realist schools in Indian philosophy on the one hand including *Mīmāmsa* and *Nyāya* and radical empiricist schools on the other mainly amongst them Buddhism. According to realist school of *Nyāya* one

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could believe that the Other exists in the same plain of time and space as oneself with different co-ordinates. Viewed in terms of time one becomes the subject of understanding of the Other. Viewed in terms of space one becomes an incarnate Other, amenable to and available for understanding. In *Advaita* system of *Uttar Mimāmsā School* the one and the Other become just two different dimensions of the self-identical object named *Brahman*. Such systems of thought involve a reductionism of sorts where individual contingencies are bracketed out in favor of more universalistic modes of understanding. As opposed to this there could be different view of the Other where the individual uniqueness of the Other is radically emphasized to the extent that an unbridgeable chasm is created between the self and the Other. Yet another approach to understand the Other could be to consider the Other as both an invitation and a challenge to the self to share a space where the self is aware of the limits of one's own understanding of the Other in the present moment but does not consider the present moment as the final one. In such a view both the self and the Other are considered along with their individual historicity with a certain openness towards each other.

In the following presentation I attempt to survey each of these approaches especially in some of the schools of Indian philosophy and examine them for their ethical implications. In the light of these findings I try to assess which of these philosophies should be considered better suited for the social milieu of the contemporary multicultural societies of the world than others.

One of the presuppositions that I am working with in this paper is that when we deal with the notion of the Other, then apart from dealing with notions regarding identity formation, the notion of the self and so on, we need to most primarily look at the notion of entity *per se* in that particular system. The epistemological status accorded to an object in a particular thought system needs to be studied for its implications with regard to morality, ethics, society, polity and so on. How we act towards an object is guided in various ways by how we conceive of that object in the first place. This link between epistemology and ethics is specially emphasized in Indian philosophy because of their pronounced stereological orientation.

Foremost among these epistemological models, I want to discuss theories of meaning proposed by two main realist schools in Indian philosophy namely *Nyāya* and *Mīmāmsā*. The *Nyāya* school maintains that an object presents itself along with its universally recognizable nature, its particularity and its matrix of relationships with its own different parts and to other objects in the world. On this view an object has both a Universal (*sāmānya*) and a Particular (*vīśeśa*) residing in it. This is explained with the help of a classical example. If somebody finds a piece of banyan leaf lying on the ground, she immediately recognizes it as a piece of banyan leaf. If an object were to be characterized by its particularity alone then the part would have given no

indication of the whole that it belongs to. Thus the Universal bears its stamp on the entire particular object in such a way that none of its parts remain un-participated in it. A modern day example of the same could be a hologram which results from piecing together several small images each of which contains a micro image of the overall picture that hologram represents. Further under Nyāya scheme of things a part bears a special relationship to its whole named *samavāya* which means inherence. The core feature of this special type of relationship is that it is characterized by the inseparability (*ayutasiddha*) of the *relata* under consideration. A subtle but very important fall out of this view is that if the relationship between an object and its parts is that of inseparability, an object can never evolve to be something other than what it already is. For example as we grow almost all the cells of our body are changed after a period of time. We would require some strong notion of parts being viewed as independent and at the same time continuants of the whole in some way to explain the sameness of the entity in question in such cases. Also under this scheme of things, all possibilities of equivocation about the object are foreclosed and precluded since the object is supposed to have a definite structure which is completely conceptualisable. *Nyāya* being an orthodox realist school, their view of the Other exemplifies a perfect blend of orthodoxy in their brand of realism. But this is only one side of the story. Whereas an object bears a relationship of inherence with its own parts it has another type of relationship with regard to other wholes which is named as *Samyog*. Whereas there is no room for contingencies in the *samavāya* type of relationship, *samyog* has enough scope for them. *Samyog* literally translated would mean chance-happening. As the meaning suggests, on Nyāya account one's relationship with the other whole objects is a mere contingent chance-happening where coming together is seen merely in terms of spatiality. Under this relationship when the either one of the two or more *relata* are parted, there is no change as a whole in either one of them in terms of their identity. Thus what could be concluded from the above is that in consonance with the overall orthodoxy of the system Nyāya considers the Other either as an unalterable part of the whole or an unalterable well defined whole which may in turn become a part of an aggregate (*sāmagri*) which is necessary and sufficient to give birth to a new entity.

Thus under Nyāya scheme of things the object of understanding or the Other is unequivocally categorisable and our behavior towards that Other is guided and vindicated in terms of our unmistaken, non-erroneous cognition, definite of it. On this account, an object has a well and pre-defined structure and has to be cognized by the subject in terms of that structure alone.

Buddhist epistemology on the other hand goes to the other extreme and views the conceptualization of the originally given raw sense data by the mind as an element alienable to the actual nature of the object. Perceptual knowledge of the object

accordingly defined as devoid of any imaginative or conceptual attribution to the object concerned (*pratyakśamkalpanāpodham*)[1]. Object on this account of things is essentially a unique particular (*svalakśana*) or a unique Other. Thus its alterity cannot be bridged by projection of one's own conceptual schemes or for that matter any conceptual scheme whatsoever. If at all this alterity can only be bridged by extinguishing one's own ways of understanding things.

Thus we observe that Nyāya and Buddhist epistemologies represent different ways of understanding the object. Subsequently there could be two different kinds of moral evaluation of the Other forthcoming. Whereas *Nyāya* epistemology would emphasize upon subject's capability to use right categories in her effort to understand the Other to make a justifiable moral evaluation of the same, Buddhists would view the alterity of the Other as inviolable. The Other is in this sense - to borrow a term from Derrida – 'the wholly other'[2]. It makes no effort to reach out or to make itself available for understanding; it does not come along with what Gadamer would call certain "pre-givenness or self-representation"[3]. As a manner of speaking it does not participate in the understanding of itself by the subject. The object under this scheme of things has an absolute, non-negotiable demand in an epistemological situation which is that the one who understands extinguishes herself completely. In Nyāya scheme of things on the other hand the object is termed as '*yathārtha*' meaning 'the one presented as it is'. On this account, object comes along with a 'representation-for' and the onus falls upon the understanding subject to unhinder her mind from unwarranted prejudices and arrive at the essence or the right cognition of the thing by applying only those concepts to the object that are warranted in that particular knowing situation. Right cognition (*yathārthajñānam*) thus achieved would further give us cues regarding how to act with respect to the object of cognition.

Yet another approach towards the Other is proposed by one of the later Indian grammarians named Bhartrhari. Bhartrhari in a certain sense denies the alterity of the Other altogether. He points out that as understanding subjects we are all imbued with the same linguisticality (*śabdanā*) of being which he terms as *Pratibhā*. *Pratibhā* is a sort of inner capability to understand the linguistic codes and also refers to perceptivity or receptivity of the subjects towards those codes. So all of us in a certain way carry a blueprint of all the possible thoughts in language and for making the communication of certain thought possible we only need to send an appropriate trigger of sorts which hits upon or invokes the intended thought in the other. Thus the

[1]PramānaSammuchaya 1.3c.

[2]See Derrida, Jacqes, *The Gift of Death* (translation by David Willis), University of Chicago Press, London, 1995.

[3]See Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* (translation by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall), Continuum, London, 2004.

content of thought becomes self-referential and self-autonomous in a certain way under this scheme of things. The role of the Other as an interpreter or as an assessor or evaluator is completely taken away. If the subjectivity of the Other were to be defined in terms of her unique historicity of being and the prejudices and biases imbibed therefrom, then such subjectivity is denied to the Other under Bhartrhari's model. Thus in this model the Other is always secretly familiar. Language on this account is not something at our disposal as an instrument to use for giving palpability to our individual thoughts. Rather, language is viewed as a blueprint of pure timeless tradition which is the storehouse of all possible understanding and also an inalienable guide to our action. According to Bhartrhari, "It is recorded through an uncut continuity – of learning that is called to mind, by those who have learned it well and hand it down.".[4] Thus as a part of language user community we are all guided by the uninterrupted inherent flow of this river that Bhartrhari calls as tradition (*vyavasthā*) and as a part of this flow, we lose our alterity as the Other.

Bhartrhari says: Whether words be eternal or otherwise, their beginning is not known. As in the case of living beings, there is what is called continuity of tradition *(vyavasthā-nityatā)*.[5] But due to influences of time (*kāla*), the purity of tradition is gradually lost. It is then the task of the grammarian to suggest ways to restore the purity of traditional understanding. Bhartrhari comments on this: Grammar is a discipline whose aim is knowledge, clarified from errors of mistaken use. Passed down through a succession that remains unbroken, the intent remembered is reconstituted, over and over again.[6] But that itself remains unchanged because of its continuing causality, it is called 'akśara' or 'that which does not change'.[7]

For an orthodox grammarian, knowledge of grammar of tradition purged of corrupting influences of time is tantamount to restoration of our subjectivity. For a hermeneuticist on the other hand, it would amount to loss of subjectivity to something *other* than and outside the subject and it is also a loss of subject's alterity as the Other.

Thus what I want to arrive from the above is that Indian philosophical tradition is by and large orthodox. Buddhists though enumerated amongst heterodox schools also look infested with a different strain of orthodoxy. This is especially true from a hermeneutical perspective in so far as the subjective projection in the process of understanding is viewed in this model as corruption of actual understanding of the object. Though differing in their methodologies *Naiyāyikas* and Buddhists arrive at consequences not very different in nature. Whereas in the epistemological models

[4]Sādhutvajñānaviśayasaiśavyākaranasmrtih1.141 Vākyapadīya.

[5]nityatvekṛtakatvevāteṣāmādirnavidyate /prāṇināmivasācaiṣāvyavasthānityatocyate // 1.28 Vākyapadīya.

[6]smrtahhīarthahparamparyatavicchedenapunahpunahnibandhyate.1.141 vrtti, Vākyapadīya.

[7]tatćaakśaranimittatvātakśaramitīućyate. 1.1 vrtti, Vākyapadīya.

offered by Nyāya, world starts looking like fixated under a matrix of categories, in the Buddhist scheme of things the Other is not amenable to these categories at all. Whereas on Nyāya account there are fixed ways of how a subject has a dialogue with the other which finishes as soon as the Other is rightly categorized and conceptualized, on Buddhist account the Other is not amenable to a dialogue at all. On Buddhist account understanding of the Other is tantamount to silencing oneself, in the sense of suspending one's prejudices and biases altogether. In either case the dynamicity in the process of understanding is conspicuously lost.

Thus the overall point that I want to bring home here is that among most of the Indian schools of philosophy the notion of the Other or rather the ways of understanding the Other are such that a certain gap between the object and the subject which constitutes the alterity of the Other is missing. This gap is either collapsed by offering fixated notions of right and wrong understanding of the object influenced by the overall stereological demands of the system or by denigrating human capacity to phenomenologically constitute the object of understanding as tantamount to corrupting influences upon the direct understanding of the object.

From here I further argue that with the changed socio-political predicaments in India and abroad the epistemological models available in a local cultural milieu of any given geographical unit need to be revived which support those conceptions of the Other which are more in consonance with the ideas of multiculturalism and interculturality. In a country like India where much of our ethical and social paradigms are borrowed from ancient literature and philosophy, it should be of special interest to analyze how we have looked upon the meaning of the text. In this regard Indian schools of philosophy have mainly relied upon the infallibility of the text as the source of its scriptural authority. In Indian philosophy authority of the scripture is supported either with the assumption of the authorlessness of the text as in *Mīmāmsā* philosophy or by assuming God as the author of Vedas as supposed by Naiyāyikas. But interestingly whereas in the west the authorlessness of the text is viewed as the end of any ascribed ownership of meaning, in *Mīmāmsā* school of Indian philosophy authorlessness (*apauruśeya*) of the text is given as an argument for its infallibility. Authorlessnes is presented as an argument for the impeccability and absolute authority of the scripture. *Mīmāmsakas* argue that a text that has an author would get infested with same contingencies that put limits upon realm of possibilities for human beings. Thus absence of the author is considered as tantamount to suprahuman absolute authority beyond any contingencies. Deeper implications of the argument from authorlessness of the text has underlying structuralist overtones. Vedas' being authorless texts should basically mean that they represent primeval structures and ways of thinking that are prior to any authorial text and thus penetrate and manifest themselves in the authorial intention even if there were to be any. Thus

the structures of language and the lifeworld are encoded and embedded in the grammar (*vyākarana*) and since the study or methodological analysis of this grammar presupposes that very grammar, therefore *Mīmāmsaka's* plea is to accept this very grammar as an absolute given. The main intellectual enterprise that a philosopher is left with in such circumstances is not the critique but only philology and metaphysics. Subsequently most of the Indian orthodox schools of philosophy are engaged in either of these two pursuits. Needless to say that such models of linguistic understanding do not have much scope for fluidity in our conception of the Other. On this account, the mode of being of the Other is pre-given in the grammar and linguisticality of our being. The task of a philosophy under this paradigm is to discover the *a priori* structures of language in grammar and suggest ways to refine our present modes of linguistic understanding back to its pre-authorial original shape. Much along the same line, the early hermeneutical theory which would include Ast, Schleirmarcher and Ranke among others fulcrums the meaning of the text in the originary spirit that runs through the text. On this account the particularities of the text which come into play because of the temporal distance are viewed as anomalies, which need to succumb to the demands of a single overall unitary narrative in the text. This view rests on an important pre-supposition that the object of understanding is a non-fragmentary, self-complete Other which has its own spirit (*geist*) running through the entire text. The subject needs to submit herself before this spirit in order to understand the text at all. As opposed to this the Other in the hermeneutic scheme of things is not a monolithic, self-complete object. Rather, it is a fragmentary Other. It is a whole composed of implicit and explicit epistemic spaces. Some of these implicit epistemic spaces may be more accessible to the Other than to the locus where they belong.

Thus the thrust of my discussion here is that human imagination and its creative urges are suspect in orthodox Indian schools of thought. An essential part of the notion of orthodoxy is fixed ways of looking at things involving hypostatization and frozenness of meaning, obfuscating the distinction between plain text and scripture. This is especially true for the schools of philology where meaning gleaning process from the text is influenced by the overall exegetical demand of the soteriology proposed by the system. Thus hermeneutical models hinging upon availability of the text free of authorial ownership and its unrestricted play with human individual imagination are by and large not available in Indian philosophy. Further as I have pointed out earlier even supposedly unorthodox philosophy of Buddhism has orthodox tendencies in disguise. Buddhist idea of knowledge as devoid of imagination is based on the pre-supposition that there is an actual something out there. Therefore as human individuals endowed with our capacities to reason and imagine, we can only have corrupting influences on the knowledge possibilities of the Other if at all. This allegation is based upon Buddhist skepticism regarding capability of human

imagination to truly capture the essence of the actual object out there which is of the nature of *svalakśana* or unique particular. In either case the dialogical models of understanding which allow due space to the 'Otherness' of the reader are missing. Orthodox epistemological models provided by *Nyāya* and *Mimāmsa* thinkers are monological from the vantage-point of the knower, the Buddhist epistemological model is monological from the point of view of the object. Thus whereas the Mimāmsa theory of *aupauruśeya* (authorlessness) is homologous to death of the author celebrated in the postmodernist literary theory, Buddhist epistemological model is analogous to orthodox tradition to which it is opposed only in structure and methodology, not in terms of consequences. Thus overall point that I wish to make in this section is that by and large in Indian philosophy, understanding of the individual human knower is never viewed as something productive of understanding. It is either viewed at the level of surface expressions which need to be refined and perfected to classical forms of understanding or viewed as a kind of veil between the knower and the Other which needs to be lifted up if there has to be any contact at all between the two. One should also note here that from ontological point of view being of the Other is considered to have primacy over our being-in-the-world because the Other was already there before *I* came into existence. Thus the historicity of the Other also informs my historical consciousness and fore-understanding of things. This fore-understanding embedded in the linguisticality of our being in the world is either fossilized as the absolute given by the Indian realist or has to be suspended to allow the understanding of the actual object to unfold fully to us (who?) or this fore-understanding has to be refined and perfected to match up to the actual nature (what?) of being of the object as demanded by the Indian Grammarian. In either case our being in the world along with our individual historical consciousness is denigrated in favor of supposed actual essential modes of existence or being-in-the-world.

As opposed above discussed epistemological models later developments in hermeneutics emphatically deny that understanding truly takes place only when the reader's or the subject's grasp of meaning is same as it is intended by the author or in Nyāya terminology, when it is same as the real structure of the object along with the matrix of relationships that connects it to the overall structure of the universe. Indian theories of realism on the other hand as pointed out earlier stress precisely upon the sameness between the structure of language, understanding and the actual world out there or 'the Other'. Nyāya theory for instance does acknowledge that understanding is not directly intuitive as it is always mediated by the *manas*. *Manas*, generally translated as internal organ, acts as a messenger between the sense organs and the soul (*atman*) which is the actual seat or locus of understanding. Interestingly on Nyāya account *manas*has a simple atomic structure. It is atomic in the sense that it is so minute that it cannot connect to more than one sense organ at a time. Thus all the

sense organs may be working in a given instance of understanding but if all the sense data is inevitably delivered to the soul then it could result in an actual 'brainstorm'. So only that part of the sense data is delivered to the soul which has its channel in touch with the soul. Now the question that comes up here is – if *manas* only selectively delivers the sense data to the subject, then how is this selection made. Naiyāyikas do not seem to be willing to say much on this issue. But it stands to reason that either this selection should depend on the context created by the situatedness of the experiencing subject or should depend on the degree of immediacy of the incoming sense-data from the five possible channels. This selection cannot be arbitrary as evidenced from our well arranged judgments. The possibility of *manas* making the selection is precluded from the fact that it is atomic in nature. Thus overall Nyāya account comes down to this. Though the decision regarding which object to focus upon out of an array of choices is taken by the subject's soul, it does not have the freedom to think of X as something *other* than X. The subject thus may be contextualized and situated, the onus always lies with it not to let those contexts cause 'misconstruing' or 'misunderstanding' of the object. On this account thus the Other is presented before the subject as it actually is or essentially is. The subject at times owing to the defect in the aggregate of conscious and unconscious conditions sufficient and necessary for an event to occur (*bodhābodha-sāmagri*) may result in misunderstanding. The interpretative role of the subject on this account is limited to 'discernment' of judgment, such that the judgment about the Other correctly represents *it*. One may ask at this point – what criterion should we follow to find out the validity of cognition? The criterion offered by Nyāya is to send the trigger to the object to behave in a way that is most characteristic of it. Thus for *Naiyayikas* not only objects have a specific character with respect to its whole and its parts along with its specific relationships with the others around it but in virtue of those structures it also has a specific behavior in response to particular stimuli. Thus the characteristic property of water for example is to quench thirst and that of fire to burn. Conversely, water that does not quench thirst is not actually water and the fire that does not burn is only a virtual appearance of it. The word offered by Naiyayikas for this litmus test is '*arthkriyākāritva'* which means that the object of cognition should effectively function in the way that characterizes it. Thus the reality of an object is decided in terms of a certain set of essential characteristics including behavioral characteristics. Needless to say that such conception of deciding the identity of the object delimits the mode of existing of the Other in certain essential ways subsequently opening up and widening up the space for aberrations. Manhood for example may be defined in terms

of machismo alone would keep emotional men outside the realm of essential modes of existence for men.[α]

Mīmāsakas go even a step further in this regard. According to them a criterion for deciding the validity of an instance of understanding is not even required. *Mīmāmsakas* maintain that all judgments come along with self-certitude. This means to say that all judgments are valid in their first instance itself. Yet another way of stating the same could be that all judgments are valid as they already exist. Needless to say that any such theory would be based on radical form of orthodoxy and scholasticism. When asked for reasons for such a view, *Mīmāsakas* only offer an argument based on indirect proof. They point out that if any judgment relies upon a further criterion for its certification then the question of validity (*pramānyata*) is only shifted one step further up to the supposed criterion itself. Thus proposing any criterion for validity of a judgment would only postpone the question of validity for a moment but would never give a conclusive solution to the problem. This conspicuously relativistic argument is used as an indirect proof by *Mīmāsakas*. They argue that since extraneous validity criterion is never conclusive, therefore knowledge-judgments are all intrinsically valid or self-valid (*svatahpramānya*). One can clearly see here that socio-political implications of such a view could be horrific. If whatever already exists has self-valid intrinsic reasons to exist then it sounds the *cul-de-sac* of critical philosophical enterprise and defends the *status quo*. Notwithstanding it should not require much effort to observe that the self-validity argument stands more to reason than experience. There is a lot of empirical evidence from our daily life-experiences that we often have erroneous cognitions. Illusions and dream-experiences are certainly neither valid nor true. This puts an insurmountable difficulty before the Mīmāsakas because to even give an explanation for unreality of instances of illusions and dream experiences one needs to acknowledge that there can be non-valid knowledge-claims or cognitions. But doing this is obviously not compliant with their self-validity theory. *Mīmāsaka's* claim that all cognitions are self-valid in virtue of lack of foolproof self-reliant ascertaining criterion precludes the possibility of any explanation of error. Nonetheless Mīmāsakas have a queer take on this issue. They point out that all cases of erroneous cognition are cases of failure to

[α]It may also be interesting to note here that the term '*Jati*'used by Naiyayikas to denote the category of an object is also the word for caste in India. This evidences the fact that social ramifications of certain epistemologies are their inevitable outcomes. Caste system is characterized by recognizing certain group of people in terms of their profession alone. Conversely in virtue of their being essentially belonging to a particular group a person cannot but take that particular profession only. Thus a carpenter on this account is a carpenter in virtue of belonging to that class which in a certain way pervades her whole being and passes on that class character to her offspring as well.

have the right cognition. It can be further construed as – all cases of erroneous cognition are cases where the subject makes an omission to differentiate right cognition from the wrong one. But cases of omission do not necessarily commit the subject of cognition to any philosophical position. An act of omission is tantamount to not-doing something. It cannot be equated with error which is a positive case of wrongful cognition. Thus Mīmāsakas instead of explaining the cases of misapprehension, explain them away.

This kind of epistemological position could have interesting politico-legal implications. This epistemological position translated in terms of our socio-political outlook towards the Other would make it excessively loaded in terms of political Rights alone. Indian constitution for example lists a number of fundamental rights to which all Indian citizens are entitled irrespective of cast and creed. Violation of any of these fundamental rights is one of the most serious cognizable offences. The constitution also has a similar list of duties. But the omission to perform those duties is not considered a cognizable offence. I believe the psychology behind this is same as Mīmāsakas'. Failure to perform one's duties is simply a case of omission to do something and not-doing cannot be equated with violation of something. This can be better understood with the help of an example – if somebody is drowning right before my eyes and I know how to swim, it is my duty to save the person, but omission to perform this duty cannot be challenged in the court of law. Though if the person in question knows swimming and starts pelting stones at the person who is drowning making her unable to swim, would be a cognizable crime. If we view this example in terms of consequences, both cases are equal in status. In both cases the consequence is the possible death of the person which could have been prevented in first case by doing something and in second case by omission of an act. Further, on *Svatahpramānyavāda* account of things, all that is cognized by us is self-attested and no further attestation is required for a given judgment. Behind this kind of view is Mīmāsaka's attempt to defend the authority of the Vedas. Vedas on their account are self-valid because any validating criterion is always in need of defense for its own validation in turn. But this account presents a strong case for maintaining the *status quo*. If all cognitions are self-valid, then whatever is prevalent is already fine. This is some kind of Utopian vision where all is already well by default.

Needless to say that these epistemological models are not conducive to or are not in consonance with the demand for more flexible epistemological postures proposed by new developments in literary theory and social sciences like Multiculturalism and Postmodernism. Any talk of interculturality requires that we understand the presuppositions of interculturality. The notion of interculturality hinges upon the notion of the difference of historicities. To truly understand the demands of interculturality we need to have an understanding of what this difference is

constituted in. It also demands recognition of the differences in the culturality of our beings and a dialogical understanding among them. The term culturality here refers to the historicity of our consciousness or the historical influences upon the categories of understanding that are linguistically *a priori*. But what is actually of consequence in a socio-political setup is the kind of philosophical consideration we have towards the historicality or culturality of our being. One of these possible philosophical consideration is to equivocate this linguistic *a priori* with Kantian synthetic *a priori* and consider them as transcendental and inevitable structures of knowing. The attitudinal demand in such an epistemological model would be to match up to the epistemic-grammatical demands of such supposed *a priori* structures. Another approach to the same could be to look at historicities of our consciousness as mere constructions which only appear as anomalies in the understanding process. This approach as radical in nature as the previous one emphasizes upon removal of or suppression of the prejudices and biases imbibed from the historicality of being of both *I* and the *Other*. But both these approaches would further reify hypostatization of either the Other or the self. In doing this both these approaches keep at bay the interactivity and dynamicity that actually characterizes both *I* and the Other in the process of understanding.

In western hermeneutical tradition there are mainly two radical positions. In medieval text-centered hermeneutics the meaning is supposed to lie in the ownership of the author. The author has some original thought that she attempts to convey to the reader or the audience. The onus is supposed to lie with the reader to extinguish her own pre-understanding and thus focus completely on the original intended meaning of the author. The author-centered approach advocated by Schleirmarcher and Ranke is put under scanner by Heidegger and Gadamer in the twentieth century. Heidegger argues against the demand to suspend one's own historicity of being in order to make room for the original intention of the author. He points out that once a text like an artwork has been completed, it has an independent existence of its own. Whereas for Ranke an artwork depends on its author for its meaning, for Heidegger and Gadamer an artwork is fully capable to speak for itself. It engages the reader and draws her into a meaning-generating game through its initial pre-given meaning which is not yet complete. The incompleteness of the meaning or its ambiguity is precisely what challenges the pre-understanding of the reader and draws her into the game. In a certain sense it is the ambiguity of meaning and incompleteness which keeps the understanding of the *Other* alive. The initial given-ness of the object prods the pre-understanding of the subject to collect itself once again in an act of its own imagination and project it on to the object. Now since there is no original understanding imbued in the text, there is no conclusive right or wrong in the process of hermeneutical understanding. The initial given-ness of the object and pre-

understanding of the subject engage in a dialogue or interplay for a meaning to emerge at all. Epistemological models conducive to such dialogical models of understanding are by and large not available in Indian philosophy.

Thus to sum up my attempts in this paper so far has been to assess different epistemological models available in Indian philosophy in terms of the index of hermeneutical space they would allow for the understanding of the Other such that neither co-ordinates of the knowing situation are characterized as the absolute nor is the space between the two rendered so readily and completely bridgeable that both the co-ordinates of a knowing situation collapse such that the 'otherness' as the quotient of individuality of the either co-ordinate is lost. My contention in this regard is that *Syādavāda* of Jainas is the only theory of knowledge which preserves this gap. *Syādavāda* is an epistemological offshoot of Jaina's core ethical concern of nonviolence. Jainas do not advocate nonviolence resulting from a deliberate control over our impulses and a strict discipline based on self-restraint. Our actions are most of the times deliberate and based on peculiar ways of thinking influenced by our peculiar belief-systems. Thus to make nonviolence a part of our general dispositional behavior, we need to have an appropriate corresponding epistemological attitude or set of beliefs which is most conducive to such dispositional behavior. Jainas point out to the fact that all our knowledge-claims signify our various takes on a particular object at hand and as such they should be recognized as knowledge-claims, not knowledge-instances *per se*. We generally put forth our knowledge-claims in such a way that we tend to forget their propositional nature and state them forth as matters of fact. Stating it as a matter of fact at a very subtle sub-conscious level infringes upon the hermeneutical space of the other in surreptitious ways. In this way it works as an invasion of sorts and draws the Other into a defensive mode. As a result, the Other instead of opening up to or becoming receptive to the hermeneutical call of the Other becomes self-oriented and gets busy with the assessment of the implication of views of the Other on her own system of beliefs, values etc. This is an epistemological attitude which is more conducive to preclusion of a dialogue rather than initiation of it.

The epistemological model proposed by Jainas is instigated by their ethical and social concern of *ahimsā* or nonviolence. Much like a medical practitioner Jainas view violence as an anomaly in human behavior and trace the genesis of violence in the general unreflective ways of human thinking. Jaina theory of *Syādavāda* makes a plea for re-considering the epistemological gap between a knowledge-claim and knowledge-instances per se. On Jainas account our past karmas or the historicities of our being bind us to particular perspectives. Thus all efforts directed at knowing the Other are perspectival in nature. Due to the lack of reflective awareness we put forward our knowledge-claims as knowledge instantiations per se. Jainas allege that the Other has infinite aspects to present before the self but due to limitations of our

perspectives shaped by our karmic baggage we are able to see only a few of them. Thus the possibilities that the Other presents us with are innumerable in number and it is our lapse not to be able to connect with the Other with full awareness of all of them. When we put forth our perspectivally limited judgments as knowledge occurrences then in a very subtle way it is denial of Other's hermeneutical space. Jaina's suggestion as a remedy to this is that when we present our claims about the state of affairs in the world, we present them as the probable ones not as the final ones. Such epistemological attitude I argue is more conducive to a dialogical situation. This immediately throws into relief to the Other the space for her perspectival claim. An individual awareness of non-finality of historically limited individualistic judgment is the foremost and most essential requirements to connect with the Other. It is the best hermeneutical call to the Other to participate in a dialogue not only for a proper understanding of the Other but also for a proper critique of one's own belief-system. This is also the most conducive epistemological attitude from the point of view of a democratic consensus. Somewhat along the same line Mohanty writes: "I have found no way of expelling the other from within my own world. The 'foreign', then, is that which I do not understand. But understanding and failure to understand, the familiar and the strange have their place within every world. It is not simply one-sidedly knowing the other, but 'mutual' communication which removes 'strangeness'. The idea of one world for all is constituted through such communication and may serve as a norm for critiquing one's home-world."[8]

Thus by and large none of the schools of Indian philosophy excepting to a certain extent Jainas would allow any hermeneutical dialogical space to the Other. Also excepting Jainas none of schools recognize historicity of consciousness and biases and prejudices imbibed therefrom as constitutive and informative of a knowledge-claim. Historicity and perspective that invariably and ineluctably inform all knowledge-claims are always viewed as something alien to the actual instances of knowledge. Unless it is accepted that there is no way to suspend our biases and prejudices to find out the fact behind the appearance and that so called 'knowledge' is a term for consensus and that dialogue is the only way of arriving at it, any epistemology would remain incurably orthodox in its core. Larger implications of saying this, is that such orthodox epistemologies could never be supportive of collectivities based on democratic principles of consensus and dialogue. Indian systems of though like Grammarians and Mīmāmsā who show remarkable consideration towards tradition as constitutive of the knowledge-claims on the other hand view tradition as a self-enclosed system not amenable to rational scrutiny.

[8]Mohanty, J. N., *The Self and its Other: Philosophical Essays*, OxfordUniversity Press, Delhi, 2000. p.113.

Commenting upon such tendencies among Indian orthodox schools of thinking, J. N. Mohanty writes: "…one should distinguish between two levels of philosophizing. There is a kind of philosophizing which is intra-cultural. At this level, philosophy thinks within the parameters and presuppositions of the culture within which it comes into being. In the Indian tradition, such thinking does not question the validity of Vedas, but proceeds to introduce new interpretation-principles to be able to achieve its goal of legitimization (theoretical justification). The *darśanas* first develop as intra-cultural. Amongst themselves, they do not raise the issue of the authority of the Vedic texts. But no culture, in its totality, is a seamless whole."[9]

Thus altogether Indian schools of thought have two dominant strands of epistemology. Either there is a plea for unmistakable, unambiguous, undisputable ways of knowing, cleansed of anything external to the knowledge situation even at phenomenological level or there is an account of tradition juxtaposing it with the rational such that the possibility of a dialogue on certain shared principles of rationality becomes impossible.

My further submission in this paper is that ancient Indian thought is marked by dominant orthodox strands perhaps with an exception of Jainas. Language is viewed as having fixed designations by most of the orthodox schools. Thus one could even say that Post-Heideggerian hermeneutical turn in western European philosophy does not have any counterpart in Indian thought. There are fixed ways of knowing the Other whether as an object or as a person such that the Other has a fixed unalterable status in the matrix of collectivity. Dominant trends in Indian philosophy allow internal pluralism but do not give an adequate and balanced account of dynamism, growth and mobility, which are essential indices of liveliness of things.[10] Much like some of the early Greek ideas, Indian ancient thought either shows a one sided emphasis on uniqueness of things making it unamenable to any way of conceptual categorization at all, or there are fixed ways of epistemological access to an object.

Another important point that emerges here is that from the point of view of identity politics, there can be two types of identities as many philosophers including Bilgrami[11] maintains. There is on the one hand models of objective identity where objective identity refers to fixed structures of meaning that are projected upon the

[9]Ibid. p.136.

[10]I believe that this trend is unfailing even upto Gandhi who though influenced by Jaina philosophy of non-violence was a strict adherent of varna-ashrama system. B.R. Ambedkar realized that unless this orthodoxy in Hindu way of life is given up, it does not have any space for consensus and dialogue which are the true hallmarks of any democratic setup.

[10]See Bilgrami, Akeel, *Politics and The Moral Psychology of Identity*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts 2007.

[11]See Bilgrami, Akeel, *Politics and The Moral Psychology of Identity*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts 2007.

identity of a person in virtue of her caste, creed nationality and other affiliations. These structures are often unmovable and un-negotiable. Orthodox schools of Indian philosophies have tenets which are conducive to and supportive of such objective identity attributions. Subjective identities on the other hand are those which may have their origins in either the life-world or subjective inclinations or whatever but what makes them a case of subjective identity is that these identities have the approval of the subject to be reflexively attached to it. But what I want to point out in this regard is that subjective approval of any identity irrespective of its locus of formation requires a hermeneutical model where subject is recognized as a self along with all its historicitiy. This idea of self obviously has to be in stark contrast with Cartesian model of self where everything except the reflexivity of the self is contingent and therefore not considered as constitutive of it. Considering that there is a lack of epistemological models conducive to or supportive of such conceptions of entities in any of the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, there seems little possibility of any hermeneutically flexible epistemological models to emerge within orthodox Indian schools of thought.

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