

The Place of Indo-Caribbean Philosophy in the Caribbean Academy

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To raise the issue of the place of Indo-Caribbean philosophy in the Caribbean academy is indeed to take up the broader problem of the role of race and ethnicity in the life and practice of philosophy as an academic discipline. Further, it also raises the question of the role of philosophy in shaping the ways in which, and the levels of self-consciousness at which we practice our ethn racial heritages. The terms race and ethnicity are indeed slippery but nonetheless real ones. With the completion of the writing of the human genome, the biogenetic foundations of the concept of race have become even more tenuous. However, this further problematization has not lessened in anyway the social power of race and ethnicity in the everyday lives of postcolonial societies such as the Caribbean. As real social practices they still have the power to define and differentiate the worth, intelligence, and capabilities of groups of human beings by a variety of physical and cultural criteria.

As philosophers, the social reality race and ethnicity concern us, in spite of their problematic empirical foundations, because of their capabilities for shaping the formation and structure of human consciousness – an aspect of our subjectivity that is definitely of great interest to philosophy. Even though most people grow up with health identities that have been inscribed in race/ethnic discourses and practices, there are some very destructive tendencies associated with our racialized and ethnicized identities. First, they establish our identities on very firm but unequal binary or “We/They” grounds. Second, to the extent that we find it necessary to cling rigidly to these binary categories, and to the extent that we are unable to see that we are much more than these race/ethnic markers, we will affirm and deploy our ethn racial heritages in very automatic and blind ways. In the words of Lloyd Best, it is the practicing of race and ethnicity “without the luxury of negotiation, reflection or even discussion” (1999:295). Strangely, we continue to project our racialized and ethnicized identities as these pure and absolute inheritances in spite of the high levels of creolization experienced by all groups in the region.

Such automatic and unreflective practicing of inherited race/ethnic traditions can be particularly explosive when the category of the “They”, as opposed to the “We”, results in processes of othering that make some race/ethnic groups the objects of stereotyping, dehumanization, exploitation, discrimination and, most extreme, genocide. In the last of these forms of othering both body and consciousness are objects of denial and elimination.

The absence of Indo-Caribbean philosophy from the Caribbean academy cannot be separated from the operating of these practices of othering in the academic and other institutions of our societies. The same holds for the recent admittance of African and Afro-Caribbean philosophy into the class rooms of our academy. Thus the very Eurocentric form in which philosophy has been taught and practiced in the Caribbean academy reflects the history of the blind and unreflecting ways in which race and ethnicity have been asserted and deployed in our everyday lives. It is the basic argument

of this paper that rather than being a damaged and inhibited victim of this violent heritage, a vibrant Caribbean philosophy can be a major contributor to more reflective modes of living and practicing our ethnoracial heritages. However, for us to have a vibrant Caribbean philosophy it will not be enough to establish the place Afro-Caribbean philosophy in the Caribbean academy. The place of Indo-Caribbean philosophy must also be clearly and firmly established. With these two in conversation with each other, and with the Euro-Caribbean tradition, the reflective conditions would be set for the progressive deepening of mutual understanding we need to mediate our too immediate ways of practicing race and ethnicity.

With these possibilities in mind, our focus in the remainder of this paper will be on the Indo-Caribbean philosophical tradition in an effort to shake off the dross of the othering practices beneath which it has been distorted and buried for so long. The aim of this uncovering is not the disclosing of a still pure ethno-national philosophical heritage, but one that has been blocked and denied recognition in its attempts to transform and creolize itself in response to the demands of the Caribbean as site of diasporic relocation. We begin with a closer look at the specific institutions and practices of ethnoracial othering that have shape the experience of the Indo-Caribbean and made his/her philosophical heritage invisible and thus absent from the Caribbean academy.

The Heritage of Colonial Ethnoracial Practices

In the Caribbean, the period of colonial rule was the violent crucible in which our blind and extreme ways of practicing our ethnoracial heritages were forged. The legacy of this experience – white racism is still very much with us even though the colonial period has passed. White racism divided the self-consciousness of Africans by niggerizing and negrifying their identities. This imposed racial identity of “the negro” was in sharp conflict with the inherited ethno-cultural identities such as Yoruba or Akan that they brought to the region. White racism also coolietized the identity of Indians who were brought to the region as indentured laborers and thus divided their self-consciousness in a similar way. The stereotypical identity of “the coolie” contested and displaced the Hindu and Islamic identities with which they arrived. Unfortunately, it is primarily through these racialized lenses of “the negro” and “the coolie” that Afro-Caribbeans and Indo-Caribbeans continue to see each other. Both of these distorted identities were in the liminal or “They” category of European racial discourses and thus stood opposed to the European “We”. These hierarchical relations between white black and brown constituted the framework of the ethnoracial order of the colonial period.

However, as the ending of the colonial period forced us to seek a new economic order for Caribbean societies, it also challenged us to find a new race/ethnic order for the region. In the political exchanges that marked the formal ending of colonial rule, political power passed from Euro-Caribbean and colonial hands into those of a predominantly Afro-Caribbean political elite. This decision by the Europeans was probably influenced by the fact that by the time of independence this political elite was highly Christianized and very Western in outlook. Having inherited this Western-based “creole” order of ethnoracial groups, the Afro-Caribbean political elite continued many of the Anti-Indian practices

that were already integral to the order. Thus the latter continued to be imagined as primarily Christian but now with a dominant Afro-Caribbean presence. In this postcolonial ethnoracial order, the philosophical identity and heritage of Indo-Caribbeans remained just as invisible as before.

However, in the decades of the 1980's and 1990s, this postcolonial ethnoracial order began to breakdown. The primary cause of this collapse was the coming to power of political coalitions that included a substantial Indo-Caribbean presence or political parties that were predominantly Indo-Caribbean. For example, in 1986, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) defeated the People's National Movement (PNM), which had been in power in Trinidad since 1956. The PNM was a predominantly Afro-Caribbean party while the NAR was a coalition group with a substantial Indo-Caribbean presence. In 1995, the political power of Indo-Trinidadians increased further with the election of the United National Congress (UNC), a predominantly Indo-Trinidadian party led Basdeo Panday. In the 1992 elections in Guyana, the Indo-Guyanese People's Progressive Party defeated the Afro-Guyanese People's National Congress (PNC) and returned Cheddi Jagan to power after almost three decades in the role of opposition leader.

The ethnoracial significance of these political developments has been a major shift in the balance of power between these two groups and also in the cultural symbols and discourses that can now legitimate, frame and adorn the public arena. Further, this power shift has helped to stimulate an Indo-Caribbean cultural revival that has given significantly greater visibility to the Indo-Caribbean heritages of both Trinidad and Guyana. At the same time that this power shift has increased the visibility of the Indo-Caribbean cultural heritage, it has also extended and reinforced the automatic and un-reflective ways in which we have affirmed and practiced our ethnoracial identifications in the region. Thus the coming to power of Indo-Caribbeans has not ended the legacies of ethnoracial conflict, but in many ways has intensified these conflicts. Indeed, being in power has helped to solidify and make more explicit the Indo-Caribbean construction of a "We" and its specific capabilities for othering Afro-Caribbeans. In other words, we now have two better-organized and more equal ethnoracial groups competing for the control of state power. Party competition for power and jobs have now become the primary motivating factor in the production and deploying of racial stereotypes of each other. This is the current ethnoracial order that we must now attempt to change by mediating its immediacies.

It is important to note that the consequences of this shift in the political and cultural presence of Indo-Caribbeans will not be restricted to just Guyana and Trinidad. There are significant Indo-Caribbean communities in Jamaica, Surinam, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. These communities have also begun to stir and are thus making their own contributions to the passing of the Afro-Caribbean dominated race/ethnic order. But this is not all. The impact of these changes in Indo-Caribbean political and cultural power will also make themselves felt more widely throughout the region as the various protocols of the CSME regarding the free movement of people are implemented. In short, we are now challenged more than ever before to fashion a new ethnoracial order in which Afro- and Indo-Caribbean identities are de-negrified and de-coolietized, the persisting legacies of

white racism erased, discrimination between the groups reduced, and more open and egalitarian relations established.

In the building of this more culturally mediated race/ethnic order, it should be clear that there is a vital role for the Caribbean academy to play. First the social order of its campuses should reflect the changes that have been taking place in the larger society. Second, its course offerings, particularly in the humanities and the social sciences, should be such that the experiences of both Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans can be extensively examined in a wide variety of disciplines – literature, music, history, politics, sociology, and of course philosophy. Indeed much of this work of ethnoracial self-examination has already begun in many of these disciplines. But this cannot be said for philosophy. And without the contribution of philosophy our grasp of the Indo-Caribbean vision of existence will not be as complete and comprehensive as it should be, and hence less able to contribute to the more constructive mediating of the rigidities and immediacies in our race/ethnic practices. With these concerns in mind, let's turn now to uncovering and examining more closely the Indo-Caribbean philosophical heritage.

The Indian Philosophical Heritage

As I have shown in *Caliban's Reason*, Afro-Caribbean philosophy can be divided into four basic phases: 1) the African heritage (1630-1760); 2) the Afro-Christian phase (1760-1860); 3) the historicist/poeticist phase (1860-1980); and 4) the existentialist/political logicist/feminist phase (1980-present). Similarly, Indo-Caribbean philosophy can also be divided into four corresponding phases: 1) the Indian heritage (1842-1868); 2) the Indo-Christian phase (1868-1890); 3) the historicist/poeticist phase (1890-1980); and 4) the feminist phase (1980-present). As in the case of Afro-Caribbean philosophy, the emergence of a new phase of Indo-Caribbean philosophy has not meant the replacing of earlier ones, but rather the addition of new schools of thought. These phases also make very clear the extent of the mixing and thus the creolization that have taken place in these two traditions of thought. In this examination of the Indo-Caribbean philosophical tradition, we will be focusing on just the first of these four phases, the Indian heritage.

The vast majority of the Indians, who arrived in the Caribbean as indentured laborers, were the heirs to one of the oldest philosophical traditions still in existence. As carriers of this tradition they brought to the region a philosophical outlook that was quite different from those of Africans and Europeans. However, this outlook shared with the latter two a deep enmeshment in religious thought and practice. In terms of its philosophical outlook as opposed to its related religious and ritual practices, we designate this outlook as Brahmanic spiritualism. In the Caribbean academy, the dominant reading of the Brahmanic heritage has been a rather static and moribund one grounded in the orientalist gaze of the West. Ironically, but not all that surprising for a colonial society, one of the best exponents of this European view of Brahmanic spiritualism is the region's leading Indo-Caribbean writer, V.S. Naipaul.

This orientalist view, as we find it in scholars such as Hegel, Schopenhauer, McCaulay, Weber and Schweitzer, saw Brahmanic spiritualism as a static, world-rejecting discourse

that was a major obstacle to Indian modernity and should therefore be abandoned. In his well known works on India, *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul shares these readings of Brahmanic spiritualism as an exhausted pre-modern philosophical tradition that must be jettisoned. In his view, the tradition is “quietistic” and legitimates “the perfection of non-doing” (1979:22). Like Weber, Naipaul links this quietism to the doctrines of karma and rebirth. In the Indo-Caribbean context, Naipaul’s view of the inhibiting impact of Brahmanic spiritualism is most clearly developed in the fictional character of Mr. Biswas. The novel narrates his absurd search for house which also allegorizes his search for himself. Hence we get Naipaul’s conclusion that “the only hope lies in the further swift decay” of this ancient and now outmoded philosophical heritage (1979:28).

In contrast to this orientalist view, I want to suggest a more dynamic and self-transformative view of this Brahmanic heritage, a view that also sees it as still having much to contribute the problems of modern identities and to the cultural mediating of ethnoracial habits and practices. In its 3000 year history, Brahmanic spiritualism has gone through many changes in response to a host of intellectual and practical challenges. But, in spite of these changes, it has retained a central focus on the ego or the everyday empirical self that establishes us in the world and gives us our identities. As a result, the primary epistemic orientation of Indian philosophy has not been towards the producing or acquiring knowledge of material objects; rather it has been towards producing and acquiring knowledge of the human self that is quite often in search of knowledge of the material world. This self, this very present but still elusive site of human subjectivity is the primary object of concern for Brahmanic philosophy. Its mode of procedure has been a self-reflective and meditative phenomenology rather than a perceptive and empirical observation external objects. Consequently, the universalism that it has sought has been in regard to the subject rather than a universalism of the object. Brahmanic philosophy is fully engaged with the formation, maturation, crises, and eventual fulfillment of the human self. In particular, it is concerned with the question of why so few humans succeed in fulfilling the potential inherent in their subjectivity – in other words, why so few of us become genuine and fully realized selves. The attempts to answer this question have led to a focus on the “organ” of self creation – the ego. Consequently, like African philosophy, Indian philosophy can be described as an ego-critical philosophy.

In the Brahmanic tradition, the moral capabilities and limits of this ego-self were determined by our consciousness of it as a creation of the ego. In other words, this empirical self or *jivatman* was perceived as a particular structure of ego-constituted consciousness. As such it was prone to severe crises and thus the source of much unhappiness. These crises of the human ego derive in part from its dualistic or binary mode of categorizing reality. This mode of cognition not only results in misrepresentations of the world but also of self. Brahmanic spiritualism links these problems to the ego’s roots in the three *gunas*, which in turn are rooted in *Prakriti*. However, Brahmanic philosophy does not stop here. Like African philosophy, it goes on to offer a spiritual solution to these crises of the ego-genic self. This solution involves the finding of a deeper and qualitatively different center for the self than that of the ego. One that is capable of lifting the self out of its ego-based entrapment in the *gunas* and

Prakriti. For Brahmanic philosophy, this spiritual center is the *Atman*. It carries within a knowledge of Brahman, the highest reality, and is thus a truth possessing consciousness and not a truth seeking one.

Prakriti is the cosmic womb, the dynamic and ever-moving cycles of pre-conscious creative energy that are responsible for the world of material nature. It is often portrayed as including the following: earth, water, fire, air, ether, intellect and ego. *Prakriti* is usually conceptualized in contrast to *Purusha*, the very silent, unmoved mover from which the former draws its energy. Because of these qualities *Purusha* was seen as being closer to Brahman or as the world-constituting aspect of Brahman. The challenge that *Prakriti* and its *gunas* present to the human subject is a moral one. The *gunas* are specific sets of creative energies and capabilities with which *Prakriti* endows our egos for purposes of self creation. Consequently, they constitute important phases in the development of self-creating capabilities by the ego, and hence the horizons within which we feel, think and act. Thus, *The Bagavad Gita* declares that “every action is really performed by the *gunas*”, (1972:47) even though we think that we are the authors of our actions.

There are three *gunas*: *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattwa*. They are the different self creating capabilities inherited by the ego, and all three are driven by and thus in service to a strong will to survive. Guided by *tamas* this will operates at its blindest in the ego-genic project of producing the self. A *tamasic* self-consciousness is one that is really incapable of genuinely recognizing and acknowledging the independence of the other or of the world. This self-consciousness reminds us of Hegel’s description of the form in which self-consciousness first appears. In this initial appearance, the distinction between self and other is lost in a Narcissistic circularity: “the distinction is not, and self-consciousness is only motionless tautology, Ego is Ego; I am I” (1967: 219). This inability to see the other except as a part of or as an extension of oneself severely compromises the capacity for inter-subjective recognition and the ethical sociality that it produces. These difficulties of the *tamasic* self-consciousness make *tamas* the most problematic of the three *gunas* that *Prakriti* makes available to the human ego.

Rajas is the *guna* that gives to human subjects their passionate nature, their desire for pleasure, possessions and emotional comforts. Here the capacity to recognize and relate to others as independent subjects is significantly greater though by no means perfect. This increased ability for inter-subjective recognition and ethical sociality is compromised by the desire for pleasure. Thus guided by these two *gunas*, the ego is really without the ability to recognize Spirit, either in form of *Purusha* or Brahman. However, the self produced by an ego in which *rajas* is dominant over *tamas* will be a more capable one and also better adjusted to the world

Third and finally is *sattwa*, the best of the *gunas*. It represents the maturing of the ego’s self creating capabilities. *Sattwa* gives to human subjects their rational nature and their longing for knowledge. It is a truth oriented but not a truth-possessing consciousness. As such it can make one scholarly and wise. It can point the way to the overcoming of the blindness and limitations of the other two *gunas*, but cannot by itself overcome its

attachments to the limits of the intellect and reason, or completely free itself from its inter-connections with the other two. In short, it can bring us closer to gaining knowledge of *Purusha* and Brahman, but it cannot really take us all the way. Thus even when guided by the best of these *gunas* made available by *Prakriti*, the ego must fall short of finding that spiritual center within, the *Atman*, that is capable of superceding the dualistic creative codes of the *gunas*. Thus both *sattwa* and the *sattwic* self must also be surpassed. Only when guided by the creative codes of *Atman* will the self be free of the inner divisions and conflicts that come with birth via the ego. Consequently, finding the *Atman* will require the de-centering of the ego and the suspending of the activities of the *gunas*. This displacing of the ego and its *guna*-based self-creating activities is the work of spiritual disciplines such as meditation and yoga.

These in brief are the core ego-critical arguments of the philosophy of Brahmanic spiritualism. Of particular importance for the more dynamic view that I am suggesting are the hierarchical differences between the three *gunas* in relation to their ego-constituting capabilities. These differences that privileged *sattwa* point to basic internal tendencies towards processes of progressive rationalization that are inherent within the tradition. As we will see, the manifestations of these tendencies towards a *sattwic* rationalization do not support the orientalist view of Naipaul and others outlined above.

The Historical Trajectory of Brahmanic Spiritualism

We can divide the long history of this philosophy into four crucial phases: 1) the Vedic period (2000-500 BCE); 2) the post-Vedic period (500 BCE-700 CE); 3) the Vedanta period (700-1800); and the modern reformulations of the Vedanta (1800-present). The Vedic period derives its name from *The Vedas* – texts in which the ritual practices of the Brahmanic tradition were codified as well as some of its earliest philosophical expressions. Even though Brahman was conceived as the highest reality, there existed simultaneously and in constant tension with this philosophical conception, the mythic and theistic conception of spirit as a pantheon of gods and goddesses who were viewed as a governing administration, working hard to maintain the cosmic order and to uphold its moral laws. In this pantheon were found such well-known Indian deities as Varuna, Indra, Agni, and Soma. It was to these deities that the rituals and sacrifices were dedicated. This mythic and ritualized conception of Brahmanic spiritualism as a governing pantheon of deities to be worshiped was an early example of religion taking the form that Peter Berger has called a “sacred canopy”. As a canopy that envelops the religious subject, and also as structure in which the latter can participate through ritual activities, this conception moves religion closer to the dramatic and performing arts and away from philosophy.

The composition and hierarchical order between the deities that provided the crucial centers of the Brahmanic sacred canopy were not static but changed considerably overtime. Thus the rise of Indra, god of battles, over Varuna, god of the sky, has been linked to the period of war between the incoming Aryan settlers and already existing groups. These shifts in the powers of specific deities call to mind not only the similar rise to prominence of Shango, Yoruba god of thunder, in Trinidad, but also the whole mythic

framework of West African religious and philosophical thought, and thus the distinct sacred canopy that African slaves brought with them to the Caribbean. At the popular level, there have been significant exchanges around African and Indian ritual practices for the worship of deities, but very little exchange on these topics at the academic level. The work of the Indo-Guyanese scholar, Denis Bassiere is the exception that proves this rule.

But nonetheless, this mythic and ritualistic phase in which religion took the form of a sacred canopy and was closer to the dramatic and performing arts constituted the first expressions of Brahmanic spiritualism. The distinct philosophy that developed out of ongoing relations with these ritual practices were contained in *The Upanishads* – a collection of expository and non-ritualistic texts that were placed at the end of the ritualistic sections of *The Vedas*. These works contested and challenged sacrificial and theistic frameworks of the ritual orientation of the earlier sections of *The Vedas*. The Upanishads are among the very best of the early human philosophical expressions that we have on record. In them, the philosophy of Brahmanic spiritualism was given its first explicit and expository formulations, and it is here that we first encounter the sattwic sages of Indian philosophy. Although the earlier noted pattern of the simultaneous existence of personal and impersonal conceptions of Spirit are evident in these texts, the supremacy of the more abstract and impersonal Brahman as the answer to the difficulties of ego existence is not in doubt.

The second or post-Vedic period of Brahmanic spiritualism is marked not only by the emergence of an even greater number of competing views on the problems of ego existence, but also a sharpening of the divergences between them. This period is marked by the rise of Buddhism, Jainism, the resurgence of theism in the form of the worship of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. In the case of Buddhist philosophy, one of the key differences with the Brahmanic tradition was its doctrine of *Anatman* – that there was no abiding spiritual center (Atman) and the related concept of *sunyata* or emptiness. These primarily religious revolts against various aspects of Brahmanic spiritualism were followed by what Hiriyanna has called the “age of the systems”. These systems are much more philosophical in orientation and stand in relations to these religious innovations that are comparable to the relations between *The Upanishads* and the ritual sections of *The Vedas*. These systems were the core of complex schools of thought or *dsarnas*, within which there was also disagreement and debate. Of these schools or *dsarnas*, the most important were the Samkya (900 BCE), the Carvaka (?), the Vedanta (250 BCE), the Vaisesika (200 BCE), the Mimamsa (200 BCE), the Nyaya (250 CE), and the Yoga (350 CE).

What was distinctive about these systems and thus the post-Vedic period as a whole, was the much more explicit emergence of logic and epistemology as subfields that now complemented and challenged the ontology and self-reflective or phenomenological orientation of the Vedic period. In these systems, sattwic philosophers articulated in much more rigorous terms the conditions of knowledge production or *pramanas*, and made them integral parts of the enterprises of philosophical and religious thought. In turn, this epistemic shift increased the importance of critical reasoning in relation to both

perception and intuition as a revelatory faculty. As we will see, the overall impact of these religious and philosophical challenges of the post-Vedic period was the deeper rationalization of Indian thought, the intensification of the search for universals, and thus a general increase in the role of philosophy in the intellectual division of labor.

A good example of these rationalizing tendencies is the Carvaka school. Its members recognized perception as the only way to valid knowledge. From this position, they denied the epistemic validity of both logical inference and intuition as a revelatory faculty. With these rejections also came the denial of the spiritual world Brahman and the deities, and also of the *Atman* as the alternative spiritual center that is capable of delivering the ego from its difficult enmeshments in *Prakriti* and its *gunas*. This secular materialism clearly brought it into direct conflict with core teachings of Brahmanic spiritualism. Further its epistemic sensualism and its discursive skepticism were in sharp contrast to the basic epistemology of Brahmanic spiritualism.

Less extreme but certainly exhibiting the rationalizing tendencies of the period is the Nyaya school. This *dsarna* was very rationalistic in spirit and emphasized a categoric approach to the study of both self and world. It's major thinkers developed a hierarchical and well-integrated set of foundational categories for understanding the cosmic process. The most basic of these were the classes into which the world as an object of knowledge could be located. According to Hiriyanna, at the top of this hierarchy was the category of the *dravyas*, which was followed by the *gunas* (quality), *karma* (action), *samanya* (universal), *visesa* (individuality), *samavaya* (necessary relations) and *abhava* (negation), (2005:231). As should be clear, many of these categories are rationalistic re-workings of concepts found in Brahmanic spiritualism, Buddhism and Jainism. Thus the *dravyas* are comparable to the concept of *Prakriti*, but now includes time, space and most significantly the *atman* as a category. Within this rational categoricism of the Nyaya school the *atman* was first and foremost a category for representing spirituality and conscious agency, and one that was subject to rational justification. In Hiriyanna's view, the God that was recognized by the Nyaya school was "classed under *atman* and described as *paramatman* to distinguish him from *jivatman* or the empirical self" (2005:242). He also notes that "one special point about God as understood here is that his existence is established through inference and not through revelation as in the Vedanta" (2005:243). This is indeed a very revealing instance of the rational categoricism that separated the Nyaya school from Brahmanic spiritualism.

At the same time that this categoricism points to divergences from the Brahmanic tradition, it also points to interesting convergences with African categoricism as in the case of the founding categories of Bantu philosophy. These categoric foundations have been made clear in the work of scholars such as Tempels, Kagame and Sempebwa. Whether derived from the analysis of language or religious thought this foundational hierarchy of categories is organized around the notion of being as "vital force". The supreme incarnation of vital force is God, followed by its presence in the nature deities, the souls of departed ancestors, living human beings, animals and inanimate objects. All these different forms of life are linked by the interactions between the vital forces within them. These basic ontological categories are also linked to the categories into which

Bantu languages organize and place all the objects and subjects that are represented in their vocabularies. Bantu categoricism also represents a departure from more spiritually centered forms of African thought.

To grasp the significance for Indo-Caribbeans of these philosophical conflicts of the age of the systems, we must take a brief look at the Vedanta system of thought and the school that developed around it. As already noted, this school dates back to around 250 BCE with the writing of the *Vedanta Sutra* by Badarayana. The term Vedanta means the end of the Vedas both in temporal and a teleological sense. In the latter case, the end or fulfillment of *The Vedas* was the philosophy of *The Upanishads*. Thus the *Vedanta Sutra* was the start of this process of re-systematizing the ideas contained in these texts. This work of the Vedanta school produced several reformulations of the philosophical foundations of Brahmanic spiritualism as it also attempted to respond to the criticisms of the other schools. These reformulations were all based on *The Upanishads* but also making full use of the greater philosophical rigor that the systems had introduced. The monistic vision of Brahman as the absolute and all-encompassing reality as portrayed in *The Upanishads* was the basic one affirmed by the Vedanta school. It is rigorously defended against the atheism, and ontological dualism of the Samkya school, the empty conceptions of the self in Buddhist and other schools, as well as the particular interpretations given to the concepts of *Prakriti*, *Purusha*, *gunas*, *Atman* and *moska* or enlightenment, that were basic to the Indian philosophical tradition as it had developed thus far.

In addition to Badarayana, three names stand out in the forging of these Vedanta syntheses: Shankara (700 CE), Ramanuja (1017-1137), and Madhva (1199-1278). The work of Shankara was extremely important in laying these foundations. Because of the importance of his work, Schweitzer referred to Shankara as the St. Thomas Aquinas of the Brahmanic tradition. The philosophical syntheses of these men had the effect of re-establishing a more rigorous Brahmanic spiritualism as the dominant religio-philosophical system in India for the next ten centuries. Over the course of these centuries, the work of these early Vedanta thinkers continued in the writings of new thinkers such as Ramanada (1400) and Kabir 1440-1518). The latter was a poet of Islamic background who became a follower of Ramanada, and whose work would later have a profound influence on Rabindranath Tagore. This Vedanta dominance was challenged by two external invasions: the Islamic and the European (dates). It was the latter of these two invasions that produced the exporting of Indian indentured laborers to the Caribbean and also initiated a new round of philosophical rationalization and reformulation that would take this Vedanta version of Brahmanic spiritualism into its modern phase.

As in the case of the conflicts between the systems of the post-Vedic period, the philosophical and religious conflicts with European colonial rule forced the then quite old Vedanta tradition of Brahmanic spiritualism to once again make more explicit the rational and universalistic elements that it contained this time in relation to Western philosophy, science, technology and colonialism. The impact of this encounter with Europe was the decline of the *dsarna* order of Indian philosophy and the rise of what we can call the age

of the individual thinker. With regard to the philosophy of Brahmanic spiritualism, the towering figure of this post-Vedanta period is Sri Aurobindo. We can consider him the Shankara of 20th century Brahmanic philosophy. However, the foundations for Aurobindo's work were laid in the reform Brahma Samaj movement started by Ram Mohan Roy in the early 19th century. From the late 19th to the mid 20th century, this movement included outstanding poets, novelists, philosophers, religious leaders and political activists such as, Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Sen, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohatma Gandhi, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and of course Aurobindo. This movement succeeded in making a major break with both the Shankaran-Ramanujan-Ramanadan synthesis and the classic *dsarna* patterns of the Vedanta and earlier phases. Here a much more individualistic spirit is very evident.

This modern break with classic Vedanta can be seen very clearly in the many works of Aurobindo. It is evident in at least three crucial themes: 1) the anti-colonialism of works such as *The Foundations of Indian Culture*; 2) the impact of a Darwinian conception of evolution in texts such as *The Human Cycle*; and 3) the concept of a yoga-revealed supramental plane of consciousness as developed in his major work, *The Life Divine*. These works have a modern and science-conscious ring to them that established the break with classic Vedanta, and at the same time established Aurobindo as the modern embodiment of the *sattwic* individual. But in spite of this strong rational orientation, Aurobindo insisted that the problems of "terrestrial existence" required the surpassing of this *sattwic* consciousness. For him, the primary condition for the fulfilled or divine life on earth was the replacing of the *sattwic* and other forms of ego consciousness with the spiritual creativity of a supramental consciousness.

In the second half of the 20th century, the Indian tradition of thought has had to adjust not only to the still hegemonic West but also to the impact of Indian diasporic scholarship from around the globe, including the Caribbean, England, Fiji, the United States, and South Africa. In contrast to Aurobindo, these scholars have advanced the secular side of Indian thought, moving away from the Brahmanic heritage and drawing on Marxist, psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, and other traditions of the West. This group of scholars includes figures such as V.S. Naipaul, Gyatri Spivak, Amartya Sen, Ashis Nandy, Vijay Prasad, Karl Torabully, Brinda Mehta and many others.

This in brief is the history of the major transformations of the Indian philosophical heritage of Indo-Caribbeans. It is the counterpart of the history of the African philosophical heritage of Afro-Caribbeans, and the history of the European philosophical heritage of Euro-Caribbeans. The many schools or *dsarnas* of Indian philosophy, the intense debates within and between them all point to dynamic tendencies toward a progressive rationalization that conflict with the static orientalist view of this tradition. Consequently, we need to rethink our view of the Indian philosophical heritage of Indo-Caribbeans. However, because of the lingering impact of our colonial experience, we have not done this yet. Further, the Caribbean academy has not yet succeeded in putting the above three histories in an open and equitable dialogue that would reveal the unique contributions of each to the formation and problems of human self-consciousness. It has not taught the works of the great figures noted in our review of the Indian heritage. Only

recently has it begun the teaching of the African philosophical heritage. This heritage is even older than the Indian as Africa is the birthplace of humankind. Indeed, through modern genetics it is now possible to trace the pattern of migration of the people from Africa who became the first settlers of India. There is much work to be done on the long and unique history of the African philosophical heritage if the needed dialogues and exchanges are to take place.

The Pattern of Blocked Dialogical Exchanges

In spite of the incompleteness in our account of the history of the African philosophical heritage, the many points of unexplored dialogical exchange between these two traditions should already be clear. As I showed in *Caliban's Reason*, pre-colonial African philosophy had a relationship with religion that was quite similar to the one we have noted in the case of Indian philosophy. The African philosophical tradition was also an ego-critical one. It recognized clearly the problems, excesses, and limitations of an ego-based subjectivity. Further, like the Indian tradition, the African also offered a spiritual solution to these problems that it associated with ego existence. For example, in the case of the Akan, the spiritual center that must displace the ego as the new and alternative site of self creation is the Okra. Among the Yoruba, it is the Ori/Emi. In short, both share the notion of a second and spiritual genesis as a necessary condition for the full flowering of the human being as a moral subject. A comparable view of the human condition is also to be found in the Euro-Christian heritage, and even in the Platonic myth of the cave. Given our presents concerns with identity and identity politics, revisiting these similar but different views of the human subject that are rooted in our ethnoracial traditions can only be a contribution to the problems of mediating our race/ethnic practices more constructively.

Another striking but also unexplored area of comparison between these three traditions are the different times and ways in they have had to handle the tensions and conflicts that emerged from the simultaneous existence of abstract philosophical conceptions of Spirit and the more mythic/theistic ones that were often the anchors of sacred canopies. The different identities and histories of these philosophical traditions cannot be separated from the specific ways in which these intertextual relations were worked out. Dialogues around issues of such great philosophical potential have to large extent been inhibited by colonial patterns of racial inscription. These blocked dialogues have restricted the dynamic tendencies of the Indian and African philosophical traditions to redefine and reformulate themselves so that they can respond and adapt more creatively to their diasporic Caribbean context.

Finally, there are the blocked and unexplored dialogues around the specific spiritual disciplines that can aid the displacing of the everyday ego, the discovery of the Atman or Okra within, and thus facilitate the desired second genesis. In the Indian tradition, we have seen that ascetic practices along with yoga and meditation were the main spiritual disciplines for de-centering the ego and increasing spiritual awareness. In the African tradition, the primary disciplines for ego displacement and the growing of a spiritual consciousness have been ascetic practices and the use of drumming to facilitate entry into

trance states which are more open to the presence of Spirit than ordinary ego states. This spiritual use of drumming is also found among the Dravidian heritage of India, which may in fact be closer to the culture of the Africans who initially populated India. An important beginning in this area has been made by Muata Ashby. He has been comparing classical Egyptian and Indian forms of meditation. In terms of deepening mutual understanding and of culturally mediating our post-colonial practice of race and ethnicity more sustained and open exchanges on the meaning of these practices cannot but help the project of building a new ethnoracial order.

These examples of blocked dialogues around issues of similarities and differences between the African and Indian philosophical heritages suggest the kinds conversations and courses that must be a part of the Caribbean academy in the years ahead. These two traditions have initiated conversations in the past but they have either been racially restricted or failed to sustain themselves. Thus within the larger Africana tradition, we have instances of scholars reaching out to Indian scholars, but never really being able to establish and sustain the exchanges. Thus from the 19th and early 20th century, the efforts of the African American, WEB DuBois and the Haitian scholar, Antenor Firmin come to mind. In his novel, *Dark Princess*, DuBois explores the possibility of Afro-Indian solidarity around issues of racism and anti-colonialism. DuBois was also a great admirer of the Indian novelist and poet, Rabindranath Tagore. The title of his autobiographical work, *Dusk of Dawn* was borrowed from Tagore. In his classic *The Equality of the Human Races*, Firmin extends his hand to India in making his responses to the arguments of Arthur Gobineau and others for the inequality of the human races.

In the work of CLR James, we have one of the more sustained attempts at engaging India and the Indo-Caribbean experience. In his novel, *Minty Alley*, his book, *Party Politics in the West Indies*, and in essays and newspaper articles, James explored both the significance of India for the anti-colonial and socialist struggles as well as the racialized patterns of interaction between Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans. Hence we get his interest in the figures Gandhi and Nehru. James' treatment of the racialized patterns of interaction is mediated by his class discourse, and the historicist ontology that supports it. He grasped Indo-Caribbeans through the same historicist lens that he grasped Afro-Caribbeans, Africans and Indians. That is through the class and nationalist projects that they were in the course of undertaking. In James' historicist perspective, there was really no place for the spiritual conceptions of the individual that were so central to the pre-colonial heritages of both Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans. This is clear for example in his introduction to Ron Ramdin's, *From Chattel Slavery to Wage Earner*. James viewed Indo-Caribbeans primarily as insurrectionary oppressed workers whose self-organizing activities were making their own unique contributions to the rising tide of anti-colonial and socialist revolts against Western capitalism. Viewed in this way, Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans became comrades in arms who, in sharing the identity of Caliban, made their negritized and coolietized identities secondary and their pre-colonial ones tertiary. It was in this insurrectionary and class-oriented manner that James was able to move beyond the automatic practicing of race and ethnicity that was normal for Caribbean societies.

However, as Matthew Quest has pointed out, this strategy of challenging and discursively mediating ethnoracial practices did not completely free James of inherited prejudices and stereotypical views of Indo-Caribbeans. In spite of the major advances his position represented, there was still a sense of distance and incomplete understanding in James' accounts. This lack, I suggest, has everything to do with James' failure to really grasp and understand the importance of the pre-colonial Brahmanic heritage in the everyday lives of Indo-Caribbeans. Precluded by his particular class perspective, James did not engage in any profound way this dimension of the identity and philosophical inheritance of Indo-Caribbeans. It was as though that phase had been erased and surpassed by the demands of the struggles against colonialism and capitalism. This failure to engage the pre-colonial religious and philosophical heritage of Indo-Caribbeans parallels a corresponding failure on James' part to really engage the pre-colonial religious and philosophical heritage of Africans and Afro-Caribbeans. Thus in *Caliban's Reason*, I pointed out that James was not particularly engaged by pre-modern philosophies whether they were Greek, Chinese, Japanese African or Indian. It was as though the negrification and the coolietization of African and Indian identities by capitalism marked a radical surpassing of these traditional identities. From that point on James ceased to see their identities as being defined by these inherited traditions. Rather, he saw them as being defined primarily by the particular socio-historical projects that they undertook to resist and negate their racialization and economic exploitation. Consequently, none of the blocked or unexplored dialogues noted above were engaged and unblocked by James' class approach to the ethnoracial problems of Caribbean societies.

Along with the work of Muata Ashby, another promising Africana attempt at engaging the pre-colonial heritage of India is the work of Bhagwan Ra Afrika. Indeed it is possible to read his work as a 20th century reformulation of the Vedanta theory of the ego that speaks directly to contemporary issues of race, ethnicity and ecology. In the place of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa* as the three crucial stages in the maturing of the ego's self producing capabilities, he identifies seven different stages. Each one is based on a specific type self-defining move by the ego and as a group Ra Afrika locates them between the points he designates as "pre-egoic" and "transegoic". Thus there is a significant shift from the classic Vedanta focus on the specific nature of the creative registers used by the ego in producing a self to the specific nature of the initial self-positing that grounds its activities of self production.

Ra Afrika's seven stages of ego maturation are: 1) the physio-centric stage in which the ego posits the body as foundational and so produces a "body self". This stage comes the closes to the *tamasic* stage of Vedanta theory. 2) The continuity-centered stage in which the developing ego makes the continuity of identity foundational and produces a self in search of permanence. 3) The possessive stage in which the ego makes the having of possessions central and so produces a "me" oriented self that is very attached to possessions. This is closest to the classic *rajasic* stage of ego development. 4) The emotio-centric stage in which the ego now posits the emotions and its creative abilities as foundational and creates a self that overestimates its creations and the importance of its emotions. 5) The socio-centric stage in which the ego posits as foundational the images of itself that are reflected in the looks and actions of others. At this stage, the ego could

make into an absolute the racial, gendered or other social looks of dominant others and produce a self that is ethnocentric, class, nation, or gender centered. Like the other selves that preceded this social group, Ra Afrika sees them also inadequate and mistaken attempts at self production by a still maturing ego. 6) The ratio-centric stage is the one in which reason is taken to be foundational and clearly corresponds to the *sattwic* stage of the Vedanta tradition. 7) The eco-centric stage is the one in which the ego capacity for initial self positing has matured to the point where it is able to genuinely identify with and also recognize the autonomy of “all sentient beings as well as nature” (199-:104). This mature capacity produces the ecologically aware self that will minimize the killing of others in order to satisfy its needs. As in the case of the Vedanta theory of the ego, at each of these stages the ego will dig itself in convinced that it is at its highest level of maturity. Another important point of similarity with the Vedanta tradition is that none of these different stages of ego development can completely separate themselves from the influences of the earlier ones but must live in a dynamic and competitive equilibrium with them. Consequently, the transition to a higher phase does not mean the dissolution and cessation of functioning of the previous ones.

The eco-centric stage is for Ra Afrika the highest stage of ego maturity. Like *sattwa* in the Vedanta tradition, it is for him the ideal stage from which to begin the meditative practices that will lead to the displacing of this whole problematic but necessary process of ego development and its correlated selves. Its displacement opens the way to the transegoic stages that will allow the Atman to emerge as the new center that will incorporate and reorganized all of this development into a spiritual self. Consequently, both the need and the justification for surpassing without denying the phases of strong ethnoracial identification are quite clear in Ra Afrika’s reformulation of the classic Vedanta theory of the ego. At the same time, it is good indicator of the kinds of dialogic exchanges that need to take place between the traditions of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean philosophy.

On the Indian/Indo-Caribbean side, the pattern of dialogues started but not sustained can also be observed. Thus the journal *Africa Quarterly*, published by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations has been an important site of Afro-Indian dialogue. Several well-known Caribbean scholars such as historian, Fitzroy Baptiste have published in this journal, at the same time that we have Indian scholars writing on African affairs. Of particular interest are articles by Indian scholars analyzing African sage philosophy or defending it from the Western colonial gaze. These are interesting beginnings but they have not been sustained and taken to a level where they have really had the effect of deepening mutual understanding between Africans and Indians. Closer to home has been the already noted work of Denis Bassiere. His work focused on the large number of Afro-Guyanese women who have patronized the Indian goddess Kali in search of solutions to problems with childbirth. These studies produced interesting cases inter-cultural exchange and borrowing between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese. But here again the study of such exchanges at the popular level have not been sustained and taken to the level where they could begin to unblock some of the dialogues that are not taking place at the academic level.

As an attempt to break this pattern of blocked dialogues, the work of Karl Torabully is very important. He is well known for his concept of “coolitude” which was developed and articulated in conversation with Césaire’s concept of negritude. Indeed the dialogue between Torabully and Césaire has been both intensive and extensive, and points to similarities in the processes of de-coolietizing and de-negrifying Indo- and Afro-Caribbean identities. Unfortunately Torabully’s work is not well known among Afro-Caribbean scholars and is a very good example of an important dialogue that has not been picked up and sustained.

Finally, another important attempt from the Indian side to break this pattern of racially restricted dialogue is the work of Brinda Mehta. She is well known for her attempts to build a new line of exchange around re-valORIZING the figure of the Dougla – the offspring of an Indian and an African. In this endeavour, Mehta has developed an original complex Dougla poetics, which is highly critical of purist conceptions of ethnoracial heritages and argues for a more realistic recognition of levels of creolization that have in fact taken place in Afro- and Indo-Caribbean communities. Mehta goes on to suggest that this more realistic recognition of patterns of mixing and creolization can be best articulated through the development of a poetic discourse on the meaning and significance of the Dougla identity. This identity has been the site for the displacement of some of the deepest racial fears and prejudices of the major ethnoracial groups of the region. Thus its revalorization has great potential for the project of changing the current ethnoracial order. But the resistance to Mehta’s Dougla poetics has been quite strong and once again has limited the potential of an important site of dialogue.

The Historicist/Poeticist Phase

In contrast to this lack of dialogic exchange in regard to their pre-colonial heritages, are the extensive exchanges that have taken place in the historicist/poeticist and feminist phases. Indeed most of the substantive dialogues that have taken place between Indo- and Afro-Caribbean scholars have been around issues arising from these two phases. Thus it is primarily around issues of race and secondarily those of gender that these exchanges have occurred. Here again the work of Brinda Mehta has been very important. Her award winning, *Diasporic Dislocations* is at the moment *the* critical work on Indo-Caribbean Feminism. A significant portion of this literature is historical and ethnographic, describing in detail the ethnoracial experiences of both groups. A significant portion of this scholarship is imaginative, taking the form of fictional, poetic and other literary accounts of Indo- Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean experiences of loss through coolietization and niggerization as well as experiences of recovery. Further, a good portion of this literature is defensive, reinforcing ethnoracial boundaries, affirming purist conceptions of race/ethnic identities, while at the same time negativizing and devaluing the identities of the other. We cannot examine this phase in detail here, or the virtual absence of dialogue between the Afro-Christian and Indo-Christian phases. The most that I can do is to suggest that these same race/ethnic dynamics that have generated so much heated dialogue in the historicist/poeticist phase, have also been major blinders contributing to the non-recognition of the importance of the pre-colonial and Christian phases in the formation and creolization of both Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans.

In short, the above examples strongly suggest that in the dialogues that have in fact taken place between Afro- and Indo-Caribbeans have been overwhelmingly of the racialized type with only a very small number devoted to the mutual exploring of each other's pre-colonial and colonial religious and philosophical heritages. From the point of view of breaking automatic and non-reflective ways of practicing race and ethnicity this is indeed unfortunate. For this type of deeper mutual understanding is an activity that can provide valuable discursive resources for culturally mediating and making less automatic our ethnoracial responses to each other.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has been an attempt to show that, in contrast to the orientalist view, the Indian philosophical heritage is a rich and dynamic one in which all of the major concerns of philosophy can be found, including the capacity for progressive rationalization and self-transformation. This creative dynamism of the Indian heritage constitutes a very important foundation for grasping the possibilities and potential of an Indo-Caribbean philosophy. Further, we have tried to show how the patterns of racial inscription between this and the other two traditions have inhibited this creative dynamism and have so far allowed only a fragmented ethnoracial reformulation of Brahmanic spiritualism within the Caribbean as a diasporic context. This unsatisfactory state of Indo-Caribbean philosophy can be significantly changed by the removing of these racist fetters and letting the flow of dialogue proceed in less inhibited fashion. In this work of philosophical change the Caribbean academy has a vital role to play as it can offer the appropriate space in which new ethnoracial and dialogical relations can emerge between Afro- and Indo-Caribbean philosophical traditions. These new relations, by making ethnoracial practices more reflective, should not only make us more honest about existing levels of creolization in both traditions but also help to deepen and expand them.