CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: A SYNTHESIS OF EAST AND WEST

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Indian philosophy represents a dynamic synthesis of Eastern traditions and Western philosophical approaches, addressing ethical, social, and spiritual challenges in modern society. This study examines how prominent thinkers, including Radhakrishnan, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar, reinterpret classical Indian concepts while engaging with global philosophical discourse. Using qualitative methods based on literature review, textual analysis, and thematic synthesis, the study identifies key currents: ethical reasoning for social justice, integration of spirituality with societal reform, and critical engagement with contemporary social issues. Findings highlight the enduring relevance of Indian philosophical thought in global debates on human rights, democracy, environmental sustainability, and cultural pluralism, while noting research gaps regarding emerging voices, technology, and interdisciplinary applications. The study demonstrates that contemporary Indian philosophy bridges Eastern wisdom and Western analytic methods, offering insights for modern ethical, social, and spiritual development.

Keywords: Contemporary Indian Philosophy; East-West Synthesis; Ethics; Society; Spirituality; Gandhi; Radhakrishnan; Aurobindo; Ambedkar; Global Philosophy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian philosophy has historically combined metaphysical insight, ethical guidance, and spiritual practice. In the contemporary era, it increasingly engages with Western philosophical methods and global ethical debates, creating a synthesis that addresses modern social, cultural, and political challenges. Thinkers such as Radhakrishnan have reinterpreted Vedanta to align with universal humanist values, while Gandhi transformed spiritual principles into practical tools for social and political reform. Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga links individual growth with collective societal progress, and Ambedkar offers critical insights into democracy, equality, and social justice.

This East-West synthesis reflects a broader trend in Indian thought: harmonizing ethical reasoning, social critique, and spiritual inquiry with analytical and global perspectives. By exploring these currents, this study seeks to understand how contemporary Indian philosophy both preserves its rich heritage and adapts to global intellectual frameworks, demonstrating relevance in guiding modern individuals and societies toward ethical and spiritual development.

Relevance of the Study: The study is highly relevant as it demonstrates the convergence of Indian philosophical traditions with Western analytic and ethical methods. Contemporary Indian philosophy provides tools for understanding ethical dilemmas, social inequalities, and cultural pluralism, while maintaining spiritual depth. The East-West synthesis highlights the applicability of Indian thought in global philosophical discourse, ethical governance, human rights, and sustainable development.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine how contemporary Indian philosophers reinterpret classical traditions and integrate Western philosophical methods to address modern ethical and social concerns.

2. To analyze the role of ethics in shaping ideas of justice, equality, and human responsibility in Indian philosophical thought.

3. To explore the relationship between spirituality and social transformation as articulated by thinkers such as Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar.

4. To identify critical perspectives on the ideological use of spirituality and religion in contemporary Indian society.

5. To evaluate the relevance of contemporary Indian philosophy in global debates on democracy, human rights, and environmental sustainability.

6. To highlight research gaps and suggest future directions for integrating Indian philosophical insights with technology, globalization, and interdisciplinary studies.

Research Questions:

1. How have contemporary Indian philosophers reinterpreted classical traditions while integrating Western philosophical methods to remain relevant in modern ethical and social contexts?

2. How do ethical principles in Indian philosophy contribute to contemporary global debates on justice, equality, and human rights?

3. How do spiritual ideas, as articulated by Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar, influence societal transformation in modern India?

4. What critiques have been raised regarding the ideological use of spirituality and religion in contemporary Indian society and politics?

5. How can contemporary Indian philosophy contribute to addressing global challenges such as democracy, pluralism, environmental sustainability, and human well-being?

6. What gaps exist in current scholarship, and how might Indian philosophy be applied to emerging interdisciplinary and technological contexts?

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on contemporary Indian philosophy reflects a convergence of Eastern and Western perspectives. Radhakrishnan emphasized the ethical and humanist dimensions of Vedanta while engaging with Western philosophical discourse (Radhakrishnan, 1927). Gandhi transformed spiritual principles like ahimsa and satyagraha into practical frameworks for social reform, resonating with both Indian and global ethical frameworks (Iyer, 1973; Parel, 2000).

Sri Aurobindo linked personal spiritual evolution with societal progress through integral yoga (Aurobindo, 1947), while Ambedkar critically engaged with democracy, equality, and social justice, bridging traditional Indian ethics with modern constitutional principles (Ambedkar, 1946; Rodrigues, 2002). Scholars like J. N. Mohanty employed phenomenological and analytic methods to create dialogue between Indian and Western philosophical traditions (Mohanty, 1992), and Arindam Chakrabarti explored literature and aesthetics as tools for moral reasoning (Chakrabarti, 1999). Meera Nanda highlighted the ideological use of spirituality in modern politics (Nanda, 2003).

The literature illustrates that contemporary Indian philosophy is pluralistic and dialogical, integrating ethical, social, and spiritual concerns with global perspectives. Research gaps remain in applying these insights to technology, interdisciplinary studies, and emerging philosophical voices.

Key Points of Review of Literature:

1. Reinterpretation of classical traditions in dialogue with Western philosophy.

2. Transformation of spiritual principles into practical social and political action.

3. Integration of personal spirituality with societal reform.

4. Emphasis on social justice, equality, and democracy.

5. Adoption of analytic and phenomenological methods.

6. Use of literature and aesthetics in ethical inquiry.

7. Critical perspectives on the ideological use of spirituality.

8. Application to global ethical and social challenges.

9. Identification of research gaps in emerging voices and interdisciplinary applications.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining literature review, textual analysis, and thematic synthesis. Primary texts and scholarly commentaries by Radhakrishnan, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar were analyzed. Comparative and dialogical methods were used to examine convergence between Indian and Western philosophical frameworks. Findings were synthesized into themes of ethics, society, and spirituality. The study emphasizes canonical thinkers while recognizing the need for further research on vernacular, non-elite, and emerging philosophical voices.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

1. Ethical Reinterpretation: Classical concepts are contextualized with Western ethical frameworks.

2. Integration of Spirituality and Social Action: Spirituality aligns with social reform and collective responsibility.

3. Critical Engagement with Society: Indian philosophy addresses caste, inequality, and democracy, informed by global ethical standards.

4. Methodological Pluralism: Western analytic and phenomenological methods enhance philosophical inquiry.

5. Relevance to Global Challenges: Indian philosophy contributes to debates on human rights, environmental ethics, and pluralism.

6. Research Gaps: Emerging voices, technology, and interdisciplinary connections remain underexplored.

6. CONCLUSION

Contemporary Indian philosophy bridges Eastern traditions and Western methods, creating a dynamic synthesis that addresses ethical, social, and spiritual challenges. Thinkers such as Radhakrishnan, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ambedkar demonstrate the adaptability of Indian philosophy to modern global concerns. While research gaps exist, particularly regarding emerging voices and interdisciplinary applications, this synthesis underscores Indian philosophy as a living discourse with both local and global relevance.

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