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## Intellectual India: Reason, Identity, Dissent

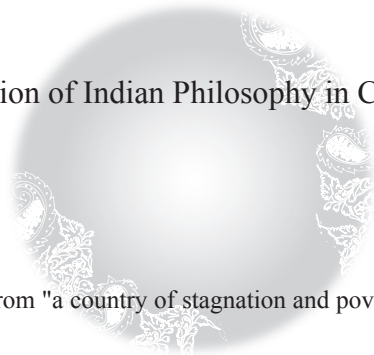
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# The Center for the Study of Contemporary India, Ryukoku University

## The Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India



The image of India has recently shifted from "a country of stagnation and poverty" to "a country of great power" as a result of its growing economic strength.

India has realized this remarkable economic development primarily because of its relatively stable "democratic" politics. What interests us is that the norms and morals that maintain the Indian economy and politics reflect traditional Indian thought and philosophical concepts such as *Satya* (truth), *Dharma* (morality or duty), and *Ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), which have been formed during India's long history.

Our project attempts to integrate the knowledge and materials on Indian philosophy and Buddhism accumulated during the 370-year history of Ryukoku University with the new findings of contemporary India studies, focusing on the "Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India". To that end, we opened the Center for the Study of Contemporary India (RINDAS), in collaboration with the National Institutes for the Humanities, for five years from April of 2010 through March of 2014.

Unit 1 Politics, Economy and Philosophy of Contemporary India

Unit 2 Social Movements in Modern India Across Borders

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## Intellectual India: Reason, Identity, Dissent

Jonardon Ganeri



## Intellectual India: Reason, Identity, Dissent

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It is a fact made evident by the increasingly multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial nature of modern societies that each of us has access to multiple sources of identity, and it follows that you can no longer think of your identity as something merely given by birth but must see it rather as something you actively and deliberately choose. What resources are available to an individual in making these sorts of choice? My talk is an analysis of that question. The argument of the talk is that one's identity—by which I mean the aspects of oneself (individual, moral, political, intellectual, aesthetic or religious, one's class, gender or vocation, one's interests, family or ethnicity, and much else besides) that one values and endorses valuing—is a work of reason. Using theory retrieved from India, my claim will be that identities are fashioned from exercises of reason as derivation from exemplary and paradigmatic cases, that it is procedures of adaptation and substitution from what I will call “local norms” which is distinctive of the rational formation of an identity.

I will talk about five interrelated themes. In the first, I examine the concept of public reason, that is the modalities of reasoning in multi-participant environments where the aim is to reach a consensus. I stress that the emergence of consensus does not require that all the participants share common background values, but only that the background resources of each participant supply them with the necessary tools to engage in public deliberation. In the second, I look at a distinctive model of reasoning, one I find to be wide-spread in much Indian rational discourse. This is an adaptive model according to which exemplary cases provide local standards of evaluation, which then spread and generalize their normative potential. In the third, I stress the importance of dissent within a model of deliberative reasoning, and the problem I try to address is to locate those features of the models of public and practical reasoning, as sketched in the first two themes, which make dissent possible within Indian traditions of discussion. In the fourth theme I look at some ways in which the bearing of reason on identity has been conceived in Indian intellectual history, focussing on conceptions of the self and its moral identity, and I argue that these historical conceptions supply further resources, to be used creatively and adaptively in the fashioning of modern identities. The fifth theme I consider is how a modern

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intellectual should make use of past cultures of reasoning and identity-formation more generally.

It is my belief that the question posed in this talk is one which is internal to the Indian theory itself, and governs the nature of its development. My firm conviction is that contemporary debates about global governance and cosmopolitan identities can benefit from resources drawn from Indian discussion of public and practical reason, resources that have been developed in circumstances of intercultural pluralism and with an emphasis on consensual resolution of conflict. One of my broader aims is to demonstrate that parties with conceptions of the good defined by religious affiliation can nevertheless enter into an overlapping consensus; that is, that a diversity of religious affiliation need not be an obstacle to participation in democratic secular governance. Here my examination of the resources made available by India's intellectual past is to be seen as a case-study of a general phenomenon, and similar case-studies of other intellectual cultures in both Asia and the west, with due attention to *their* specificities and nuances, can and should be undertaken.

## The Reach and Resources of Reason

India has a long and multi-faceted culture of argumentation and public reasoning.<sup>1</sup> In recent work, Amartya Sen has sought to provide the history of this culture with a global context.<sup>2</sup> Public reasoning is fundamental to both democratic politics and secular constitutional arrangements, and it is, he argues, no accident that India, with its extensive traditions of tolerance and the admission of dissenting voices in public discourse, should have deep democratic and secular instincts. This is something, Sen suggests, which more narrowly sectarian understandings of India have lost sight of, and he recommends that we keep in mind figures such as the Indian emperors Aśoka and Akbar, both of whom strongly encouraged public debate and respect for the heterodox, and also internal voices of dissent like the Hindu atheist Jāvāli, so vividly depicted in the epic *Rāmāyana*. Sen insists that such individuals are as much the precursors of a modern Indian identity as any other figure drawn from Indian history. It is therefore a mistake to think of democracy and secularism as western

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<sup>1</sup> See Esther A. Solomon, *Indian Dialectics* (Ahmedabad: B. J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1978), 2 volumes; Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Jonardon Ganeri, *Indian Logic: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Allen Lane 2005, London: Penguin 2006).

values which India has latterly embraced, for “public reasoning is central to democracy, [and] part of the global roots of democracy can indeed be traced to the tradition of public discussion that received much encouragement in both India and China from the dialogic commitment of Buddhist organisation”.<sup>3</sup> The demonstrably global origin of cultures of public reasoning not only undermines any thought that the west has a distinctive claim upon liberal values, but also, as importantly, it undercuts arguments that there are things called “Asian values” which are antithetical to ideas of democracy, secularism and human rights.<sup>4</sup> There are no “cultural boundaries” in the reach of reasons or in the availability of values like tolerance and liberty.<sup>5</sup>

Another central idea in Sen’s work has been that reason is *before* identity, meaning that each of us is free to reason about what is of value and significance to us in whatever situations we find ourselves, that neither religion nor community nor tradition imposes upon us an identity fixed in advance.<sup>6</sup> There is a relationship between identity and freedom, because a full sense of agency involves not only “control over decisions” but also “the freedom to question established values and traditional priorities”,<sup>7</sup> including the freedom to decide, if one chooses, that religious or communitarian affiliations are of less significance to one than one’s literary, political or intellectual commitments. So Sen says:

We have choice over what significance to attach to our different identities. There is no escape from reasoning just because the notion of identity has been involved.<sup>8</sup>

A very astute analysis of the concept of identity in play is supplied by Akeel Bilgrami. He distinguishes between subjective and objective aspects of identity, where one’s subjective identity consists in those among one’s characteristics which one values and endorses valuing in a relatively non-revisable manner, while the objective aspects of one’s identity are such as those deriving from one’s biological inheritance.<sup>9</sup> The ‘objective’ aspects will be less important to my discussion than those for which a

<sup>3</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 182. On Buddhist theory, see chapter 3 below.

<sup>4</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, pp. 134–7. See also chapters 15 and 16 below.

<sup>5</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 280.

<sup>6</sup> Amartya Sen, *Reason Before Identity: The Romanes Lecture of 1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 352.

<sup>9</sup> Akeel Bilgrami, “Note Towards the Definition of ‘Identity’,” in Jyotirmaya Sharma and A. Raghuramajaru eds., *Grounding Morality: Freedom, Knowledge and the Plurality of Cultures* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), pp. 43–59.

notion of rational endorsement is constitutive: I am interested here in the processes through which one fashions a sense of self through the ways one reasons about which values to endorse.

Reasoning has centre-stage both in shaping individual identities and in deliberating about public goods, and in seeking to give structure and substance to those deliberations, the whole of India's intellectual past is available, a past that has been deeply international and profoundly inter-religious. Sen finds in Rabindranath Tagore's assertion that "the idea of India militates itself against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others" two thoughts in tandem, one that opposes the idea of India as a mere federation of separate and alienated religious communities, the other opposing an isolationist conception of India in the world.<sup>10</sup> In the global circulation of ideas, India has always been a major player, and the combination of "internal pluralism" and "external receptivity" has fashioned for India a "spacious and assimilative Indian identity."<sup>11</sup>

I admire much in Sen's argument, and what I will say will for the most part agree with and develop the important considerations he has brought out. However, while rightly emphasising India's argumentative cultures and historical accommodation of dissenting voices, the lack of detail in his description of those traditions is striking. Despite its title, there is in *The Argumentative Indian* little mention of any actual analyses of public reasoning in India, no reference, for example to seminal works on dialectic and argumentation such as the Buddhist *Elements of Dialogue* (*Kathāvatthu*), the *Nyāya-sūtra* of Gautama, or Śrīharṣa's radical critique in his *Amassed Morsels of Refutation* (*Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya*). Still less is there any significant description of the resources of practical reason in India's intellectual past, or of the ways in which selfhood is understood as fashioned and not found. Sen's understanding of the "reach" of reason, of the utility of critical public discussion, and of rationality in human psychology, hardly makes reference to India's long tradition of thought about these topics. This is puzzling. It is as if the mere fact of this culture of argumentation is sufficient for Sen, that the substance of that culture is irrelevant. Or else it is as if Sen presumes *a priori* that the substance must coincide in all important respects with the substance as it features in contemporary work on political and social theory. In short, while Sen speaks freely about exemplary *political* figures like Aśoka and Akbar, he is largely silent about the *intellectual* figures who have provided India with its theoretical resources and self-understandings. Sen observes with decisive clarity how a false contrast between the intellectual traditions

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<sup>10</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 349.

<sup>11</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 346.



of India and the west is brought about by the biases in the respective histories that are told, that:

In comparing Western thoughts and creations with those in India, the appropriate counterpoints of Aristotelian or Stoic or Euclidean analyses are not the traditional beliefs of the Indian rural masses or of the local wise men but the comparably analytical writings of, say, Kauṭilya or Nāgārjuna or Āryabhaṭa. ‘Socrates meets the Indian peasant’ is not a good way to contrast the respective intellectual traditions.<sup>12</sup>

What I find astonishing, though, is that this is the only time Sen mentions Nāgārjuna in the whole book, and of the many great Indian intellectuals who have thought so long and so hard about reason, theoretical, practical and public, Nāgārjuna is lucky in getting a mention at all—no Nyāya philosopher is mentioned, for example, and the word “nyāya” is not even in the index.<sup>13</sup> Profoundly aware of the pitfalls, Sen seems nevertheless to fall into them.

Misleading impressions aside, the significant danger here is that a liberal secularism is made to win too easily. The mere suggestion that one should reason more and better might seem to fail to engage at anything other than an abstract admonitory level; it might sound more like enthusiasm than practical advice. This is the deeper worry that motivates attacks on the Enlightenment’s appeal to reason, an anxiety more serious simply than that ‘reason’ has so often been abused for totalitarian ends. What a proper response to that worry requires is a detailed engagement with the resources of reason in India as they are actually in play or can be brought into play. My proposal, in other words, is that the focus needs to shift from the idea of *reach* to the idea of *resources*, in thinking about the place of reason in the fashioning of identities.

The cause of Sen’s silence is, I think, that his primary interest is in provisions of the secular state as such, and not in what it is to be a participant within it. A secular state tries to work out how to structure its policies and institutions in such a way that there is *symmetry* in the state’s dealings with any particular group, religion, class or

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<sup>12</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 158.

<sup>13</sup> The term ‘nyāya’ has three distinct meanings. It denotes a school of philosophy committed to the use of evidence-based methods of inquiry, including observation, inference, and also testimony in so far as it is grounded in verifiable trustworthiness. The term also signifies a particular five-step pattern of demonstrative reasoning, which I will describe in chapter 1. In a rather different sense, ‘nyāya’ refers to a set of heuristic principles to guide practical reason. In his recent study, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), Sen does mention ‘nyāya’, but has in mind only this third sense. The heuristic principles are collected by G. A. Jacob, *A Handful of Popular Maxims Current in Sanskrit Literature (Laukika-nyāyāñjali)* (Bombay: Tukaram Javaji, 1900–1904), and by V. S. Apte, “A Collection of Popular Sanskrit Maxims,” in his *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Revised and Enlarged*, Appendix E (Kyoto: Rinsen Publishers, 1957).

individual. The appropriate model of reason here is the one which John Rawls seeks to capture with his use of the term “public reason.”<sup>14</sup> Public reason is the mode of deliberation that brings people of diverse philosophical, religious and moral conviction into a state of rational accord with respect to a matter of mutual concern and common interest. In a pluralistic community tolerant of difference, it is essential that the resources, reach and requirements of public reason be properly understood, and no such understanding is acceptable that gives discriminate advantage to the particular view of any one of the parties in the deliberation. For a straightforward if overly simple example of the workings of public reason, consider the following account of the process leading to the preparation of a common communique at a recent meeting of the G8 industrialised countries: “Acting under the policy parameters set by their political masters, ... the job (of the negotiating officials or “sherpas”) is to move words and phrases in and out of square brackets. If a phrase stays in square brackets, it is not agreed. If it comes out of brackets, consensus is reached.”<sup>15</sup>

But the view from the side of the institutions and the state is blind to the question that is most pressing for the participants themselves. That is the question of how a specific individual, whose access to resources of reason has a particular shape and character, finds *within* those resources the materials to engage in acts of public and practical reason. How, for example, does such an individual find their way to a conception of deliberative thinking about the public good? How do they form a conception of the rationality and entitlements of *other* participants in the public space, for whom the resources of reason are *different*?

It is important, certainly, to point out as Sen does that Hinduism, for example, contains within itself many dissenting voices and heterodox opinions; but the difficult question is to understand how those dissenters, no less than the mainstream, made sense of their dissent. One needs to show how Hinduism has within itself models of rational deliberation that make possible the dissenting voices and internal critiques, and how those models also make available to Hindus a conception of what it is to reason about the public good, a space encompassing non-Hindus as well as Hindus of every stripe and persuasion. I would argue that such resources are indeed available, not only in the idea of dialectic or *vāda*, but also in mainstream Hindu discussions of the processes and concepts of rationality: *tarka*, *nyāya*, *yukti* and *ūha*. An analogous exercise needs to be repeated for each of the participants in a secular state; only in this way can each reach an understanding of what Rawls has

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Lecture VI in *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> “Sherpas call tune for political masters,” *The Guardian*, June 30 2005, p.4.

appropriately described as the “overlapping consensus” in which each group, *for its own reasons and on the basis of its own resources of reason*, makes sense of and agrees to a common position or policy.<sup>16</sup> The exercise can already be seen happening within Islam, through a contemporary revival of the practice of *ijtihad* (‘intellectual struggling’).<sup>17</sup> It can be seen too in contemporary Buddhist discourses on topics such as human rights, abortion and euthanasia.<sup>18</sup>

Space for such an approach depends in part on the identification of a *neutral secularism*, that is a secularism which demands that politics and affairs of state are unbiased and symmetric in respect of different religions or other modalities of affiliation, in contrast with an understanding of secularism that sees it as requiring the prohibition of any religious association in public or state activities.<sup>19</sup> *Prohibitory secularism*, as we might call it, requires the resources of reason to be wholly disenchanted in public, even those upon which individuals draw. Neutral secularism imposes this requirement only on state invocations of public reason; its requirement on individuals is that their appeal to private resources or reason does not bias them or lead to an asymmetry in their reasoned dealings with others. A Buddhist analysis of reasonable discussion from the time of Aśoka, the *Elements of Dialogue*, provides an astonishingly subtle theorization of this idea of freedom-from-bias in public reasoning. The background worry, of course, is that in developing the resources of reason *within* Hinduism, *within* Islam, *within* Christianity, or Buddhism, we are in some way making reason subordinate to tradition and religious command. Sen reads Akbar as resisting that threat with a strong insistence on the autonomy of reason.<sup>20</sup> My argument is that we can respect the need for autonomy without restricting reason’s resources to those merely of allegedly value-free disciplines such as social choice theory. If that is right, then it is a mistake to speak of a conflict between “secular values” and “faith values”, as if a choice has to be made between the two, for the point is to see how any faith can sustain secular principles in activities of public

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<sup>16</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture IX.

<sup>17</sup> “*Ijtihad*: Reinterpreting Islamic principles for the Twenty-first Century,” *USIP Special Report* 125 (2004), pp. 1–8; Muqtedar Khan, “Two Theories of *ijtihad*,” <http://www.ijtihad.org/ijtihad.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> See many of the contributions in the journals *Contemporary Buddhism* and the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*.

<sup>19</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 19; cf. p. 313.

<sup>20</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 274.

reasoning, equipping its adherents with the resources needed to participate in deliberative democratic procedures.<sup>21</sup>

I am saying that the appeal to India's cultures of argumentation and public reasoning is hollow if it does not engage with the detail of those cultures. For only in this way does the full panoply that a well-informed "argumentative Indian" has available to himself or herself come to the fore, in contrast with the restricted vision of a sectarian approach. Likewise, in speaking of the resources for fashioning Indian identities, the wealth of material about self, agency and identity, whether faith-based or faith-free, needs to be weighed and thought through. My point is that these are the intellectual resources that anyone entering a negotiation in public space can and should bring to the table. In the case of figures such as Tagore and Gandhi, this clearly is exactly what happened, Gandhi's re-introduction of the idea of *ahimsā* as a defence against inhumanity and injustice being a good case in point. Only in this way can the claims of more sectarian thinkers, that theirs is the sole true inheritance of India, effectively be silenced.

Let me give an example. There is in the *Nyāya-sūtra* an elegant discussion of the various ways in which an opinion or principle might count as 'settled' (*siddhānta*).<sup>22</sup> An opinion might be 'settled' because there is a general consensus, which is further analysed as a situation in which the opinion is accepted by some parties, including one's own, and outright rejected by none (*Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.28). Alternatively, an opinion might be 'settled' in the sense of being accepted by some parties, including one's own, even though it is rejected by certain others (1.1.29). An opinion is considered 'settled' in a third sense if it used as a premise in further derivations (1.1.30), and in a fourth if it is entertained provisionally for the purpose of considering its merits (1.1.31). The idea of consensus implicit in the first conception of a settled opinion is a valuable and useful one, for it reveals a way to see how achieving consensus might require something weaker than universal endorsement by all parties. Indeed, if the officials at the G8 meeting had been cognisant of this theory, they might have wanted to refine their bracketing method, so as to distinguish between the case where a phrase is accepted by some but rejected by others and the case where it is accepted by some and rejected by none. In so far as it allows for progress towards a consensus that might not have otherwise been

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<sup>21</sup> I therefore disagree with Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), who sees in what he calls "secularization" a distinctive movement within the emergence of European modernity.

<sup>22</sup> *Gautamīyanyāyadarśana with Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana*, ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997). Trans. M. Gangopadhyaya (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1982). Henceforth 'NS'.

achievable, this would represent a substantive contribution to the actual machinery of public reason. (Indeed, precisely such a model of consensus and compromise is envisaged in recent political discussion: “The Lib Dems' biggest mistake at the last election was not the tuition fees pledge, but failing to be clear with the electorate that coalition inevitably means compromise and compromise entails not being able to deliver previous promises. The answer, perhaps, is for their next manifesto to tell us how seriously its commitments should be taken. Signed-in-blood pledges would be ones they vow to stick by come hell, high water and coalition negotiations. Pencil pledges would give fair warning that these commitments were subject to being erased. The final category would be invisible ink pledges, liable to disappear during the first hour of any power-sharing negotiations with other parties.”<sup>23</sup>) My point is that this analysis of settled opinion is a resource of reason that a well-informed “argumentative Indian” has at their disposal, something that can shape the nature of their participation in public debate. It is by acquainting ourselves with such detail that we get a true sense of the “India large” about which Tagore and Sen speak. And Sen is surely right in his diagnosis of the cause of what he calls the “extraordinary neglect of Indian works on reasoning, science, mathematics and other so-called ‘western spheres of success’,”<sup>24</sup> in the “comprehensive denial of Indian intellectual originality” that one sees in the appalling colonial writings of James Mill and others (more precisely, in the pincer effects of the “magisterial” and the “exoticist” approaches to India)<sup>25</sup>. The influence of this systematic deprecation is still to be seen in the reluctance of many scholars even today to take seriously the *intellectual substance* of the Indian texts. Sen is right too when he speaks of the need for a “corrective regarding Indian traditions in public reasoning and tolerant communication, and more generally what can be called the precursors of democratic practice”.<sup>26</sup> The recovery of theory, such as the example I briefly sketched (and it was, of course, developed to a much greater deal of sophistication than I have revealed), is the way to make good that necessity. Fragments of theory like this one, though presented in the texts as abstracted from any concrete context, were most certainly the product of engagement with the day-to-day business of reasoning publicly about matters of common interest with others who did not share one’s views. We should not forget that context even if we cannot always reconstruct it.

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew Rawnsey, *The Observer* 23 September 2012.

<sup>24</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, pp. 154–5, 160.

<sup>26</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 80.

I have said that intellectuals like Gandhi and Tagore were most certainly aware of the “India large”, full of resources for reason. For example, Sen observes how Tagore was resistant to anything that seemed to smack of the application of mechanical formula, that “the question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account.”<sup>27</sup> At least two resources from India’s intellectual past are available to support such a question. One is the prolonged debate in the *Mahābhārata* over the rights and wrongs of a lie, uttered by Yudhiṣṭhira in a moment of crisis.<sup>28</sup> There are anticipations too of a discussion of the problem that was to challenge Kant and his conception of universal moral law: whether it is right to lie to the malicious pursuers of an innocent person.<sup>29</sup> A careful examination of the Indian handling of this case reveals a decidedly unKantian conception of moral reason at work. Another example, perhaps even more interesting, is the strong vein of particularist moral reasoning found in the highly intellectual Mīmāṃsā. The Mīmāṃsā theoreticians develop an account of practical reasoning that is situational and adaptive, driven by particular cases, and extremely versatile. This, again, is a resource of great value for any “argumentative Indian”. Indeed, it through the imaginative exploitation of such models that dissenters and sceptics find the resources of reason with which to develop their critique.

Pointing to the brute existence of sceptical voices like that of Jāvālī is only the beginning of the story. What we really need to know is how a sceptic like Jāvālī adapted and manipulated the tools of justification and argument at his disposal so as to make possible (and intelligible) his dissent. If nothing else, that would be a step towards understanding how subaltern voices might similarly empower themselves in global public discourse today. In Sen’s observation of the way one sees “the colonial metropolis supplying ideas and ammunition to post-colonial intellectuals to attack the influence of the colonial metropolis”,<sup>30</sup> we see an expression of the typical sceptic manoeuvre. Again, the general pattern of such a move would be familiar to an Indian intellectual with access the materials for reasoned thought that an expansive conception of India makes available. For precisely such strategies have been put into practice by dissident critics of mainstream culture, voices that include the radical

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<sup>27</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> MBh. 7.164.67–106; for critical discussion see my *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> MBh. 8.69.40–46.

<sup>30</sup> *The Argumentative Indian*, p. 133.

Buddhist Nāgārjuna,<sup>31</sup> the free-thinking Jayarāśi<sup>32</sup> and the brilliant critic Śrīharṣa<sup>33</sup>, all of whom, it must be said, achieve a far greater degree of sophistication and methodological self-awareness than does Jāvālī. The strength of their criticism derives precisely from its using the very same resources of reason as its target. For while “reasoned humanity” should certainly be open to sound criticism from any quarter, it is a fact of human nature that it is much harder to be receptive to criticism formulated by outsiders in outside terms than to criticism made from within in one’s own terms. The reason for this is that rational criticism is effective and not merely enthusiastic when it has the potential to become *self-criticism*. This is what avoids what would otherwise be felt as a distant call upon the “sovereignty of reason”. I have been able to retrieve several new voices of dissent from within the Hindu corpus, all of them embedded, anonymous, and somewhat hidden. Hinduism has often been regarded by its opponents as intolerant of dissent and by its proponents as speaking with a single voice. Of many sceptical voices within Hinduism, I will mention one which challenges the moral authority of the Vedas on rational grounds. The argument appeals to broad principles of rational interpretation: the Vedas, it is said, are verifiably mistaken, internally inconsistent and pointlessly repetitious (Nyāya-sūtra 2.1.57). As speech-acts, the argument continues, they resemble the delusional ramblings of a drunkard; they carry no epistemological authority. An uncharitable view of religious tolerance might lead one to expect this sceptical argument to be met with censure and condemnation, but in fact it is joined in argument. Other principles of rational interpretation are advanced that resolve the inconsistencies and explain the repetitions, and a justification of the assent-worthiness of the Vedic pronouncements is sought in a general epistemology of testimony.

An important contrast within mainstream Hinduism is reflected in the differential use of the terms *hetu* “evidence-based rationality” and *tarka* “hypothesis-based rationality”. Manu, the author of the most influential of the lawbooks, is disappointingly unequivocal in his criticism of the unconstrained use of evidence-based reason (Manu 2.10–11), but what is overlooked in the standard criticism of him

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<sup>31</sup> Nāgārjuna, *Vigraha-vyāvartanī* [*Dispeller of Disputes*]. Ed. Johnston, E. H. and Kunst A., in *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna: Vigrahavyāvartanī*, with a translation by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> Jayarāśi, *Tattvopaplava-siṃha* [*Lion who Upsets Truths*]. Ed. Shuchita Mehta, with translation by Esther Solomon (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* [*Amassed Morsels of Refutation*]. Ed. N. Jha, Kashi Sanskrit Series 197 (Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1970); trans. G. Jha, *The Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhāḍya of Śrīharṣa* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1986).



as an “orthodox” thinker is the fact that he is considerably more willing to allow a place for hypothesis-based rationality (Manu 12.106). A careful examination of the resources of such rationality reveals that there is an underlying model of considerable flexibility and power. This model of rationality is based on two sorts of principle: i) principles for the selection of paradigmatic cases or exemplars, and ii) principles for the mapping of truths about the paradigms onto truths about other cases, based on rules of adaptation and substitution. One might imagine how one reasons when one is trying to change the battery in a new car, a process that involves remembering the procedure that worked for the old car, and adapting it to fit the different layout and design of the new one. Clearly this ‘blueprint + adaptation’ model is situational and particularist. I believe that it came to serve as the basis of a general theory of moral reasoning, leaving behind its origins in the hermeneutics of ritual. And, as many texts make clear, it makes possible the existence of dissent and disagreement, for different decisions about what counts as an appropriate adaptation, and also what counts as a relevant paradigm, can always be advanced and defended (compare with the dialecticians’ concept of *jāti*, reasoning about appropriate and inappropriate resemblance). As a resource to be drawn upon in reasoning about one’s choices, the model is a highly versatile one. The details of this theory are found in works of Dharmaśāstra and Mīmāṃsā, especially in Kumārila’s *Tantravārttika* and in commentaries on the *Manusmṛti*. Such a model might have informed Gandhi’s understanding of ethics, for, as Akeel Bilgrami has suggested, an ethics based on the exemplary role of particular acts is central to Gandhi’s conception of moral identity.<sup>34</sup>

Public reasoning under a secular constitution demands a framework which is symmetrical or unbiased in its accommodation of a plurality of evaluative standpoints. Buddhist dialecticians have done important theoretical work here. The tolerance of diversity of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE Buddhist emperor Aśoka is well-known, and the Council he convened with the purpose of settling doctrine disputes between different Buddhist groups was run according to a codified theory of impartial dialogue. Debate is so structured as to give each party a fair and equal opportunity to rehearse their arguments, and for counterarguments to be presented. Guiding the entire debate is an endeavour, not to find a winner and a loser, but to tease out the hidden assumptions that may lie in the background of some given position, so that there can be a clarification of what is at stake and what each party is committed to. The policy of making debates have the clarification of commitments as their

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<sup>34</sup> Akeel Bilgrami, “Gandhi’s Integrity: The Philosophy Behind the Politics,” *Postcolonial Studies* 5 (2002): 79–93.



function, rather than confrontation, victory and defeat, has important advantages. One is that it is easier to concede, if one comes to see that one's position rests on hidden commitments that one would not endorse. There can be progress in public reasoning without having to be winners and losers. The text which Aśoka's dialecticians produced is called the *Elements of Dialogue*. Much later, in the seventeenth century, the Jaina philosopher Yaśovijaya espoused a doctrine of public reason based on the intellectual values of neutrality (*madhyasthatā*) and 'groundedness in all views' (*sarvanayāśraya*). He argues that the practice of such values is what distinguishes reasoned public dialogue from empty quarrelling. I have discussed his theory elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

If neutrality is one requirement of public reasoning, another is that there be common ground. Indian theoreticians describe this shared ground as the *dṛṣṭānta* or *udāharaṇa*; I will call it the "anchor" in a debate. Anchors are what ensure that acts of public reasoning have a grounding in participants' experience, that what is disputed and what is implied are tied to their frames of reference. At one level, this is simply a reflection of "blueprint + adaptation" model of decision-making, shifted from the domain of individual deliberation to the domain of public reason (from *svārtha* to *parārtha*, in the terminology of the Indian theorists). Any given case that is to serve as the starting point in a public discussion must be such that its relevant features are agreed upon by all participants to the dialogue; otherwise, the act of public reasoning will not even get off the ground. So the existence of anchors is a requirement in an act of public reasoning. It is possible to develop an account of anchoring from ideas described in the ancient Ritual Sūtras as well as in early Nyāya sources.

I have been arguing that the full range of resources from intellectual India, as well as from other intellectual traditions, is available in the fashioning of modern identities. J. L. Mehta has said about one such resource, the Ṛg-veda, that "We in India still stand within that *Wirkundsgeschichte* and what we make of that text and how we understand it today will itself be a happening within that history."<sup>36</sup> I propose to generalise what Mehta says, so as to include all the texts and traditions of India, and to broker identities in the global diaspora as well as in India itself. One clear example of this is in the work of an exemplary intellectual Indian, Bimal Krishna Matilal, who is what I would describe as a "situated interpreter" of India, drawing on its resources to fashion a contemporary cosmopolitan intellectual

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<sup>35</sup> Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> J. L. Mehta, "The Ṛgveda: Text and Interpretation," in his *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: ICPR, 1990), p. 278.

identity. Situated interpretation is a way to enrich the present though an analysis of the past, all the while remaining acutely sensitive to the fact that the context and circumstances of the present-day thinker are radically different to those of the ancient writers whose work one seeks to analyse.

I would argue that a contemporary identity should avail itself in a substantive way of resources of reason from the *whole* of the past. Reasoning is implicated in the choice over what significance to attach to the diverse strands that make up our identities. According to the useful analysis of the Roman Stoics, individuals have four distinguishable ‘personae’, each of which has its role in practical decision-making. Their personae are: one’s rational being, the position one is born into, the choices one makes, and what fortune deals. The first of these personae is a part of our common humanity, something we all share; the other three are individual. In so far as it is possible to deliberate about one’s identity, therefore, the important point is that two forces will always be at work, one which takes our common humanity as its starting point, the other making choices based on our individual needs, natures, inheritances and situations. The dialectical interplay between these two forces is a running theme in Indian discussions of selfhood, the quest for a universal self having been put firmly on the intellectual map by the Upaniṣads two millennia or more ago, and again, in a different way, by the Buddha. It is not easy to decide what to do, in a Kantian fashion, on the basis of the principles of pure reason, and yet no easier to exercise real choice in matters that shape the sort person one is to be. So individuals tend to move back and forth between the two, in sort of a perpetual oscillation. Something of this is caught brilliantly by a Tamil short-story writer of post-Independence India, whose pen-name was “Mauni”, the silent one. He uses the narrative device of the double to investigate the to-and-fro between our cosmopolitan and our individual selves.

One response to that oscillation is to attempt to cultivate a more fixed relationship with our rational being, our cosmopolitan self. We might think of this as involving something like a ‘return’ to a natural state of being, an idea that expressed by the Sanskrit term *svāsthya* “coinciding with oneself”, and we might think of the relevant way to cultivate such a return as involving a reining in of individual emotional attachments (which texts like the *Mahābhārata* describe as a “taming” of the self). To put that thought another way, what one does is to cultivate the ability to choose not to attach value or significance on the basis of merely private passions. My point is not that the problems of the ancients are also our problems, but rather that in the formation of modern identities, contemporary individuals can learn from the

methods and techniques they employed to fashion identities which were appropriate to them.

### Concluding Summary

I have argued that you must understand your identity as an individual in both public and private space as a grounded in your exercise of reason, and I have claimed that this should be thought of not as an abstract Kantian exercise of derivation from categorical and hypothetical imperatives but rather as a process grounded in the local normative function of exemplary cases. The clash of different potential sources of identity within an individual constitutes a ‘case’ (Kasus), and the way they resolve it, adapting and substituting, is constitutive of their identity. The ancients brokered identities in ways responsive to *their* times; modern individuals must learn from this example but adapt it to fit new circumstances. Bearing in mind the distinction between subjective and objective aspects of identity—where the objective aspects of one’s identity are such as those deriving from one’s biological inheritance, while one’s subjective identity consists in those among one’s characteristics which one values and endorses valuing in a relatively non-revisable manner—my investigation has been into the processes by which you fashion a sense of self through the ways you reason about which values to endorse. I have argued that at the heart of such processes lies a case-based rather than rule-governed model of reasoned activity, one fundamentally characterised in terms of mechanisms of adaptation and substitution from local norms.

More exactly, an individual who fashions an identity solely around a commitment to categorical and hypothetical imperatives represents an extreme case of the model I have been developing, one in which only those features in terms of which every particular resembles *every* other are held to be significant. Likewise, an identity fashioned around a commitment to “individual reasons” and absolute particularity, such as in some versions of moral particularism, is an example of the limiting case at the other extreme, where *none* of the features in terms of which any particular resembles any other is deemed to be of deliberative relevance. The model I have proposed thus includes particularism and universalism as special cases, the result of letting one or other of the variables in the model run to zero. Individuals have choices to make not only *with the aid of* a model of reason but also *about* the profile of the model itself, the two sorts of choice feeding back into one another until reflective equilibrium is achieved. Reason and identity co-exist in a relationship of

mutual re-adjustment. And one can certainly always look for explanations of the particular choices that have been made.

The idea of India is indeed an open, assimilative, and spacious one, sustaining a plurality of voices, mainstream and dissenting, of many ages, regions and affiliations. Modern individuals can call upon all these voices and cultures, re-think them, adapt and modify them, use the resources of reason they make available in deliberation about who to be, how to behave, and upon what to agree. That is a fundamental freedom, and it ought not be surrendered by limiting oneself to narrower, constricted understandings of India, whether one's attitude to those impoverished understandings is one of endorsement or dismissal. There exists a fluid, dynamic relationship of re-appropriation to India's past, the situated interpreter conscious of the requirements of their contemporary circumstance.

Finally, I have argued that participation in secular democratic political institutions is fully compatible with having a conception of the good grounded in a particular religious affiliation, as long as that affiliation provides one with the resources of reason that make such participation possible. This requires the cultivation of an attitude of openness to the full richness of the intellectual past, and I have been at pains to show how the example I have chosen to explore, the intellectual cultures of India, contain within themselves a range of astonishingly sophisticated dissenting voices, whose techniques and arguments are fully available in the construction of a contemporary critical intellectual stance.

The existence of these internal voices of dissent is enough to establish that the resources of reason available to an individual in a particular culture can be turned in upon themselves, making it possible for individuals to call into question and even to reject the very values and beliefs that the culture presents to them. It is thus precisely because identity is a work of reason that there is no legitimacy in using one's identity—for example, one's culture, ethnic group or gender—as an apology for one's behaviour, values or attitudes. Any given cultural practice or value is your own precisely because and to the extent that, of all the practices and values available to you, you have conferred on *this one* your rational endorsement, and that was something which, even allowing for pragmatic constraints bearing upon the choices available, you need not have done. To someone who says, "I do this, because that's just what people of my culture or with my type of identity do," the reply must always be that *this* identity is *yours* only because this is what you choose to do.



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