THE OXFORD HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

The Lost Age of Reason

Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450–1700

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Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy since 1960
Gary Gutting

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c.1325: **Gaṅgeśa** writes the *Gemstone for Truth*, and a renovated Nyāya takes root in his hometown of Mithilā.

1460–1540: **Raghunātha Śiroṃani** invents the 'new reason' in Navadvīpa, a town in Bengal. His immediate followers develop and teach his ideas both in Navadvīpa and also in Vārāṇasī.

1486: Birth of **Caitanya** in Navadvīpa.

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1582: Debate between **Vidyānivāsa,** a 'new reason' thinker, and Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa at Ṭoḍarmal's house.

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1613: **Roberto Nobili** writes the *Informatio*, containing a description of the new 'natural philosophy'.

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1621: **Sébastien Basso** publishes the *Natural Philosophy Directed Against Aristotle*.

1634: **Viśvanātha**, son of Vidyānivāsa, writes a commentary on the *Nyāya-sūtra*.

1637: **René Descartes** publishes the *Discourse and Essays*.

1638: **Kavīndra Sarasvatī** petitions Shāh Jahāṇ to repeal a tax on Hindu pilgrims.

1650: Death of Descartes.

1655: Death of **Pierre Gassendi**. His protégé **François Bernier** is with him.

1656: Dārā Shukoh assembles a team of Vārāṇasī scholars to translate the Upaniṣads into Persian. Bernier arrives in India, and works as physician to Shāh Jahāṇ and Dārā Shukoh.

1657: Leading Vārāṇasī intellectuals publicly meet and sign a letter of judgement.

1659: Dārā Shukoh is sentenced for heresy and executed, after a conflict with Aurangzeb. The key 'new reason' philosopher **Jayarāma**, an acquaintance of Kavīndra, finishes the *Garland of Categories*. He writes the *Garland of Principles about Reason* around this time too. **Raghudeva**, another 'new reason' philosopher, is doing similar work too and moving in the same circles in Vārāṇasī.

1658–61: **Dānişmand Khān**, an accultured nobleman who opposes the execution of Dārā, takes on Kavīndra, Bernier and others when they lose their patron. They exchange ideas, Bernier translating Gassendi and Descartes into Persian, Kavīndra bringing Vārāṇasī thinkers and Bernier into discussion.

1660: Foundation of the Royal Society in London.

1670: Bernier, back in France, publishes his *Travels in the Mogul Empire*. Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society, will arrange for their English publication; John Dryden bases his 1675 play *Aureng-zebe* on them.

1677: Death of **Spinoza**. The *Ethics* is published.

1678: Bernier publishes his *Abrégé* of Gassendi's philosophy.

1688: Death of **Yaśovijaya Gaṇi**, a brilliant Jaina philosopher who responds to the 'new reason' and perhaps also to Dārā's project.

1690: **John Locke** publishes his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He seems to have read Bernier's *Abrégé*.

1690s: Several 'new reason' thinkers are active in Vārāṇasī: **Mahādeva** writes the *Precious Jewel of Reason,* and **Mādhavadeva** the *Essence of Reason*.

1707: Death of Aurangzeb.

1757: The Battle of Plassey.

1765: East India Company obtains taxation rights over Bengal.

1769–70: Great Famine, caused by punitive taxation and grain stockpiling.

1772: Britain, defeated in the American war for independence, turns its attention to India. Warren Hastings prepares a 'plan for the administration of justice'.

Principal Philosophers Discussed

I. Key individuals

Raghunātha Śiromaṇi (c.1460–1540), the inventor of the 'new reason' philosophy. Raghunātha lived in the dynamic multi-cultural town of Navadvīpa in Bengal. His *Inquiry into the True Nature of Things* shaped discussion in metaphysics throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while his commentaries on older thinkers, called *Light-Rays*, bristle with new ideas and an innovative spirit which inspired later philosophers.

Vidyānivāsa (c.1500–90) an early 'new reason' philosopher. He and his sons, also philosophers, benefited with patronage from the Mughal court of Akbar and became well-established figures in Vārāṇasī.

Dārā Shukoh (1615–59), eldest son of Shāh Jahāṇ and heir apparent to the Mughal throne. Dārā sought a rapprochement of Hinduism with Islam, and sponsored a large translation project of Sanskrit texts into Persian. The project gave his brother Aurangzeb an excuse to have him tried for heresy. He was executed in 1659.

Kavīndra Sarasvatī (c.1600–75), a Sanskrit scholar and poet in Vārāṇasī, who received the patronage of Shāh Jahāṇ and Dārā Shukoh, and mediated a conversation between Sanskrit philosophers and the Mughal court. He negotiated with Shāh Jahāṇ the repeal of a poll-tax on Hindu pilgrims, and was in turn feted by Vārāṇasī intellectuals.

François Bernier (1625–88), French philosopher and physician, the protégé of Pierre Gassendi. Bernier came to India in 1656 and worked for Shāh Jahāṇ and Dārā Shukoh. After Dārā's trial, he spent the years from 1658 to 1661 with Kavīndra and other Sanskrit intellectuals in Vārāṇasī. He returned to Paris in 1667 and published first his travel memoir and then an *Abrégé* of Gassendi's work.

Jayarāma Nyāyapñcānana (mid seventeenth century), a leading 'new reason' philosopher in Vārāṇasī. Jayarāma knew Kavīndra and may have been in the Kavīndra–Bernier circle. He wrote an important work on the new metaphysics in 1659, *The Garland of Categories*, and a companion work on public reasoning, *The Garland of Principles about Reason*.

Yaśovijaya Gaṇi (1624–88), the most important Jaina intellectual of the seventeenth century. Yaśovijaya studied the 'new reason' in Vārāṇasī in the years before Dārā's project, and adapted it to suit a liberal syncretic philosophy.

Raghudeva Bhaṭṭācārya (mid–late seventeenth century) was a pupil of Harirāma in Navadvīpa but lived in Vārāṇasī and signed the 1657 'letter of judgement'. A prolific

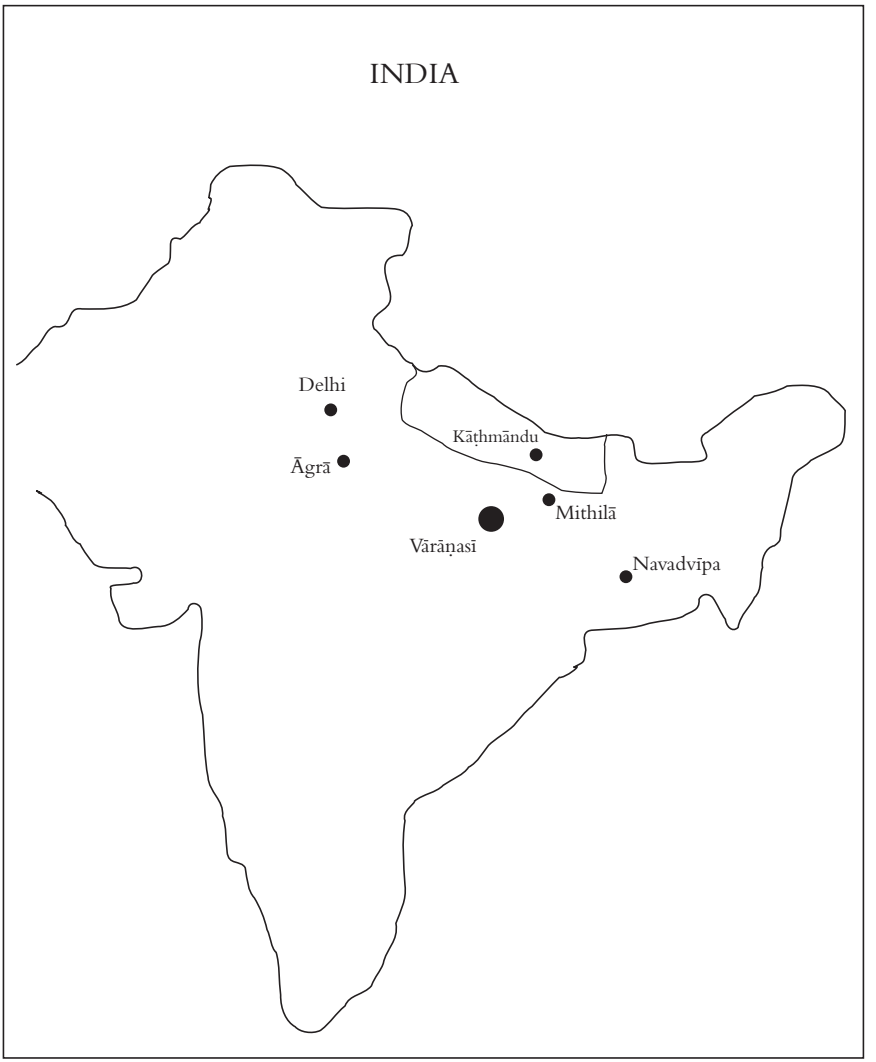
writer, his *Survey of What is Essential about Substance* is an important work on the theory of material objects.

Mahādeva Puṇatāmakara (late seventeenth century), originally from the south but living in Vārāṇasī. He is the author of the *Precious Jewel of Reason*, the most systematic 'new reason' work in epistemology, as well as the important *Examination into Selfhood as a Natural Kind*.

Veṇīdatta Vāgīśa Bhaṭṭa (late seventeenth century), author of a work in the spirit of Raghunātha, the *Embellishment of the Categories*, advocating a new five-category ontology.

II. 'New reason' philosophers located

	Mithilā	**Navadvīpa**	**Vārāṇasī**
1300s	Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya		
	Vardhamāna		
1400s	Yajñapati		
	Jayadeva (Pakṣadhara)		
	Śaṃkara Miśra		
1500s		Raghunātha Śiromaṇi	
		Vidyānivāsa	
		Jānakīnātha	
		Kṛṣṇadāsa	
1600s		Rāmabhadra Sārvabhauma	
		Bhavānanda	Viśvanātha
		Dinakara	
		Jagadīśa	Rudra
		Śrī Rāma	Govinda Śarman
		Rāmarudra	
		Harirāma	Annambhaṭṭa
		Mathurānātha	Jayarāma
		Gadādhara	Laugākṣī
			Raghudeva
			Mahādeva
			Mādhavadeva
			Veṇīdatta
1700	Gokulanātha		


INDIA
Delhi
Āgrā
Kāṭhmāndu
Mithilā
Vārāṇasī
Navadvīpa

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Introduction

The arrival of modernity at a certain point in the history of philosophy seemingly admits of two non-compossible explanations. One model presents modernity as involving a thorough rejection of the ancient—its texts, its thinkers, its methods—as starting afresh and from the beginning. This was how the two figures who are emblematic of the 'new philosophy' in Europe, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and René Descartes (1596–1650), chose to present themselves.[1] A second model locates modernity not in a rejection of the past but in a profound reorientation with respect to it. The ancient texts are now not thought of as authorities to which one must defer, but regarded as the source of insight in the company of which one pursues the quest for truth. This new attitude towards the texts does not imply abandonment but a transformation in their place within inquiry, a change in conception of one's duties towards the past.

The first model has dominated the standard history of philosophy, which speaks of a revolution in philosophy in the early seventeenth century, one in which the Aristotelianism of the schools—with its obscure terminology, doctrine of forms and final causes, and schoolmen who 'loved Aristotle more than the truth' (Mercer 1993: 34)—is cast aside in favour of a new mechanical conception of natural explanation. Recently, however, this familiar account has begun to unravel. John Cottingham says, for example, that 'any picture of Descartes as a lone innovator setting out on a new quest for certainty cannot survive serious scrutiny' (Cottingham 1993: 150), while Dan Garber, pointing out that Descartes' correspondents did not find his project seriously in conflict with their own progressive Aristotelian ambitions, speaks of 'the revolution that did not happen in 1637' (Garber 1988). One of those correspondents, Libert Froimont, saw in Descartes' account of himself in the *Discourse* the renewal of a very ancient spirit:

[1] Bacon: 'There was but one course left, therefore,—to try the whole thing anew upon a better plan, and to commence a total reconstruction of sciences, arts and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundations.' (*Instauratio magma, Preface*; 1857–74, vol. 4: 8). Descartes: 'As soon as I was old enough to emerge from the control of my teachers, I entirely abandoned the study of letters . . . For it seemed to me that much more truth could be found in the reasonings which a man makes concerning matters that concern him than in those which some scholar makes in his study.' (*Discourse*, AT vi. 9; 1984: 115).

I seem to see a Pythagoras or a Democritus, a voluntary exile from his homeland who has traveled to the Egyptians, to the Brahmans, and around the entire globe, to investigate the nature of things and the nature of the universe.[2]

New work has revealed a complexity in Descartes' relationship with late scholasticism, including a tension between the self-presentation of the *Discourse* and views expressed in his letters (Ariew 1999; Secada 2000). In another vein, Julian Martin has described Francis Bacon's self-depiction as 'a studied pose', adding that 'when Bacon painted himself and his natural philosophy as modern and novel, he was moved to do so by local concerns and ambitions' (Martin 1993: 74).

There can be no doubt but that the new philosophers in seventeenth-century Europe were profoundly innovative, but the standard historiography simultaneously distorts two aspects of their relationship with the ancient. First, it misrepresents the dynamism and openness of progressive peripateticism. Many late scholastics, it is now becoming evident, were highly original in interpreting Aristotle and in fact saw no incompatibility between a recast Aristotelianism and the new philosophy (Schmitt 1983; Mercer 1993). Grievances against scholasticism gained succour from the stale academic practices in the universities, which opposed innovation without contributing anything new and treated scholastic philosophy as a monolithic never-changing whole. In a new intellectual climate there arose a new genre of very original interpretations of the philosophy of Aristotle—in the work, for example, of Jean-Baptiste du Hamel, Jean-Baptiste Morin, Erhard Weigel and Kenelm Digby. Weigel is typical in being willing to reinterpret basic Aristotelian notions in order to establish a reconciliation with the doctrines of the moderns, arguing for example that prime matter is fundamentally extension. In the judgement of Christia Mercer, 'early modern Aristotelianism not only shows impressive vitality and resilience, it also contributes to the intellectual debates at the centre of the philosophical revolutions of the period. It was a major force in early modern thought and one that has gone unexamined for too long' (Mercer 1993: 61).

The standard picture, furthermore, radically simplifies the complex ways in which the moderns drew upon the ancients. In the work of Leibniz, Spinoza, Basso and Gassendi, what one finds is a firm conviction that there is truth in the ancient philosophers, truth which might well stand in need of radical rejuvenation and reconfiguration, but truth which provides a gateway to new philosophy and is not a road-block to it. Leibniz described himself as seeking a 'reformed philosophy', one which put the mechanical philosophy on sound ancient foundations. That this is not simply to 'looke upon Nature, but with Aristotle's Spectacles'[3] is clear from the philosophical project of Pierre Gassendi. Gassendi uses recently retrieved Epicurean ideas in the development of a new atomism and empiricism. His Epicurean treatise, the *Syntagma Philosophicum*, is not exegesis but a creative recovery of the ancient materials

[2] Froimont 1637, quoted in Garber 1988: 476.

[3] John Donne, *Sermons*, vii. 260.

so as to inform a modern project (Lolordo 2007; Wilson 2008). Spinoza's engagement with ancient Stoicism has also, recently, begun to be more thoroughly explored and acknowledged (e.g. Kristeller 1984). Susan James' assessment is that 'much of the substance and structure of the *Ethics*—its central doctrines and the connections between them—constitute a reworking of Stoicism' (James 1993: 291). The fact is that the early modern philosophers had a far more subtle and interesting understanding of the relationship between their new work and the past than the standard model can accommodate. It is simply not the case that these early modern philosophers were merely residually scholastic; rather, a revival and retrieval of the ancient and a transformation of it into the modern was at the heart of their philosophical method. And that is not so different from those progressive Aristotelians who, says Leibniz, 'draw from the springs of Aristotle and the ancients rather than from the cisterns of the Scholastics' (1956: 124).[4]

When we come to look at early modern India it is especially important that we do so with eyes not blurred by the standard historiography of the battle between ancients and moderns in Europe. I am aware of no Indian thinker from the period who makes the sort of audacious self-proclamation that one finds in Bacon or Descartes, a sweeping dismissal of the ancient tradition and of everything associated with it. And yet a modernity there certainly was, one which had its equivalents of Leibniz, Spinoza, Basso, and Gassendi on the one hand, and Morin, Sennert, and Weigel on the other. I believe that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a remarkable project began to take shape in the Sanskritic philosophical world. It is not just that the philosophers are willing to describe themselves as 'new', though that is indeed a striking feature of the period. Yet others before them had done the same, and the question is in what this self-attributed newness consists and what the self-affirmation means.[5] Was it only a newness in the ways that the ideas of the ancient authorities are described, a newness of style but not of substance? In asking this question, I have in mind Sheldon Pollock's well-known assessment of the new intellectuals of the seventeenth century, that their work displays a 'paradoxical combination of something very new in style subserving something very old in substance' (2001a: 407). That was certainly how a *pre-modern*, Jayanta, at the end of the first millennium, conceived of his own originality:

[4] P. F. Strawson therefore speaks of a 'vainglorious delusion' implicit in the studied pose: 'Many philosophers in the past—among them some of the greatest—have seen themselves as starting afresh, as setting out on a new path which they conceive to be the only sure one; and thus as freeing themselves, and us, from fundamental mistakes or misconceptions which have hitherto impeded the discovery of the true way. It is unlikely that any of us, in the second half of the twentieth century, will be buoyed up by any such glad, confident assurance—or, if you prefer, will be the victim of any such vainglorious delusion' (Strawson 1998: 20).

[5] Cf. Ariew 1999: ix: 'To understand what set Descartes apart both from the Scholastics and from other innovators, one has to grasp the reasons behind the various opinions; but, beyond that, one also has to understand the intellectual milieu in which these reasons played a role, to see what tactical measures could have been used to advance one's views or persuade others of them.'

How can we discover a new truth? So one should consider our novelty only in the rephrasing of words.[6]

This characteristically pre-modern attitude of deference to the past changes fundamentally in the work of Raghunātha Śiromaṇi (c.1460–1540). Raghunātha belongs to a tradition of philosophical speculation known as Nyāya, a term more or less synonymous with the appeal to reason and evidence-based critical inquiry—rather than scriptural exegesis—as the proper method of philosophy.[7] Raghunātha concludes his most innovative work, the *Inquiry into the True Nature of Things,* with a call to philosophers to think for themselves about the arguments:

> The demonstration of these matters which I have carefully explained is contrary to the conclusions reached by all the other disciplines. These matters spoken of should not be cast aside without reflection just because they are contrary to accepted opinion; scholars should consider them carefully. Bowing to those who know the truth concerning matters of all the sciences, bowing to people like you [the reader], I pray you consider my sayings with sympathy. This method, though less honoured, has been employed by wise men of the past; namely that one ask other people of learning to consider one's own words.
>
> (*Inquiry* 1915: 79, 1–80, 3; trans. Potter 1957: 89–90)

The new attitude was summarized at the time by Abu al-Faḍl, in a work—the *Āīn-i-Akbarī*—which relates the intellectual climate during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Abu al-Faḍl describes the philosophers as those who 'look upon testimony as something filled with the dust of suspicion and handle nothing but proof'.[8] In the writings of those philosophers who follow Raghunātha from about the middle of the sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth there is a fundamental metamorphosis in epistemology, metaphysics, semantics, and philosophical methodology. The works of these philosophers—some of whom lived in Raghunātha's home-town of Navadvīpa in Bengal, others in the newly invigorated city of Vārāṇasī—are full of phrases that are indicative of a new attitude, phrases like 'this should be considered further', 'this needs to be reflected on', 'this is the right general direction to go in'.

[6] kuto vā nūtanaṃ vastu vayam utprekṣitum kṣamāḥ | vacovinyāsavaicitryamātram atra vicāryatām || (Jayanta 1936: 5, v. 8). Though certainly exaggerated, Jayanta's disclaimer is still less than that of the influential eighth-century Buddhist writer Śāntideva: 'Nothing new will be said here; nor have I any skill in composition. Therefore I do not imagine that I can benefit others. I have done this [simply] to improve my own mind' (na hi kiṃcitapūrvam atra vācyaṃ na ca saṃgrathanakauśalaṃ mamāsti | ata eva ne me parārthacintā svamano vāsayituṃ kṛtaṃ mayedam || (*Guide to the Path leading to Enlightenment* 1.2).

[7] Ganeri 2001a: 7–41. The term 'nyāya' has several meanings. It denotes a school of philosophy committed to the use of evidence-based methods of inquiry, including observation, inference, and testimony in so far as it is grounded in verifiable trustworthiness. The term also signifies a particular five-step pattern of demonstrative reasoning. In a rather different sense, 'nyāya' refers to a set of heuristic principles to guide practical reason (they are collected in Jacob 1900–4; Apte 1957). It is in this third sense that the term is used by Amartya Sen in his recent study of justice (Sen 2009).

[8] [1597] 1873: 537 (cited in D. C. Bhattacharya 1937). Abu al-Faḍl does not mention Raghunātha in the list of philosophers he provides to accompany this description, Raghunātha presumably already dead when Akbar came to the throne; but he does name someone with close ties to Raghunātha, Vidyānivāsa, and he also mentions Raghunātha's best-known student (see chapter 6).

Openness to inquiry into the problems themselves, a turn towards the facts, is what drives the new work, not merely a new exegesis of the ancient texts, along with a sense that they are engaged in a radical and ongoing project. The spirit which Raghunātha sought to provoke is clearly on display in a passage which asks about the meaning of historical and fictional terms:

> How does it come about that, from hearing the word 'Daśaratha', people now, who never saw Daśaratha [the father of the legendary king Rāma] come to know of him? Likewise how, from the words [for fictional entities like] 'hobgoblin', do others come to know of them? I leave this for attentive scholars to meditate upon. I shall not expand further here.
>
> (*Inquiry* 1915: 60,4–61,4; trans. Potter 1957: 76)

A second group of philosophers, again influenced by Raghunātha, aim to use his work in a profound reinterpretation of ancient metaphysics. In so far as their approach is that, when freshly interpreted and reconceptualized, there is no incompatibility between the ancient and the modern, these Vārāṇasī metaphysicians partly resemble the 'progressive' Aristotelians of early modern Europe. In the first instance, it is not to the most ancient thinkers that they return but to a pair of already innovative philosophers from the more immediate past, Udayana (eleventh century) and Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya (fourteenth century). What stands in between, and takes the place of conservative Aristotelian scholasticism, is the work of a third group of philosophers who grew up in Gaṅgeśa's home town of Mithilā. One dimension of modernity in early modern Indian philosophy has the form of a reappropriation of Udayana and Gaṅgeśa from the Mithilā scholastics.

Other branches of scholarship, including linguistics (vyākaraṇa), philosophical theology (advaita, dvaita and viśiṣṭādvaita vedānta), ritual exegesis (mīmāṃsā), and jurisprudence (dharmaśāstra), encountered early modernity in ways that do not always agree that of the 'new reason', the later Navya Nyāya. Particularly worthy of notice are the Kerala mathematical astronomers, whose sensational work is increasingly being appreciated.[9] In view of the difficulty of the materials and the enormity of the work that remains to be done, I cannot hope to do justice here to every aspect of a hugely complex story. What I do hope is that a study focusing in as much detail as possible on a single aspect of South Asian early modernity will illustrate the nature of the period. Many important early modern Sanskrit intellectuals will not get a mention in this book at all, others in scant and insufficient detail. Nor will I be able to treat in anything like adequate thoroughness the relationship between the 'new reason' philosophers and their affiliates

[9] Nīlakaṇṭha (1444–1545) and Jyeṣṭhadeva (c. 1530) are exemplary figures. Jyeṣṭhadeva's Malayalam *Rationales in Mathematical Astronomy*, for example, contains results, using methods closely analogous to the infinitesimal calculus, for computing the equation of centre and latitudinal motion of Mercury and Venus, derivations in spherical astronomy, and proofs of the infinite series for π, the arc-tangent and the sine functions. See Sarma *et al.* 2008; Narasimha 2009. Raju 2007 presents the case for thinking that Keralan mathematics was transmitted to early modern Europe.

in other disciplines, not to mention their personal religious commitments and the many other factors that go into a complete intellectual profile.

The existence of this modernity, I have emphasized, can be seen only when we free ourselves from the idea that modernity involves a complete rejection of the ancient sources. Our philosophers still, for example, write commentaries, and still use concepts and categories that might, if looked at from a distance, seem archaic. What must be recognized is that the mere activity of writing a commentary, though now strongly associated with conservative scholasticism, does not by itself tell one very much about the author's attitude towards the text being commented on. The fundamental role of a commentary was to mediate a conversation between the past and the present. It therefore offers *us* a route into the question that lies at the heart of *our* study of early modernity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the question of *their* sense of *their* duties towards, or separation from, the ancient philosophical world. There are different sorts of commentary, and a fundamental distinction is between those whose ambition is to clarify or systematize the 'truths' already in the ancient treatise, and those which are using the treatise in the process of a creative pursuit of an inquiry into the truth itself. Early modernity expresses itself as a distinctive way of reading the past, and in our period this also finds a voice in a new genre of commentary, the commentary which digs up the deep or hidden meaning (*gūḍhārtha*) in an ancient text. A mistaken understanding of the ambitions of commentary has also led to a tendency to read new developments back into the original works, with the result that the originality of the later thinkers tends to disappear from view.

Other works structure themselves as auto-commentarial glosses on groups of tersely stated principles (*sūtras*; *kārikās*), in a style familiar to historians of early modern European philosophy through texts like Spinoza's *Ethics* and Descartes' *Principles*. Raghunātha is, nevertheless, also striking in his new promotion of the genre of philosophical treatise in which a problem is discussed directly; his *Inquiry into the True Nature of Things* is just such a work. In general, however, the discursive style in the works of the early modern Indian philosophers—mostly devoid of boastful self-assertion—can make it easy to overlook the originality of their ambitions.

Whereas in Europe the emergence of the new philosophy was inextricably interwoven with the emergence of natural science, in India this was not so. The failure to appreciate that the two developments are nevertheless distinct is another important reason why there has not been a proper diagnosis of early modernity in the philosophy. Generally speaking, what we can say is that early modern forms of philosophical inquiry in India are governed by data drawn from logical form and linguistic practice rather than the microscopic and distal observation of natural phenomena. Philosophy in early modern India made the discipline rest instead on the sort of linguistic turn that characterized, much later, the origins of analytical philosophy in European thought. Bearing this point in mind, it is no surprise that profound affinities should have been discovered between early modern theory in India and twentieth century analytical philosophy (Matilal 1985b, 1986; Ganeri 1999b, 2001a).

A very influential 'theory and method' for the history of philosophy has recently been developed by Quentin Skinner, the core idea of which is that one understands a thinker to the extent that one can fill in the context in which they write in sufficient detail to know what 'illocutionary intervention' their text makes in that context (Skinner 2002). Skinner's method is a very productive one, although I have found that his concept of context needs to be expanded to include what I will call 'intertextual' contexts of intervention. I have therefore taken great care to reconstruct in as much detail as I can the various contexts, social, political, intellectual, and intertextual, in which Raghunātha and his 'new reason' philosophers lived and worked. In the first instance it is within a community of peers that the philosopher seeks to make an intervention, against a background constituted by the history of their intellectual field. I have prefaced my examinations of the new epistemology and the new metaphysics with detailed reconstructions of the history so that the *contrast* between the new and the old, or the lack of it, is evident. It is also of enormous significance that this should be a period of strong Persianate influence and Islamicate power. The problem is to square this fact with another: that one finds very few direct traces, if any, of Islamic or Arabic ideas in the work of the Sanskrit philosophers of the time. It is not at all similar to the situation in astronomy, for example, where the confrontation between ancient Hindu cosmological models and the new Arabic sciences is a topic of heated debate. In philosophy, the causality, if it exists at all, is much more indirect. The Persianate context nevertheless created incentives that had not existed before. One fact to note is that the brightest and best Sanskrit intellectuals were actively encouraged, for instance by Akbar's great minister the Hindu Ṭoḍarmal, to learn Persian and join Mughal imperial office. Those who preferred instead to remain within the intellectual world of Sanskrit faced a very clear challenge to demonstrate the relevance and vitality of that world.[10] They did this by drawing on its resources without burying themselves within its folds. If in Europe power lay with the Aristotelians in the university departments, in India it was located in the Islamicate administration. By not becoming a part of it, the new philosophers were, one could say, in a state of internal exile. Modernity was the alternative to irrelevance. Another possibility is that rather than writing directly about Islamic thought they wrote instead about constructed surrogates within the Sanskrit milieu. In any case what is clear is that the sheer presence of alternative modalities of thought presented motivations and opportunities that had not existed before.

The context of these new philosophers is therefore quite different from an earlier phase of renewal within the tradition. When Gaṅgeśa writes in the fourteenth century, he is responding to a variety of pressures internal to the Sanskrit world, critiques that

[10] An example is Bhārat Candra Raī, a prominent scholar in the court of Kṛṣṇa candra. According to an early report, 'his fondness for Sanskrit studies displeased his relations, who thought that an acquaintance with Muhammadan literature was a better passport to wealth and distinction than the Vedas and Purāṇas.' (Quoted in Wilson 1877: 155–156.)

had been gathering force for some time. One critique came from the direction of a rival philosophical theory about the nature of inquiry, developed within a context of defence of the legitimacy and authority of Vedic knowledge, Mīmāṃsā. If the Vedas are authoritative, then there is no question about the truth of the beliefs we form from them and no further project of verification. Such an attitude towards inquiry is profoundly at odds with one which sees the truth as a matter of discovery and confirmation. The other came from a challenge to the pluralist metaphysics of common-sense. Advaita Vedānta seeks to undermine the principle that appearance is trustworthy, and in particular that there is a world populated by middle-sized objects and known to a plurality of distinct cognizers; all there is, for Advaita, is consciousness, containing the world within itself. These internal challenges will lead Gaṅgeśa to bring to the surface two principles that had been less strongly emphasized before: a firm opposition to deference (an authority is not to be trusted just because it is an authority, but only when its credentials are in place; it is then apt, fit to be believed, *āpta*); and a robust commitment to the individual as a unit of intellectual, moral, and emotional life (the particular self—*ātman*—as a locus of psychological properties).

The two sources of internal challenge come both from rival Hindu theory. Gaṅgeśa's context was, in this respect, again very different from that of *his* predecessors, for whom the dominant intellectual circumstance was one fashioned by an intense and long-enduring dialectic with Buddhism (Matilal 1986; Ganeri 2007). It is entirely possible that it was precisely because Nyāya philosophers had configured themselves so as to be able to offer a robust answer to the Buddhists that their philosophy was left vulnerable to challenge from rival theory closer to home, in the turf-war which became possible only after Buddhist philosophers were exiled.[11] Be that as it may, and in spite of the description of his theory as 'new', Gaṅgeśa continued to be a pre-modern thinker in this sense: he writes to defend the ancient philosophy from rival critique rather than to channel its resources in the project of a new inquiry into the truth as such. Gaṅgeśa could not, as Raghunātha was to do, simply reject several of the ancient metaphysical categories on the grounds that they no longer made any sense. Nor could he bring himself to acknowledge new sources of knowledge and methods of inquiry. For all its originality, and despite the fact that later thinkers look to his and Udayana's work as laying the foundations of the new Nyāya, neither Gaṅgeśa nor any of the philosophers who lived after him in Mithilā can be described as other than pre-modern. If we compare with the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* in the Renaissance, where those who follow the path of 'the ancients sought solutions to contemporary problems in the works of classical antiquity . . . [while those who follow the path of] the moderns believed that contemporary thinkers had in some cases improved on the works of the classical writers' (Osler 1993: 131), then, in this terminology, Gaṅgeśa remains a *via antiqua* thinker while Raghunātha is the first to adopt the *via moderna*.

[11] One of the forms which that configuration took was an emphasis on a 'medicinal' or 'therapeutic' understanding of philosophy; see Ganeri 2007; Ganeri and Carlisle 2010.

The Mithilā philosophers create, indeed, a genre of commentarial writing on Gaṅgeśa that comes to function a little like the conservative scholastic writings on Aristotle, a road-block to progress. It was left to two new communities of philosophers, one based in Raghunātha's hometown of Navadvīpa and the other in the historical city of Vārāṇasī, to fashion a new modernity. Vārāṇasī had in the course of the sixteenth century become a great meeting place and point of aggregation for Sanskrit scholars from all over India.[12] I will look first at three intellectual stories that are centred in this city in the seventeenth century: the stories of a Muslim Sufi, a Jaina, and a group of Hindu 'new reason' thinkers. Philosophers in Raghunātha's town of Navadvīpa, a famously cosmopolitan place with a long and complex history of Muslim–Hindu interaction, take Raghunātha's achievement to lie in his having perceived a new methodology for philosophy, a kind of logico-philosophical linguistics. They are less worried about compatibilism with the ancient tradition, more interested in pursuing a quite new research programme for philosophy, though one which is happy to draw upon and rework resources from the past.

As Julian Martin reminds us, however, 'For Ramus, Galileo, Descartes, and for Bacon, "modernity" was a studied pose, and since studied poses involve self-conscious choices, explaining why [they] chose to adopt it requires close attention' (Martin 1993: 74). I will describe some of the significance which the new philosophical ideas had in the seventeenth century. In the chapters that follow, I will say much more about the intellectual climate of the times in Vārāṇasī and in Navadvīpa. I will describe how philosophy was embodied: the nature of its texts, the genres in which it took form, both commentaries on established works, and, increasingly, in the production of short free-standing treatises on particular topics. I will offer a revised Skinnerian methodology for studying the philosophical literature of the period. In later parts of the book, I will explore in detail the substantive philosophical issues which the early modern Indian thinkers grapple with and their motivations for doing so. To make sense of their discussion, I will have to spend quite a lot of time reconstructing the intellectual context, which for these thinkers primarily means the centuries-long philosophical tradition a transformation within which was their primary aim. The issues I have chosen are those which constitute the fundamental underpinnings of the new philosophy: an epistemology to explain the possibility of systematic inquiry in the face of serious challenges from other sectors of the Hindu intellectual world; a new realism to explain the possibility of an objective conception of the external world; and a new language in which to formulate philosophical theory with precision and clarity.

It is only by going deeply into the thinking of the new philosophers that we will be able to establish for certain that theirs was a newness of substance and not merely of style. I believe that in a very complex political and intellectual climate the early modern 'new reason' thinkers were developing philosophical ideas of great radicality and

[12] 'Vārāṇasī in the seventeenth century witnessed a confluence of more or less free intellectuals . . . of a sort it had almost certainly never seen before' (Pollock 2001b: 21).

originality, initiating a line of philosophical inquiry that did not so much run its course as was brought to a virtual stand-still, in the first instance by the collapse in stable Mughal power and patronage, and in the second by the disruption caused to established patterns for conducting and financing education by the British imposition of new fiscal arrangements and educational policies. Work in the 'new reason' continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in an educational set-up now sharply bifurcated between low-prestige traditional networks and well-funded colonial colleges and universities.[13] What was lost from this 'lost age of reason' is the what-might-have-been had that bifurcation not taken place. Much more work is needed to recover a fuller understanding of the philosophical project, but I hope that I have done enough to make a case for further interest in this phenomenally rich episode in the history of philosophy, a period from which all those who are interested in the nature of modernity and its global origins have a great deal to learn.

[13] See Krishna 1997c; 2001.

PART I

India Expanding

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1

The World and India: 1656

François Bernier and his paṇḍit

India in the seventeenth century, the century after Akbar, was in intellectual overdrive. Muslim, Jaina, and Hindu intellectuals produced work of tremendous vitality, and ideas circulated around South Asia, through the Persianate and Arabic worlds, and out to Europe and back. If ever there were a concrete embodiment of the open and spacious 'idea of India' to which Rabindranath Tagore would later give voice, it was here.[1] To get an impression of the times let us fix our gaze on a single year, the year 1656. In India, this was the year in which a long-running process of religious isomorphism, pioneered by Akbar's chronicler Abu al-Faḍl and orchestrated around Ibn al-Arabīs idea of 'unity in being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), reached fulfilment in Dārā Shukoh's grand project to translate fifty-two Upaniṣads into Persian, a project for the sake of which he assembled in Vārāṇasī (Benares; aka Kāśī) a large team of bilingual scholars. Dārā believed that he could establish that the differences between Hinduism and Islam were largely terminological, and even that the Upaniṣads can be read as a sort of commentary upon the Qur'ān. The fallout from this remarkable project of Dārā, Akbar's great-grandson and heir apparent to the Mughal throne, would reverberate throughout the period and long afterwards.

1656 would also be the year in which the French philosopher and physician François Bernier would leave behind him the France of *les libertins érudits* on a journey that would soon bring him to Mughal India. In Bernier's travel writings, we will find a fragment of testimony to the aftermath of Dārā Shukoh's translational project. Before embarking on his travels, Bernier had been the protégé of the early modern philosopher, scientist, and mathematician Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). Indeed, it was Bernier who would eventually—on his return to France—devote himself to making Gassendi's work available to French and British audiences. Before doing so, however, he was to spend years as the court physician first of Dārā Shukoh and then of Aurangzeb. In a letter written from Shiraz in 1667, some ten years after the Vārāṇasī project, Bernier describes how he had come to know one of the paṇḍits whom Dārā Shukoh had used,

[1] '[C]annot India rise above her limitations and offer a great ideal to the world . . . ? I feel that the true India is an idea and not merely a geographical fact . . . The idea of India is *against* the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others.' Tagore 1921: 287–288; see Amartya Sen 2005 for further discussion.

someone fluent in both Sanskrit and Persian, how they had exchanged the latest medical and philosophical knowledge, and, fascinatingly, how he had translated work by Descartes and Gassendi into Persian for the paṇḍit's benefit:

> Do not be surprised if without knowledge of Sanskrit I am going to tell you many things taken from books in that language; you will know that my Agha, Dānişmand Khān, paid for the presence of one of the most famous paṇḍits in India, who before had been pensioned by Dārā Shukoh, the oldest son of Shāh Jahān, and that this paṇḍit, apart from attracting the most learned scientists to our circle, was at my side for over three years. When I became weary of explaining to my Agha the latest discoveries of William Harvey and Pequet in anatomy, and to reason with him on the philosophy of Gassendi and Descartes, which I translated into Persian (because that is what I did during five or six years) it was up to our paṇḍit to argue.[2]

It is of considerable interest to those who are interested in the global circulation of ideas to be told here that the work of Descartes, by this time the leading French philosopher and a key figure in the Early Enlightenment, was available to the Vārāṇasī paṇḍits already in the early 1660s, barely ten years after his death. If Bernier's testimony is reliable, the migration of ideas was already remarkably swift. As for the name of Bernier's paṇḍit, and the nature of his reaction to the work of Descartes or Gassendi, that is a story which Bernier neglected to tell. He has now provisionally been identified (Gode 1954a) as the very influential scholar–poet Kavīndra Sarasvatī, an important intermediary between the Sanskrit intelligentsia and the Mughal court, and someone who built up a great library.[3] The patron of Bernier during this period was the Persian nobleman Dānişmand Khān, who was the only person to oppose the capital sentence against Dārā (Smith 1923: 415, 425), and who afterwards offered Kavīndra and Bernier employment. His generosity and openness created the space for a remarkable exchange of French, Persian and Sanskrit philosophical ideas in the three years from 1658/9 to 1661/2. Kavīndra was on good terms with perhaps the most important of the 'new reason' philosophers in Vārāṇasī, Jayarāma Nyāyapañcānana, about whom I will have much more to say. It would be during this period that Jayarāma would write two very unusual and significant works, *The Garland of Principles about Reason*, and *The Garland of Categories*.

Bernier does include in his letter a fascinating account of the secret doctrine which Dārā thought he had rediscovered in the Upaniṣads, a doctrine Bernier describes as having been the source of a considerable degree of fuss:

[2] 'Letter to Monsieur Chapelain, Despatched from Chiras in Persia, the 4th October 1667,' in Bernier 1981; translated in Bernier 1934: 323–325; again in Rizvi 1989.

[3] H. Shastri 1912: 11; Gode 1945. Shastri tells us that 'he was a great collector of manuscripts. It is not known how many thousands of manuscripts he collected, but all the manuscripts of his library bear in large, bold, and beautiful Devanāgarī character his signature *sarva-vidyā-nidhāna-kavīndra-sarasvatī*. That signature is a guarantee for the correctness and accuracy of the manuscript. It is not known when and how the library was broken up, but the manuscripts of his library can now be procured in Benares, and they are preferred by all Paṇḍits to other manuscripts.' The importance of Kavīndra is independent of the correctness of Gode's identification.

In conclusion, I shall explain to you the Mysticism of a Great Sect which has latterly made great noise in Hindustan, inasmuch as certain paṇḍits or 'gentile doctors' had instilled it into the minds of Dārā and Sultan Sujah, the eldest sons of Shāh Jahāṇ.

(1934: 345)

The doctrine in question, that the world is rationally ordered according to principles derived from final causes, is one which Bernier finds in the work of the Greeks:

You are doubtless acquainted with the doctrine of many of the ancient philosophers concerning that great life-giving principle of the world, of which they argue that we and all living creatures are so many parts: if we carefully examine the writings of Plato and Aristotle, we shall probably discover that they inclined towards this opinion. This is the almost universal doctrine which is held by the sect of the Sūfis and the greater part of the learned men of Persia at the present day.

(1934: 345–346)

Bernier is explicit about the reason for his antipathy towards this doctrine: in the version defended by Robert Fludd, it had itself been refuted by his philosophical mentor Gassendi.[4] Bernier's presentation of the doctrine clearly bears traces of his association with the Hindu paṇḍits. He describes the idea in question as being that

God has not only produced life from his own substance, but also generally everything material or corporeal in the universe, and that this production is not formed simply after the manner of efficient causes, but as a spider which produces a web from its own navel, and withdraws it at pleasure. The Creation then, say these visionary doctors, is nothing more than an extraction or extension of the individual substance of God, of those filaments which He draws from his own bowels; and, in like manner, destruction is merely the recalling of that divine substance and filaments into Himself.

He concludes that this idea has led him to take as his motto the slogan that 'there is no doctrine too strange or too improbable for the soul of man to conceive'.[5]

The year 1656 was to be fateful in Europe too, for it was the year in which Spinoza received his *cherem* in Amsterdam, an excommunication from the Portuguese Jewish community as a result of an anticipation of the heretical views he would later systematize, the pantheistic or atheistic doctrine that 'God or Nature' is the only substance, the denial of miracles, of prophecy, and of scriptural revelation. The influential French early moderns Bayle and Malebranche soon came to perceive China to be a land inhabited by Spinozists, but it would fall to Anquetil Duperron, while introducing his Latin translation of Dārā Shukoh's Persian Upaniṣads, to declare

[4] Fludd drew on Neoplatonist resources in a search for hidden connections between a purely intelligible realm and the realm of sensation.

[5] Perhaps Bernier had in mind Part Two of Descartes' *Discourse*, where Descartes, reflecting on the philosophical value of his own travels, says, '[I]n my school days I discovered that nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher; and since then I have recognized through my travels that those with views quite contrary to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages' (AT vi. 16; 1984: 118–119).