

# Chapter 5

## Brajendra Nath Seal: A *Disenchanted Hegelian*

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**Abstract** Brajendra Nath Seal, one of the greatest savants of the nineteenth/twentieth century Bengal, set on his philosophical journey following in the footprints of Hegel. However, he discovered the flaws and biases in the Hegelian system of thought quite early. Having imbibed the wisdom of the East and the West, he developed his own philosophy characterized by syncretism, internationalism and interdisciplinarity. He drew the attention of the Western world to the scientific temper of the Indian mind garnering evidence from the ancient Indian philosophical treatises. He was the architect of the subject ‘Indian philosophy’ as we study it today. His philosophy of education and academic administration are still relevant.

**Keywords** Hegelian · Synthetic · Critico-comparative method · *Pāñcarātra* · Grades of divine manifestation · Education · Syllabus · Indian philosophy

### 5.1 Brajendra Nath Seal: A *Forgotten Genius*

The main objective of this essay is to explore the thoughts and works of a forgotten genius who was acclaimed as the greatest savant of the nineteenth century India. Edward Thompson told in his obituary tribute to the world, broadcast by BBC, “In my judgment, Brajendra Nath Seal was one of the greatest intellects of his time in India, a man in some ways unsurpassed. The late Sir Patrick Geddes used to say that Seal’s was the greatest brain functioning on earth.”<sup>1</sup> And what was his time? It is 1864–1938 and who were his contemporaries? Rabindranath

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<sup>1</sup> Broadcast talk from London: Empire Transmission III, January 26, 1939 at 4.20–4.35 p.m., as mentioned in Chatterjee (1968: 58–62).

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Tagore, Narendranath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda), Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jagdish Chandra Bose, Prafulla Chandra Roy, Bipin Chandra Pal, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya, Hiralal Haldar, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Hirendra Nath Dutta and many other luminaries who were the architects of modern India and thought to be the products of the controversial ‘Bengal Renaissance.’ One may not want to take Thompson’s words seriously because obituary tributes are often filled with overstatements. However, long before his death, he was acknowledged as the moving encyclopaedia for the extent and depth of his knowledge. According to Sir Asutosh, the most powerful microscope would be needed to detect any cultural germ which might have successfully escaped his omnivorous intellect. However, his mind was not an uninteresting stockpile of information: “what was unique about Brajendra Nath Seal was the soaring quality of his mind which, rising from its base of knowledge could ascend to great heights and see therefore visions of new vistas open before it; To a view of those visions he called everyone” (Chatterjee 1968). He was a friend, philosopher and guide to all who used to come to him for some advice and the man was considered greater than his works. Long after his death, his two students S.K. Maitra and Rasvihary Das reminisced about him in the following manner which, we think will give the readers an idea of his characteristic qualities.

Indeed very few people have impressed me so much as the late Dr. Seal by the breadth and depth of his scholarship, his phenomenal memory, his urbanity and above all, by his wonderful conversational powers. His conversational powers were indeed so wonderful that I have always regretted that there was no Boswell to record his talks. One had only to mention a topic and words would flow from him like a torrent for hours. And what words! Many leading men of Bengal of the present and also of the past century—writers, teachers, statesmen, politicians—derived the inspiration of their lives from these talks. I have heard him talk in one of the common rooms of the Lowis Jubilee Sanitarium, Darjeeling, or in his room in his house in Rammohan Shah Lane, Calcutta, for hours, keeping his audience literally spell-bound. (Maitra 1936: 382)

Rasvihary Das wrote,

I am particularly indebted to Dr. B.N. Seal and Professor K.C. Bhattacharyya. The wide sweep of Dr. Seal’s mind and the breadth of his views impressed me, and it was probably from him that I derived an interest in knowledge of all kinds as well as an interest in free speculative thinking. He was an enthusiast for Indian Philosophy and introduced me to Śankara and Rāmānuja. I easily followed him in his sympathy for the latter’s teaching. (Das 1936: 232)

He has powerfully influenced my life and thought, not so much perhaps by his actual teaching as by his example and close association. (Das 1968: 139)

Seal’s published works are few and none of them was on what academics considered as philosophy even a few years ago, *The Gita: A synthetic Interpretation* (Seal 1964) being an exception. But he generously wrote introductions to scholarly works of heterogeneous genre, which included *A History of Hindu Chemistry* by Ray (1909), *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* by Sarkar (1914) and *Indian Shipping: A History of the Sea-borne Trade and Maritime Activity of the Indians from the Earliest Times* by Mukharji (1910). The only available philosophical work, *The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus* (Seal 1985), on which he was awarded a doctoral degree of the University of Calcutta, was a collection

of introductions and appendices of the first two books mentioned above and which was sent to press by Benoy Sarkar without informing Dr. Seal. His writings on education administration, education reform, self-study and pedagogy are relevant even today. His philosophical thoughts too need re-evaluation from the contemporary perspectives, the inspiration for which we have derived from K.C. Bhattacharyya, whom we have learnt to take seriously. Bhattacharyya wrote:

I found out later in conversation and in listening to his discourses before the Philosophical Society that his scholarship in philosophy, I cannot speak of other subjects, was not only very comprehensive and precise but thoroughly organized and grouped round living thoughts, each with a promise of magnificent growth. (Bhattacharyya 1968: 52)

We cannot and should not ignore such a thinker when we are discussing modern Indian philosophy of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

## 5.2 The Hegelian Impact

Brajendra Nath Seal in his formative years was strongly influenced by Hegel. However, he soon detected the loopholes of the Hegelian philosophy. His thorough grounding in Indian philosophical traditions and acquaintance with the new developments in the field of natural and social sciences made him weary of Hegel's concept of history, philosophy and logic. However, this account should come much later in our narrative. We need to discuss first how Kant and Hegel became two dominant forces amongst the academic philosophers of the nineteenth century.

Indian thought and culture were open to the West, especially through its trade-routes, since ancient times. However, through Arabic translation Indian theories got quite transformed by the time they reached the European soil. So, when the Europeans came to India, they rediscovered India with all its material and cultural richness. Oriental studies comprising Indology, Sinology, etc., started to flourish from the 17th century. The concern of Indology, like Sinology, was not only philosophy but an entire country—including its history, language, religion, culture and civilization. When the Europeans came in contact with Indian culture and civilization, they were quickly divided into two groups; the first group comprising Indophiles such as Max Müller, Schlegel, Kant, Herder, Schopenhauer and Humboldt and the second group consisted of Indophobes such as Hegel, Schelling and Schleiermacher. These two attitudes can be gleaned clearly from Hegel's two articles on the interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* by Humboldt. Scholars belonging to the first group were enamoured by the philosophical thoughts of ancient India and viewed India through romantic eyes, while Hegel and other Indophobes shared a distinct animosity towards everything Indian. The latter attitude persisted for a long time. Husserl and Heidegger too thought like Hegel that philosophy is essentially a European phenomenon and hence India couldn't have any philosophy.

Indologists discussed Indian Philosophy from a philological orientation and later from anthropological standpoint with the ultimate end of discovering some

cultural universals. To both Indophiles and Indophobes, however, Indian thought was an ‘other’ of the European thought, the study of which would enable Europe to know herself better. Hegel never read original Indian texts, yet considered himself as competent to examine and evaluate Indian thought. When Humboldt commented on Schlegel’s Latin translation of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* meticulously, Hegel wrote his infamous essays. Let me at this point compare briefly Humboldt’s and Hegel’s approaches to philosophy in general, which were opposed to each other.

Humboldt approached philosophy through language. He was an excellent philologist. Language was, to Humboldt, “as realization of the spirit a dynamic progressive process, the never-ending, perpetual striving after the revelation of what is to be revealed” (Herring 1995: xiii). Humboldt had great interest and respect for Indian life and culture, the knowledge of which he gathered from Sanskrit texts simply because he thought that all civilized languages originated from Sanskrit and therefore a thorough study of Sanskrit would enable one to understand and evaluate the history of development of the Indo-Germanic languages. Humboldt’s philological interests merged with his religio-philosophical ones. So when he came across Schlegel’s Latin translation of The *Gītā*, he wrote in a letter dated 21 June 1823,

I cannot deny that while reading I was overwhelmed more than once by the emotional feeling of genuine gratitude towards destiny for granting me the opportunity to listen to this poem in the original language.... Nothing of what I have read so far in Sanskrit has exercised such an impression on me, yet I concede that the one who reads it in a translation only, even the best one, cannot at all have such a feeling. The translation of such a work is like the description of a painting: colours and light are missing.... *Gītā* is the most beautiful, presumably the only real philosophical poem of all known literature. (Herring 1995: xiii)

Humboldt advised the German scholars to understand the book as a whole without comparing it with other known philosophical theses and be aware of ‘the dark spots’ in Indian mythology and not to confuse the philosophical theses with the Purānic myths. But, he found to his horror that Hegel had done exactly the thing he had advised people not to do. However, it will be too simplistic if we consider Humboldt’s and Hegel’s approaches to the *Gītā* in terms of their affective attitude towards Indian or other non-European culture; rather, these reflect their entirely different and antagonistic ideas of the roles of religion and philosophy in unfolding the world history.

Humboldt was thinking within the Kantian paradigm of Critical Idealism. As he wrote, “The true end of man—not that prescribed by changing inclinations but that prescribed by eternal unchanging reason—is the highest and most balanced shaping of his powers into a unified whole” (Herring 1995: xvii). Unlike Hegel, he did not proclaim the state as the metaphysical and political purpose and aim of individual. Second, Humboldt thought the only way the course of history can be investigated was by empirical means. It is necessary for this purpose to do a subtle and detailed study of various peoples and nations and the performances of their great exemplary individuals. We shall see soon that Seal too considered empirical methods important for understanding society and the individual. Hegel,

on the other hand, thought that the course of history was to be derived from an a priori teleological principle. Hegel wrote in the Introduction of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*,

The history of the world is none other than the development of the consciousness of spirit. The result is at which the process of world history has been continually aiming... This is the only aim which sees itself realized and fulfilled, the only pole of repose amid the ceaseless change of events and conditions, and the sole sufficient principle that prevails them... This final aim is God's purpose with the world. (Herring 1995: xviii)

Hegel's idea of freedom was also different from that of Kant. To Kant, 'freedom' was a natural capacity to comply with the Moral Law. Hegel, on the other hand, maintained that the slave obeys because he is afraid of his master's whip; the free man obeys because of his voluntary decision when he realizes himself as a moral being. But this is realizable, thought Hegel, only in a 'reasonable state.' In a reasonable human community only the subjective will of the individual submits to law, and hence, the contradiction between liberty and necessity disappears. It was Hegel's idea that the Orientals—in the childhood of history—lived under the impression that only one single man was free, the despot, the tyrant. The ancient Greeks and Romans—representing the stages of adolescence and early manhood in history—were convinced that a few were free, the adequate form of the state in this conviction being aristocracy or democracy. However, history reached its maturity with the Germanic people coming at the stage which generated freedom of each and all, its form of government being monarchy. That India was never governed by one single monarch and consequently there was no idea of a nation-state was sufficient proof for Hegel of political immaturity and lack of freedom of the caste-ridden Indian societies.

Hegel's thesis might appear utterly confusing because we tend to think that freedom of each individual is guaranteed in a democratic form of government. But according to Hegel, democracy represents the will of single citizens who are ruled by individual or group interests. Monarchs, on the other hand, are the great world-historical individuals who keep the universal purpose of mankind as their personal aim.

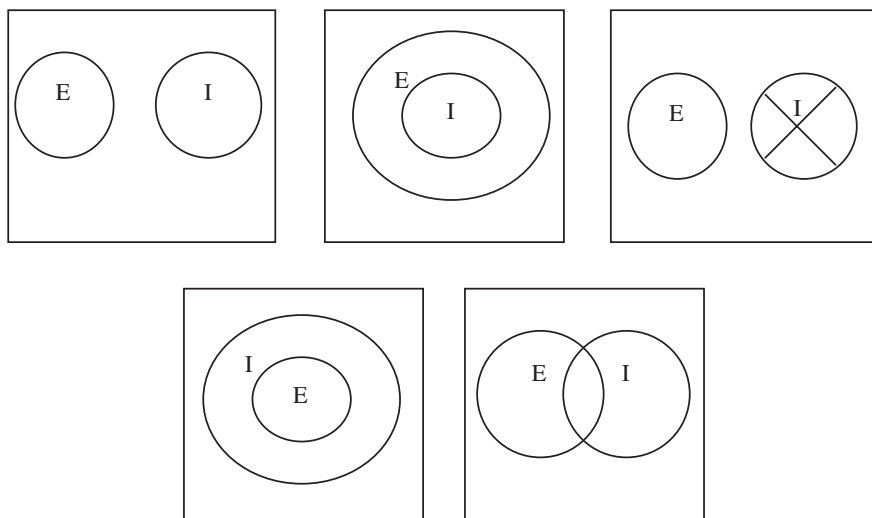
The progressive course of history, showed Hegel, is from myth to reason, from the idea of the abstract unqualified spirit to consciousness and conscience of the individual as a moral person. In Indian thought, Hegel did not detect any distinction amongst myth, religion and philosophy (which is an unbounded domain of critical thinking) and no concept of individual as a moral agent on its own account. For, the ultimate aim of Indian philosophy was to merge every individual with one absolute, unqualified, indeterminate substance, thus leaving aside all individual distinctions. Since Hegel was convinced that the autonomy in this human world was finally realized in Germanic thought, Indian thought appeared to him as lower than the Occident's because the former was merely in a preparatory stage. The main deficiencies, according to Hegel, of Indian philosophical systems (heterodox and orthodox alike) are its abstractness manifested through the renunciation of the world and the lack of the concept of the autonomous, free, self-conscious

individual. But Hegel did not stop here. He further declared that the whole life and imagination of the Indians

... is nothing but superstition.... The annihilation, casting away of all reason; morality and subjectivity can only lead to a positive feeling and consciousness...when exceeding to crude imaginations, therein as a dissolute spirit finding no rest, no coming to oneself, but in such a way only enjoying the pleasures of life. (Herring 1995: xx–xxi)

Halbfass (1990: 98) has denounced the Hegelian arrogance which was manifested in his select objectification of India and his idea of Indian thought being superseded by and contained in modern Western thought. However, in spite of Hegel's denouncement of Indian philosophy, the Hegelian logic and philosophy captured the imagination of thinkers of the colonial India and continued to exert its influence for quite long time. Lectures on Kant and Hegel were regular features in liberal arts courses of the University of Calcutta, even before its department of philosophy came into existence. When in 1913 the department started with Brajendra Nath Seal as George V Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy, works of Kant and Hegel were immediately included in the philosophy syllabus and stalwarts like Seal, K.C. Bhattacharyya, and Hiralal Haldar were the exponents of these works.

Without delving further in the spread of European influence on the colonial Indian psyche, let us remind ourselves that there were various models of interaction between Europe and India in the nineteenth century. Figure 5.1 provides schematic representations of the ways how India, especially her philosophy, affected the Europeans. The *first* scheme represented by two disjoint circles expresses the famous attitude—*the East is East and the West is West; the twain shall never meet*. This attitude did not necessarily imply disrespect to the other culture; nonetheless, European and Indian forms of life and thought were to run parallel and remain alien



**Fig. 5.1** Schematic representations of the ways Indian philosophy affected Europeans

to each other without any prospect of convergence. The *second* scheme represents the Hegelian thought in which Indian civilization was included within the European civilization being its primitive form. The *third* scheme stands for the moments of the European denial of Indian philosophy by Hegel and others. The fifth scheme represents different ways of doing comparative philosophy. The *fourth* scheme shows that ignoring the other tradition of philosophy was not the monopoly of the Western philosophers alone. The same charge can be brought against many Indian scholars who upheld that we need not look at other ways of thinking because the Vedic knowledge system was complete and also against those who wrongly maintained that all brands of philosophizing can be integrated within Vedānta.

### 5.3 Hegelianism Reviewed

In this backdrop, we shall try to present and understand the philosophical thoughts of Brajendra Nath Seal. Like other thinkers of his time, Seal assimilated the new learning from the West and the social, political and scientific culture embodied in it. During his student days, he was much impressed by positivism of Comte, Kantian notion of Reason, the French Revolution's ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, as well as Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta. He imbibed Hegelian philosophy from Henry Stephen who came to teach mathematics in the General Assembly Institute and Seal accepted whole heartedly Hegel's concept of Absolute Reason, its manifestation through different stages of human history and Hegelian dialectics. What appealed to the polymath Seal most in Hegel was the compactness of his exposition and the applicability of his methods in the most varied disciplines. As has already been pointed out, Hegel started from the basic notion that philosophy as the science of the Absolute, by means of a careful observation of the spontaneous unfolding of Absolute Reason, can deduce the particular from the general, and finally the entire real world by the autonomous shifting of terms. Seal noticed with great fascination that Hegel dealt with every phenomenon of natural and spiritual life and assigned it a place in his all-embracing structure of thoughts. That is why, Hegel discussed in detail the concept of Indianhood in all its forms and in which it has found expression; he had in his own way studied its history, political and social institutions, art, science, religion and philosophy. In 1890, Seal wrote in 'The Neo-romantic Movement in Literature':

No department of investigation dealing with the mental history of the race promises so much success, if we judge from the magnitude of results already achieved. Hegel's grand generalization concerning the three stages of art, the oriental, the classical and the romantic, is one of the most luminous and fruitful, that the comparative method has given to the world. Indeed it is surpassed in immensity of range only by one or two generalizations of sociology. Comte's law of three stages and Herbert Spencer's classification of types of social structure in the order of their genesis are certainly vaster still, but the one is exploded and the other has been only sketched in outline and waits elaboration. The three stages of Hegel, on the other hand, have been accepted, with whatever modifications, in the highest circle of philosophical criticism. (Seal 1890: 363)

However, the more he read Indian thoughts embodied in different systems, the more he came to understand the shallowness of Hegel's understanding of India and inapplicability of his linear Historical method in explaining the social evolution of the human race and civilization. He became convinced that the civilizations of Egypt and Babylon, Greece and Rome, India, China and Japan could not have emerged from the same root because the multiple bonds of utility that led to the formation of a complex whole called social structure or civilization were distinctive of a particular community in a given age. Moreover, these were not static but evolved like organisms in a biological series. He succinctly expressed his reservations against Hegelian system. "I was convinced", wrote Seal, "that any philosophical system which fails to accept and reconcile the timeless reality and the temporal relativity at once puts itself out of court and is as unscientific as it is unphilosophical" (in Das 1968). Besides, he did not admit that Absolute Reason reached its point of culmination in the European culture. To him East and West were equally valuable and they had equally and independently created culture and cultural values. Though Seal considered reason as the tool of philosophical investigation, yet he did not believe that reason was immutable. He upheld that there was no immutable and infallible means of knowledge in the possession of man. What is called reason and is supposed to be such a means is, like all other capacities of man, dependent on the physiological structure of the brain which may change in course of evolution (Seal 1911). Here, he had deviated from Kant, Hegel and all rationalist philosophers and came closer to neo-Darwinism.

Another point in which Seal diverged from Hegel was his concept of a State. Seal looked upon the nation as a conscious social 'Personality', exercising rational choice as determined by ideal ends and values, and having an organ, the State, for announcing and executing its will. All individuals are integral members of this Composite Personality, but the individual units are themselves Persons, and, therefore, self-determining wills. He was far from transforming the State into a kind of God whom everybody had to obey, or which was above everything in the Hegelian sense. This liberal ideal of State he didn't inherit either from Hegel or from Indian philosophy; it was his own. A compatible marriage between Western knowledge and Indian wisdom gave birth to this offspring. Seal upheld that the best form of State on earth should conform to this ideal. In Indian philosophy, the idea of common good (*loka-śreyas*) was considered more important than individual freedom, though the concept of liberation or *mokṣa* was individualistic. So, social stability (*lokasthiti*), social solidarity (*loka-saṃgraha*), social consensus (*mahājana-prtyaya*) and social continuity (*mahājana-sampradāya*) were taken as the four basic values which were supposedly sufficient for ensuring social progress. However, within Indian tradition, freedom of the individual from the trammels of social custom could be secured in either of the following ways: (a) by accepting *sannyāsa* or *pravrajyā*, i.e., by embracing an ascetic's life, (b) by following the rules of life of a householder who gives up the Vedic values and rites as prescribed in Kulluka's commentary on the *Manusmṛti*, 4/22–24 and (c) by choosing one's own code of conduct (*ācāra*), one's own creed and Guru (the spiritual teacher) and attaching oneself to any of the precepts orthodox (*vedānukūla*)



or heterodox (*veda-bāhya*), e.g., Śaiva, Śākta, Bhāgavata, Bauddha, Jaina, Siddha, Nātha, Sahaja or by forming a school by himself (Seal 1924).

Seal also condemned Hegel's logic as defective because of its triadic rhythm scheme. He explained to his student S.K. Maitra, 'The triadic rhythm makes a fine musical appeal, no doubt, but ours is a hard world, too hard to be put under this musical scheme.' He thought that the *Caturvyūhavāda*, the theory of four grades of divine manifestation, as offered in the Pāñcarātra tradition of the Vaiṣṇavas was far superior to the triadic scheme of Hegel. But in the tetradic scheme, reason did not play the leading role; it yielded place to devotion. According to different Pāñcarātra texts, the highest principle, Brahman, voluntarily condescends to emerge in fourfold form out of his compassion for his devotees. The first mode of the highest principle, Vāsudeva, is self-complete and has for his subtle body the total complex of six qualities, three static—knowledge (*jñāna*), sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) and power/capacity (*śakti*), and three dynamic, viz. force (*bala*), valour/creative vibrancy (*vīrya*) and effulgence (*tejas*). Though replete with possibilities, in Vāsudeva all these attributes remain undifferentiated. This subtle body is divided into halves and out of one half emerges the individual soul (*jīva*), named Saṁkarṣana, which combines the attributes of knowledge and force. Saṁkarṣana once again halves himself and there arises the internal organ *manas*, named Pradyumna, possessing the attributes of sovereignty and creative vibrancy, and from one half of Pradyumna emerges the principle of egoity (*ahamkāra*), called Aniruddha, having the attributes of power and effulgence. Two important points must be mentioned here. *First*, when one static and one dynamic attribute are combined in a specific mode (*vyūha*), the other four are not absent but only remain dormant. *Second*, as Vāsudeva is successively manifested, none of the modes are incomplete. The process of sequential appearance is compared with the sequential lighting of one lamp from another. *Lakṣmī-tantra* further clarifies this process of the physical and spiritual evolution of beings thus:

Saṁkarṣana provides the foundation for all the individual souls, Pradyumna enters into the souls, seizes hold of the faculty of awareness and distinguishes between the subjective and objective frames of reference, and Aniruddha projects the world of multiplicity and differentiations.... The four nodes going bottom up are also equated to *jāgrat* (wakefulness), *svapna* (dream), *susupti* (deep sleep) and *tūrīya* (the state beyond it).<sup>2</sup>

This is how the absolute principle manifests itself in the universe through the above-mentioned fourfold modes. When the progressive evolution reaches its culmination, regressive moment starts. In this reverse process, Aniruddha merges with Pradyumna, Pradyumna with Saṁkarṣana and Saṁkarṣana merges with Vāsudeva. So, the entire history of evolution of the universe is nothing but the revelation of these moments. Now we can conjecture how Seal might have assigned logical values to the four modes. If we begin with Aniruddha representing the multiplicity and differentiations of the objective world and assign it the value *p*, then

<sup>2</sup> Sri Pedia Pāñcarātra/modes, downloaded on 4/7/2010. I am indebted to Rupa Bandyopadhyay for providing me with authentic source books on the *Pāñcarātra* philosophy.

Pradyumna can be assigned the value  $\sim p$  as the subjective state is opposed to the objective world. Every individual soul contains both the subjective and the objective elements so the appropriate logical valuation of this stage should be  $p$  and  $\sim p$ . As Vāsudeva mode transcends all these stages, it can be assigned the value  $\sim(p \vee \sim p)$  from the transcendental point of view.<sup>3</sup> Though Seal highly praised this tetradic scheme, as a mathematician and as a social scientist he believed in the possibility of extending the four-valued scheme to  $n$ -valued schemes.

Like Hegel and the Hegelians, Seal did not hold philosophy to be out and out a theoretical discipline. Philosophy, according to him, is a synthetic enterprise which does not place theory and practice in two water-tight compartments. In Indian philosophy, he pointed out that there is no chasm between theory and practice.

When Indians first came in contact with the European culture, there was a wholesale rejection of the tradition in the name of reason and science. In the second stage, however, the pendulum swung to the other extreme and there was a return to the orthodoxy as unassailable. Seal was against both these extreme positions. When Bengal was in deep despondency during the colonial period, aggressive nationalism was being championed by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Nabinchandra Sen and others in the form of glorification of everything Indian, especially of everything Hindu. Swami Vivekananda was also helping this cause in his own way. An orator called Śāśadhara Tarkachudāmaṇi preached that in the time of the ancient Vedas all the knowledge of modern scientific Europe was known. Seal called this move ‘the great sink of national imbecility’ (Seal 1903) and warned people not to believe such utter nonsense. Similar note of caution was issued by Sir Asutosh in his Convocation Address of 1911 as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, which was published in Volume XIV of *The Dawn*. All like-minded people condemned this irrational brand of nationalism which betrayed a lack of true historical spirit.

While highlighting the differences amongst different cultures, Seal did not rule out the possibility of comparative study. The early Indologists were engaged in very superficial comparison which neither contributed to intercultural understanding in a significant way nor led to any creative philosophy. There are some methodological problems of pursuing comparative philosophy. One can only manage to offer some external criticism of the other tradition from within one’s own tradition. To make a significant comparison of two traditions, one has to take a position beyond both traditions which is not available. It is possible to incorporate ideas from both traditions by internalizing them as had been done by Gandhi, Tagore and Aurobindo. They never took up the programme of bringing the East and the West closer to each other; rather they were immersed in their own tradition. “But life and experience brought them into contact with the West. They responded creatively to that contact” (Mohanty 2001). Seal was aware of this problem and showed us how one can pursue useful comparative philosophy. Seal upheld that any

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Arindam Chakrabarti for this interpretation of the tetradic scheme.

comparative study, be it philosophy, religion or anthropology has to adopt a critico-comparative method that must emphasize the significant differences between the systems being compared instead of their similarities. Seal said that there are at least two ways of doing philosophy. First, philosophizing is an autonomous activity. The system of thought a philosopher happens to build up is peculiarly his own. In addition to the point of view of the philosopher as a creative thinker, there may be another perspective, namely, that of students of philosophy, where everyone adopts a stance of critical but appreciative spectators of diverse ways of philosophical creation and it is from the latter point of view as distinguished from the former that comparative philosophy is a possibility.

In the Introduction of the essay entitled *Comparative Studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity* (Seal 1899) which was presented at the International Congress of the Orientalists in 1899, Seal made the following observations.

In the first place, the comparative method of investigating the sciences relating to the history of the Human Mind requires elucidation and correction, for nothing has done greater mischief in the department of research than the ill-conceived and blundering attempts of so many tyroes and “prentice hands” to build ambitious theories and comprehensive systems on the shifting quick-sands of loose analogy and vague generalization in the name of scientific method. Again, historical comparison such as is here proposed implies that the objects compared are of co-ordinate rank and belong more or less to the same stage in the development of human culture. Very few scholars in the West will be prepared to admit that any other religion can bear this relation to humanity.

It is obvious how Seal had already started deviating from Hegel. This becomes more evident from the following excerpt:

... the Historic method, as reinforced by biology and evolution, requires one more fundamental correction, to fit as an organon for the investigation of social phenomena. As employed by Mr. Herbert Spencer and his school, the historico-genetic method is deviated by an unhistorical and unreal simplicity, a desire to reduce the variety of Life and Nature to a uniform formula. In the result, the method breaks down in its application to the higher stages in each department... The German schools of sociologists following in the wake of Hegel, have a more comprehensive conception of the historico-genetic method, and a super perception of different stages of development; but here also the different races and cults are measured and adjudged by an abstract and arbitrary standard derived from the history of European civilization, and the ethnic varieties are given only a subsidiary and provisional place, as if there were either monstrous or defective forms of life like the monotremata or the marsupialia of a biological laboratory, or only primitive ancestral forms, the earlier steps of the series, that have found their completion in European society and civilization. (Seal 1899: iii–iv)

He suggested that the anthropologists should adopt a synthetic approach while dealing with human civilization. As Radhakumud Mukharji pointed out in his Centenary Lecture,

With a most remarkable foresight he pleaded in a paper on *Race Origins* (1911), the need of harmonizing the claims of physical anthropology with its permanent anatomical types, cultural anthropology with its geographical zones of ethnic culture and the philosophy of history with its law of three or more stages for a synthetic view of the development of mankind and civilization. (Chatterjee 1968)

Seal thus continued his philosophical pursuits in a truly interdisciplinary spirit, when disciplinary pursuit was the norm.

## 5.4 Seal's Philosophy of Education

By assimilating the ideas and traditional ideals of education extant in India and combining them with those of the West, Brajendra Nath developed his theory of education which was expressed in his convocation addresses, and in the report of Shimla Commission, set up by Lord Curzon in 1902 and also in the report of the Saddler Commission of 1911. We shall summarize here the most salient points of Seal's theory of education, especially the education in the university system. It will be evident from his thoughts listed below how relevant these are even today.

*First*, he has said over and over again that a university should not be reduced to a mere examining body and promoter of rote learning. The syllabi should be formed to enhance creativity of the students and not to hinder it. He also fought for giving sufficient autonomy to the university teachers so that they could educate themselves and bring out the best in their students through innovative teaching and research (Chattopadhyaya 1999).

*Second*, he argued strongly for introducing mother tongue as the medium of instruction, particularly for the students of liberal arts. But he wanted to keep English as a wholesome second language. He wanted English to be taught in three separate lines, depending on the stream of education. He felt that for science teaching and practice English as the medium of instruction should be retained as a matter of necessity. "But English cannot be the language for the masses; so an All-India vernacular has to be found. But while stressing the necessity of solving the problem at an early date, Dr. Seal is not quite sure as to what this vernacular should be..." (Seal 1928–1929).

*Third*, he pleaded for introduction of social sciences in the curriculum side by side teaching of natural sciences. He was the first person to talk about introducing statistical methods in social sciences including history.

*Fourth*, he was against creating an educated class engaged in what is known as 'ivory-tower philosophy.' While a university must open the windows to the world, it should also take care of the local needs. In one of his convocation addresses he said:

It is not merely humanistic culture that a province needs; nor that other type which we love to call "national"; but in addition, that which fits for the land we live in. For this Dr. Seal insists upon the agricultural and industrial characteristics of particular localities being noted in the framing of the curricula of the general school classes no less than in the purely vocational courses. For this, again, he would strictly and mercilessly proportion the output of a University to the demand of the province. (Seal 1928–1929)

*Fifth*, he addressed the question of adjusting the claims of the arts and science subjects upon the general student. He was for breaking down the artificial barrier

between sciences so that new ‘border-land’ scientific disciplines can be created and students of science can overcome the initial handicap of incipient specialism. However, he was against the burdening of the students of science at the graduate level with an arts subject, however, important it might be to the pure humanist. In arts subject, he was in favour of making compulsory either logic or mathematics, in order to impress on them the virtues of rigorous training which would help overcome looseness in thought and argument. But for all students belonging to any stream he would make a general knowledge of science essential and would also insist upon training in practical use of English as a link language (Seal 1928–1929).

*Sixth*, Seal insisted that university departments should engage in outreach activities. The academics should try to educate industrial labourers and poor slum-dwellers through films by using ‘magic lanterns.’

*Seventh*, university communities should follow the motto of service to the mankind which according to him was the demand of this age (*yuga-dharma*). This motto, however, does not mean just helping the poor, distressed, disabled and suffering people. The aim of service should be empowerment of the needy and eradication of causes of poverty and suffering. Otherwise, this would be a mockery like allowing the war to go on and at the same time offering services to war victims.

*Eighth*, the benefits of education should not be ripped by a privileged few; efforts should be made to bring philosophy and culture to the masses through public lectures and public debates. University education should be opened to all eligible persons irrespective of caste or creed.

Last but not the least, great care should be taken in framing the constitutions and syllabi of the Indian Universities. We need not follow exactly the principles adopted in the British or the European Universities. Indian policymakers should scrupulously avoid on the one hand, the aggressive, competitive, heartless, militant culture of the West ensuing from the Malthusian theory of population explosion and the theory of a superior race, and on the other hand, purely mechanical, materialistic system of education built on the utilitarian line. In the traditional education system of India, institutes of higher learning developed norms, which evolved out of indigenous culture, and these should be kept in mind while forming education policy. With his characteristic frankness, Seal drew our attention to the weakness of the traditional system too. He found the system lacking in social equality and justice which needed to be remedied urgently.

All these policy matters were discussed incisively and constantly in the meetings of the National Council of Education, Bengal, of which Seal, Tagore and Satish Chandra Mukherjee were core members amongst others. They dreamed of an education system which would play a significant role in building the character of the Indian nation similar to the role that Harrow and Eton played in building up the character of the British people.

Seal, though a product of the university system of education, did not underestimate the merits of self-study (*svādhyāya*) as enjoined in traditional Indian systems

of education. Self-study in the tradition was considered the best means of preservation of our ancient culture through the chanting of the Veda-s and meditation on them. Keeping this spirit intact, Seal offered four most effective principles of self-study which he himself put into practice in his own life right from his childhood days. These principles can be formulated *a la* Seal in the following manner: (a) Educate thyself continuously, (b) pursue only one subject or one interest at a time, (c) discover it or do it if you want to learn a thing and (d) engage in intellectual combat. It goes without saying that there cannot be any better proponent of self-study than Seal who had mastered almost all systems of Indian learning through self-study.

## 5.5 Seal's Concept of Philosophy

Let us now look at what Seal's idea of philosophy was. According to him, a philosopher is an interpreter of culture, including science, art, religion and morality, and with man as its centre as well as its circumference. N.V. Banerjee elaborated Seal's idea of philosophy thus (Banerjee 1968). Seal divided knowledge broadly into two kinds, scientific and historical. The former is concerned with the nature or the objective world and hence must be free from anthropocentricity which technology is not; the latter deals with the essential features of the human situation in evolution, comprising art and religion and morality. Historical knowledge is essentially anthropocentric. However, it is ultimately concerned with certain types of human behaviour, i.e., with man as objectified instead of with man as he is unto himself and his fellows. So both types of knowledge suffer from some inadequacy which needs to be remedied by philosophical knowledge. The task of philosophy is synthesis, consisting in allocation of an appropriate place to scientific and historical knowledge in the analysis of human situation, based on the idea of man as nonobjective. His insistence on the all-importance of Universal Humanism as a philosophical doctrine seems to lend support to this interpretation of synthetic philosophy.

Because of this synthetic conception of philosophy, Seal was reluctant to write any philosophical treatise. Being endowed with a passion for flawless perfection and knowing that knowledge is ever growing, he recoiled from composing a treatise on philosophy. In one of his speeches he said:

I had found the scientific discoveries working on special fields, such as the physical, the biological and the social had the advantage of preserving their mental freedom. But a philosopher is denied this privilege. For, a philosopher, who embraces all knowledge for his province and must organize the universe of science as one whole, must build on the widest basis possible or attainable at the time. A philosopher, therefore, must claim all knowledge for his province, but at the same time premature philosophizing will be a real danger and hindrance, if he desires to be a universalist, as a philosopher must be.

In his conversation with D.M. Dutta which was published in *Prabashi* (Bengali year 1338), Seal confessed that when he was on the verge of writing a philosophical

work having mastered Einstein's Theory of Relativity, he came to know about the theories of quantum physics. Its implications, he thought, would surely change his world-view. He would be completely inauthentic if he had written his proposed book without considering those implications. So, he could not write his *magnum opus* in philosophy. He was so dependent on the results of scientific enquiry and did not admit any unbridgeable gulf between science and philosophy which lead us to consider him as a 'result-naturalist.'

Seal was totally against any 'heroic' concept of science and philosophy. When many of his students expressed concern that all his valuable thoughts would be lost, if these are not preserved in written form, Seal replied that whatever ideas he had entertained and whatever thoughts he expressed were manifestations of the ideas prevailing at that time; these were not his own. Rather, these thoughts formed part of the Ultimate Whole (*bhūmā*) which he hoped would be manifested by some other individual. When his students argued that he alone had the expanse of knowledge to combine specialized knowledge of different disciplines and synthesize them in the corpus of philosophy, he denied that. He said that India had never been satisfied with the limited perspective of a specialist, so Indian scholars who had internalized its culture had always adopted and would adopt a synthetic world-view. To substantiate his view, he often mentioned Jagadish Chandra Bose who began his career as a physicist but went on to biology and could establish a link between physics, biology and zoology because of his overarching holistic framework of thought. So it is not true that he alone was capable of developing a synthetic philosophy.

S.K. Maitra wrote that Seal became a Vaiṣṇavite when he ceased to be a Hegelian. However, I don't think that Seal's philosophical understanding can be clubbed under Vaiṣṇavism though Rāmānuja's system was more acceptable to him than the world-denying philosophy of Śaṅkara. Even when he discarded Hegelian philosophy and advocated the tetradic logical scheme from the Vaiṣṇava philosophy, he professed a godless humanism, while all Vaiṣṇava systems were theistic in core. He wrote in his unpublished autobiography,

My creed at that time was a religion without a God or a Godless humanism. I believed in no personal immortality but held fast to a glorious future of the human race which was to me a substitute for personal immortality. This was a new type of humanistic positivism but without the Comtist's borrowed religious paraphernalia. I warded for a long time between atheism and agnosticism on the one hand and theism on the other. But in the end some form of theistic affirmation had my preference.

However, even during this theistic period he upheld a position which a Vaiṣṇavite surely would not hold. First, the God he believed in was a sorrowful God, a concept which he borrowed most probably from Christianity, but God of a Vaiṣṇavite is the Bliss Incarnate. To quote from him, "Suffering humanity impressed me so much that in affirming the reality of the world, I conceived it as an expression of a 'suffering God.' This led me on to an affirmation of *Bhagavan* as *duhkhamaya*—the sorrowful one, who shares in the suffering of the world and thus affirms His own fellowship with his creatures" (Excerpted in *Hindustan Standard* December 4, 1938). This, in a way, was Seal's solution to the problem of evil—God is good but not omnipotent—a

view which is in tune with the account of the creator God of Indian philosophical systems. Second, though he believed in the reality of the external world, he could not accommodate it within the transcendent realm because of his own mystical experience in the last phase of his life. A Vaiṣṇavite would have accommodated the empirical within the transcendent. “In the *Bhūmā*, there is no trace of earthly, temporal experience. I do feel that they are totally obliterated or eradicated. I am consequently left fumbling and fidgeting all in vain for a bond of union between the world of daily life and this domain of Life Eternal. As a consequence thereof it appears that the two worlds are discrete and discontinuous out and out” (ibid).

As a historian of culture and civilization, his position was that of a universalist and internationalist, tempered by nationalism as a stepping stone to the coming of humanism. In support of his view, he mentioned the concepts of Brahman and Viśvadevatā which transcend nationalism. At this point, a striking resemblance can be seen between Tagore in his *Religion of Man* and Seal.

As an academic philosopher, he was not interested in building a system of philosophy because he believed that it is possible to defend any philosophical theory with rational justification. Moreover, philosophical systems are temporary in nature, which become extinct after some time. With his exemplary honesty he declared, “the problems of philosophy are of a perennial nature and they are not going to be solved finally by any philosopher, however great. A philosopher is wise, if he does not seek to spread the illusion that he has solved them” (Das 1968). Keeping in mind such a position, K.C. Bhattacharyya wrote in his *Studies in Vedantism*,

A true philosophic system is not to be looked upon as a soul-less jointing of hypothesis. It is a living fabric which, with all its endeavours to be objective, must have a well-marked individuality. Hence it is not to be regarded as the special property of academic philosophy-mongers, to be hacked up by them into technical view, but it is to be regarded as a form of life and is to be treated as a theme of literature of infinite interest to humanity (Bhattacharyya 1956: 6).

Brajendra Nath championed two complimentary approaches to philosophy—comparative and synthetic. He declared that his account of the positive sciences of the ancient Hindus is intended to serve as a preliminary to his *Studies in Comparative Philosophy*. For,

Philosophy in its rise and development is necessarily governed by the body of positive knowledge preceding or accompanying it. Hindu philosophy *on its empirical side* was dominated by concepts derived from physiology and philology, just as Greek philosophy was similarly dominated by geometrical concepts and methods. Comparative philosophy, then, in its criticism and estimate of Hindu thought, must take note of the empirical basis on which the speculative superstructure was raised. (Seal 1985: vi)

In this pioneering work on ancient Indian scientific treatises and scientific method, Seal gives a naturalist interpretation of the basic Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tenets, overriding their overtly spiritual interpretations. Within the corpus of approximately 300 pages, he drew our attention to the elements of physics, chemistry, mechanics, acoustics, botany, biology, zoology and physiology, excerpting from ancient Indian treatises which need to be reviewed once again in the light of contemporary developments of science. He considered an intensive



study of scientific methodology a necessity because in the absence of a rigorous scientific method Hindu sciences will be construed either as collections of practical recipes or as unverified speculations. In this context, he has provided detailed descriptions of the methods of scientific discovery, rules for establishing causal connection amongst natural phenomena and criteria of theory choice as manifested in their theses of *saṁvāda* (experiential coherence) and *lāghava* (simplicity).

The synthetic strand of his philosophy is well-documented in his short commentary on the *Gītā*, which he named *The Gītā: A Synthetic Interpretation* (Seal 1964). Of all the sacred texts of India, the *Gītā* probably has the largest number of commentaries which have been written in different periods of Indian civilization. During Seal's time, many modern interpretations of the *Gītā* were published and these had a great influence on the nationalist leaders and also on the 'armed revolutionaries' who went to the gallows chanting the verses of the *Gītā*. Most interpreters have written commentaries to support their sectarian view and as a result people are much confused about the real teachings of the *Gītā*. Seal tried to remove those confusions by offering a syncretic reading of the text.

The *Gītā* describes three ways to liberation—knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*) and action (*karma*). Different interpreters have explained the relevance of these three ways to liberation differently relying on their basic philosophico-religious commitments. Some have thought that following any one of the three paths is sufficient for attaining liberation. Others have upheld that one of the three ways is the most effective or the principal way to liberation, the other two are just subsidiary and of secondary importance. Śaṅkara, for example, underscored the significance of the path of knowledge and held that the other two paths are just required for cleansing one's mind which is a necessary prerequisite of liberation, while Rāmānuja and other Vaiṣṇava teachers have highlighted the path of devotion (*bhakti*) as the most effective path, relegating the other two as mere auxiliaries which do not have any significance in the penultimate stage of liberation. Interpreters belonging to a third group, however, upheld that seekers of liberation should choose the most suitable way in accordance with their nature and dispositions. So for some, the path of action may be the most suitable one, while for another having a different nature the path of devotion may be the most effective and so on. This third view indicates towards a fourth one which Seal called 'Ecticism.' According to this position, each of the three ways, severally and independently, can yield a combined result—liberation (*mokṣa*). Ecticism can be practiced in two different ways. One way enjoins simultaneous practice of knowledge, devotion and action. Depending on the nature of the liberation-seeker, any of these three can be considered primary but that does not make the other two of lesser significance because, on this view, the relation amongst the three paths is organic or internal. Just as in an organism, each organ equally contributes to the survival and benefit of the whole, similarly all three paths have its own significance in bringing about the liberation-seekers' goal. Another brand of ecticism advocates sequential combination of these three paths. Usually one starts by following the path of action which enables one to realize the importance of the path of knowledge, which in its turn leads to the path of meditation and devotion.

As a combined result of all these three practices, one attains liberation. Seal further refines eclecticism and points out that even the so-called internal relation that obtains in the dynamic combination of the paths of action, knowledge and devotion creates a chasm between the knower and the known, the devotee and the devoted. Integration of action, devotion and knowledge in sequence leads to the union of the self with the Brahman which Seal calls ‘*Ātma-yoga*’ or ‘*Brahma-yoga*’ which finally culminates into *jīvanmukti* or the attainment of liberation while living in this world. This, according to Seal, is the essential teaching of The *Gītā*.

## 5.6 Syllabus on Indian Philosophy

This exploration into Seal’s life and intellectual journey will remain incomplete if we do not place it on record that B.N. Seal is the architect of the subject ‘Indian philosophy’ as we study it today. When Seal joined the University of Calcutta as the George V Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy in 1913, no Indian system of philosophy was taught there. Seal introduced the courses in Indian philosophy and taught till 1920. Based on his lectures, V. Subrahmanya Iyer published the syllabus on Indian philosophy in 1924 with a view to showing to the world what a rich and inexhaustible mine of philosophical wealth still exists in India for the seeker after truth to quarry. Iyer observed:

This syllabus at first sight appears to extend over areas placed in Europe, latterly, outside the pale of philosophy. But a little thought will show that philosophy in its wider sense necessarily stretches its roots to every region of Human knowledge and practice, a feature on which the ancient Hindus laid great emphasis. Every Indian system of philosophy attempts at covering the entire field of thought, its ultimate grounds and basic principles, from Physics to Metaphysics, including philology, and a study of social institutions. In using this syllabus for purposes of research or critical evaluation, the student should make a comparative study of both the Indian and Western systems of thought with reference to the entire circle of the philosophical sciences. (Foreword to Seal 1924)

The span of the syllabus is mind-boggling and once again shows the expanse and depth of Seal’s knowledge. Starting the philosophical journey from the early Vedic period and progressing to the ages of the systems, a postgraduate student of Indian philosophy is supposed to cover all systems mentioned in Mādhavācārya’s *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* with special emphasis on Indian attempts at synthesis and critique of all philosophical systems. For the first topic, the teachers need to consult *Ṣad-darśana-samanvaya* and *Sarvāgama-prāmāṇyavāda* and for the critique he prescribed Śrīharaṣa’s *Khaṇḍaṇa*, Jaina *syādvāda*, Bauddha *śunyavāda*, Dhūrta Cārvāka’s *Tattvopaplavasimha* and other *sahajamata*s (non-Vedic folk-systems). All systems are to be discussed keeping in mind the following topics: Ultimate Postulates, theoretical and practical, commonly accepted in systems of Indian philosophy, Principles of Experience, Analysis of Experience, Dialectic of Experience, Dialectic of Nescience, Dialectic of the Self; Philosophical Standpoints—Realism versus Idealism, Mechanism versus Teleology; Epistemology and Logic, i.e., doctrine of *pramā* (valid cognition),

*prāmāṇyagraha* (means of justification), *pramāṇa* (accredited sources of cognition) and theories of inference from the perspectives of Logic and Scientific Method; Methodology, general and applied; Various Types of Pragmatism in Indian Systems—logical (*saṁvāda*), epistemological (*vyāghāta*) as the ultimate solvent of doubt, linguistic (*bhāvanā*, *ceṣṭā*, *vākyārtha*), radical (*arthakriyā* as constituting *sattvā* or existence), voluntaristic (*vidhi*, *niṣedha* as forms of action), absolute (conceptual construct of Nirguṇa Brahman for pragmatic ends); Categories of Reality, Theory of Being, Ontology and Cosmology; Theory of Causation, Dialectic of Causation; Dialectic of Relation, Philosophy and Logic of Language (origin of language, original language, philosophy of grammar, categories of grammar, related to categories of thought, relation of thought to language); Psychology, the Aesthetic Sentiments; Ethics, ethical disciplines and special problems in Ethics, e.g., Theory of *Karma* and its implications in the realm of Ethics; Social Philosophy; Political and Juristic Philosophy—Canons of Interpretation of Codes, Civil or Religious; Theology; Religion (some features of Indian Theism), Krishna cult, Foundations of the Science of Mythology; Practical Philosophy, Philosophical Disciplines, *Yoga*, *Mukti*, *Nirvāṇa*; Psychic Phenomena, Hypnotism, *Siddhis*; and Stages in Cultural History.

This syllabus is unique in many respects. The time when it was proposed, Indians had already been somewhat alienated from traditional learning. Besides, what was going on in the name of educating people about their own heritage was mostly biased and unscientific. Seal framed the syllabus in such a way that students were compelled to study the original texts and critically evaluate them. The only drawback of the syllabus was its overambitious character. Only a student with Seal's acumen can master the whole syllabus. However, assuming the distribution of labour, it is an excellent syllabus because it is both exhaustive and innovative.

There was a tendency amongst the Indologists to construe 'Indian philosophy' as synonymous with the great Vedic tradition. It goes to the credit of Seal that he had placed equal emphasis on the great tradition as well as the little traditions including non-Vedic *āgamas* and philosophy underlying folk religions. Most probably, keeping in mind the Hegelian criticism that Indian philosophy could not go beyond the mythical stage, Seal tried to show the importance of mythological stories in later philosophical systems. In Europe, philosophy emerged as a theoretical discipline in *toto*; in India, philosophy was rooted in experience and aimed at attainment of liberation; hence, theory and practice were never dissociated. Practical philosophy and philosophical disciplines, therefore, formed an important part of this syllabus.

Seal imposed contemporary categories to interpret traditional knowledge and taught us to reinterpret our tradition using contemporary idioms. Thus, we learnt to differentiate amongst elements of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, psychology, social and political theories within the integrated systems of Indian philosophy. This was probably the most controversial move. However, after the publication of this syllabus, all works on Indian philosophy are found to internalize these categories. Of course, there had always been debates on the issues like whether the *pramāṇa* theories are the same as epistemology or Indian theories

of *anumāna* can be regarded as logic proper; nonetheless, Seal must be given his dues as the trend-setter. Three things probably motivated Seal to re-categorize Indian philosophy. First, many of his associates like Benoy Sarkar requested him to do something so that the British and European academics could appreciate the richness of Indian philosophy. Second, comparative philosophy, of which Seal was a great enthusiast, becomes a nonstarter in absence of a unified set of categories of interpretation and evaluation. Third and most important, it was not possible for the nineteenth century Indian people to set the clock back and travel by time machine to the pre-colonial period; so the only way to integrate traditional Indian values with their contemporary life form and prevent Indian philosophy from obsolescence was by bridging the gap between tradition and modernity, by reinterpreting Indian tradition with the prevalent modernist tools. This way of reinterpreting the tradition by borrowing tools from other traditions have been severely criticised by many. Many are of the opinion that conceptual tools cannot be thus borrowed without warping them because tools are specially designed for solving specific problems. Outside the context of origin, these tools are likely to become ineffective or may distort the significance of the new discourse. These criticisms have some points but should not be taken too seriously. For such a thesis is symptomatic of parochialism like Schopenhauer's, who used to believe that philosophy cannot be done in any language other than German nor can be developed anywhere outside Germany. Moreover, if selected pieces of philosophical tradition are never put to novel uses, the tradition become 'a museum diorama' (Siderits 2003: xii–xvii) to be appreciated from a distance but cut off from the current form of life. Thus, our dream of integrating our philosophical heritage with the contemporary form of life will delude us forever. So by framing the syllabus of Indian philosophy, Seal has made the pursuit of 'fusion philosophy' a feasible enterprise.

Seal's life was synonymous with an eternal quest for knowledge and truth. He took it upon himself to swim in the oceans of world culture and civilization, retrieve treasures from ocean beds like an expert diver and make a gift of them to whoever may care to acquire them. According to the famous historian, Roy Chaudhuri (2009: 150), this was the ideal of nineteenth-century Bengal. Under the influence of the Bengal Renaissance, there emerged a class of people who pursued knowledge for pure enjoyment, not for money or for fame, never considered it a waste of time to pursue theoretical interests without immediate practical gain, never hesitated to share their knowledge with others and never wrote a single line if they did not have anything significant to contribute. Seal was the greatest exponent of this philosophy. Men of this genre are now a rarity, in the market-dominated lifestyle of the 21st century.

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