

Reviews

BRAHMABANDHAB UPADHYAY : The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary by Julius J. Lipner *Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1999. Pp xxiv + 409; £11.99 pbk.*

Complex lives and identities are never easy to understand and the temptation is always to simplify and emphasise one aspect at the expense of the rest. When religion and nationalism are at stake this tendency becomes acute — clear loyalties are sought, blurred boundaries are feared. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay has been prone to misunderstanding on both counts. A Hindu who became a Catholic Christian and yet who sought to show that conversion to Christianity did not entail a rejection of Hindu identity nor a wholesale acceptance of western customs and patterns of thought. A worker for national pride and liberation throughout his life, Upadhyay still sought to convert his people to Christianity, a religion coming to India from outside. Hardly an easy figure for those who identified Hindu culture with the darkness of heathenism, to be swept away by the light of Europeanized Christianity —nor an attractive ally for those who might equate Indian nationalism with Hindu revivalism, understood in terms exclusive of Christian or other identities. Upadhyay's attempt to work out a balance between profession of Christian faith and pride in Hindu identity was inevitably bound to result in a complex position, one which also had its own dynamic of development, as he changed his religious and political stance in the course of his life. In this study Lipner aims both to write a biography of Upadhyay and to discuss and assess his thought.

On one level, then, this book is a lucid and engaging account of the life of one (if a less well known one) of those great figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Keshabchandra Sen, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, who arose in the second half of the nineteenth century in Bengal under British rule, where Hindu religion met Christianity and the attitudes and activities of Christian missionaries, and Indian culture encountered the European and the influence of western education and English language. Lipner amply and carefully sets the scene for those unfamiliar with India in this interesting period . He traces the life of Upadhyay from his childhood in an orthodox and traditional Brahmin household, to his encounter with the Brahma Samaj and attraction to Christianity mediated through it, then on into his early teaching and journalistic career and eventual formal acceptance of Roman Catholicism. Along with this we see the development of Upadhyay's patriotic zeal. Lipner graphically depicts Upadhyay's naive and unsuccessful attempts to enlist as a warrior in the defunct army of the Maharaja of Gwalior, in a bid to counter the ideological depiction of the Indian and

Bengali as 'effeminate' in contrast to the 'virile' Europeans. Upadhyay is shown, from the outset, as expressing his patriotic and religious aspirations in the terms of Hindu categories. Taking a vow of celibacy, he is depicted as conforming to the role of the *karmayogi*, the ascetic activist. Likewise the adoption of Christian faith did not mean for Upadhyay the acceptance of European clothes and culture. Instead, he took up and wore the clothes of a Hindu *sannyasi*, a renouncer. Lipner then depicts Upadhyay's zeal for Catholicism and work to promote this religion and convert India to it. We see the eventual opposition of the conservative Catholic establishment to Upadhyay's attempts to harmonise Christian with Hindu thought. We learn of Upadhyay's shift, in the final years of his life, to a more stridently nationalist stance and his self-presentation as a champion of Hindu religion, and his eventual death while being tried by the British for sedition. Throughout his career Upadhyay is shown to have promoted his ideas through his person mode of life and through teaching and a succession of journals.

Lipner's book is, however, also a sustained exploration of Upadhyay's thought. He offers detailed discussions of the development of Upadhyay's attitude towards Hindu religious and social traditions and their compatibility with his Christian faith. In his mature period Upadhyay understood Advaita Vedanta as offering an authentic natural theology, which should serve as a preparation for the revealed truths of Christianity. Lipner shows how Upadhyay assimilated elements of Advaita Vedanta to the categories of neo-Thomism:

The task of philosophy, says Upadhyay, is not to challenge or change Christian revelation but to support, defend, clarify, expound and develop it and to show its relevance for life. In the past the philosophy of Aristotle, adapted 'of course minus its errors' by the 'sovereign intellect of St Thomas Aquinas', has performed this service for the 'Christianity of the Catholic Church'. But though in 'substance' it is everywhere the same, in form the Catholic Christianity we have is a western phenomenon and therefore alien to Hindu minds. The Catholic faith has now finally encountered another brand of philosophy that, though it may contain more errors 'because the Hindu mind is synthetic and speculative, and not analytical and practical,' is unquestionably superior to the Aristotelian-Thomistic synthesis. This is the Vedantic philosophical system
(p.186)

Moreover, Upadhyay, saw an idealised form of the caste system as a mark of the superiority of Hindu society over western and as compatible with Christian faith:

To sum up Upadhyay's stance then: by a recovery of the traditional *varnasrama* system, not only will India be able to keep the disintegrative forces of westernisation at bay, it will have the strength to receive and integrate what it adjudges

beneficial for its development from western influences. Thus firmly established in self-respect and its own history and culture, and free from the European disease of lust for power and unrestrained ambition, India will be in a position to acquire material prosperity — without damaging the prospects of its own spiritual fulfilment. And ideally, what would these prospects be? Embracing the Catholic faith which could, if Upadhyay's model were implemented, be achieved without the need for self-alienating transformations. In this way, true to its best heritage of 'Aryan one-centredness,' India will 'progress into the future.'

(pp.245-6)

Even in his name Upadhyay reflected the complex nature of the identity he wished to maintain. Having converted to Christianity he took up a Sanskrit version of Theophilus, Brahmabandhab, both meaning friend of God. By name, in his life and thought Upadhyay expressed his desire to be a Hindu-Catholic.

This is a superb book, written about an inspiring figure. It is of great interest to those who are willing to consider Upadhyay not merely as a member of a particular society and time, but as a model, to be accepted or rejected, of how different religions and cultures might fruitfully embrace each other, though at the same time serving as a warning of how difficult this is, both in its achievement by any individual and in its acceptance by others.

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UNDERSTANDING HUMAN GOODS: A THEORY OF ETHICS by T. D. J. Chappell *Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998. Pp. 218; £14.95 pbk, £40.00 hbk.*

A great virtue of Tim Chappell's book is to introduce important themes from contemporary natural law thinking to our rather insular 'mainstream' ethics. For this we should be truly grateful. Naturally, his project requires subtlety and some cunning: the secular academy is very resistant to argument historically connected to Christian ethics unless well disguised. The question is: does this sort of Christian realism emerge strengthened by engagement with the world of analytic ethics, or does the mask blur the truth?

Chappell's arguments could be called 'Aristotelian' in that they blend questions of values acquisition with values analysis (normative ethics with metaethics). He argues from the structure of our choices to a pluralism of human goods; he then argues for some particular goods and for an indeterminate number of ways in which these may constitute a good human life. There is no such thing as the way in which to promote or respect human goods; however, there are various types of act which are always violations of the good, thus there are some absolute moral prohibitions. It is rational for us to seek goods from within the developing narratives of our lives: we should seek to sustain a personal identity. However, personal identity is not only our own chosen project. Our identity