

Book Reviews

*Knowledge, Theorization and Rights: Negotiating the Connectives*¹ by Pius V Thomas (Eds.), Salesian College Publication, Siliguri-West Bengal, 2015, 261 pages, INR 600.00, ISBN 978-93-82216-12-4.

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In an age where 'doubt' has assumed an almost *enabling* status, the questions of identity, culture, roots, rights, justice and belongingness, seem to continuously call for newer ways of re-consideration. The idea of 'faith' and 'belief'² had always been crucial in terms of linking such questions with the idea of existence itself. Besides, the idea of existence further remains linked with the concept of presence which itself determines the realm of the 'real'. However, what happens to the idea of existence when the concepts of 'faith' and 'belief' itself face a crisis in terms of its own functional existence? The question of doubt has always haunted the realms of 'faith' and 'belief' forcing them, in different ages, to reconsider and alter its definitional and functional frameworks. In other words, it can be said that it has always been 'doubt' that has *enabled* 'faith' to modify and represent itself in newer ways. However, what happens to the concept of 'faith' in an age of make-belief only, an age threatening with dystopic visions of cyborgs, bio-wars, genetic transmutations and other technological turns that has brought the very concept of 'real' under the realm of doubt. In this age, then, has 'doubt' acquired the role of the decisive signifier shaping, affecting and even determining the concept of existence? Then, what about the questions of identity, culture, roots, rights, justice and belongingness? Have these concepts ceased to operate as 'real'? Have we lost then any concept of 'ground' for conceptualization, and has any claim to knowledge lost its authenticity? Questions like these continuously haunt our concept of the present, and thus problematize any attempt to search for solutions marked by the question: *what is to be done?*

¹ In this review I also attempt to raise broader questions concerning understanding, theorization and practice. As such, the "Re-thinking" of the subtitle I strategically propose with a hyphen suggesting the simultaneous break and continuity between thinking and rethinking. As such, the hyphen suggest the constant negotiation between any attempt at thinking again or thinking new with what has been already thought, for there cannot be any such thing as radical or absolute newness; rather, all attempt at search for alterity and newness remains inextricably linked with the *same*, with what is always already there.

² Though these two concepts are usually seen as similar terms they also differ from each other in crucial ways. Though both are linked with the concept of acceptance, however their difference emerges in terms of their relation towards the notion of Truth. The concept of 'faith' is seen to operate even beyond the realm of Truth, and in this sense is associated with a metaphysical and transcendental significance. Such conceptualization of "faith" has often led it to be placed in opposition to "reason". However, on closer analysis, "faith" can be seen to follow its own reason whereas "reason" may sometimes also assume a metaphysical character. , as already pointed out by Pius in his chapter of the book.

These questions continuously force us to search for newer ways of conceptualization. The search for *newness* has always been linked with the enlightenment question of modernity that haunts western metaphysics. However, the question of 'modern' and 'modernization' remains dependent on the constitution of the binary 'ancient' and has always characterized entire western civilization: be it during the Greek civilization or during the Renaissance or post-Renaissance Europe. Besides, the concept of 'modernity' as a condition, state or process of existence remains an always incomplete project³ and led thinkers like Bruno Latour to state that we have *never* been 'modern'⁴. Added to these, questions of alternate modernities, outside or beyond the western context (as, for example, in the South Asian or African context), further problematize the concept of 'modernity' and force us to reconsider the newer routes we take towards conceptualizing questions concerning knowledge, theorization, rights, identity and existence. *Knowledge, Theorization and Rights: Renegotiating the Connectives*, edited by Pius V Thomas, forces us to explore such issues in newer light by critically (re)considering not only the questions concerning knowledge, theorization and rights but also the 'connectives' itself that goes on to shape the very realm of praxis. In other words, the structure(s) of the conceptual binaries that separate the realm of 'theory' (as abstract speculation dealing only with 'idea') from that of 'practice' (seen as more *grounded* in questions concerning the real 'matter') remains operative in a more co-constitutive and co-constraining manner. The book humbly proposes to critically explore the negotiations, links and differences that shape the realm of both theory and practice, and thus our 'common-sense' as well. In this regard, while simultaneously remaining focused on exploring the larger question concerning the theory-practice relation, the book also leads us to reconsider our commonsensical ideas concerning concepts like religion, community, epistemology, knowledge, rights, existence and experience, showing how these concepts, seen otherwise as holistic, remains always multifarious and shifting.

The articles selected in the book thus range widely both in terms of the questions they focus at exploring as well as in terms of the disciplinary viewpoints from which they are written. In the Introduction of the book, titled "Knowledge and Rights: Towards More Decentred Theoretic Frames", Pius V Thomas asserts that the connecting links between Knowledge, Theorization and Rights operates in a more deceptive and multifarious manner, and such the articles selected also attempt to understand and (re)present those links from various interlinked epistemic, social, political and cultural vantage points. Divided into two parts, the articles emphasize on both theoretical and empirical approaches, as well as remaining critically aware of the co-constitutive relation they share. Thus, while some articles like George Thadathil's "Community, Critical Knowledge and Rights", Anthony Savari Raj's "Universalizing the Human Rights or Humanizing the

³ To use Jurgen Habermas' term from his celebrated essay "Modernity: An Unfinished Project" where he proposes modernity, in relation to the concept of post-modernity, as the child of enlightenment and in a continuing phase without reaching its end to have a *post-modernity*.

⁴ To use the title of Bruno Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern* where he attempts to show how the concept of 'modern' remains operative as a formative and constitutive absence. For further details, see Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Cosmos?: Theorizing a Mutually Fecundating Knowledge”, Subhra Nag’s “Epistemology of the Oppressed: Theorizing Knowledge from a Feminist Standpoint” or “Theorizing Rights: Liberal and Multiculturalism Debate” force us to reconsider the conceptual frameworks of understanding from broader philosophical perspectives. Similarly articles like Remith George Carri’s “A Critical Appraisal of Right to Education Act 2009” or Mahmood Ansari’s “Right to Equality and Justice Theorizations: An Account Beyond Conventional Knowledge Paradigm” remains focused on particular contexts and cases. However, the articles never suggest any absolute detachment between the theoretical and empirical, abstract and particular approaches but also (re)presents in their articles, in their own individual manner, the links, connectives and negotiations between such conceptual and methodological approaches. Remaining critically aware of the fact that any claim to complete or all-encompassing description is always bound to fail in its absolutist stance, the articles selected in the book provide a variety of diverse areas of exploration and background but remaining always conscious of giving local, contextual and partial perspectives⁵ and remaining critical of the totalitarian views characterizing western metaphysics. The articles selected thus range from exploring the connectives between religious knowledge and practice to the questions concerning globalization and multiculturalism and its effects on local communities; from questions concerning human rights to that of epistemology; from questions of equality and justice to that of technology and its all-inclusive effects. With critical awareness the articles attempt to use local and contextual knowledge to explore the larger questions concerning conceptualization, understanding and practice, as, for example, reconsidering the concept of community by studying the changes in Darjeeling or understanding the ambivalences and paradoxes of the conceptual and operational framework of ‘rights’ by focusing on the ambivalences and paradoxes of equality. The articles selected also successfully provide us with *other* views on the *same* question of the efficacy of modernity and its modes of knowledge production, thus linking together yoga with transcendental philosophy or knowledge with the existential emphasis on suffering. Since the search for disciplinary autonomy ends up producing similar grand-narratives of absolute knowledge claims, the book skillfully presents a variety of articles from various disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from philosophy to political theory, sociology to science, theology to technology. The broader implications rather seems to suggest for a more assimilatory move which calls for a bringing together of what is rather separated as different, unrelated and distinct, however, with critical awareness of the ‘connectives’ itself that bring them together as well as with an honest and sincere acceptance of the inevitability of partial perspectives and limited knowledge.

⁵ Donna Haraway uses this phrase in her essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” in relation to show how “Science” operates by a logic of “reductionism” that depends on a politics of “vision” or “gaze” whereby by means of science’s own technological “eyes” it plays the “god-trick” of an infinite vision. The logic of “reductionism” operates in terms of a search for translation, convertibility, mobility of meanings, and universality. Haraway asserts that feminist politics should therefore focus on “partial perspectives” and “situated knowledges” which would both subvert the totalization of science’s single vision and address the question of difference within feminism (and not promising an ideologically common oneness of “equality”) while simultaneously not reducing itself simply to relativism, for “Relativism and totalization are both ‘god-tricks’ promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully”.

Returning to the question – *what is to be done?* – then the (perhaps doubtful?) views that seem to emerge may be that of how much successful the book is in providing an answer to such condition or if it is able at all. In a condition where we have a problem that has no name, we cannot have any single solution or absolute answer. Besides, the book never attempts for any such answer, nor it can. Regarding the question – *what is to be done?* – any search for a solution or answer remains operative on the three interrelated realms: the specificity of the “what”; the present of here-and-now, the immediacy of the “is”; and the probability and expectation of “to be done”. However, in any search for the answer, it is always the immediacy of the “is” that shapes and links both the specificity of the “what” and expectations of “to be done”. In other words, any search for newness, alterity and change remains always linked with the here-and-now of the present. However, the “is” of here-and-now is not a singular, absolute and static category but remains always shifting, always evolving, and so are the connectives linking them. Pius V Thomas’ edited book, *Knowledge, Theorization and Rights*, helps us to reconsider such connectives in newer ways. One may doubt the approaches it makes, one may not agree with the arguments it proposes but it makes a humble and honest attempt to view the same questions from different perspectives, and it is this attempt that calls for at least one sincere, serious and critical reading, without any *a priori(ties)*, be it of acceptance or dismissal.