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A Memorial Tribute to Daya Krishna

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Daya Krishna was a man of many parts: a brilliant philosopher, gifted administrator, bold and challenging thinker, universal gadfly. . . . I first met Daya some forty years ago when he was a fellow at the East-West Center at the University of Hawai'i. Many of the leaders of the Center, however, were not certain that he was really in residence, for Daya had the habit of walking everywhere in Honolulu and talking with anyone—be it a shopkeeper, an old woman sitting on a park bench, a young man about to go surfing in the ocean—about their life stories, their aspirations, and hopes and fears. He was not doing sociological research, he assured me. He just found these folks more interesting philosophically than his academic brethren at the Center.

Some years later, when I was traveling in India, Daya invited me to come to his university in Rajasthan to meet with his colleagues and graduate students and present a paper. It came as quite a surprise when I discovered then that he now occupied a top administrative position in the university. Watching him in action in this unexpected role, it was evident that he was highly organized, efficient, and admired for his wit and wisdom and the gracious respect he offered to one and all.

Philosophically he was now embarked on new adventures steeped in traditional Indian thought. Daya organized a number of interviews with traditional Sanskrit-(non-English) speaking pundits, masters of many obscure texts that were being translated and recorded as an oral history project that would preserve the expertise these pundits enjoyed.

In the late 1980s Daya returned to Hawai'i to participate by invitation in an East-West Philosopher's Conference, sponsored by the Department of Philosophy, which I had the privilege to direct. Among the 150 or so participants in this two-week-long conference, Daya stood out for the sharp, but civil, challenges he offered to both Asian and Western scholars regarding what he perceived to be their fundamental misunderstandings of Indian philosophical traditions. This was further made evident in his controversial book *Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective*, published in 1991 by Oxford University Press. In this work he questioned just about every standard reading of Indian thought regarding its alleged "spirituality," its "schools" (he believed there were none, only different styles of Indian philosophy), its supposedly overriding concern with *mokṣa* (liberation), and so on. He had now become the Socrates of India, uncovering philosophical pretense wherever it was to be found.

I have benefited a great deal from the frequent correspondence I had with Daya Krishna over the many years of our friendship. I have valued highly the originality of his thought and the boldness of his quest to attain a kind of enlightenment in his own special way, and if he fails to realize it we shall wholeheartedly welcome him back with joy and wonderment as he undertakes his next karmic tasks.