

EASTERN ZONE TEACHERS' MEET

VISVA-BHARATI, SANTINIKETAN

21-23 FEBRUARY, 2020

REVITALIZATION OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Concept Note

For many centuries, Indian philosophy has been seen as *ṣaḍ darśana*, or “six views” on reality and very often they are taken as separate groups even though they may have developed their perspectives using dialogical methods over several centuries having *purba-paksa* and *uttar-paksa*. The Sanskrit terms also differ in their meaning depending on the view of the system of Indian philosophy. No doubt there are serious difficulties in translating Sanskrit words such as *jiva*, *atman*, *dharma*, *mokṣa* and the word *darśana* is no exception-leading to a loss of much of the original meaning and sometimes addition of connotations never intended.

Philosophy normally has come to refer, in most modern universities, until very recently, to a purely academic activity of a highly technical nature, with little or no reference to lived human experience. And ideally philosophy is philosophy – neither Indian nor Western. But *darśana* (Indian Philosophy) which is always understood to occur within the context of a way of life, usually (though not always) aimed at the goal of *mokṣa*, or liberation from the cycle of rebirth, the highest of the *puruṣārtha*-s. The aim of human existence, therefore is leading to understanding of *darśana* as religion, spirituality or theology; for theology has come to refer increasingly to any reflection on the basic questions of life that occurs self-consciously from within the context of a lived tradition of practice.

Contemporary Indian thinkers for last two centuries have strongly argued against this characterization. It is argued that Indian philosophy being ‘Religion’ or ‘Spirituality’ is a misnomer in Indian context. Modern Western idea of religion does not fit the indigenous traditions of India to which it has been applied: its practices of worship, meditation and reflection, its path for achieving wisdom, enlightenment, or liberation. And these are not unified and mutually exclusive systems of belief distinguishable from, for instance, philosophy or science. For example, can *Gita* be called as religious narrative? The text deals with nature of reality, the self, ethics, knowledge – we cannot make a distinction between religious and philosophical elements. It cannot be similar to Bible as revered text. Indian traditions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, do not separate religion and philosophy nor do they separate philosophy, as the quest for wisdom, from the practice of living. Most of what is known as Indian Philosophy is about abstract and intellectual understanding. In all Indian philosophical debates religio-philosophical positions are quite common, disputing the other’s claims and comparison is the fundamentally important epistemological category. Central texts and figures may be revered, but reason, analysis, reflection, experience, and meditation all play important roles, and these ways of knowing are firmly bounded, if they are bounded at all, by the obligation of respect, whether based on the words or scripture or the statements of an authority.

No doubt, in the global context the West has been privileged with its Greek and European philosophical traditions recognized as “Philosophy” but the Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions (largely Asian) have not been so privileged and are not considered as “real philosophy”. The non-European intellectuals are not taken seriously by the Western standard almost like defining ‘food’ as that which the Italians and the French prepare. But the situation would be changed soon if more and more people study, teach non-western philosophy (specially, Indian Philosophy) as there is a massive body of philosophically sophisticated, well argued, and important work in Indian philosophical traditions and it is of the same kind as philosophy pursued in the West and that it addresses issues with distinctive arguments and positions. No doubt there are differences in understanding of Western Philosophy by Indian thinkers and understanding of Indian Philosophy by Western thinkers and more so due to globalization.

About the Teachers’ Meet

Our endeavour at this East Teachers Meet would be to explore the ways to revitalise Indian Philosophy and broaden the conception of philosophy, through dialogue if possible within contemporary life of Indian and to characterize a new vision of philosophy embracing parallel processes of economic, political, social, cultural, and ecological along with scientific development in pursuit of the economic growth and equality, looking afresh at the fundamental philosophical questions that are now at the core of public discourse in India and the world.

Eminent scholars from various parts of India have been invited to deliver lectures on various aspects of Indian philosophical traditions which would help the participants to enrich themselves with the latest discourses happening on and around these traditions; also, in a broader sense, it will help to revitalize different traditions of Indian philosophy according to the contemporary needs and due to the emergence of new knowledge systems.

The college and university teachers of Philosophy of the Eastern states of India (Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal) are invited to apply for the proposed Teachers’ Meet. About 30 participants from the above-mentioned states of Eastern Region would be selected. T.A will be paid to the participants according to the existing rules. Airfare will not be entertained. Accommodation and hospitality will be provided to participants.

Those who are interested to participate in the proposed Meet are requested to submit their full papers (about 2000 words) related to the theme of the Eastern Zone Teachers’ Meet on or before 10.1.2020 positively to the Seminar Coordinator by email: asha.mukherjee@visva-bharati.ac.in. The candidates will be informed of their selection latest by 15.1.2020.

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