

**Year- 2019**

**A One Day State Level Seminar commemorating Indian Philosopher's Day**

A One Day State Level Seminar commemorating Indian Philosopher's Day on the auspicious occasion of Adi Shankara Jayanti was organized by the Department of Philosophy, Diamond Harbour Women's University, Sarisha, West Bengal-743368 on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2019 with the gracious financial assistance from the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. The chosen theme of the seminar was Indian Ethics: Its Relevance in Contemporary World. The Head of the Department of Philosophy, Diamond Harbour Women's University, Dr. Sushmita Bhowmik delivered the welcome address. The inaugural session commenced with the chanting of Vedic hymns and was presided over by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Diamond Harbour Women's University, Prof. Tapan Mondal who lauded the initiative taken by the Department of Philosophy to organize a seminar on such a globally pertinent issue and thanked ICPR for generously offering the wherewithal for organizing the seminar. The inaugural session was also marked by the august presence of the Registrar, the Controller of Examination and the Finance Officer of the university all of whom expressed their happiness at the choice of the theme of the seminar and the scale at which it was being organized.

The keynote address of the seminar was delivered by Prof. Piyali Palit, retired Professor of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. In Prof. Palit's lecture, the universalistic and harmonious tenor of Indian ethico-religious tradition resonated. The speaker pointed out that both the leading orthodox and heterodox systems of Indian Philosophy prescribe and practice any one or more of the four ultimate ends of life (*Puruṣārtha-s*), viz. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa* — that together are known to constitute the ethical bedrock of the Indian society. Among these four ideals of life open to an individual in the Hindu social milieu, *dharma* should be considered the fundamental value because it guides and regulates the egoistic motives of *artha* and *kāma* and serves as the precondition of the *summum bonum* of life, i.e. *mokṣa*. The value system is primarily founded upon the binary of *dharma* and *adharma*. *Dharma* is defined as the universal principle that governs *sādhukarma* and the resultant *karmaphala* leading in the end to *abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa*. *Sādhukarmas* are means to establish universal harmony at three levels: 1. Intrapersonal level in which one tries to attain harmony with one's own self, 2. Interpersonal level that encompasses harmony with even the nonhuman species

populations and 3. Transcendental level, i.e., harmony with the Supreme Consciousness or Super humans, so to speak. The speaker significantly underscored in her lecture the perpetual relevance of the Hindu canonical scriptural texts, especially, *Śrimad Bhagavad Gītā* and the ideals of *karmayoga*, *jñānayoga* and *bhaktiyoga* enshrined in it in helping iron out conflicts, dilemmas and confusions when doubt arises in the mind of the performer of *dharma*.

The first academic session of the seminar chaired by Prof. Piyali Palit was graced by two eminent speakers: Prof. Indrani Sanyal, retired Professor of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and Prof. Kuntala Bhattacharya, Associate Professor, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. The title of the presentation given by Prof. Indrani Sanyal was “Dharma-Ethics: Its Scope and Relevance”. Tracing the coinage of the term to Bimal Krishna Matilal, the speaker argued in favour of the import of Dharma-ethics, which according to her brings within its fold ethics embedded in a multi-dimensional religious and cultural ethos of Indian society. Here is an excerpt of her speech: “Some predicament surely lurks over the venture to explore Dharma-Ethics for the expression *dharma* is clouded by many shades and layers of meaning. The expression *dharma* is difficult to make clear because of its oblique significance. The first reason for disappointment is due to the difficulty in determining the semantics of the expression *dharma*. *Dharma* stands for, to name a few, truth, intrinsic quality, justice, merit, duty, morality, moral law. Further different schools of Indian philosophy and religious traditions differ from one another in their use of the expression *dharma*. This has been the reason for considering the expression *dharma* to be ubiquitous. It has been realized by the sages that ‘*Dharmasyatattvamnihitamguhayam,*’ i.e. the true essence of *Dharma* is concealed in (the darkness of) the cave.... No ethics is able to sustain without any agent and Dharma-ethics as ethics is also thriving upon its subject. Dharma-Ethics from the very start deals with the agent in its full-blooded sense. The practical aspect of Dharma-Ethics depends upon the psychology of the agent. Hence when we are talking about practical ethics in the context of Dharma-Ethics we are meaning thereby the practical aspect of the application of ethics”. The next speaker of the first academic session was Prof. Kuntala Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata who read a paper titled “Compassion: The Basis for Human Happiness”. Analysing the meaning of the term *dharma*, the speaker discussed the nature of *dharma* within the ambit of Buddhist ethics. Special emphasis was laid in her lecture to explicate the exact meaning of the value-laden concept of *karuṇā*, which through her illuminating explanation assumed a deeper meaning of a universal unconditional kindness bestowed upon beings who are in anguish. Her lecture also threw light upon the subtle

distinction the *Hīnayānī* and *Mahāyanī* sects of Buddhism has on the question whether *śīla* should be performed, i.e. whether there is need for sustaining a value-oriented life, even after attaining *Arhat*-hood or *Bodhisattva*-hood respectively in consonance with their respective soteriological tenets.

The second academic session was chaired by Prof. Kuntala Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Rabindra Bharati University and contained two lectures, one by, Mr. Sudip Bag, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Diamond Harbour Women's University, and another by Dr. Sharmistha Dhar, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Diamond Harbour Women's University. The first speaker, Mr. Sudip Bag delivered his lecture in Bengali and had his paper titled "*Mokṣa Ebong Brahmasākṣātkārer Karaṇa Viṣaye Prasamkhyānavāda*" written in Bengali as well for facilitating better comprehension of the students. He tried to explore in his discussion the divergent views centred on the nature of *mokṣa* in the *Advaitic* tradition which teaches that *mokṣa* in essence consists in deliverance from the dichotomist and dualist tendencies caused by nescience about the ultimate nature of the world of living and nonliving beings. In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (*na ca punarābartate* 8.15.1), *mokṣa* is described as that state considered the *summum bonum* of life which represents the cessation of the cycle of mortal lives fraught with evil and dissatisfaction. The speaker focused for the purpose of his paper on the famous work of *Brahmasiddhi* authored by Advaitin Maṇḍana Mīśra who described *mokṣa* as the state of dissolution of *avidyā* culminating in *ātmasākṣātkāra* that ensues from the famous three-fold path of *jñānayoga*, preached in the *Upaniṣads*, viz. *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana*. The moot question of his paper was: what is the instrumental cause (*karaṇa*) of *ātmasākṣātkāra*? The speaker in his lecture favoured the theory developed by Maṇḍana Mīśra on which *nididhyāsana* (single-minded concentration upon the Highest Truth, the Absolute Consciousness, *Brahman*) is the *karaṇa* of *mokṣa* as *ātmasākṣātkāra*, by citing relevant portions of the *śruti* literature, such as *vijñāya prajñām kurvīta* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.21) .

The next and the final speaker of the seminar was Dr. Sharmistha Dhar, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Diamond Harbour Women's University who read a paper titled "Ecological Concern in the *Upaniṣadic* Tradition: Some Challenges". The speaker explored in her work the prospects of an Advaitic environmental ethic and embarked on the project of offering an alternative view to the critics' suggestions that the only thing accorded intrinsic value and ultimate moral standing in the Advaitic tradition is *Brahman*, the logical entailment of which is the relegation of all the sentient and insentient creatures and the biosphere on the whole to a moral abyss. Here is an excerpt of her lecture:

*Ayam bandhurayam neti gaṇaṇā laghucetasām,*

*Udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam*

These metric hymns of the *Sāmaveda* stand out as an epitome of the harmonious relation among the different beings of the biosphere eulogized in the *Vaidika* ethico-religious milieu. When the *Vaidika* cosmological and theological thoughts culminated in the *Upaniṣads*, the ethical holistic outlook shone in them even brighter. The non-dualistic tenor found across the length and breadth of the *Upaniṣadic* literature of different branches forms the mainstay of the *Upaniṣad* and, what I argue in this paper, also helps them emerge as a distinctive environmental ethic. Several western and Indian scholars of Indic studies however are in favour of taking a cautious approach in according the Advaitism of the *Upaniṣadic* culture the status of an ecologically-minded worldview. Christopher Framarin (2014), for example, argues that if Brahman or the Highest Consciousness propounded in the *Upaniṣad* is the only thing real, then it must have an intrinsic value worth considering, which renders all else, including plants and wildlife morally expendable. With such criticism at the backdrop, the main thrust of the paper would be to interpret the early Advaitic literature such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in a light that on the contrary to what critics of Advaita ecology suggest, brings forth an approach of moral egalitarianism.

The valedictory session of the ICPR Sponsored One Day State Level Seminar Commemorating Indian Philosopher's Day Organized by the Department of Philosophy, Diamond Harbour Women's University concluded with a vote of thanks. In particular, it ended on the high hope that the Indian Council of Philosophical Research would continue to patronize seminars of such global relevance that would generously offer scholars, not just based in India, but from around the world to present their work to a wide spectrum of audience.

