

**Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR, New Delhi) and Indian Institute of
Advanced Study (IIAS, Shimla)**

Re-Examining Indology: *Prospect and Retrospect*

Overview:

Every civilization has an inbuilt mechanism to recollect and interpret its past which is a storehouse of its history and culture. This gives a sense of continuity on the basis of which traditions are built. India had her own intellectual traditions of self-recollection, self-identification, and self-representation within the broad framework of Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina and Lokāyata ways of living. This was long before the emergence of Indology as a formal discipline during 18th and 19th century to gather knowledge of Indian civilization by European scholars. These Indian traditions were abounding with foundational texts inquiring into everything from astronomy and grammar to the nature of ultimate reality, and articulating appropriate knowledge-systems concerning the threefold nature of human activity; namely, knowing, willing, and feeling. These texts were continuously reflected and commented upon by a chain of commentaries in various forms along with *Itihāsa* as recollected, chronicled, and retold through various means not to speak of myth and *kāvya* traditions. Without bearing any formal disciplinary nomenclature such as Indology, this vibrant and living engagement with the past—a realization of its own civilizational-self (*ātma-bodh*)—was derived from an ‘internalist’ perspective of its agency which was an integral part of those living traditions.

Classical Indology was a result of colonial processes, centuries after the purported European ‘discovery’ of the non-European world. In those centuries preceding colonialism, much knowledge was already appropriated from India ranging from calculus to astronomy and navigation. Indology totally neglected these earlier appropriations and sought to reduce the ancient civilization of India to a limited body of knowledge for the purposes of dominating it and ruling it. This body of knowledge developed out of the orientalist, missionary and the colonial interests of European scholarship in India which in turn was influenced by the overall European attempt at ‘othering’ the Indian civilization as was done with Amerindians and Africans.

The Eurocentric body of knowledge about Indian civilization in its classical era did exhibit some of the best shining examples of thorough and painstaking scholarship in translating some of the key texts of Indian civilization (e.g. Charles Wilkins, William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Max Müller, George Thibaut, Paul Deussen) but it was

nonetheless overshadowed in terms of its implicit presuppositions such as the civilizational division between Occident and Orient, the Aryan invasion theory, and the superiority of European civilization. As subtexts to these assumptions, Indian civilization was portrayed as mythical, esoteric and other-worldly, with no sense of history, devoid of scientific temper, incapable of developing theoretical and practical sciences.

Round Table discussion on "*Rethinking Indology*" was organized at IAS on 13 March 2020. Welcome address was delivered by Professor Makarand R. Paranjape, Director, IAS. Introductory remarks were given by Professor Sharad Dashpande, Former Professor and Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Pune. Vote of thanks was proposed by Col (Dr) Vijay Tiwari, Secretary, IAS.

Participants:

- Professor C.K. Raju, Tagore Fellow, IAS
- Professor Kenneth Zysk, Professor and Head of Indology, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
- Professor Dr. Harald Wiese, Professor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University of Leipzig, Germany
- Professor Dominik Wujastyk, Professor & Saroj and Prem Singhmar, Chair in Classical Indian Society and Polity, Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta, Canada
- Dr. Balram Shukla, Fellow, IAS
- Professor Medha Deshpande, National Fellow, IAS
- Dr. Peter Scharf, Fellow, IAS