

Three-Day National Seminar
on
Guru Parampara and Indian Knowledge Tradition

Date: 25,26,27 June 2025

Venue: IAS, Shimla

Concept Note

India's sublime Dharma-centred knowledge tradition, nurtured and nourished by the Guru Parampara of India, was universalistic and all-inclusive. Though Indian culture is a synthesis of various spiritual, philosophical, and religious streams, the uninterrupted knowledge tradition originated with the Vedic rishis. It was nurtured and sustained by successive Guru Parampara through diverse knowledge branches, which constitute the sum and substance of the Indian cultural legacy.

India's most sublime tradition of Wisdom perfected by the Atmajnani Guru Paramparas of the Vedic period viewed all sentient and insentient phenomena as part of the same Transcendent or Supreme cosmic power. Guru Parampara has been the torchbearer of human culture and civilization. Ashrams were the citadel of learning culture and meaning and purpose of life, offering a way of life appropriate for its realization. Gurus addressed both the spiritual and material aspects of human life and sought to guide people to a righteous life, leading to the ultimate purpose of life. Belief systems, worship patterns and practices were evolved to facilitate the sublimation of inherited base propensities and impurities in the soul and its positive evolution to achieve a virtuous life leading to liberation. In the present Seminar, we attempt to show how Guru Paramparas have periodically been instrumental in igniting social awakening, evolving knowledge systems and preserving the same. They addressed the deviations and distortions in religious faith and practices through their teaching and practices following their Time and clime. We also make a humble attempt to examine how far this knowledge tradition has historically continued through the Guru Parampara of India amidst various challenges in guiding people in their spiritual and material pursuits in conformity with the highest ideals of this tradition.

Focus of the Seminar

The Indian knowledge systems have been marvels that bespeak ancient India's physical and metaphysical achievements. Ancient India's remarkable strides in astronomy, mathematics,

metallurgy, aeronautics, music, spirituality and philosophy remain unparalleled in the annals of human history. Ancient Indian knowledge systems evolved as part of India's wisdom tradition, which originated and was perfected by the Atmajnani Guru Paramparas of ancient India. Dharma was pivotal in shaping the Indian knowledge tradition. Dharma is a fundamental and multifaceted concept found in various Indian religious and philosophical systems, particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism. It was central in determining ethical, moral, and social principles in Indian culture and philosophy.

A central feature of India's knowledge systems is its non-clashing characteristic with the eternal cosmic laws and laws of Mother Nature. These knowledge systems are the living monuments of the Indian cultural legacy and India's contribution to the civilizational growth of humanity. Unlike modern inventions, ancient Indian inventions followed the eternal cosmic laws that hold Mother Nature and human life in order. Modern researches in the varied areas of Indian knowledge systems reveal the science and rationality behind them.

For example, researchers hail the invention of Zero in ancient India as "one of the greatest inventions in human history and a cornerstone of modern maths and physics". According to Marcus du Sautoy, the lead researcher of the Bodleian project, "This zero in India is the seed from which the concept of zero as a number in its own right represented by the same dot or circle will emerge some centuries later, something many regards as one of the great moments in the history of mathematics." (National Geographic piece here, with a video on the findings)

The secretary of Zero projects, Peter Gobets, notes: "The Indian zero, widely seen as one of the greatest innovations in human history, is the cornerstone of modern mathematics and physics, plus the spin-off technology." (Source: Who invented Zero by Jessie Szalay). Adds Oxford University professor Du Sautoy: "We now know that it was as early as the third century that mathematicians in India planted the seed of the idea that would become so fundamental to the modern world. The findings show how vibrant mathematics has been in the Indian sub-continent for centuries. "Similarly, Ancient India's incredible knowledge in civil engineering, as exemplified by the Grand Anicut, an irrigation dam still in use in the Cauvery (Kaveri) river basin in Tamil Nadu, built in the first century CE by Chola King Karikalan, is an exemplary example. It is considered the world's oldest dam, and it is still in use.

There are several challenges in visualizing the relevance and conceiving its implementation in the school and university syllabi. The Seminar proposes to discuss these two aspects in their various dimensions.

Since humans cannot conceive the cosmic laws, they follow the words of Jnanis, who are bestowed with the faculty of seeing. They unravelled the eternal cosmic laws behind every creation. They brought these into human understanding to help them and save them from going astray in the wilderness of material life. This jnana tradition, which India lost much before, is rejuvenated and restored in Santhigiri by the founder, Navajyothisree Karunakara Guru. A lifestyle and life vision per the Dharma of the current Time is imparted through a way of life in Santhigiri, which provides a platform to unite beyond religion, caste, race and gender.

The relevance and rationality of the Seminar originate from the proposition that the sublime Wisdom revealed by the Vedic Rishis and the successive Guru Parampara has provided humanity with a comprehensive and intuitive Knowledge system to understand the cosmic Reality that exists behind the cosmic phenomenon of creation, existence and destruction. It sensitized humans to their interconnectedness with the cosmos for their survival and sustainability on Earth. It provides profound knowledge and understanding of the need to lead a righteous life conforming to the Dharma of the Time to achieve harmony at all levels of life so as to attain the ultimate goal of life by addressing challenges in material life.

Objectives:

The National Seminar is organized with a threefold objective.

1. To examine how the tradition of Atma Jnanis, who developed and evolved the ancient Indian Knowledge Systems, has been eclipsed.
2. To examine, understand and disseminate the methodology the Rishis and Gurus evolved in unravelling the highest Wisdom, which makes the ancient Indian knowledge systems distinctive, emulative and sustainable.
3. To examine how the methodology of unravelling knowledge the seers developed can be transmitted and harmonized in our present attempt to blend traditional and modern education and knowledge to address the existential problems of humanity.

Sub-themes

1. Guru Parampara and Indian Knowledge Tradition- Historical and Philosophical Perspective
2. Guru Tradition and Cultural Creativity: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives.
3. Guru Tradition and Social Awakening: Reinventing India's Cultural Pluralism
4. The tradition of Jnana's path- Reinventing India's Spiritual Heritage
5. To examine, understand and disseminate the methodology the Rishis and Gurus evolved in unravelling the highest Wisdom,
6. Examine how the methodology of unravelling knowledge the seers developed can be transmitted and harmonized in our present attempt to blend traditional and modern education and knowledge to address the existential problems of humanity.
7. Indian Knowledge Traditions revisited in the emerging Social-cultural Context
8. Indian Knowledge Traditions revisited in the emerging Scientific Advancement and Technological Civilization
9. Indian knowledge systems - Problems and prospects in addressing India's rising aspirations in the social, economic, educational, scientific and cultural realms and moulding human future.
10. The Santhigiri School of Thought and Guru tradition in the New Age

Call for Papers

A limited number of participants will be invited for the Seminar. Those interested in participating should send (preferably by email) an abstract (500 words) of the proposed paper in English only along with their C.V. (One page) directly to **Professor K. Gopinathan Pillai**, Email: gopikgopi@yahoo.com Mobile: 9447784067 and **copy to the Academic Resource Officer, Indian institute of Advanced Study, Shimla on his Email seminar@iias.ac.in** Tel: 0177-2831385

The last date for submission of abstract (500 words) is till 15th May 2025 05:00 PM. The Institute intends to send Invitation letters to selected participants by the 31st May, 2025. It is the policy of the Institute to publish the papers not proceedings of the seminars it organizes. Hence, all invited participants will be expected to submit complete papers (in English/Hindi only), hitherto unpublished and original, with citations in place, along with

a reference section, to the Convener and copy to the Academic Resource Officer, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla– 171005 by 15th June, 2025.

The IAS, Shimla will be glad to extend its hospitality (**free hospitality is provided only to the Seminar participant**) during the seminar period and is willing to reimburse, if required, rail or air travel expenses from the place of current residence in India, or the port of arrival in India, and back.

Note: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and the Institute reserves the right to cancel the selection/participation of a candidate found guilty at any stage.
