
The India Centre Newsletter



Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of *The India Centre Newsletter*

We are thrilled to present the first edition of our TIC Newsletter, a space to explore the vibrant assemblage of Indian culture, heritage, and knowledge systems. We aim to bring you the latest news and insights into the world of India's cultural, intellectual, and social heritage.

In every issue, we'll explore the timeless wisdom of classical Indian languages and literature, the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), and their relevance to contemporary society. We will delve into the realms of Indian classical films and filmmakers and the marvels of archaeological discoveries that continue to unveil India's rich past.

We'll also keep you updated on the events and activities at The India Centre. Stay tuned for the exciting upcoming topics and events. Join us on this journey to rediscover and celebrate India's wisdom.

Indian Music and Films

Raag Bhairavi - A Relaxing Raga

The 'queen of the morning ragas' is Raag Bhairavi. It has been assumed to be relieving in nature. According to research by the IIT Mandi, if people listen to Raga Bhairavi for 15 minutes daily, stress could be drastically reduced within six days. Source: [Telegraph India](#).



A lost legend: Pandit Ram Narayan

Pandit Ram Narayan, the outstanding sarangi maestro, has left his fans bereft by his unfortunate demise. A trendsetter who made the sarangi an important soloist instrument in the tradition of Hindustani classical music, his contributions transformed the perception of the sarangi worldwide. They left an indelible mark on the field of classical music. Tributes have been pouring from all parts of the music world. They include Kavita Krishnamurthy, Adnan Sami, and many others as they honor his legacy and even more profound impact on generations yet to emerge. Source: [The Times of India](#)



Indian Music and Films

Classic Films Screened in Thiruvananthapuram

Thiruvananthapuram recently hosted the Film Preservation and Restoration Workshop India 2024, organized by the Film Heritage Foundation. From November 8 to 14, audiences gathered at Sree Theatre for daily screenings of restored cinematic classics. This unique event celebrated the importance of preserving film heritage, offering residents a rare opportunity to experience timeless masterpieces on the big screen. Source: [The Hindu](#).

Indian Heritage and Archaeology

Shipwrecks in Goa Reveal Rich Maritime Heritage, Says NIO Scientist



Shipwreck remains discovered by researchers from the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) highlight Goa's rich underwater archaeological heritage. NIO's Aniruddh Gaur reported findings, including pottery, glass bottle bases, Chinese ceramics, and elephant tusks, dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. These artifacts near St. George's Reef off Mormugao shed light on Goa's maritime connections.

Gaur also noted that regions like Gopakapattana, Old Goa, and Chandor remain largely unexplored. The workshop on underwater archaeology, organized by the Asiatic Society and Goa University, discussed marine conservation and research methods. Source: [The Times of India](#).

Indian Heritage and Archaeology

Forty-nine Ancient Mughal Coins Discovered in Uttar Pradesh

In Chaubara, Uttar Pradesh, construction workers recently uncovered a hoard of forty-nine ancient Mughal coins, sparking significant interest among locals and archaeologists. Initially unaware of their historical importance, the workers planned to keep the coins, but local authorities intervened to preserve the collection.



The coins, dating back to the Mughal Empire (1526-1857), feature Persian inscriptions and are linked to two significant emperors: Shah Jahan, known for constructing the Taj Mahal, and Muhammad Shah, under whose reign the empire began to weaken. The Archaeology Department is now studying the coins to gain further insights into Mughal history. Source: [Heritage Daily](#).

Puri Jagannath Temple's Mysterious Secret Chamber: ASI's Findings



The Puri Jagannath Temple's treasure chamber, the Ratna Bhandar, has long been surrounded by legends of a secret hidden room to protect the temple's wealth. After reopening the chamber in July 2023 following a 46-year closure, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted a thorough survey with laser scanning, and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR).

While no hidden chamber was discovered, the ASI noted structural cracks needing repair. A team of snake experts found no evidence of the rumored snake guardians protecting the treasures. The ASI's final report is pending. Source: [The Indian Express](#).

Indian Heritage and Archaeology

Ancient Shiva Lingams Found in Almora Village Spark Religious and Archaeological Interest

Two ancient Shiva lingams have been uncovered in Koteswar village, near Almora's Jageshwar temple complex, igniting spiritual devotion and archaeological curiosity. The discovery followed a local villager, Shekhar Bhatt's vivid dream about a hidden Shiva lingam, which was dismissed by many until workers repairing a broken wall found the relics. The appearance of a large black snake during the excavation added to the mystery, prompting villagers to dig further and unearth the artifacts, believed to date back to the 10th or 12th century.

The site, linked to local folklore, has quickly become a religious hotspot, drawing people from surrounding areas for prayers. Authorities are planning an in-depth archaeological survey to further explore potential discoveries in the region. Source: [The Times of India](#).

Excavation Resumes at the Historic Buddhist Site of Ratnagiri in Odisha

After over six decades, this November, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is set to restart excavation at Ratnagiri, a significant Buddhist site in Odisha's Jajpur district. Collaborating with researchers from Utkal University, Sambalpur University, and Cotton University, Guwahati, ASI aims to address staffing and resource shortages by involving academic partners.



Ratnagiri, known as the "Hill of Jewels," was discovered in 1905 and gained archaeological importance during ASI's 1958-1961 excavation, led by Debala Mitra. From the 5th to 13th century CE, the site was recognised for its extensive Buddhist complex. It featured unique architecture, including a carved chlorite door frame. With new excavation efforts, ASI hopes to uncover further insights into Ratnagiri's monastic heritage and its role in the evolution of Buddhism in Odisha. Source: [The Statesman](#)

Indian Knowledge System

Five Languages Added to the List of 'Classical Language' Status

In a landmark decision on October 4, 2024, the Union Cabinet granted Classical Language status to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali. This recognition elevates India's tally of classical languages to eleven, underlining the country's rich linguistic and cultural tapestry. These designations not only celebrate the historical significance of these languages but also reaffirm India's commitment to preserving its linguistic heritage.

The announcement follows the revision of the criteria for classical language recognition by the Linguistics Experts Committee (LEC). Until recently, the 2005 criteria mandated high antiquity of texts (spanning 1,500-2,000 years), a robust corpus of ancient literature deemed a valuable heritage, originality in literary tradition, and a distinct evolution from modern forms. Source: [The Hindu](#).

Book Brahma Literature Festival 2024 Held in Bengaluru

The Book Brahma Literature Festival 2024 (BBLF2024), held from August 9th to 12th in Bengaluru, celebrated the unparalleled richness of South Indian languages and literature. As a prominent Indian language literature festival, the three-day event hosted 300+ writers from Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, and English.



Festival director Satish Chappariké emphasized the event's mission: "India hosts numerous literary festivals, but the focus often remains on English literature, sidelining the rich traditions of Indian languages. BBLF2024 fills this gap by providing a vibrant platform for Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam to thrive." Source: [The Indian Express](#).

Indian Knowledge System

UGC to Train 100,000 Affiliated Faculty Members in IKS

In an ambitious move to integrate India's rich heritage of knowledge into modern education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) is set to train over 10,000 faculty members and 1,000 research scholars in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) between November 2024 and March 2025.



This initiative, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, underscores a vision to build an educational ecosystem deeply rooted in Indian ethos and cultural heritage.

IKS, or *Bharatiya Jnana Parampara*, forms a cornerstone of the NEP 2020, which reimagines India's education framework by blending traditional knowledge with modern disciplines. It will cover topics ranging from ancient mathematical models of Aryabhata and Madhava to the philosophical foundations of *Samkhya*, *Vaisheshika*, and *Nyaya*. Case studies will explore the relevance of Ayurveda, Ashtanga Yoga, Sangeet, and Natya Shastra, bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary applications. Source: [News 18](#).

TIC Happenings

Webinars August 2024

Indigenous peoples, often seen as endangered, have been the focus of extensive preservation efforts worldwide.

"In India, the Adivasi communities are at the heart of this conversation, with urban activists and global groups raising urgent calls to "save" them—often in the same breath as wildlife like tigers. But are these fears justified? This book delves into the global history of attempts to "protect" indigenous cultures, critiquing the parallels between ecological and cultural extinction. It unpacks the implications of biocultural diversity narratives through fieldwork, archival research, and theoretical insights. It highlights how conservation and development pressures and dehumanizing analogies impact Bhil and Gond communities in India.

The poster features the logos of FLAME University and The India Centre at the top. The title is prominently displayed in the center. Below the title are two circular portraits: Prof. Pankaj Jain on the left and Prof. Ezra Rashkow on the right. At the bottom, there are icons for a calendar, a clock, and a Zoom logo, indicating the date, time, and platform of the webinar.

FLAME UNIVERSITY | **THE INDIA CENTRE**

**THE NATURE OF ENDANGERMENT IN INDIA:
TIGERS, 'TRIBES', EXTERMINATION & CONSERVATION,
1818-2020**

HOST
PROF. PANKAJ JAIN
Head of Department - Humanities & Languages; Chair, The India Centre, FLAME University

SPEAKER
PROF. EZRA RASHKOW
Associate Professor of History, Montclair State University

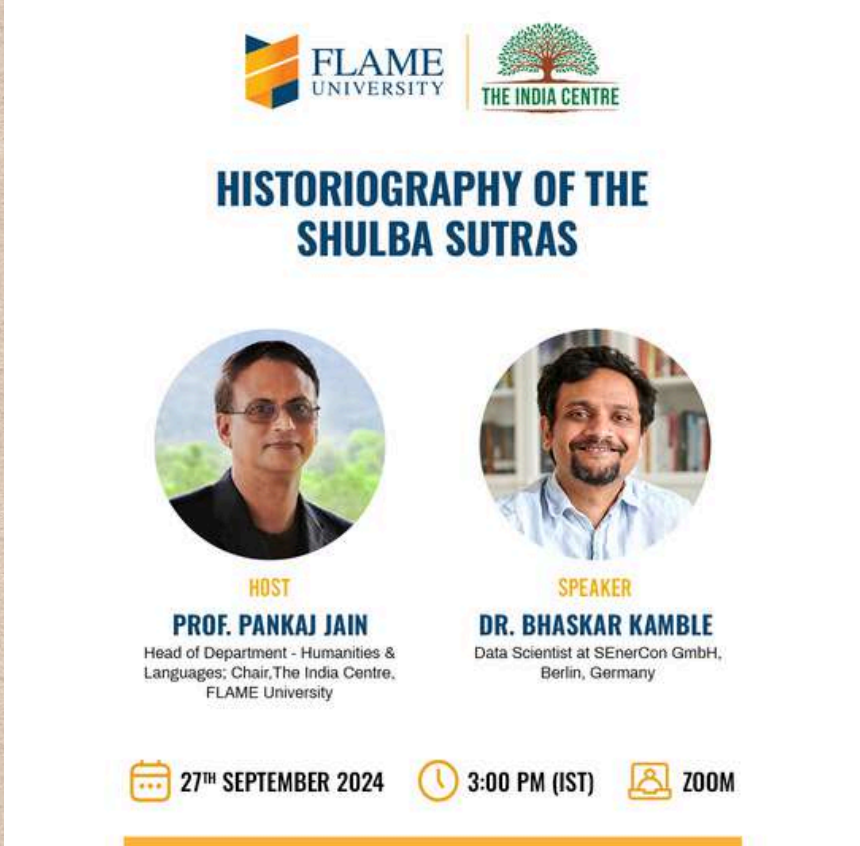
26TH AUGUST 2024 | **6:00 PM (IST)** | **ZOOM**



TIC Happenings

Webinars September 2024


Since Abraham Seidenberg's pivotal 1979 article highlighting the Sulbasutras' overlooked contributions to the history of mathematics, little has been done to systematically explore how perceptions of these ancient Indian texts have evolved.


This talk seeks to fill that gap by tracing the historiographical journey of the Sulbasutras since their introduction to Western scholarship in 1875 by Georg Thibaut. It critically examines the works of influential figures like Moritz Cantor and Otto Neugebauer, whose writings have shaped the marginalization of the Sulbasutras within mainstream mathematical history. By unpacking these narratives, the talk aims to reevaluate the Sulbasutras' role and challenge their relegation to a mere historical footnote.






HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SHULBA SUTRAS

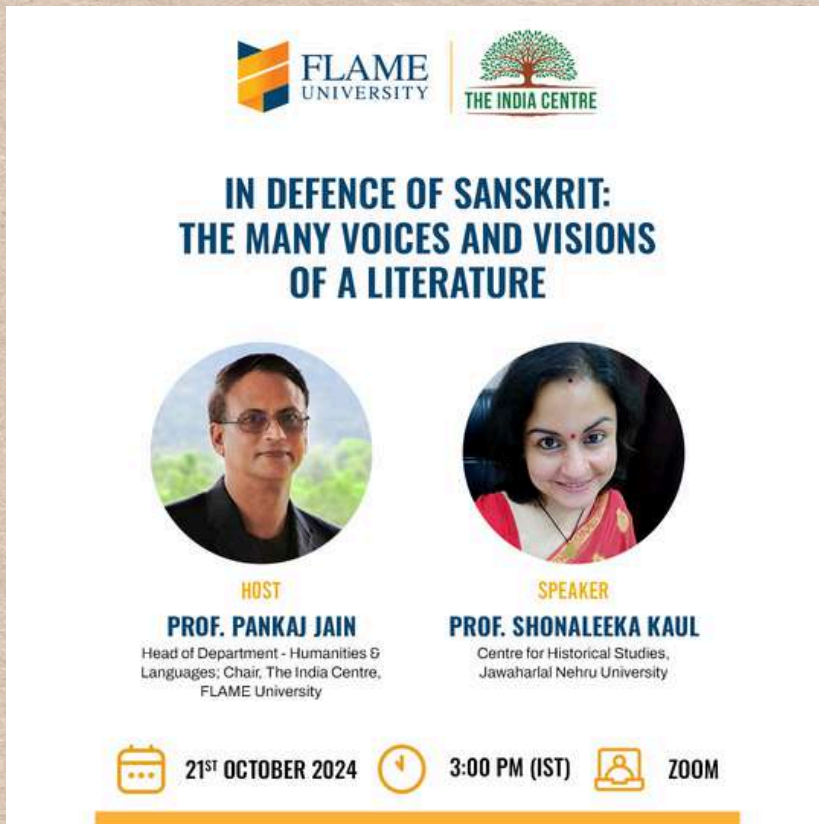

HOST
PROF. PANKAJ JAIN
Head of Department - Humanities & Languages; Chair, The India Centre, FLAME University




SPEAKER
DR. BHASKAR KAMBLE
Data Scientist at SEnerCon GmbH, Berlin, Germany

 **27TH SEPTEMBER 2024**  **3:00 PM (IST)**  **ZOOM**


TIC Happenings


Webinars October 2024






**IN DEFENCE OF SANSKRIT:
THE MANY VOICES AND VISIONS
OF A LITERATURE**


HOST
PROF. PANKAJ JAIN
Head of Department - Humanities & Languages; Chair, The India Centre, FLAME University


SPEAKER
PROF. SHONALEEKA KAUL
Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

 **21ST OCTOBER 2024**  **3:00 PM (IST)**  **ZOOM**

Modern perceptions often dismiss Sanskrit as an elitist and insular tradition, disconnected from its time's broader cultural and intellectual currents. This talk challenges such assumptions by highlighting the diversity and depth of Sanskrit's literary and knowledge systems, which span virtually all domains of human inquiry. Far from being narrowly obscurantist, Sanskrit has historically fostered a diversity of voices and perspectives. By engaging with a range of Sanskrit texts, this discussion seeks to illuminate its far-reaching influence and enduring relevance, offering a nuanced understanding of its role in early Indian society.

TIC Happenings

Webinars November 2024

Abhinavagupta's concept of paramādvaita or "absolute non-duality" presents a profound philosophical resolution where duality (dvaita) and non-duality (Advaita) coexist within a singular, all-encompassing meta-category. This might appear paradoxical—how can two seemingly contradictory categories merge?



FLAME UNIVERSITY | THE INDIA CENTRE

ABHINAVAGUPTA AND 'NON-DUALITY' (ADVAITA)

HOST
PROF. PANKAJ JAIN
Head of Department - Humanities & Languages; Director, The India Centre, FLAME University

SPEAKER
PROF. MRINAL KAUL
Assistant Professor of Indian Philosophy, IIT - Bombay

29TH NOVEMBER 2024 2:00 PM (IST) ZOOM

For Abhinavagupta, the recognition of distinctions, such as a 'pot' (*ghaṭa*) and a 'non-pot' (*aghaṭa*), is grounded in the same underlying non-dual consciousness (*advaitasamvit*). This unifying principle does not negate the plurality of forms but reveals their intrinsic interconnectedness as expressions of one reality.

Abhinavagupta's vision transcends binary oppositions, advocating an inclusivism where opposites like "pluralistic idealism" and "idealistic realism" find harmony within a shared foundation. His *paramādvaita* invites a reevaluation of non-duality not as an erasure of duality but as its ultimate resolution in a pluralistic, non-dual framework. This perspective remains deeply relevant to contemporary philosophical discourse.

TIC Happenings

Webinars December 2024

India's emergence as a significant player in global politics positions it uniquely in the evolving multipolar world order, characterized by opposition to unilateralism and hegemony. India's leadership in the Global South could revolve around championing equitable development, promoting climate justice, and addressing trade disparities. Through platforms like BRICS, G20, and the Global South Summit, India can advocate for the interests

The poster features the logos of FLAME University and The India Centre at the top. The title 'INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS' is in a yellow box, followed by the subtitle 'INDIA'S ROLE AS A GLOBAL PLAYER IN A COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENT WORLD ORDER: A CRITIQUE'. Below are two circular portraits: Prof. Pankaj Jain (HDST) and Prof. B.M. Jain (SPEAKER). At the bottom, it lists the date '27TH DECEMBER 2024', time '7:00 PM (IST)', and the platform 'ZOOM'.

of developing nations and foster South-South cooperation. At the global level, India faces challenges such as cyber threats, energy security, and the implications of great-power rivalries. Regionally, border conflicts, cross-border terrorism, and instability in neighboring countries require strategic focus. Strengthening alliances, modernizing defense capabilities, and investing in multilateral security frameworks are vital for India's security posture. India's longstanding call for UN reforms, particularly the expansion of the Security Council to include permanent representation for countries like India, is critical. By leveraging its global influence and aligning with other reform-seeking nations, India can push for a more inclusive and representative global governance system. As a secular democracy in a region rife with ethnic and religious tensions, India has a moral obligation to mediate and support conflict resolution efforts. Promoting dialogue, fostering people-to-people ties, and providing humanitarian assistance can bolster India's role as a stabilizing force in South Asia.

TIC Happenings

1. Swayam Course on Jainism



Prof. Pankaj Jain, Director, The India Centre) has introduced a course titled "Introduction to Jainism" on Swayam. This self-paced undergraduate-level course covers topics such as Jainism's origins, karma theory, nonviolence (*Ahimsā*), ecology, political thought, scriptures, and animal ethics. It also explores Jainism's influence on figures like Gandhi and its global relevance. Resources include readings by renowned scholars. The course is part of India's Ministry of Education initiative to promote accessible online learning.

2. Lecture on Varna, Jati, and Caste

The FLAME Itihaas Club and The India Centre organized a lecture by Prof. Pankaj Jain on Varna, Jati, and Caste in Oct 2024.

The *Varna Vyavastha*, often translated as the class system, remains a fascinating and highly debated topic in the study of Vedic culture. The Vedas, composed in archaic Sanskrit, continue to be an enigma, leaving much of ancient social history to be reconstructed through extrapolation from the later history of Indian society. While modern scholarship frequently employs Marxist and Weberian frameworks to interpret this system, Prof Jain's lecture takes a distinctive approach, shedding light on some of the lesser-known aspects of *Varna Vyavastha*.

Podcasts

1. *Sarva Pitru Amavasya*

Sarva Pitru Paksha Amavasya, the last day of *Pitru Paksha*, marks a sacred period of gratitude and remembrance for our ancestors. This fortnight begins after Ganesh Visarjan and concludes just before the vibrant festivities of Durga Puja and Navratri Garba.

The tradition of *Shraddh*, derived from *Shraddha* (reverence), is observed during this time to honor and express gratitude to our forebears. Rituals such as *Pinda Daan* and *Karmakand* are traditionally performed in Gaya, a place whose very name signifies "to go." Devotees also offer food to Brahmins, cows, and crows as symbolic acts of respect to humanity, animals, and birds, respectively.

This practice reflects the profound idea of worshipping nature through symbols. The cow represents animals, the crow represents birds, and the Brahmin—defined not by birth but by virtue and deeds—embodies humanity. These acts remind us of our interconnectedness with all living beings and the importance of honoring the cycle of life.

2. Indo-European Roots: Jackal, Cow, and Mouse

The rich tapestry of language often reveals fascinating connections across cultures. Sanskrit, one of the oldest Indo-European languages, offers intriguing links to Persian and English through the names of animals like the jackal, cow, and mouse.

- **Mouse:** The Sanskrit word *Moosh* remains *Moosh* in Persian and eventually becomes mouse in English.
- **Cow:** *Go* in Sanskrit evolves into *Gau* in Persian and later becomes cow in English, a seamless transition through phonetic adaptation.
- **Jackal:** The Sanskrit *Shrigal* finds its Persian counterpart in *Shagal*, which transitions into jackal in English, showcasing the shared linguistic ancestry.

These connections underscore the profound historical interplay between languages, tracing to shared roots and cultural exchanges across continents.

Podcasts

3. Exploring Indo-European Language Connections: *Upari* and *Unter*

Language reveals fascinating histories of shared roots and cultural exchange. The Sanskrit prefix *Upari*, meaning "above," provides a compelling example of its transformation across Indo-European languages:

- *Upari* evolved into *Uber* in German, meaning "over" or "above," and into *upper* in English. Interestingly, the modern car service "Uber" derives its name from this same German usage.
- In Persian, Urdu, and Hindi, *Upari* became *Upar*, retaining its meaning as "above." Similarly, the opposite of *Upar* has its roots in Sanskrit and travels a parallel linguistic path.
- *Unter* in German (meaning "under") transitioned into *under* in English.
- In Persian, Urdu, and Hindi, this transformed into *Andar*, meaning "inside." In Sanskrit, the related term *Antar* signifies "inner" or "internal." For example, *Antarmukhi* (introvert) refers to someone who is inward-looking.

These shared linguistic threads, stretching across Sanskrit, Persian, German, and English, underscore the deep connections within the Indo-European language family. They illustrate how prefixes like *Upari* and *Unter* have evolved while maintaining their core meanings.

4. Origins of the Varna System: Vedic and Jain Perspectives

The Varna system, a foundational concept of ancient Indian society, finds its earliest mention in the Rigveda. In the 10th Mandala, 90th Hymn, and 12th verse, the Purusha Sukta describes the cosmic origins of the four Varnas:

Podcasts

- Brahmins emerged from the mouth, symbolizing knowledge and speech.
- Kshatriyas arose from the arms, representing strength and protection.
- Vaishyas came from the thighs, signifying commerce and sustenance.
- Shudras originated from the feet, embodying service and support.

However, Jainism also presents a unique perspective on the origins of the Varna system. An ancient Jain text attributes the introduction of the system to Rishabhdev (Adinath), the first Tirthankara. He is credited with establishing three Varnas, which his son, Bharat, later expanded to four.

This Jain narrative predates the Vedic reference, highlighting the possibility of parallel and interconnected developments in Indian societal structures. Both traditions underscore the importance of collaboration and interdependence among the Varnas for the harmonious functioning of society.

5. Vedanta Retreat: Exemplifying Unity and Spirituality

The Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda, has long served as a beacon of spiritual harmony and service. One such inspiring initiative is the Vedanta Retreat near Portland, Oregon, established by the mission in the 1970s.

What sets this retreat apart is its embrace of universal spirituality. Within its serene environment, shrines dedicated to diverse traditions—Jewish, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu—coexist harmoniously. This unique space invites individuals from all backgrounds, ethnicities, races, and religions to meditate and connect with nature.

Grounded in the philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta*, which teaches that every particle in the universe is divine, the retreat embodies this principle in action. Here, every stone, every breeze, and every moment serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all existence.

Whether you're seeking spiritual growth or simply a moment of peace, this retreat offers a transformative experience of merging with nature and realizing the divinity present in every particle.

Podcasts

6. The Varna System in the Bhagavad Gita: Beyond Birth

The Bhagavad Gita profoundly explains the Varna system, emphasizing its basis not on birth but on qualities (guna) and actions (karma). Two significant references clarify this.

Chapter 4, Verse 13:

Chātur-varṇyamī mayā sṛṣṭamī guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśhaḥ

Tasya kartāram api māmī viddhyakartāram avyayam.

Krishna tells Arjuna, "I created the four Varnas based on the division of qualities and work. Though I am the creator of this system, know me as the non-doer and eternal."

Chapter 18, Verse 41:

Brāhmaṇa-kṣhatriya-viśhāmī śhūdrāṇāmī cha parantapa

Karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaiḥ.

Krishna explains, "The duties of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras are divided according to the qualities born of their inherent nature."

These verses highlight a crucial aspect of the Varna system; it was initially envisioned as a framework based on an individual's natural aptitudes and contributions to society, not as a rigid caste system tied to birth or family lineage.

Krishna's message reinforces that true identity and purpose come from one's character and deeds, aligning with Gita's universal teachings on self-realization and duty (dharma). This perspective offers a dynamic and inclusive understanding of societal roles, transcending hereditary constraints.

Podcasts

7. Understanding the Varna System Across Ancient Texts

The Varna system is a recurring theme in ancient Indian scriptures, with nuanced interpretations highlighting aptitude and work over hereditary privilege. For instance, the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes qualities (*guna*) and actions (*karma*) as the basis for Varna, not birth. Other religious texts also emphasize this aspect.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4, 11.5, and 1.31): This text asserts the unity of humanity, describing how all people originated from a single divine source. It emphasizes equality, as every individual has the potential to achieve spiritual growth regardless of Varna.

Mahabharata (Chapter 12): The epic states, "We were all Brahmins" and "We were all Shudras by birth," reinforcing that all humans are born equal. Social roles are determined later by individual qualities, education, and actions.

Manu Smriti (11.157): Manu provides a symbolic perspective, "Just as a wooden toy elephant is not a real elephant, and a stuffed deer is not a real deer, a Brahmin is not a true Brahmin without knowledge of the Vedas and intellectual development." This underscores that education, knowledge, and character define a Brahmin, not mere lineage.

These texts collectively suggest that the Varna system, at its inception, was intended as a flexible and meritocratic framework rooted in individual qualities and societal contributions. Later interpretations often diverged from this egalitarian ethos. Still, the original teachings emphasize the intrinsic equality of all human beings and the importance of education and ethical conduct in determining one's role in society.

Podcasts

8. Exploring Varna Mobility in Ancient India

Ancient Indian texts provide profound examples of varna mobility. Vashishtha, revered as a Brahma Rishi, was born to a courtesan but earned his status through his actions and wisdom. Similarly, Vishwamitra, originally from a Kshatriya lineage, is honored today as a Maharishi. Vyasa, the author of the Vedas, Mahabharata, and Puranas, was the son of a Shudra woman but is celebrated as a Brahma Rishi. Parashara, also born to a Shudra woman, rose to be regarded as a Brahmin. King Janaka, a Kshatriya, is remembered as a Brahmin for his spiritual achievements. Vidura, born of a Shudra woman, is hailed as a wise rishi. Even the Pandavas and Kauravas, from a Shudra lineage, are recognized as Kshatriyas.

These stories offer a nuanced perspective on ancient societal structures.

9. Varna and Jati: Stories of Transformation

In this segment of Varna, Jati, and caste, we explore historical figures who transcended their birth-assigned roles to achieve greatness and redefine societal perceptions.

Chandragupta Maurya and Chhatrapati Shivaji, both born into traditional Shudra jatis, are celebrated as two of the greatest Kshatriyas in Indian history for their leadership and valor. Similarly, iconic figures like Kalidas, Thiruvalluvar, Kabirdas, Surdas, and Tukaram were not born into the Brahmin varna, yet their profound contributions as saints, philosophers, and poets have earned them a revered place in spiritual and literary traditions. Modern visionaries like Gandhi, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Mahesh Yogi, and Chinmayananda, though not born into the Brahmin varna, are now regarded as some of the greatest Brahmins by virtue of their scholarship, accomplishments, and the way they lived their lives.

These examples highlight how societal boundaries of varna and jati were transcended.

Podcasts

10. Eklavya: A Story Beyond Caste

Eklavya is often portrayed as a victim of caste oppression, but the broader context of his story reveals a different perspective. Eklavya's father, Hiranyadhanush, was the chief of the Nishad clan and served as the army general under Emperor Jarasandha, a powerful ruler who repeatedly attacked Krishna's kingdom and temple.

According to the Bhagavata Purana (10.5, 10.24), Eklavya later joined Jarasandha's army, aligning himself with Krishna's adversaries. This rivalry sheds light on why Dronacharya asked Eklavya to sacrifice his thumb. The Pandava side, preparing for inevitable conflicts, could not afford to let someone with ties to their enemies gain mastery over their military techniques. Eklavya's skill as an archer made him a potential threat, especially if he shared their military secrets with the rival camp. This decision, therefore, was not driven by caste bias but rather by strategic military and diplomatic considerations. Eklavya's thumb sacrifice was a safeguard to protect critical knowledge from falling into the hands of a potential adversary. This reframing highlights the complexities of his story.

11. The Origins of the Word "Caste" in India

While Varna and Jati are ancient Sanskrit terms deeply rooted in Indian culture and literature for thousands of years, the concept of "caste," as we understand it today, was introduced during British colonial rule.

The word "caste" entered India in 1901, when Herbert Hope Risley, a British census commissioner, conducted India's first census (Janganana). Risley, driven by his belief in the racial superiority of white Aryans, categorized thousands of Indian Jatis as "castes." This imposed a rigid European-style caste system on Indian society, creating a false narrative of a mythical, birth-based, and racially hierarchical caste system. Hindu scriptures and historical records do not associate Varna or Jati with racial superiority, skin color, or purity of blood. The British census, however, used these ideas to classify and divide the population, institutionalizing a system that had never existed in this form before colonial rule. This distortion of India's social framework has left a lasting impact.

Podcasts

12. Race Science and the Nasal Index: A Colonial Distortion

Herbert Hope Risley, a British census commissioner, was a proponent of "race science," a method used to classify populations. Risley applied the nasal index—the ratio of the width of the nose to its height—to divide Indians into Aryan and Dravidian "races" and categorize them into seven castes: Brahmin, farmer, shepherd, artisan, trader, warrior, and leader/king. According to this method, narrow noses (types 1-5) indicated European origin, medium noses (type 6) were attributed to "yellow races," and broad noses (types 7-8) were associated with Africans, Melanesians, or Australian Aborigines. Risley used this classification to impose racial theories on India's diverse population, reinforcing colonial narratives of division.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar critically examined this racial categorization in 1948, highlighting its flaws. Ambedkar pointed out that the nasal index measurements showed no significant differences between Brahmins and Untouchables, proving they belonged to the same race. He argued that if Brahmins were Aryans, then Untouchables were also Aryans. Similarly, if Brahmins were Dravidians or Nagas, the same applied to Untouchables. Ambedkar concluded that the entire theory of racial divisions was built on a false foundation. Furthermore, Dr. Ambedkar outrightly rejected both the nasal index method and the Aryan invasion theory, which claimed that Aryans and Dravidians were separate races. He viewed these constructs as European impositions, designed to fragment Indian society and perpetuate colonial control.

Podcasts

13. Jainism's Influence on Place Names in Bengal

Bardhaman, the fifth-largest city in West Bengal, carries a fascinating connection to Jainism. The city is named after Vardhaman, the adolescent name of Mahavir, the 24th Tirthankar in Jainism. During his spiritual journey, Mahavir traveled extensively across Bihar and Bengal, leaving a lasting impression on the region.

Interestingly, many places in Bengal derive their names from Jain influences. For example, Birbhum, another district in Bengal, is also linked to Mahavir. In Bengali, the Sanskrit or Prakrit word Mahavir becomes Mahabir, and when combined with Bhoomi (meaning land), it forms Birbhum, literally translating to "Land of the Warrior" or "Land of the Braves." Both Bardhaman and Birbhum reflect Jainism's historical presence and cultural influence in Bengal.

14. The Journey of the Word "Door" Across Languages

The simple word "door" which symbolizes an entry into a room or building, has a fascinating linguistic history. Most likely, the origin of the word can be traced back to the Sanskrit word Dwar, meaning an entry point or gateway. In Farsi, this evolved into Dar, which later became Darwaza in Urdu. Remarkably, these words—door, Dwar, and Dar, are all interconnected through the shared roots of Indo-Aryan, Indo-Iranian, and Indo-European languages. They not only carry the same meaning but also retain similar sounds, etymology, and linguistic cognates.

This interconnectedness highlights the beauty and unity of the Indo-European language family, where ancient roots continue to resonate in modern words across diverse cultures and regions.

Meet our Team

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