Challenges and Issues in Teaching Indian Philosophy: An Appraisal

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Abstract— The objective of this paper is to identify the huddles faced in understanding Indian Philosophy by students and to develop methods for the same. There is a requirement for understanding Indian Philosophy for making it relevant for 21st century, because understanding makes subject interesting and makes application easier. Our task is to expand Indian Philosophical concept world-wide. Sooner or later it would create a benchmark and will be placed as only philosophy without any distinctive geographical boundaries.

Recently, Government of India has brought a proposal to reform the ongoing education structure by bringing National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and is expecting to implement it as soon as possible. Emphasis has been given to implant Indian culture and values into the life people through education. It also wants to make people aware about the enriching culture and philosophy that our country has. Indian culture and philosophy were lost in British era which now brings us into a mission to revive it and one of the ways that can be done is through education. It focuses to draw attention of the students and scholars of India and of the world-wide towards research in philosophy. NEP 2020 wants to show the world how rich and relevant Indian culture and tradition is. It has the power to produce spark in the lives of everyone. It sets aim to develop method for the same. So as scholars and teachers in philosophy we can better analyse the problems we generally face while reading and teaching philosophy.

Keywords: Indian Philosophy, Education, NEP, Methodologies.

I.

Indian Philosophy has been an academic subject-matter for a few centuries now both in India and the West in various colleges and universities either under department of religion or/ and philosophy. Although not unfamiliar, its popularity among students for pursuing it as a career still remains a situation which needs to be introspected upon. The number of students willing to purse philosophy, in general, is diminishing gradually which creates a requirement to analyse for why students are reluctant to study it and determine the factors associated with it. In this article, we are primarily concerned with the problems faced during the academic pursuit of Indian Philosophy. It also emphasizes on providing plausible solutions to help a genuine study and understanding of it which would help finding relevance in this 21st century.

 Our course of discussion will take place in three parts. In the first part, we will make a discussion on the state of Indian Philosophy in India. This section would emphasize on the trends- past and current, the changes that occurred in the course while and the factors that facilitated the change of course. The second part will be dedicated to an elaborative discussion of the problems encountered while reading and understanding Indian Philosophy. The third part would offer some methods that can be taken up as plausible solutions to the problems indicated which might help both the teacher and student to take up to understanding Indian Philosophy well and proceed towards rigorous research in further time period.

The origination of Indian Philosophy traces back to Vedic Period when schools were developed basing on the acceptance or denial of the authority of Vedas and associated literatures (*Vedāngas, Upavedas, Granthas, Upaniṣads*, etc). It is endowed with intellectual tradition rooted in it. The Indian Philosophical Schools have developed more a synthetic outlook. The method of developing world view was through dialogue and debates. There was no separate treatment of ontology, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics as distinct branches of philosophy. These questions were approached both generally and relatively while some schools stressing more on the metaphysical point and some on the logical approach to knowledge. The trend of doing philosophy changed during colonial period. Dialogues and debates were no longer used as the method. Colleges and universities started in India by British in the first half of the 19th century included philosophy into the curriculum. The syllabus then designed forged a divide between Indian and Western Philosophy in the mind of the Indian students. The training of the Indian students and scholars in the kind of philosophy studied in Britain put forth a condition that the ancient Indian Philosophy was to be understood and interpreted tallying with the Western thinkers. This kind of doing philosophy still prevails today. Evolution of Indian Philosophy seems to have taken a halt. The contemporary Indian philosophers, though they tried to produce some notable works, could not become a flag bearer after Classical Indian Philosophy. The understandings of the systems are posited as something static and self-contained with a lack of opportunity of growth with passing time. The progressiveness of Indian Philosophy and difficulty in its study are said to have been obstructed due to both internal and external factors. The later identifies with the intervention of

colonial rule as a reason for changing patterns of philosophical activity in India. This takes us back to 2nd February, 1835 when Sir T. B. Macaulay proposed a design for education in colonial India reforming the Charter Act 1813, which still hides within our system like a wolf in a flock of sheep. Famously termed as Macaulay's minutes, the proposal was made to '*no longer encourage Sanskrit and Arabic*', [6] '*...as it contains neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them.*'[8]Instead the funds which were set apart for the study of Arabic and Sanskrit is now to be channelized towards the subjects that promote the '*intellectual development amongst the people of India*'. The proposal was also made to impart education in English. Every possible argument was made to show the supremacy of Western literature over the ones belonging to India. Science, technology, history and philosophy of the West, regarded as knowledgeous, of refined taste and professional, were to be imparted in educational institutions by trained teachers of the discipline and, thus, claiming Indian literature, culture, history and philosophy to be full of superstitions and prejudices; and Indian education system that of *gurukul* and *madrāsā* creating uncivilized mind. This proposal was accepted and implemented by then Lord William Bentinck's government. It implicates the prime reason for a cut-off of population from Indian philosophical study. However, the internal factors are more liable for the current fate of Indian Philosophy. The impacts of British system are kept alive even in independent India by the inhabitants themselves. First of all, Indian Intellectuals have accepted the Western method of doing philosophy and use the same measurements to understand Indian philosophical systems. There is nothing wrong in the acceptance of method but accepting and applying irrationally creates the problem. It creates a condition like you are left with a tool-kit about which you have no knowledge of utilization. This has led to decline of the dialogical structure that formed the foundation of Classical Indian Philosophy and to worse; the originality of thought is not received as it should be as the understanding of it takes place with a dependent and comparative thinking of the West. Secondly, the attempt made by the contemporary Indian thinkers was primarily focused on socio-political grounds i.e. to integrate people for attaining political freedom. For this, they adopted the theories from the classical thought and presented it by fabricating in a new style to instil the spark of nationalism, thus, giving an impression of arguing in a circle. The arguments so produced were nothing new but can be called as an attempt to so relevance of the classical theories in the then context. Finally, the idea of expertise in a system changed with time. Earlier, during classical period, a scholar or thinker of one school was not confined to his own system. He had knowledge of all other systems and their criticism against him was welcomed which helped him to develop his argument and also in the growth of his own system. The debate structure helped for the same. Now, an academician pursuing his research in one system is least concerned with the development happening in other systems, hence, he is away from holistic form of knowledge. These entire factors sum up for the disruption caused while studying Indian Philosophy.

II.

Popularity of a subject lies in its application in our day-to-day life. The factors that affected the teaching of Indian philosophy to mass, created a bridge between the two, generated ignorance about the subject amongst them. People are unaware about what our systems have to say to all of us. Adding up to these, the textbooks on Indian Philosophy, except a few, do not articulate the theories well and gives an impression as if all systems are speaking about something abstract. It does not portray the grounds for why and how the philosophers have derived their doctrines. This makes the doctrines look mere speculations and look irrelevant to present day situation. When one cannot connect oneself with or find practical utilization of what one is studying, the knowledge of such subject seems useless to him. Further, many myths are associated with the Indian philosophical doctrines like - it is spiritual in nature, emphasizes on *moksa,* is other worldly, based on speculations, superstitious, etc. for which scholars in Indian philosophy conceive it as impossible to find implication in worldly issues faced today in our lives. In order to retain its position, Indian Philosophy needs to prove its worth in relation to current time.

Another prime problem that one encounters is the language of the original literature. Most of the original texts are written in Sanskrit; and some are written in Pali, Dravidan, etc. What we read now are secondary texts written by various scholars mostly in English. To draw the original thought accurately from these translations becomes a huge task as the technical terms used in original texts have different connotation in English. Moreover, terms used in the original texts are ambiguous in nature. A term may mean something in one doctrine and other in some other doctrine; and allotting an English term for the entire context wherever the parent term has been used misleads the reader from having a proper knowledge of a doctrine. Hence, to study Indian Philosophy, one requires having a thorough grounding in the language and grammar in which the texts have been written.

Along with these problems, syllabus and pattern followed in universities for Indian Philosophy does not provide ample opportunities to explore the subject in depth. Though syllabus designed for it is extensive in nature, the semester pattern followed does not provide enough time period and scope to cover every system in detail and lacks the opportunity to enforce critical thinking. It becomes the case of mugging up whatever is taught for the sake of examination.

Education should not be merely limited to transmission of knowledge only, but also foster inquiry and reasoning skills that are conducive to the development of autonomy. Philosophy necessarily involves thinking activity in a logical order. This will ensure evolvement of new trends in it. So it becomes essential to find ways within this system to help reinforce thinking and philosophizing into the minds of the students and scholars to remove the stagnancy that seems to prevail.

III.

So, we are now quite aware about some of the problems faced by academicians in Indian Philosophy. It becomes a task to find solutions to minimize these. Our aim is to have orderly and comprehensive understanding of Indian philosophical traditions, to be able to interpret into the world-context and then, also rejuvenating it into higher orders or developing new systems.

There were techniques followed in the ancient India for educating the young minds. One such thing was the technique of *Śravana*, *Manana* and *Nididhiyāsana* which was followed in the Vedic *gurukuls*. The students were supposed to stay in the ashrams of their gurus and draw knowledge from him by listening, remembering and analyzing it experientially. This method was used to obtain a holistic knowledge both theory and practical. Gurus of that period were well-versed in Sanskrit, had knowledge of literally everything and if we consider the teaching of Indian Philosophy, they might have developed some methods on how to analyse it (*nididhiyāsana*) for making its learning easy and relevant to their students. However, we cannot deny the changes that have occurred. We cannot deny the change in society. We cannot deny the 'westernisation' in education that has been in-cooperated in our education system. And to ask to go back and adopt the Vedic educational system would be an unreasonable choice that can be made and would possibly send Indian Philosophy to graves. Today students are taught by teachers and professors having hold in a particular section of a branch of specific subject who might or might not be well-versed in Sanskrit. We need to accept the radical changes that have occurred so far and develop new methodologies that lead us towards the accomplishment of our goals.

The immaculate portrayals of Indian Philosophy can be understood after a serious venture into original texts. Hence, first of all, there is a need to have basic knowledge of Sanskrit language. For this NEP 2020 has a proposal to introduce Sanskrit as a compulsory subject in level of schools and higher education. It also identifies the importance of learning Sanskrit to sieve out the vast knowledge from our classical literatures. It states that:

> The importance, relevance, and beauty of the classical languages and literature of India also cannot be overlooked. Sanskrit, while also an important modern language mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, possesses a classical literature that is greater in volume than that of Latin and Greek put together, containing vast treasures of mathematics, philosophy, grammar, music, politics, medicine, architecture, metallurgy, drama, poetry, storytelling, and more (known as 'Sanskrit Knowledge Systems'), written by people of various religions as well as non-religious people, and by people from all walks of life and a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds over thousands of years. Sanskrit will thus be offered at all levels of school and higher education as an important, enriching option for students, including as an option in the three-language formula. It will be taught in ways that are interesting and experiential as well as contemporarily relevant, including through the use of Sanskrit Knowledge Systems, and in particular through phonetics and pronunciation. Sanskrit textbooks at the foundational and middle school level may be written in Simple Standard Sanskrit (SSS) to teach Sanskrit through Sanskrit (STS) and make its study truly enjoyable. (4.17)

For the students who are currently doing graduation or higher studies, they can take up diploma course in Sanskrit or it can be made a skill enhancement course to be pursued by philosophy major. Teachers in Indian Philosophy too need to take short-term courses in Sanskrit to improve their skills. This will ensure that language would not now become a barrier for wrong interpretation of original intention of the texts.

Interest in students and scholars plays an important factor here. They need to be motivated to go for making a career with Indian Philosophy. For this we can in-cooperate some sections of our classical theories into the textbooks designed for high schools. For example, while introducing students about atomic theory in science we have Dalton's theory, Rutherford's theory, etc. Along with it we can introduce them with Kanada's *parmanu* theory. Adding such sections wherever relevant will help to induce curiosity among students about contributions made by our Indian Philosophical Schools.

> Regarding the extensive nature of curriculum as a whole and to give space for critical thinking, NEP 2020 suggests that:

> Curriculum content will be reduced in each subject to its core essentials, to make space for critical thinking and more holistic, inquiry-based, discovery-based, discussion-based, and analysis-

based learning. The mandated content will focus on key concepts, ideas, applications, and problem-solving. Teaching and learning will be conducted in a more interactive manner; questions will be encouraged, and classroom sessions will regularly contain more fun, creative, collaborative, and exploratory activities for students for deeper and more experiential learning. (4.5)

Thinking as a philosophical activity is done individually; but that thought process is enforced in a context i.e. one cannot philosophize by being completely independent from the surroundings. So, we can design methods that are situation-based or application-based which will instill philosophical thinking in the minds of students. They may use theories from their learnt courses or may result into new pattern of thinking or doing philosophy. This helps them know the utility of what they have learnt so far. Relating theories with real-situations- social, political, moral, scientific, emotional, legal, etc. makes a subject interesting and significant. Such methods are also suggested in NEP 2020 to make learning and teaching attractive and interesting. In addition to it, not only reading of Indian classical texts is to be done but also its understanding is to be motivated by adopting heuristic method where students will analyse the text by themselves and try to show its implication in modern day context. Students can be motivated to replicate the dialogue - debate method and interact among themselves like *pūrvapakşa* and *uttarapakşa* on a topic from Indian context. This too would be effective for developing rational and synthetic argument. By adopting these methods, we can achieve our goal for making Indian Philosophy an approachable course.

There should be no barricades for adopting methodologies for doing philosophy unless it decimates the subject-matter. A vegetable needs to be chopped but that cannot happen with a butter knife. It needs a sharp-edged knife to cut it into pieces. That does not mean butter knife is useless; it can be used in some other cases like spreading butter on bread. Similarly, any methodology cannot be used anywhere. A doctrine requires a specific method to be understood and assessed. Making rational use of methodologies will help a just research of philosophical doctrines in general. It will also do justice in imparting accurate understanding of the doctrines in the original texts.

The dire need to develop techniques to teach and understand Indian Philosophy is to keep its spirit alive in the upcoming generations in order to handle the spiritual, moral and material issues we are facing in our lives. Indian Philosophy holds so many principles whose proper understanding will contribute to maintain harmony amongst all aspects of human life. As mentioned earlier, philosophy develops in a context; Indian philosophical doctrines too have developed from the situations faced by human then. It can be said that philosophy as a whole is mingled with human life. So by being able to teach Indian Philosophy to greater mass and being able to properly communicate the themes in it, we can develop it further in terms of content and method to address modern day challenges.

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