

Email Correspondence

Jul 7, 2019

Friends,

The mail with this subject had gone to three different addressee lists. They are combined in this. There are responses from Aseem Shrivastava, Pawan Gupta, Abhijit Mitra, Asoke Chattopadhyay, PK Sasidharan, PRK Rao, Lina Dokuzovic, Ashok Jhunjhunwala and CNKrishnan. They are mostly not on 'Reply All'. This is to suggest that responses may be given on Reply All. This facilitates dialogue and collaborative search for direction. Further this is to request everybody to please respond. Even if you wish to say that the exercise is not worth it, please say so, it will be deemed a serious response to be factored in while searching for the way ahead.

The mail that I sent to you all initially is attached. Also to give some idea of my thinking on matters such as these, attached is a write up that I had prepared for a lecture at Swaraj Vidyapeeth, Allahabad, in August 2018 on the occasion of their Swaraj Mahotsav. It is in Hindi. The plan to render it in English has got delayed, but I hope to do it before long.

Can we look forward to a meeting in October 2019? It can be held in Varanasi. May be part in Vidya Ashram at Sarnath (See vidyaashram.org) and part in Darshan Akhada on the bank of Ganga ji. (Please see darshanakhadablog.wordpress.com to have an idea about this place.). This year October 13 is Ashwin Poornima - full moon and clear skies. It will be a great occasion to be on the bank of Ganga ji, then.

Sunil

Jul 7, 2019

Sunil ji

Thank you for pushing. It will good to meet in October.

let me give you what I have been up to. Around 1992 or so I stopped reading for a few years and also started spending more time with children of illiterate people. Without my knowing a cognitive rewiring happened due to this and I began to also function like an illiterate. what I mean by this is that all the habits I had acquired during my literate phase slowly began to disappear. (not fully)

That is when I was able to see through some of the important aspects we, the literates have not examined. It became clear to me that literates learn the WORD whereas the illiterates learn the WORLD. What this also means is that for the literates the word has played the culprit in rewiring their total cognitive system. Word as the source of knowledge demands reading, thinking, reasoning, agreeing disagreeing and further reading, further thing and so on as the process. this process has changed the physiological functioning of the senses too and eye instead of seeing has been conditioned to think, imagine, etc

I think what we are encountering is a cognitive crisis and we need to reverse our learning agenda and start learning from the illiterates and from children. one this that has not been considered by modernity is the fact that our formation depends on what we engage with. Just as word forms the literates and the world forms or shapes the illiterates the digital or virtual forms the present generation. The generation gap we talk about is in fact due to the difference in their cognitive source.

I have done a deep study on how children are learning the world, how biology or nature has equipped them to decode and make sense of the world they experience and how knowledge gets constructed.

As biological beings knowledge has to be rediscovered and that is what children do. I have huge documentation on children- videos and images of what they do

spontaneously and also drawings and from these, I have been able to see the patterns that tell us how and what they learn.

Modernity has totally misunderstood children. I have written about this in academia. please see the links.

<https://independent.academia.edu/JinanKodapully>

There also other links below.

Hope we can collectively pursue this also along with other aspects.

Jinan

Aug 7, 2019

Dear All,

Thanks to Jinan for a comprehensive reply explaining his ideas. I have waited for a while now for more responses. Meanwhile, we wish to finalize the meeting on 12,13 and 14 October 2019. The idea is to start around 11 am on 12th and end by lunch time on 14th. Once this is fixed we can proceed to figure out how exactly the dialogue can be distributed. To take a more detailed call on the organization of this meeting, it will be helpful if we knew who all are deciding to come. So, please send in your confirmation as soon as possible.

I do not know if some persons not in this list may also be invited. Perhaps not. Perhaps there may be some exceptions. We may expect some participation from Varanasi.

This list has persons of variety of inclinations - philosophy per se, science, politics, economics, art, tradition, the virtual world, social media, and much more. Their interests have a philosophical interface and it is for this reason that we should like to listen to them, listen to them as philosophers. So, this is to request you to come prepared to speak. It is of course desirable that we have, say by end September, a note on what you would like to speak.

Lodging and boarding in Varanasi will be taken care of by Vidya Ashram. You will have to meet your travel expenses.

Thank you and with regards

Sunil

Aug 10, 2019

Hello Prof.Sunil Sahasrabudhey,
Greetings.

Any attempted cognitive privileging of the illiterate over the literate or the other way around evades the central question of the conditions of legitimacy of exercise of political power by one over the other in the name of an enforced political order when it does not lapse into an advocacy of cognitive relativism which is the hallmark of contemporary postmodern condition of thought with occasional appeals to the ethics of thinking. Listening to Philosophers is not about learning how to reconcile one privilege with another but about whether political philosophy has anything to offer by way of justification for the legitimacy of exercise of power in a political order which exists now, or, has existed in the past, or possibly can be created by human effort in times to come.

The Histories of Political Orders and their Philosophies. to my thinking, offer little hope for the emergence of neither emancipatory political practices nor liberating thoughts in political philosophies. The contemporary low esteem attached to politics and philosophy render the situation worse. Add to it our age old vulnerability to conflating Social Change with Technological Progress you get the sense of Scientific, Industrial, Military Complex and its dangers that, paradoxical as it may seem, General Eisenhower had spoken about in the last millennium .

All that and my physical condition rule out the possibility of my ‘ Listening to the Philosophers ‘ . I can only wish the proposed Meet a success it aspires for.

Regards,

prkrao

Aug 23, 2019

I have chosen three philosophical pieces which seem worth engaging with. These are by three philosophers.

I am attaching an interview with Reza Negarestani, an Iranian philosopher, titled 'Engineering the World, Crafting the Mind'. In his latest book 'Intelligence and Spirit', he looks at the history of western philosophy in terms of 'intelligence' (See the last part of the interview). As we know, artificial intelligence is at the frontier of knowledge today. Negarestani examines the whole of philosophy from the standpoint of 'computation'. The interview has a lot of other things along with some interesting biography. He engages with some political debates and positions which are found exclusively on the webosphere. There is a long section on education and politics. (You can read it online here: <https://www.neroeditions.com/docs/reza-negarestani-engineering-the-world-crafting-the-mind/> I have tried to extract it and attach it here, though it is much more readable online.)

I am also attaching Navjyoti Singh's paper on 'The hard problem of contentious belief: Towards a formal theory of justice'. He resurrects the idea of 'dharma' as the basis for a theory of justice. He does so on the basis of two trans-jural principles: all disputes/discords are judicable in principle, and the principle of trans-parency of actions and deeds which states that - all deeds are knowable as judicious fiats. From these principles he derives the idea of the jural autonomy of all individuals.

We can also look at Isabelle Stengers essay on 'The Challenge of Ontological Politics'. I am attaching a book called 'A World of Many Worlds' which contains Stenger's essay (p.83 -111). Stengers was the co-author along with Ilya Prigogine of the famous book 'Order out of Chaos'. I have not gone through this properly. We can choose some other contribution from the same book too.

The whole book would be of interest really. The phrase ‘world of many worlds’ occurs in a Zapatista document. Here is the original quote given at the beginning of introduction:

Many words are walked in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and worlds that are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds that are truthful and true. In the world of the powerful there is room only for the big and their helpers. In the world we want, everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit.

—ejército zapatista de liberación nacional,

“Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle” (our translation)

I highlight certain issues below, which we can try to address in our discussions:

1. Local and the Global:

The very appeal for a ‘philosophical intervention in society’ presumes a dialectic between the local and the global. A philosophical enterprise is a global enterprise. What is the relationship between Lokavidya and Philosophy? What is the relationship between Lokavidya and Lokavidya Darshan? We sometime seem to reduce Lokavidya Darshan to the advocacy of the local. This won’t do. Lokavidya Darshan is, in essence, a global thought, which wants to reconfigure the relation between the local and the global. What is the meaning of swadeshi in this context?

Can Lokavidya Darshan do that without being a robust and comprehensive philosophical framework. It has to have a reading of the whole history of thought and an imagination of the future which is rigorously connected to an adequate understanding of the present global conditions. We cannot treat Lokavidya Darshan to be a finished product that we are in possession of.

We do have a deep philosophical insight in the form of the conception of ‘ordinary life’ and a reading of current global conditions in terms of a ‘knowledge revolution’. What is the progress that we have made beyond that?

2. The idea of justice and the notion of emancipatory politics

I think this is a blind spot. We have 'economic justice' and 'social justice'. To my mind, social justice has run its course as a vector of emancipatory politics. I do believe that the impetus for gender justice, caste justice, race justice is irreversible, but they do not by themselves any longer provide the path to future. And we don't seem to have any idea of how to create a new thrust for economic justice in the face of rampant info-capitalism. The idea of 'cognitive justice' as propounded by some seems quite lame and problematic to me. The idea of seeking 'real' justice through cognitive assertion is different from cognitive justice.

What is the idea of justice which is a part of ordinary life? I think fundamentally it refers to a just resolution of conflicts. Some form of justice has been there in most societies. From the standpoint of 'emancipatory politics' this kind of justice is seen as compromise and is denigrated. It seems to me that none of the conflicts in modern society ever get resolved and they keep festering and most politics is built upon that. We need to rethink justice in a fundamental way.

Maybe 'swaraj' offers a form of emancipatory politics which is different. We need to examine and see exactly how it is so.

3. Science

I think our attitude to science needs revision now that it no longer defines a closed circle of authoritative knowledge. Now that 'logic, values and methods of modern science' no longer lead the dominant dynamics of change. We need to look at science, religion and art as forms of knowledge as is implied in Lokavidya stance.

We have to imagine how constructive forces can work survive and work in tandem and destructive forces have to be identified and impeded.

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that it is 'the human' which is moving to the centre of knowledge, including science. New emerging fields like evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology, cognitive science etc. have 'the human' as their core object of knowledge. We have seen earlier that the convergence paradigm is directed at 'enhancing the human'. 'Big Data' is also mostly about the knowledge of individual human beings. If so, what is its significance?

Avinash

Aug 25, 2019

Dear all,

This is to clarify that the dialogue 'Listening to Philosophers' will be held at Vidya Ashram, Saranath in Varanasi between 12-14 October 2019 as announced earlier and as scheduled.

Girish, Abhijit, Avinash and Sasidharan have already booked the tickets. Suresh, GSRK and Mrs. GSRK have informed that they are coming and will soon be booking their tickets. Abhilash has informed that Prasanna will be there in the meeting. Ravikiran Jain will be here for one day. CN Krishnan and Jinan have expressed their inclination to come. Krishnarajulu has also said that he will try his best to be here for the meeting.

This is to request responses from those who have not yet said anything.

This dialogue as formulated so far is not focused on any very specific idea. This is causing some unease, however the idea of listening to others' reflections, be they about politics, epistemology, ontology, ethics or anything else for that matter, requires that the scope of the dialogue is kept rather wide. The common concerns of the participants are expected, with some moderation, to give a general direction and focus to this dialogue. Hopefully we shall emerge with a reasonable consensus which may give us a sense of direction.

From my earlier mails it should be clear that the word philosopher here has not been used in any professional sense. May be I should add that 'philosophy' is to be taken in the sense of 'darshan', a sense in which persons like Gandhi, Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, Kabir, Ravidas, Annamacharya, Basavanna, Tukaram, Guru Nanak and many such others are philosophers. And not just this, but that artists and social and political activists who work for change too devote a reasonable part of their thinking to deeper issues bordering on 'darshan'. Listening to their reflections on deeper issues of life ought to be like listening to philosophers.

Thanks and regards

Sunil

Aug 29, 2019

Dear Budhey ji,

Great. Sorry for troubles.

I will make my travel plans soon. thinking of going to Lucknow area to visit some places before getting to Varanasi. Sravasti and Bharhut are in my mind.

I have not thought about writing on something for presentation. Rather, keen to be there with you all people. Personally, I have difficulty with the ideas of Philosophy and Philosophers. Ideas of Universal truth or knowledge, Wholist approach, Philosophical understanding, etc seem to have given enough troubles for humanity. In fact, the so-called universal truths are not universal at all. they are someone's truths that have been projected to be applicable for all. I am scared of philosophy and philosophers. So I need great patience to be in the midst of philosophers!! One cannot argue with philosophers or argue against philosophy. Because philosophy is only an argumentation. The argument is not all that is matter to life. Particularly, I have great difficulty with the word philosophy itself. In India, we have different terms and ideas. Anvikishiki, Meemamsa, Darshana, etc are very famous. There can be many more. Even among these, there is no similarity of meaning!! I was wondering at what point of time people have stopped or dropped the ideas of anvikshiki and meemamsa!! Now they are rather used in specific senses. Why so? Similarly the case of the idea of philosophy. There may have different terms and ideas that have been undermined and suppressed. Why Philosophy? I am not arguing against the need for greater visions or ideologies. There is an urgency to delink the pursuit of ideas, knowledge, visions, wisdom, etc from philosophical thinking. I am talking about anti-philosophical thinking in the context of the specific discourse on the idea of philosophy that prevails among the western philosophers, academic, professional, technical experts in the discipline. Most of them consider that it is uniquely the western faculty or genius. Strangely enough, it continues to be held even by some of the critical insiders of philosophy in the west, when they castigate non-western intellectual traditions for being unqualified to be philosophy!! My simple question is this: If the westerners are

very particular about their specificity of thinking (ethnocentricism) why it should be universalised for everybody else? Why non-westerners should argue that their thoughts are equally philosophical? Why should the western normativity become a status issue for others? Many westerners also are aware of the pathological nature of philosophising, and have argued that craving for philosophy should be treated as a disease, and so treated as the case of neurotic disorder.

Terminological issues apart (politics of philosophy), I am aware of the spirit of lokvidya meeting. We need to listen to or learn from victimised or suffering people for better solutions than the philosophical elite. This spirit is very much there with the idea of lokvidya. I am interested in it.

Thanks and regards,

Sasidharan

Aug 29, 2019

Dear All,

Our tickets are booked. We (Prasanna, GSRK & his wife, self) will be there from the evening of 11th to the afternoon of the 14th.

What Sasi observes below is essentially what GSRK and I, over several meetings in recent weeks, have been endlessly debating.

I present below one thread of thinking that I found interesting but unsatisfactory.

One may take a view that the game is over for Philosophical ruminations in our times. Philosophy and Science have been instrumental in creating theories of the world that make life subservient to the word; the word which has meanings and contexts within Ontologies that do not intersect those of a majority of people; in turn facilitating the imprisonment of faith in the clutches of the word; and the substitution of reality by the word. To reiterate, it is philosophy that has imposed on us the imperative of knowing the world through the word in its relationship

with other words. And our despondency is rooted in the hopelessness that arises from knowing the world through the word.

The word has become a faithful servant of the few. It enables the concealment of reality through recursive subject-object inversions that open up the doors to ever higher degrees of objectification, progressively degrading our humanness. It does seem that our dissatisfaction with the world is also a consequence of the thingification of everything around us.

In fact, the text above itself is a good example of how reification consumes us in every way possible.

Greek philosophy had to be chiseled away from reality for 16th century Europe to manufacture its rational moorings of thought. In the post-truth world, the death of rationality may not necessarily translate into the death of reason. However, it does foretell an eclipse of philosophy.

What we can do now is not very clear to me. I am open to suggestions, though.

Suresh

Aug 29, 2019

Something tells me I should remind Suresh and youngsters that Philosophy is forever! For, it is created as long as the mind is free from its own delusions. So until some maniacal powers drug the minds to suicide philosophy thrives, with or without words. Thus today at least three aspects may be discussed:

1. A Philosophy of Humanity under 5G
2. A Philosophy of humanity practicing the medical science arising from the 'Science of Mind' being created in laboratories in 21st century - survival and evolution of philosophy itself.

3. A Philosophy for humanity having the strength to confront the existing maniacal powers of nationalism, imperialism or tradition, all of which are in at least two varieties, with or without religious intoxication.

And finally to remind the humanity that they are human not by virtue of GDP but by virtue of that which precedes utterance of words.

Best wishes

Surendran

Aug 30, 2019

Thank you Avinash for giving us these references to look at and pursue. I have already got Neeraja to order the book for Vidya Ashram. Hope to see it before we meet here.

The points you have raised, I expect, will be raised by you here in the meeting. Just a point now; global and universal seem to be mainly different because the former has a meaning through its reference that is the whole world in actual extension. Whereas the later derives its meaning from its connotation. Understood this way they may be inter-translatable. However the question in my view is not whether lokavidya or lokavidya darshan is global or universal but that whether it is 'globalizable' or 'universalizable'. Philosophy seems to seek not these characteristics as given but as possibility conceptually conceivable.

Surendran has already made worthy remarks on what Sasidharan and the Bangaluru group have driven at. I would like that you too comment on what they have said.

In my view they are throwing out the baby with the bath water. Looking at knowledge practices of the people is an anthropological exercise of no use to us until it is understood and also made clear that the practitioners command the knowledge, theories and the philosophies behind these practices. Such philosophies and knowledge apparatus is given expression to by their philosophers. It would be not done to approach a member of lokavidya-samaj and

demand from him the philosophy behind his practice. However I have the impression that such a person will be able to give some answers to your questions in utter contrast to the situation you may encounter if you approach a working scientist and ask some serious questions about philosophy of science.

Philosophy is ubiquitous. Its expression assumes a variety of forms - poetry, theater, story, painting, sketching, music, speeches of peoples' leaders, the evening discourses among the enlightened in the community, the analytical essay and so on. The educated today seems to be entrapped in the last one, unable to see clearly beyond the declarative sentence and the conceptual apparatus weaving these sentences, namely the propositional and the predicate calculus. Why bother even about the possibility of quantification, namely, universalizability or globalizability?

The point is not that there is lokavidya and there is lokavidya darshan but the main point is that they constitute the wherewithal to be able to think in real terms about justice, change and emancipation.

Sunil

Sep 01, 2019

As I am not attending the meeting, I have limited write to comment. Yet, I am writing something for most of you have been friends.

While people's practice has been trampled for a long time, there is a new acceleration that is taking place in recent times. It comes up with a belief that there is only one of way of doing right thing; it also attempts to exclude large sections of our society and there is a belief that differences can be handled by "beating them to submission." This may have happened in Indian history in the past, but we have not seen this at such scale during our life-time. I am worried whether space will be left for any different thinking (right or wrong). This would need some immediate action. While thinking for long-term, we must always try to determine, what we can do in five to ten years. With conditions changing fast (including the

environmental impact), belief that someone in twenty five or fifty years will pick-up the pearls of wisdom that we come up with today and make a difference, can be a private but not a public-discourse.

I am adding further. Even though much has happened that we do not like, there has been some seminal changes in the last thirty years:

1. Since 1991, our country have had a economic growth of about 6.5% per annum, implying that today in real-terms, we are about 7 times the economy that we were then. While incomes have been considerably skewed, it also means that the government has and spend 7 times the fund (in real terms).
2. While empowerment may be casualty at local and individual level, poverty has significantly been removed. While agriculture is in a mess, poverty and deprivation is now lower than 20%. Electricity has reached most, cooking gas is reaching more and more and better(?) house and better transport is likely to be there for most. Most children go to school and increasing number goes to college. Communications have reached most. Most get meagre employment and poor living conditions in city, but they are uprooted form their traditional base.
3. Even the 20% poverty is also likely to go away in next ten years. While this is good, it will also take away the last freedom of “local.” Everyone will become appendage of large urban industry. Local entrepreneurship is getting converted to become supply-chains. You earn more delivering food for Zomato than being a farmer or artisan.
4. The difficult issue is to “not oppose poverty-alleviation process (any attempt and you will be casted as villain and may even be jailed)” and yet work towards local empowerment. The only local empowerment that would be allowed is when you become a “local bhajan mandali” in line with spreading the message that the center wants you to spouge. It will be portrayed as going back to your traditions.

Thus the juncture is important and there is a lot to discuss and debate and come up with a way to make a difference. In this I have a strong urge. But yet, I am not even making an attempt to come to the meeting, for I doubt (and what I have read confirms that) that we as a collective are ready to take up this task.

Ashok Jhunjhunwala
