

Report of
ICPR Sponsored Periodic Lecture, 2026
Two Day State Level Seminar on
“Indian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Challenges”
Organised by Department of Philosophy
in collaboration with IQAC, P. R. Thakur Government College
Date: 30th and 31st January, 2026

An ICPR (Indian Council of Philosophical Research) sponsored Two Day State Level Seminar on “Indian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Challenges” organized by the Department of Philosophy in collaboration with IQAC, P. R. Thakur Government College. It was held on 30th and 31st January, 2026. The convenor of the seminar was Dr. Supriya Samanta, treasurer was Smt. Pritha Paul and the secretary was Smt. Sucheta Mitra, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, P. R. Thakur Govt. College. This seminar was inaugurated by coordinator of IQAC, Officer-in-Charge invited speakers and other professors. And the inaugural session was ornamented by the presence of distinguished philosopher from academia, faculties of different Colleges and Universities, research scholars and a large number of enthusiastic students of both undergraduate and post graduate programme of social sciences and humanities, who are our future generation cognoscenti of Philosophy. On 30th January, 2026 the convenor of the seminar Dr. Supriya Samanta started the first session with her inaugural speech and welcome address. Here she had nicely described the theme. She had lucidly explained the main theme and the scheduled program of the two days. She elaborated the differences between morality and ethics and why Indian ethics is taken in to consideration in this respect. Then Dr. Utpal Singha Roy delivered key note speech with an illustration of contemporary moral challenges in Indian context. Why should we discuss this topic at all.

In the title there are two words – “ethics” and “morality”, which are sometimes complementary to each other but not synonymous. It is a common mistake to mix up these two. The word ‘ethics’ comes from the Greek *ethikos*, which means a set of moral principles. The word is sometimes used to refer to the moral principles of a particular social or religious group or an individual. It prescribes conducts in terms of good and bad, right and wrong. It is also a branch of philosophy which represents external, societal, institutional code of conduct of different cultures and community. It is completely a normative and prescriptive discipline. Whereas morality always represents a body of discourses which discusses or scrutinizes different moral values of different individuals, society and community and which is both normative and descriptive in nature. In fact, we can say that discussion of morality or the moral philosophy is a descriptive study of norms, ethical code of conducts. Even, the question “why should

we be moral?” can be an integral part of the discussion of morality but “why should we be ethical?” is not a question to be discussed within the scope of ethics itself. Since ethics and ethical principles are made to be followed. When does an act become ethical? – this question cannot be asked without referring to certain individual, specific society or community and in that respect the obvious answer is if it is prescribed somewhere as right action. But if we ask when does an act become moral, then it is a matter of discussion and there might be different answers if we adhere to different moral values.

In the Indian context, the word “ethics” has been translated as dharma, not in the sense of religion but in the sense of determinants of right and wrong. Etymologically, the word “dharma” comes from the root “√dhr”, means “uphold, support, sustain”, which can protect us, which can bind us together. That is why both legal and social codes were designated by the pervasive term dharma, as were the ethical principles or code of conducts. For western scholars of Indian philosophy, it was a long debate whether dharma-ethics can be considered as moral philosophy, since moral philosophy is completely an open-ended rational discourse and for them there was no concept of morality in Sanskrit literature for dharma-ethics is completely a strict compartmentalization of individual and social conducts. But now it is no more a matter of dispute, since for last couple of centuries both traditional and professional Indian philosophers able to show the rational, diverse and multidimensional nature of dharma-ethics. It is true that morality is not an Indian term and it is not easy to find out its Sanskrit equivalent. The nearest that one can use is the enigmatic word dharma. The ever illusive and multifaceted representation of dharma in multiple Indian texts as well as in epics prove the rational nature of dharma and which can be translated both as ethics and morality. And for our convenience we can use the word “dharmaniti” to designate the concept of dharma connected with both ethics and morality.

The word “dharma” is a very ubiquitous concept in Indian philosophy where law, religion, aesthetics, ethics etc. – all have remained well integrated. Sometimes this sounds very positive. But at the same time, it may be negatively put as a devastating criticism for those who have been used to the modern analytic method, to sharp distinctions, precision and exactitude. It can and sometimes has been said that the Indian mind lacks the power of sharply distinguishing one concept from another. Part of this problem is connected with translatability and interpretability of concepts across cultural boundaries. But on its home ground dharma is an intelligible concept in spite of its ubiquity, ambiguity and multivalent character.

In our two-days periodic lectures, we focused on dharmaniti from both legal and societal perspective. Our first speaker Dr. Aditi Dashgupta, Professor of Philosophy, West Bengal State University, delivered lecture on context sensitive character of dharmaniti. Our second and third speaker Dr. Inamur Rahaman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Presidency University and Dr. Abhishek Anant Nowbagh, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Jadavpur University reflected on dharmaniti through examining the concept of poverty and Indian jurisprudence respectively. On the first day 30th January Dr. Aditi Dashgupta

delivered lecture on “The Context Sensitive Morality in Indian Tradition”. In this session the chair person was Dr. Lipika Saha, Associate Professor of Bengali, P. R Thakur Govt. College. Here she nicely spoke on Dharmaniti in Indian context, such as Puranas, Mahabharata, the Epics, the philosophical Schools, the folk tales and so on. Objective of social morality along with psychological or individual morality not only paves the way for liberation but also helps us to live a happy and prosperous civil life with sense and sensibility by accommodating multiple ethical attitudes including the deontological, the teleological the virtue and even, sometimes, the pragmatic. Context-sensitivity and moral dilemma are two important features of Indian ethical discourse.

On the second day 31st January, Dr. MD. Inamur Rahaman and Dr. Abhishek Ananta Nowbagh delivered lecture respectively on “Poverty Through the Lens of Morality” and “Contextualising the Moral Dimensions in Indian Jurisprudence”. In these two sessions the chair person was Dr. Sunirmal Das, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Jadavpur University. Here Dr. Rahaman elaborately spoke on poverty and the Indian scenario, he focuses on poverty, rights, duty, Gandhi and so on. His paper aims to understand the exact nature of our duty towards the poor by analysing the debate between positive and negative duties and individual and collective duties. In addition to that, it tries to address the question of which duty should be given primacy in this context. The distinction between positive and negative duties blurs and compels us to rethink whether we can continue considering our duties in binary terms. This debate tries to examine whether the responsibility to alleviate poverty rests primarily with institutions or whether individuals share an equal moral obligation to address it. Within this larger debate of how to discharge our duties if freedom from poverty is a moral right, this paper tries to focus on Gandhi’s emphasis on three things: first, the primacy of duty over rights, where he locates the source of rights in the performance of duties. Second, his principle of distributive justice, where he urges us to use what is needed and not more than that. And, third, the idea of trusteeship, where he proposes that the affluent people should become the trustees of the poor. This paper will try to examine whether Gandhi’s framework can provide us with an alternative approach to understanding our duties to alleviate poverty.

On the other hand, Dr. Nowbagh’s deliberation was focused on Indian jurisprudence, morality, *Naya, dharmaniti*, Ambedkar, Gandhi and so on. He tries to elaborate Ambedkar’s model of Jurisprudence and how it differs from Gandhian Model. The most decisive ethical contribution to modern Indian jurisprudence, however, came from B.R. Ambedkar and his idea of constitutional morality. Ambedkar was acutely aware that Indian society was marked by caste hierarchy and deep social inequalities. He therefore argued that justice could not be left to social customs or popular opinion. For him, the Constitution had to become the highest moral authority of the nation. Constitutional morality requires firm commitment to the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It demands that constitutional principles prevail over tradition, prejudice, and majoritarian pressures. In Ambedkar’s vision, law serves an essential counter-majoritarian function: it protects the rights and dignity of individuals and minorities

against social domination. This Ambedkarite understanding transformed Indian jurisprudence. Fundamental rights, judicial review, and constitutional supremacy became mechanisms to ensure that justice would be guided by ethical reason rather than by inherited discrimination. Through many landmark decisions, the Supreme Court has relied on constitutional morality to challenge oppressive practices and to expand the scope of human rights. Indian jurisprudence, therefore, represents a living ethical tradition. Drawing upon ancient Indian and Islamic ideas of justice, Gandhian humanism, and above all Ambedkar's constitutional morality, Indian law seeks to align legal authority with moral responsibility. Its legitimacy ultimately depends on its ability to promote fairness, protect dignity, and advance social transformation.

All the learners of philosophy, students, research scholars and faculties enjoyed every bit of the lectures. Their active participation and interaction made the lectures more fruitful. We are confident that students and research scholars would derive due encouragement from this exposure and feel inspired to carry on exemplary careers in future in this field. We are very much thankful to ICPR for the financial support without which it was hardly possible to organize this lecture series.