

**Two-day seminar/webinar**  
**Science of Mind - II**  
**-A DIALOGUE BETWEEN MODERN SCIENCE AND DIGNĀGA'S LOGIC-**  
Lecture Room-1, India International Centre (Annexe), New Delhi  
April 23-24, 2022

The World Buddhist Culture Trust and Indian International Centre jointly organised a two-day seminar/webinar in continuation of its series on Science of Mind, the first of which was held in October 2021. This time around, the theme was more specific: 'A Dialogue Between Modern Science and Dignaga's Logic.' Dignaga is taken to be the predecessor of the more celebrated Dharmakirti, associated with refining Buddhist Logic and Epistemology, notably the idea of Pramana or Valid Cognition. It is only natural that Dignaga, who is seen to have systematised this branch of philosophy, giving it analytic rigor, should be discussed in a conversation with modern scientific thinking on epistemology and ontology. To address the theme adequately, the event was divided into two sessions over two days, with three presentations each by experts in their respective fields, followed by a discussion on each day.

The proceedings began with a ceremonial lighting of the lamp with Lama Doboorm Tulku, Director of WBCT, introducing the main concept. Giving an overview of the place of Dignaga in the Pramana tradition, Rinpoche invoked the late Prof. Lal Mani Joshi's postulation in *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India* (1967) that the mass of Indian learning in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. can be divided into two streams: the sacred and the secular. While one focused on polemical learning involving mastery of all the Indian philosophical systems, the other was esoteric and oriented towards ritual and mysticism. Rinpoche pointed out that Jey Tsong Kha Pa had asked a question long ago of Tibetan Buddhists, who combine both these streams. Rinpoche wondered where that placed Dignaga: whether in the secular or sacred tradition as demarcated by Prof. Joshi! He then spoke briefly on the theory of Pramanas in various schools, pointing out the hierarchy of pramanas in which *pratyaksha* (direct cognition) was always important but *anumana* (inference) was given greater weightage.

The sessions began aptly with the Prof. S.R. Bhatt (formerly Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi and the ICPR) providing a sweeping overview of the place of Dignaga, in his talk entitled 'Dignaga: The Father of Medieval Indian Logic'. Highlighting the key role of debate in the Indian tradition, which had *atmavadi* and *anatmavadi* streams, he highlighted Dignaga's innovative insight that epistemology has to be structured keeping in view the requirements of ontology, as well as his theory of language or *apoha*. He also evoked western formal logic to point out that, by contrast to its logical formalism, for the Buddhists a kind of pragmatism was always present. In the Buddhist tradition philosophical knowledge was connected to reality and linked to the goal of the alleviation of suffering and cultivation of compassion.

Geshe Yeshe Lhundup from Drepung Loseling Monastic University spoke next on "Acharya Dignaga and his Contribution to Understanding Non-deceptive Cognition" from within the Tibetan monastic perspective, delineating systematically the arguments in *Pramanasamuccaya*, but linking it to the meditative practices on emptiness and calm abiding which start with an inferential prime cognition relying on a valid reason, gradually moving beyond the conceptual to "yogic direct prime cognition." Dr. Pempa Dorjee, formerly of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, brought the weight of his scholarship in Sanskrit to dwell on the *Mangalacarana* of *Pramanasamuccaya*, the foremost independent text on Buddhist Logic, with special emphasis on the concept of rebirth, relating it to other Buddhist ideas on how mind and consciousness work. The session ended with some interesting questions received online as well as as a general discussion with the scientists present who engaged briefly with the speakers.

Day Two, focused on science, began with a keynote from theoretical physicist Professor K. Sridhar. Affiliated to Azim Premji University and CERN, Geneva, he also works on philosophy of science and fostering interdisciplinary conversations. His talk entitled “Materialism, Atomism and the Challenges for Physics” was a sweeping survey of the field from Newton to Quantum Physics. He pointed out that the search for a theoretical understanding grounded in physics that can account for aspects of human existence beyond the material—consciousness, self-awareness, mind, spirit—still eludes us. But he pointed to how quantum physics, though not accepted by all physicists in the fullness of its ‘mystical’ implications, challenges the crude materiality and certitudes of the Newtonian worldview. Declaring, however, that the Charvakas were his “heroes”, he expectedly elicited some strong responses from the Buddhists who have enjoyed a promixity to the Charvakas as fellow “heterdox” philosophers, while also differing from them in not being thoroughgoing materialists. The need to engage more closely with recent philosophical reconsideration of the Carvakas--who are often dismissed in crude caricatures by rival schools--was an important takeaway of his talk.

Dr. Yugandhar GR, a medical doctor turned spiritualist interested in inner transformation, spoke next, calling his talk “Neti Neti-Charaiveti”. He blended the “Vedic” and the Buddhist paths in his attempt at a “fusion” that focuses on peeling away “the clouds of consciousness otherwise called the ‘mind’,” leading to “an inner core of silence.” His reading of the Buddhist tradition was questioned for its erasure of distinct aspects of Buddhist ontology, particularly the idea of *anatmavada*. “Can Machines Think? Revisiting Limitations of Computing in the Age of Artificial Intelligence” was the tantalising title of the last presentation from the domain of science. The speaker, T.V.H. Prathamesh who teaches Computer Science at Krea University, took the audience on an illustrated, interactive journey through some fascinating questions on such basic questions as what thinkiing is and what a machine is. While suggesting that the man-machine divide may be somewhat exaggerated, he also pointed out the inherent limitations that exist in any project which seeks to mechanise thinking. The optimism of the mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing and the scepticism of the philosopher Hurbert Dreyfus framed his discussion of the question.

Dr. Maya Joshi of Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi, who moderated the two-day seminar, concluded the session with a summation of the proceedings, connecting it to the previous conference and opening the possibility for further discussions. She pointed out that the discussions covered not just Buddhist ontology and epistemology but also psychology and soteriology, since the aim of Buddhist practice could never be separated from intellectual or conceptual understanding. Thus, the secular and spiritual, the sharpening of the intellect and the opening of the heart, exist side by side in the Buddhist world view, which must ultimately impact how we are in the world. Questions of subjectivity, ethical choices, and the greater common good also hover at the back of scientific debates around Artifical Intelligence. She pointed out that besides carrying on more discussions on the issues raised in the two days, neuroscience was one fertile area that could be explored in future dialogies between Buddhism and Science. The conference ended with eminent Baha’i, Shri A. K. Merchant, thanking everyone, especially the organisers, Lama Doboomb Tulku and Chungkey of the World Buddhist Culture Trust and the IIC, for the wonderfully stimulating sessions.