THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FIRST CENTER FOR DEWEY STUDIES IN INDIA

Savitribai Phule Pune University to house center dedicated to the philosopher of democracy and education, John Dewey, and those influenced by his pragmatist thought in India, such as Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Details

India is the world’s largest democracy. It is only fitting that a center dedicated to the thought of one of the most important philosophers of democracy and education, John Dewey, be established in a democracy with plentiful resources and important needs. The goal of the Center for Dewey Studies, based at Savitribai Phule Pune University and directed by Dr. Vijay Khare, will be to encourage scholarly engagement with the ideas of John Dewey on topics relevant to the Indian context as far ranging as education, democracy, communication, morality, science, and national security. It will enable the international exchange of ideas among Indian academics and scholars from other countries. While Centers for Dewey Studies have been established in the United States of America, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Japan, Turkey, and China, this center represents the first Center for Dewey Studies established in India. Inauguration ceremonies for the new Center are scheduled for January 9, 2020, at Savitribai Phule Pune University in Pune, Maharashtra.

This Center will organize academic lectures, courses, and seminars to deepen understanding of the American pragmatist’s expansive set of writings, as well as the thought of those influenced by pragmatist philosophy in India such as Bhimrao Ambedkar. Ambedkar was the architect of the Indian constitution, a prominent leader of the anti-caste movement, and an eager student of Dewey while studying at Columbia University in 1913-1916. Ambedkar wrote upon hearing of Dewey’s death in 1952 that “I owe all my intellectual life to him. He was a wonderful man.” Dewey’s idea of democracy as “more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” inspired Ambedkar throughout his life. Ambedkar’s creative and innovative body of thought can be seen as a form of Indian pragmatism extending Dewey’s thinking in new directions.

Beyond Ambedkar, John Dewey had a many connections with India. Dewey, along with other notable Americans, wrote Mahatma Gandhi an open letter pleading with him to visit America after the 1931 Round Table Conferences in London. India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, attended Dewey’s 90th birthday in New York and described how “the ripe wisdom of men like John Dewey” helped him think through India’s problems.

American scholars, organizations, and companies believe strongly in this project. The John Dewey Society has gratefully donated all 38 volumes of Dewey’s collected works for the use of the Center’s students and faculty and the Intelex Corporation has agreed to donate access to the Past Masters electronic edition of Dewey’s collected works to the Center. “Our hope in supporting this Center is that future generations of Indian students...
and scholars will become inspired by Dewey’s creative philosophy to identify new solutions to the problems and challenges that confront India’s democracy,” says Dr. Sarah Stitzlein, President of the John Dewey Society and Professor of Education at the University of Cincinnati (USA).

The promise of future innovation in addressing India’s problems with Dewey’s approach is equally present. “When Dewey visited China in 1919, he was eagerly introduced to audiences in that land filled with political and social turmoil as ‘Mr. Democracy’ and ‘Mr. Science,’” says Dr. Scott R. Stroud, an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin (USA); “it is finally time to bring Dewey’s pluralistic democratic philosophy to India, a democracy that has so much in common with the American political scene that Dewey cared deeply about.” Dewey’s expansive philosophy—his writings consist of around 8 million words—covers many topics of interest to Indians looking for solutions to educational deficits, religious tensions, technological ethics, democratic disagreement, social justice, caste discrimination, and more.

Dr. Vijay Khare, a Professor at Savitribai Phule Pune University, will serve as the Founding Director of the Center for Dewey Studies and will organize annual John Dewey Lectures and related events to examine the relevance of pragmatist philosophy for the Indian state and community. Dr. Scott R. Stroud of the University of Texas at Austin will advise him and the Center as its Founding International Advisor.

The Center for Dewey Studies at Savitribai Phule Pune University will be inaugurated on January 9, 2020, with ceremonies convened by its Vice-Chancellor, Prof. (Dr.) Nitin Karmalkar; Prof. (Dr.) Sukhadeo Thorat; Prof. (Dr.) Vijay Khare and other notable scholars and academic leaders. Dr. Scott R. Stroud of the University of Texas at Austin, currently completing a book manuscript on Ambedkar’s relationship with Dewey, will deliver the Inaugural John Dewey Lecture on the topic of “Bhimrao Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Unfinished Story of Pragmatism in India.”

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