Tattva Samvad

Vādo hi satyavinirṇayāya

The Place of Ishvara in Jain Darshana

Detailed Proposal for Scholarly Dialogue

13–14 January 2027

Freedom Park, Bengaluru

Under the guidance and in the presence of

His Holiness Gachhadhipati Jainacharya Yugbhushansuriji Maharaja

Organised by

Gitarth Ganga
Religious Research Institute

Supported by

JYOT

Background and Rationale

Religion and spiritual reflection hold an important place in human life. Yet many misconceptions and unresolved questions surround Īśvara, a foundational concept in the understanding of religion. For this reason, “The Place of Ishvara in Jain Darshana” has been selected as the subject of this dialogue, so that the existence and nature of Īśvara, and the role attributed to Īśvara in life, may be examined through reason, evidence, and open-minded discussion.

The meaning of the term Īśvara is not uniform across traditions. According to Jain Darśana, the existence of Īśvara, the basis of Īśvaratva, and the nature of Īśvara must be examined through a truth-oriented, impartial, and evidence-based inquiry. Can the existence of Īśvara in fact be established? Does Īśvaratva consist in complete power, sovereignty over the world, perfection of the self, or the full manifestation of the soul’s highest capacities? How does Jain Darśana understand Īśvara, and how does that understanding shape its views of the soul, the world, human effort, devotion, and liberation?

These questions are not confined to specialists. In ordinary life, people also ask whether Īśvara governs events, grants blessings, protects devotees, intervenes in suffering or accidents, responds to prayer, or is present within every living being. Such accessible questions lead into deeper philosophical inquiries concerning agency, omniscience, perfection, causality, grace, freedom, and the soul’s highest potential.

Conceived under the guidance and in the presence of Jainacharya Yugbhushansuriji Maharaja, organised by Gitarth Ganga with the support of JYOT, this dialogue will bring together Indian and international scholars of Jain Darśana, philosophy, and related fields. It will be held on 13–14 January 2027 at Freedom Park, Bengaluru.

Purpose

- To examine the existence, meaning, and nature of Īśvara in Jain Darśana through open questions, evidence-based foundations, and disciplined reasoning.
- To connect the everyday questions of the wider public with serious philosophical discussion.
- To clarify the relationship among Īśvara, the soul, human effort, the world, grace, devotion, and liberation.
- To make the dialogue an impartial effort to understand truth, rather than a contest of victory and defeat or a means of refuting any position; and to invite scholars from diverse intellectual backgrounds to participate with an open mind.
- To develop material suitable both for scholarly publication and for an accessible public book or presentation.

Method of Dialogue

The discussion will begin with questions rather than predetermined conclusions. Each theme will allow space for different definitions, interpretations, and lines of reasoning. Participating scholars may draw upon textual traditions, philosophical argument, and authoritative references. Each participant will make the basis of their claims intelligible to both scholars and general listeners.

The principal questions will be simple and direct, while scholarly responses may retain the full depth of technical concepts. The moderator will clarify difficult terms, briefly identify the direction of an argument, and periodically reconnect the dialogue with the central question. Care will be taken to ensure that the dialogue remains relevant to the defined subject and does not move beyond it. The aim is not to oversimplify the subject, but to make serious reflection accessible to a general audience.

Proposed Themes for Dialogue

The following themes give the discussion a coherent sequence without predetermining its conclusions. All themes will share a common foundation: Jain padārtha-vijñāna and the order of cause and effect, impartial examination of each theme, the search for truth, and an open-minded hearing of different approaches. These principles will not remain confined to the method of dialogue; they will also shape the questions and the direction of discussion within each theme.

• The Meaning, Existence, and Power of Ishvara

Within Jain Darśana, the question of Īśvara will not be considered apart from the nature, qualities, and modes of substances, or from the order of cause and effect. Every claim concerning existence, meaning, and power will be tested through evidence and reason. Rather than treating a familiar belief as an initial truth, the dialogue will hear different approaches with an open mind and seek a conclusion grounded in reality.

- What ontological foundations are required for understanding the meaning, existence, and power of Īśvara within Jain padārtha-vijñāna? By what evidence may the meanings and interrelationship of the terms Īśvara, Bhagavān, and Paramātmā be established? How may their existence and power be understood in accordance with padārtha-vijñāna?

• The Nature and Qualities of Ishvara

The nature and qualities of Īśvara will be understood not on the basis of the popularity of a description, but through its philosophical coherence and evidential validity. Each quality will be impartially examined within the limits of the nature of substances and the order of cause and effect. Different interpretations will be heard with an open mind; the aim will not be to confirm a prior conception, but to identify sound criteria for Īśvaratva.

• The Role of Ishvara in the Journey from the Soul to the Perfected Self

The journey from the soul to the perfected self will be examined through a padārtha-vijñāna-based understanding of the living being’s nature, present state, and causes of transformation. Innate Īśvaratva, perfection attained through discipline, and an inwardly present potential will be considered with an open mind and tested through impartial reasoning and evidence. The relationship between a living being’s own effort and any possible contribution of Īśvara will also be examined without predetermining the conclusion.

- Can all living beings become Īśvara because they possess the same ontological capacity, or is this possibility limited to certain beings? In light of different approaches, how should the roles of right vision, knowledge, conduct, and spiritual discipline be determined?

• Grace, Right Understanding, and Relevance to Life

Worship, grace, and the relevance of Īśvara in life will not be treated merely as matters of belief. The discussion will examine whether and how Īśvara contributes to the causal process by which a worshipper’s knowledge, dispositions, and conduct are transformed. Hearing diverse experiences and interpretations with an open mind, it will use padārtha-vijñāna, impartial reasoning, and evidence-based inquiry to explore how Īśvara-tattva actually becomes effective in life.

Questions Proposed for the Dialogue

01 Is Jain Darshana theistic or non-theistic?

What are the grounds for calling a position theistic or non-theistic, and how should Jain Darshana be understood in relation to these terms?

02 How can we know whether Ishvara exists?

How should this question be examined through reason, evidence, and a coherent account of reality?

03 Does being Ishvara mean making the impossible possible?

How should divine qualities and powers be understood from a scientific perspective?

04 What is the extent of the excellence, influence, and qualities of Ishvara-tattva?

How should the distinctive nature of divine qualities and influence be understood within a metaphysical framework, through reason and evidence?

05 Does a vitaraga Ishvara give us anything? If so, what and how?

How can the ideal of a perfected being help transform our understanding, conduct, and life?

Proposed Scholarly Panel Format

A focused scholarly panel comprising multiple participants is proposed. It should include Indian and international scholars associated with Jain textual and philosophical traditions, Jain Studies, philosophy of religion, and the impartial study of religion. Its structure should enable scholars working through different methods to engage meaningfully with one another; genuine dialogue must remain possible.

Element	Proposed Format
Dates	13–14 January 2027; the detailed programme for both days will be finalised separately.
Venue	Freedom Park, Bengaluru.
Scholarly panel	Multiple scholars, with a moderator able to bridge scriptural, academic, and public vocabularies.
Duration	Approximately three hours for the main dialogue; its precise placement and the sequence of other sessions within the two-day programme will be shared separately.
Audience	Scholars, invited guests, students, and members of the wider public attending in person.
Moderation	Direct questions, disciplined turns, clear explanations of technical terms, periodic synthesis, and audience interaction.
Preparation	Themes and guiding questions will be shared in advance. Participating scholars will be expected to study and reflect on the questions beforehand and prepare their arguments and references.
Participation and languages	Participation will be in person only. The discussion will be conducted in English and Hindi.
Supporting activities	The two-day programme will include one-to-one and group discussions with His Holiness and learned Jain monks, along with a demonstration of the distinctive scriptural research conducted by Gitarth Ganga. These activities will support the main dialogue on Īśvara.

Expected Outcome

Misconceptions in the public mind concerning Īśvara as presented in Jain Darśana may be resolved, and an accurate understanding of Īśvara-tattva may be developed.

Potential Outcomes

- **A scholarly publication or edited proceedings on Īśvara in Jain Darśana, preserving the principal arguments, convergences, differences, and questions requiring further study.**
- **An accessible book, presentation, or learning resource for the wider public, communicating the central conclusions in clear language without weakening their philosophical depth.**
- A structured conceptual framework for future research on Īśvaratva, human effort, grace, devotion, liberation, and impartial reflection on religion.
- **A model of scholarly dialogue in which questions familiar to the public become gateways to rigorous philosophical reflection.**

Basis for Scholarly Participation

This proposal provides the intellectual basis for inviting scholars to participate in Tattva Samvad. Participants will be expected not merely to present settled positions, but to refine the questions, clarify necessary distinctions, and contribute to serious inquiry. The accompanying invitation provides practical information about participation, while this detailed proposal explains the background, thematic scope, and intellectual direction of the dialogue. The final session design will be shared separately.