**Social Scientists in the Civic Space**

**India International Centre, Delhi, 30 Jan. – 1st Feb. 2020**

**Abstracts**

**Thursday 30 January 2020**

**6.30 p.m. – 8 p.m.**

**Gopal Guru** (former professor Jawaharlal Nehru University), “Ethical Reconfiguration of Social Scientist and Civic Space**”**

It has been a human endeavour to convert static, barbaric and frozen places into dynamic spaces that flow with new possibilities and promises. Spaces become dynamic on account of their being normative, anchoring in them universal values such as friendship, justice and dignity. Spaces do not generate normative content on their own. In fact, such content can be generated through robust ethical, theoretical and political interaction, between philosophers, theorists, social scientists or public intellectual on the one hand and the general-public on the other. It is needless to mention that normative values form the content of civic space. Such values are vitalized through the processes of deliberation, debate and discussion particularly involving social scientists and the general-public. Connections between the general-public and social scientists gets formed and performed in spaces that are essentially civic in character. The interplay, I argue, between the category such as time (intellectual time in which the intellectual makes reasoned arguments and offers philosophical intervention) and space (moral/ethical space) by converting the social scientist into a public intellectual. I am already taking a risk of suggesting that the social scientist is an inadequate option in terms of performing the pedagogical function that is necessary to harness creative interaction with the civic space. I, in my presentation, am going to suggest that this conversion is necessary to firmly root and replenish in civic space values such as, friendship through mutual attention, justice and dignity. These two values could be effectively communicated through the language of humanities rather than scientific language that social scientist may use.

Social Scientists need to become public intellectuals transcending their narrow academic boundaries and overcoming their academic jargon. Thus, the presentation will make the first claim that it is the subjective condition to strengthen the symbiotic relationship between the social scientist and the civic space. But objectively speaking, such civic space in recent time, has been continuously shrinking. The ruling powers in different countries including India, have been putting closure on the civic space to protect their narrow interest. Such power does not seem to listen to legitimate dissenting voices. In fact, it actively uses different means to discredit the social scientist or public intellectual. The use of the emotive language of labelling such as anti-nationals is just one example that points to malicious acts of discrediting. Such manipulative design has a purchase in sections of civil society. Growing success of the ruling power has led to the shrinking of civic space. This should make it imperative on the part of the social scientist to examine the efficacy of their efforts. They need to deploy the ethical language over the scientific. They need to be more reasonable than to be moved by the unitary power of reason. Social Scientists or public intellectuals, I argue, need to also bind them in the ethical force of normative vocabulary. They do not exist over and above this semantic field.

The ethical question becomes important in the context where the gesture of cognitive generosity may be welcome to give voice to the voiceless. But such a gesture may produce only cognitive generosity that may be ethically quite dry. Intellectuals may be seriously inclined to write on the theme of voiceless but they may be socially quite indifferent if not actively hostile to the voiceless sections. I would like to underline the significance of social generosity. Thus, certain social groups can become an object to be showcased. Social Scientists need to animate the civic space with universal values.

**Alain Trannoy** (Aix Marseille School of Economics, EHESS), “Are Economists Intellectual?”

In the most common definition, an intellectual is someone who becomes famous because of his acknowledged accomplishments as a writer, a scientist or an artist, and uses her fame to make public statements in the media about general problems confronting society. One distinctive feature of being an intellectual for scientists is that these problems may be out of reach of their expertise. This first definition is sufficient for some purposes but it does not allow us to explain in the first place why some scientists become famous. Not many scientists become famous because they have received a Nobel Prize or some equivalent distinction. Most scientists become famous because they write successful essays. I then submit a second definition, which does not necessarily contradict the first. An intellectual is someone who evokes global phenomena that are in fact ill-suited to attempts at verification. It does not mean that subsequently, with the progress of techniques and knowledge, it will not be possible to falsify these conjectures. Generally, these conjectures take the form of essays. A scientist can or cannot also be an intellectual in this sense, and not all intellectuals have a scientific activity. I then explore why up to WW2, all great economists were intellectuals according to the latter definition (Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes), whereas since WW2, not so many engaged in intellectual activity. The main reason is the *scientific turn* in economics, which took place in the thirties with the foundation of the Econometric Society. The old name of economics, *political economy*, has been replaced with economic science, with the explicit aim to establish causality relations theoretically or empirically. Since this period, intellectual activity or production through essays has been discarded among academic economists to the benefit of hard science outputs.

**Friday 31st January 2020**

**9.30 a.m.– 12.30 a.m.**: ***Social sciences and the civic space***

**Nandini Sundar** (Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University), “Public sociology in India”

Michael Burawoy who is widely credited with establishing the term public sociology in global sociological discourse today defines public sociology as what reflexive sociologists do when taking sociology outside the academic arena to a wider public. At the same time, he argues, public sociology cannot be divorced from the professional practice of sociology within the university.

My paper examines public sociology in another sense: that which circulates on public platforms like the media (both MSM and social media especially whatsapp), which edges out and renders irrelevant sociology done in the university. What does one do if the public is busy doing its own sociological analysis and claiming its own kind of evidence for it? How does public sociology in Burawoy’s sense function when academic work in general is publicly delegitimized?

**Yohann Aucante** (EHESS, Paris), “Social sciences, democracy and social policy reforms: insights from Scandinavia and France”

Social (policy) reforms are a domain in which social scientists are often expected to play an important part in public debate as well as in policy expertise. However, this takes place according to very different and rules of the game that have also changed significantly over time in different countries. Drawing from the experiences of Scandinavia and France that are widely known for their specific and supposedly resilient 'social models', I will strive to provide some ideas about the changing role of social sciences, especially politics, but also history, in these countries, in relation to other fields of knowledge (such as economics) and with regard to the issue of social reforms over time. The current heated debate on pension reforms in France, which actually relates to the pioneering pension legislation passed in Sweden in the 1990s will be a case-in-point. I will also reflect on the potentially diverse democratic cultures that might underpin these forms of public cultures of knowledge.

**Peter Ronald deSouza** (University of Goa),“Ideas of Swaraj”

K.C. Bhattacharya the eminent Indian philosopher, in his 1928 lecture titled ‘Swaraj in Ideas’, argued that the colonization of India resulted in the ‘enslavement of our minds’ thereby converting ‘real minds’ into ‘shadow minds’. This intellectual impact of colonialism was worse than its political impact since in the latter we know where the tyranny lies whereas in the former we mistake the enslavement for good. Such an impact has strong implications for the intellectual life of a post-colonial society. In this paper, I shall show that KCB’s thought converges with that of R. Tagore, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, TB Cunha, etc. who also bemoaned the harmful effects of the colonial encounter on native minds. Two ideas from this lament merit our attention, the ‘enslavement of minds’ as articulated by KCB, and the sense of ‘inferiorisation’ as discussed by Césaire. I will set out four strategies to combat the asymmetry of this knowledge landscape produced by colonialism. These are to (i) infiltrate, (ii) elevate, (iii) appropriate, and (iv) populate the established conceptual world of the Social Sciences with keywords and concepts from the plural Indian linguistic world. It will set the basis for a different conceptual lexicon of social sciences in contrast to the dominant lexicon from which we hope a new vocabulary will emerge that will be more accessible and therefore more inclusive, *ceteris paribus*. This will produce ideas for swaraj.

**Julien Levesque (**Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi), « Historical narratives as performative political claims: insights from Muslims societies of South Asia »

History writing involves weaving factual elements into narratives to make sense of the past. These narratives are interpretations whose reliability rests on the critical skills and toolbox of the historian. Yet diverging narratives emerge, giving rise to historiographical debates between their proponents. Such debates are rarely confined to historians and often implicate society at large in multiple ways. In particular, historical narratives can and are used by various actors—such as cultural entrepreneurs, religious leaders, or political representatives—to make performative political claims. Most political discourses can be qualified as performative in the sense that they seek to bring about what they state (John L. Austin, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler). Hence, these actors invoke historical narratives to support their claims about the present, concerning, for instance, social boundaries and identities (“European nations are rooted in a Christian heritage”), social and political problems (“Islam is a threat…”), or what the “represented” supposedly want (“My proof is the faith of 130 million people”). Such performative claims in turn serve claims to representation: when uttered, they are meant to reinforce the image of the speaker as someone who legitimately represents a certain group or has the capacity to solve certain issues. The question then becomes when and how historical narratives—meant to make sense of the past—become performative political claims—seeking to mould the present? Based on selected cases from Muslim societies of South Asia—nationalism in Sindh, caste-specific history writing among Ajlaf Muslims in North India, and reactions to the Ayodhya verdict—this presentation will try to delineate the conditions that make certain historical narratives more likely than others to be used for political claims-making.

**2.30 p.m. – 6.00 p.m.**: ***Intervening in the civic space: social scientists in context***

**Manohar Kumar** (Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, Delhi), “Civility in the Civic Space; The case of disobedience”

There has been a recent spike of interest in the concept of incivility in political theory. There is an interest in the question as to when incivility is justified as a form of democratic engagement. In other words, when are democratic citizens justified in engaging in uncivil behaviour with their fellow citizens? The turn to incivility largely reflects an anguish against the restrictive nature of ideal political theory that fails to track the non-ideal spaces of politics and imposes the constraints of morality on political action. It is also argued that ideal political theory imposes unfair burdens on actions which though being uncivil are still democracy enabling. In this paper, I take issue with the turn towards incivility within democratic theory. I use the case of civil disobedience to highlight the limitations of the current turn towards incivility. I argue that this turn highlights incivility without properly capturing or defining the concept of civility and the role it occupies in a democracy. This turn poses larger problems for democracy than it resolves. By making justification of dissent independent of its mode this turn undermines a crucial component of democratic practice: its ability to share and provide reasons in an uncoerced and unhindered space. The frustration against civility is manifested and crucially inhabits the civic space and the common deliberative spaces that citizens occupy. This is especially true of the digital space where the tendency and the proclivity to provide reasons is underscored over the desire to defeat the opponent in an argument. This paper is an attempt to bring back the concept of civility and highlight the crucial role that it can play in the heavily polarised contemporary political discourse.

**Jean Boutier** (EHESS), “French Historians in a World in Crisis (1925-1939)”

Many European historians were deeply disturbed by the disastrous impact of the first world conflict. In the academic field, its consequences were manifold: political activism in peace organizations, activism in veterans' associations, but also changes in their programmes and research methods following Henri Pirenne’s suggestion in his inaugural conference of the International Congress of Historical Sciences at Brussels in 1923. New possibilities of intervention appeared in these years: historians could be active participants in international organizations oriented towards intellectual cooperation such as the "International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation", an organ of the League of Nations, created in 1924 at Paris. They could also attempt to develop large scale research inquiries based on international collaboration. The paper is based on the 1920s and 1930s archives of some French historians who played an important role in the emergence of a new position of the researcher in the civic space, far from the more traditional political activism.

**Arundhati Virmani** (EHESS, Centre Norbert Elias, Marseille), “Between Two Societies : National History from Afar”

This presentation begins with Claude Lévi Strauss’s reflection that if one wished to understand the human being, it was essential to avoid both narrow introspection or be satisfied with considering one single society - one’s own. It was necessary to “look into the most distant and different cultural experiences” and learn to observe one’s own culture “from afar, as if one belonged to another culture”. Taking this as a point of departure, I discuss the effects of dislocation on writing national history. Both the long history and persistence of the national paradigm in the construction of national identities and its mobilization as a powerful political tool have invested the practice of the discipline with emotion and ideology. The paper debates the effects of distancing on the historian’s choice of problems, objects or methodologies. It then reflects on the implications of such constructions of historical knowledge selections on her/his engagement in the civic space.

**Madhura Swaminathan**, “Policies of Food Security in India: The debate on targeting versus universal distribution”

In the 1990s, with the onset of policies of economic liberalisation, there was a strong move, in line with the tenets of fiscal conservatism, to reduce the food subsidy by means of introducing targeted distribution of food in the PDS or public distribution system. There was a forceful debate in India on targeting versus universal transfers that involved policy makers, academics and activists that was carried out in multiple fora including books and journals, the media and public discussion. I shall discuss this debate and its importance in policy-making on food security during the 1990s and 2000.

**Saturday, 1 February 2020**

**9.30 a.m.– 12.30 p.m.**: **Responses to social challenges (I)**

**Ekta Singh (**Ambedkar University Delhi), “Reclaiming Social Sciences in the context of ‘Big Data’”

‘Big data’ in the form of large voluminous data sets generated at increasing speed from varied sources and of a variable nature has attracted widespread attention of researchers across the spectrum of disciplines. As an information base that may be analysed computationally to reveal patterns, trends, and associations, ‘big data’ is visualized as a transformative tool for social sciences. The potential promise as well as dangers of ‘big data’ for modes of inquiry in social sciences are increasingly debated in recent times. On the one hand is the optimism that ‘big data’ in the form of large data sets can generate insights that were previously impossible, adding to the repertoire of knowledge in social sciences. On the other hand, usage of ‘big data’ to analyse social reality has also invited scepticism, with concerns that ‘fixed bias’ can actually grow with bigger data sets and the need to be alert about possible misuses of big data for manipulation and surveillance. Given the excitement and concerns with the possibility of a data intensive social science, the paper seeks to investigate the role of social sciences in converting these data sets into meaningful information. Instead of seeing the emergent context as a scenario where social sciences need to adapt to the data based on analytics, the paper asserts that social sciences need to reclaim a central place in research facilitated by big data by shaping the questions that we ask of big data.

**Kalpana Kannabiran** (Council for Social Development, Hyderabad), “Laws, Lives and Disobedience: Experiences in Higher Education in the Continuing Present”

In this presentation, I will attempt an exploration of the contentious relationship between Higher Education institutions as enclosure and as intellectual, lived space animated by ideas, contestations and personal histories - spaces that defy prescription and enclosure in fundamental ways. Drawing on conversations and experiences over the past five years, I hope to reflect on the figure of the "law", and the ways in which the "outside" manifests itself within enclosures of Higher Education. How might we make meaning of the rich cultures of disobedience and resistance now incarcerated within the securitised territories of Higher Education enclosures and what are the futures of learning that lie ahead?

**Anne Rasmussen (**Centre Alexandre Koyré for History of Science, Paris)**,** “Geographers, health borders and public debate on migration (Europe, 1900-1950)”

In the 19th century, science and technology were mobilized as tools of government and control of population flows faced with epidemic circulation. In the 21st century, the health border remains a cornerstone of the global government of migration. This apparent continuity of issues - the health protection of territories and populations - and practices, from medical visits of immigrants on Ellis Island to modern biometric data collection, can be misleading. During the 20th century, in times of peace and conflict alike, the relationship between border, disease and health has undergone profound changes. The contemporary migration issue is now feeding into the formulation of questions for the social sciences - in history, geography as well as health anthropology. In turn, social science issues - for example, the analysis of changes in the prophylactic paradigm (from Ellis Island to modern European detention camps), or reflection on the uses of "humanitarian reason", contribute to a critical perspective useful for the social construction of the public migration problem. I will focus here on the construction of this critical point of view in the first half of the 20th century, particularly on the contribution of European geographers.

**Bruno Dorin** (CSH, New Delhi; Cirad-Cired, Paris), “Towards a New Sociotechnical Regime for Indian Agriculture? Natural Farming Promises and Controversies**”**

Compilations of historical data and projections to 2050 shows that over nearly a century (1961–2050), sub-Saharan Africa and Asia follow an asynchronous but somewhat similar agricultural trajectories. These past and projected land-labour relationships also show that India and African countries can hardly experience the same “structural transformation” or “modern growth” that developed countries went through. They could work together towards a new sociotechnical regime by developing their own regionally differentiated labour-intensive production investments and technological capacities for economic, social, and ecological sustainability. Promising technical, social and institutional innovations are already underway in the southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh through a form of agroecology called ZBNF (Zero Budget Natural Farming). But rather than documenting and scientifically understanding the first results of these grass-roots innovations, conventional Indian agricultural scientists and industrialists (favouring seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) reject ZBNF in the name of science, and denounce it as witchcraft.

**2.30 p.m. – 6.00 p.m.**: **Responses to social challenges (II)**

**Ashwani Kumar** (TISS, Mumbai), “Experiencing Last-Mile Welfare: Notes from the Six Districts of India”

Using registers of last-mile bureaucracy, stylized ethnographic accounts and travel across six districts of India, the paper attempts to interpret how the local state manifests itself in the lives of people especially the poor. Written in a reflective and introspective mode, I explain the variations in the implementation of MGNREGA, the largest public employment program in rural India. Further, extending the argument of traveling and experiencing the diverse and contradictory encounters of citizens with local state officials, the paper reflects on the elusive, porous, and mobile boundary between state and society at the grassroots. In the process, the paper also reconsiders how the social scientist re-constructs experience of familiar field research as a trope of political imaginary.

**Michel Bozon** (National Institute for Demographic Studies (Ined) Paris),“Anti-gender movements in two national contexts. France, Brazil, 2010 decade »

Movements opposing the so called « gender theory » or « gender ideology » spread all over Europe in the 2010’s (Kuhar, Paternotte, 2017 ; Garbagnoli, Prearo, 2018), including Russia, and extending to South American countries. This presentation will first focus on the Roman catholic origin of this political invention against gender equality and feminist and LGBT movements. In the line of the familistic orientation and the traditional opposition of Catholicism to the right to abort, the anti-gender movements opposed sex education at school and the legalization of same-sex marriage. A second step is taken when conservative and far right movements not so interested in religious values incorporate the anti-gender issue in a global discourse of defence of social and national order targeting migrants. Finally, the opposition to « ideology of gender » and to gender studies in general becomes a motto for authoritarian statesmen (Brazil, Hungary, Russia…) for whom gender equals subversion and disorder.

**Srishtee Sethi** (TISS, Mumbai), “A Partitioned Past - Reflections on Belonging, Identity and Shared Histories of Refugees”

The partition of British India in 1947 caused the biggest mass migration of the twentieth century; semantic and material partition of these borderlands affected communities on both sides of the territorial boundary in multiple ways - impacting efficaciously the process of “bordering” of Selves against a factual or imagined “enemy Other”. Negotiations of citizenship and belonging came to be heavily influenced by hegemonic ethics of nationalism and statehood as well as religious conformism in contemporary society. Locating the “Social Scientist self” became essential as growing up in a partition refugee household and surrounded with several partition stories in the neighbourhoods of Dehradun (a town that hosted refugee camps in World War II barracks) led me to collect stories from Partition witnesses. Questions of identity and belonging remained constant and I chose to unravel it through first understanding the imagined idea of partition refugee community, identity and nostalgia.  As a result, previously corresponding, often hybridized socio- cultural and religious traditions gradually transformed into means of ideological contestation and conflict.

The paper provides an advance epistemic framework of individual life histories and an alternate perspective to mainstream narratives by locating one’s self through commonalities and variations in refugees 'everyday lived experiences' through an amalgamation of community projects and social science research. The paper explores three questions: which specific legacies of Partition continue to affect the contemporary population? How do partition refugee populations perceive the border or the often abstract, concepts of state power and the nation, which are responsible for these watershed changes in their life worlds? How do they relate to their shared ethnic, cultural and religious pasts?

**Sarayu Natarajan** (Aapti Institute, Bangalore), **Aasim Khan** (IIIT-Delhi), « Social Science and changing cultures of forecasting: Reflections on the state and big data revolution in India »

Understanding our shared future(s) has been a central theme in the development of social scientific enquiry. Whether it is predicting optimal resource allocation, or developing theories that can estimate political outcomes, social scientists have developed tools and theories that can help us gauge the pitfalls and policy opportunities in the near term to the very long term. Myriad cultures of forecasting however share one common element, and that is their use on empirical evidence. Recent advocates of ‘open data’ seek to review and reform these relations, simplify access to a variety of data sources and exploit the potential for connecting siloed information. But do digitally accessible, not to mention machine-readable data sources, truly democratise the potential for social scientists to master the craft of foretelling, or is it likely to create new constraints? In this paper, we review two dominant strands of what we call ‘critical’ and ‘realist’ strands of the debate. We trace the genealogies of these two particular strands up to a historical split; one that emanated, though not exclusively, in terms of inter- and intra-disciplinary orientations towards the historical origins of data. On one hand, a shift in disciplines such as history, anthropology and to an extent sociology was noticeable in growing critical uses of data sources accompanied by a critique of the state. The second, more ‘realist’ vision with neo-classical economics, political science and sociological studies harnessed new data sources to advance human development and state capacity. In spite of the evident heterogeneity in these two streams, they correspond to a narrow vision of both the state and data that overlooks their political specificity, especially in India. By not excluding the political economy of the state and data, and showing overlaps in the development of both these artefacts in the digital era of ‘big data’, We show that the Indian experience has been one of deep politicisation. This stance, of taking politics of data to be central, can enrich our cultures of forecasting and could help us respond more effectively as a society. Themes such as politics of big data could thus guide us along with ideals of openness and should be incorporated in the framework of social science.