

*Journal of Human Values*

Seminar on

**“Exploring Values: Interdisciplinary Perspectives”**

Friday, 13th March 2015

Venue: Management Centre for Human Values (MCHV), IIM Calcutta

Co-convenors of the seminar:

Manish Thakur, IIM Calcutta, Kolkata

and Dev. N. Pathak, South Asian University, New Delhi

**Schedule of presentations**

**10:00-10:30: Welcome address and introduction**

Introduction to the Seminar: Manish Thakur, IIM Calcutta and Dev. N. Pathak, South Asian University

**10:30-11:30: Paper One**

Title: The Outer Self and the Inner Body: Exteriorisation of the Self in Cognitive Sciences

Presentation by: Sangeetha Menon, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore

Discussant: Nimruji Prasad J., Behavioural Sciences Group, IIM Calcutta

**11:30-12:30: Paper Two**

Title: From Sacred to Commodity and Beyond

Presentation by: Sadan Jha, Centre for Social Studies, Surat

Discussant: Vidyanand Jha, Behavioural Sciences Group, IIM Calcutta

**12:30-13:30: Paper Three**

Title: Democracy as Civil Religion: Reading Alexis De Tocqueville in India

Presentation by: Anindita Chakravarty, Department of Humanities and Social sciences, IIT Kanpur

Discussant: Renuka Hodigere, Human Resource Management Group, IIM Calcutta

***13:30-14:30: Lunch at Tata Hall***

**14:30-15:30: Paper Four**

Title: The Nostalgia of Values: A Sociological Introspection into Changing Values towards Aged in India

Presentation by: Deblina Dey, Centre for Law and Governance, JNU, New Delhi

Discussant: Nisigandha Bhuyan, Business Ethics and Communications Group, IIM Calcutta

**15:30-16:30: Paper Five**

Title: Reflections on Scientificity and Temporality

Presentation by: Ratheesh Kumar, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU, New Delhi

Discussant: Devi Vijay, Behavioural Sciences Group, IIM Calcutta

**16:30-17:00: Summing Up: Underlying Theme of the Presented Papers**

Discussion by Manish Thakur, IIM Calcutta and Dev N. Pathak, South Asian University

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**About the Seminar:**

Even as modern knowledge systems emanate from the Enlightenment-induced epistemological binary of facts and values, its limitations are increasingly being debated across a range of academic disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. At present, scholars are more open towards an acknowledgement of the place of values, emotions and sentiments in relation to various apparatuses of human cognition and apperception. Not surprisingly, an engagement with values has made some kind of comeback in the human sciences. Such an engagement has the promise of re-energizing the current stock of disciplinary traditions of enquiry, and extending them to the hitherto marginalized areas of the phenomenal world. Given the potential scholarly pay-offs of the renewed appreciation of the alternative ways of producing knowledge, this seminar, leading to a special issue of the *Journal of Human Values*, brings together a set of well-researched essays on the central problematic of values.

**Names, Institutional Affiliations of the speakers and Titles and Abstracts of Presentations:**

**1. Sangeetha Menon, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore**

Title of Presentation: The Outer Self and the Inner Body: Exteriorisation of the Self in Cognitive Sciences

*Abstract:* The minimalism project for cognitive sciences entails the search for a ‘primitive’ aspect of the minimal self which is not even conceptualized as myself in an immediate experience. The minimized minimal self exists even prior to possessing ownership. It is pre-linguistic with nonconceptual elements of the first-person. The minimalistic minimal self is the most basic and ‘stripped down version’ of the self which can be initiated in an artificial system.

In this context, whether human experiences are just behaviors controlled by the brain and cognitive architecture is a valid question to ask. It is not easy, and perhaps not worthwhile, to see human experiences from the lens of artificial systems and robotics. The crucial factor which is missed in such envisions is the human capability to reflect and self-recognize in deeper and organic ways. If a deeper self is identified as the value that inspires, directs and leads our lives, there is not enough scope for such a self in the mainstream cognitive sciences. If the 'ego tunnel' is non-existent who can vouchsafe for the reality of any experience? By Metzinger's theory all experiences have to be delusional, since even that entity which gives veracity to experience, the ego, is illusory. We experience meanings in terms of emotions, values and attitudes, and are the agents of our actions. The meaning of an experience is the value given to that experience in responding to it in terms of a physical and mental action, attitude, emotive valence, memory evoking, consequential thinking, and value system, all assimilated to contribute to the formation of purpose. Can a neural correlate or the brain as a whole be an agent? Can an agent and agentive action be value-free?

In mainstream cognitive sciences the self-sense and any value – moral, philosophical etc. are emergent of the feedback received by the brain from vision, vestibular, tactile and proprioceptive capabilities. Such a view limits oneself to just an automaton which sees and uses the body for sensing location and locomotion. Is cognitive science forgetting the core of human life and living which are founded on not just moral but deep ontological values? In this paper I will explore how and why the minimalism project fabricates a primitive self in order to exteriorise the very fabric of 'inner self'. And, how such attempts lead to agents who are zombies who have no perception about life and living which are essentially value-laden.

## **2. Sadan Jha, Centre for Social Studies, Surat**

### Title of Presentation: From Sacred to Commodity and Beyond

*Abstract:* A venture in a less traversed terrain of Indian scholarship, this paper looks at the transformation in the value regimes that go into the making of colours in Indian milieu. At one level, this traces the sacredness imbued in colours and at another level delves into colonial investment in the economy of colours that was aimed at capitalising on colours as commodities. With these entanglements, the idea is to locate social fabrics and politics of colours in India.

This

story is narrated with key rubrics like modernity, visuality and social and cultural life of colours. the manner in which western science and modernity has influenced the values in colours is the anchoring axis for this paper that attempts to look at a wide range of historical registers : written as well as pictorial, archival as well as literary and cinematic.

### **3. Anindita Chakravarty, Department of Humanities and Social sciences, IIT Kanpur**

Title of Presentation: Democracy as Civil Religion: Reading Alexis De Tocqueville in India

*Abstract:* This paper explores Alexis de Tocqueville's explication of democracy as civil religion or the new sacred of modern times. Kept away from the affairs of the state through the principle of 'disestablishment', religion became secure in civil society whereas the concept of democracy, Tocqueville argued, had become inviolable and 'set apart' as sacred in America. In 'Democracy in America' Tocqueville offered an analytical gaze on democracy as a political system and a moral value. Therefore, Tocqueville noted, the power of the majority acquires an inviolable character in democracy and has the potential of becoming tyrannical. The power of the majoritarianism, Tocqueville argues, is difficult to question unlike the power of the king, as the majority possesses a power that is physical and moral at the same time. What mechanisms did democracy have at its disposal to mitigate the tyranny of majority? According to Tocqueville, it was the courts of justice that were empowered to control excesses of democracy. The legal profession in America, according to Tocqueville, offers the most powerful security against the tyranny of majoritarianism. In this paper I would look at the debates around the Uniform Civil Code in India in the light of this Tocquevillian discussion on majoritarianism and the judiciary. The issue of personal law of minority groups has evoked strong emotions in India, both for and against, but has rarely made sociological inquiries into kinship, inheritance and the phenomenon of 'legal choice' available to the litigants. Exploring the threads of civil religion argument, I read the debates around the Uniform Civil Code issue in India that brings the courts, Constitution and the community in a challenging bind.

### **4. Deblina Dey, Centre for Law and Governance, JNU, New Delhi**

Title of Presentation: The Nostalgia of Values: A Sociological Introspection into Changing Values towards Aged in India

*Abstract:* Discussion around issues of ageing revolves around a sense of 'alarm' because the rise in the proportion of the elderly implies a strain on resources of the country. Policies on ageing in the country illustrate this 'alarm' by rooting it in social changes of the contemporary times in which family is no longer viewed as the primary centre of care for the elderly. This study is an exploration into the changing values associated with the process of ageing and representation of these dwindling, cherished values in the popular culture. This exploration has been conducted at two levels. Firstly, through a content analysis of popular media which upholds certain notions of care for the elderly, an analysis of problems and concerns that are most commonly written about the elderly is undertaken. Such images of value transformation are corroborated with an empirical analysis of perceptions of elderly interviewed at an old age home in Kolkata. I use 'nostalgia' as an analytical tool to inquire about changes experienced by virtue of their relocation to old age homes. Through interviews and participant observation, this study reveals that there has been a significant change in the values and attitudes towards

elderly. Such change in the domain of values becomes utterly important in contemporary period because it has engendered repercussions in society which were hitherto not common. This can be seen in the increase in elderly abuse in the hands of one's own kin. Such value changes draw up the necessity to have legal formulations for the care for the elderly in order to promote a safe living environment for the elderly. Thus, the substantive and formal notion of care towards the elderly is undergoing a change in contemporary period.

## **5. Ratheesh Kumar, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU, New Delhi**

### Title of Presentation: Reflections on Scientificality and Temporality

*Abstract.* How does one make sense of the “present” in Indian sociology and social anthropology in its politically construed temporality? Is there a possibility of critical ethnography that tracks politics of time in the accounts of the other? How does the question of values inform such an epistemological and methodological shift? By centering these questions to the domain of

contemporary Indian social sciences, this paper takes a look into the shifting locations of self and the other in the practice of ethnography. Ethnography has become a key approach in almost all social science disciplines today and in certain domains of humanities, management and market research. Ethnography itself has been reimagined and reshaped under different terrains of interdisciplinary approaches. But one would rarely find accounts of ideological nature of temporal concepts and value orientations which inform the theories and rhetoric in it.

Within the framework of the 19th Century reconfiguration of modes of inquiry and consolidation of disciplinary boundaries—in the five-fold division among the social sciences in particular—the given territories of anthropology was undoubtedly the “non-west” and the “primitive” in terms of their spatial and temporal understandings. This enlightenment project towards a new conceptual ordering of the knowledge domain by enunciating the “scientificational” and therefore “value-neutral” had impinged a timeless essence on human inquiry. Ethnography had thus been imagined to be a scientific process of constructing value-neutral accounts even though it involves personal and prolonged interaction with the other—often the culturally inferior. It pronounces upon the knowledge gathered from such research a discourse which construes the other in terms of a distance from the self, both spatial and temporal. This denial of coevalness of the other rests on a conjuring trick of ethnography, worked with an array of devices that have the common intent to keep the other outside the present of the self. If time belongs to the political economy of relations between individuals, classes and nations, then the construction of the object through temporal devices and concepts is a political act located in the domain of certain dominant values. Drawing up on this register of time from the writing of Johannes Fabian, the paper transposes the framework to understand the currents in contemporary Indian social sciences.

