

Concept Note

There is something dialectical about social theory. It can illuminate or camouflage. What a particular theory does, however, depends on the socio-economic location of the theorist in question and the enabling environment or lack of it in a society. The essential function of a 'good' social theory is to raise relevant questions and if possible to find answers. Apart from its explanatory power, it is said to possess certain important features such as critical and reflexive interrogation of concepts, rationally rooted search for objectivity, a deep concern to make sense of empirical data, aim to project some degree of generality and abstraction are some of them. Without the above features, a social theory remains merely speculative and metaphysical. This is what one finds in some of the best social theories we have had so far in social sciences.

Social theory has had an interesting trajectory of growth. It took some time to liberate itself from the grip of philosophy (Hegel) and concern itself with material aspects which, according to some constituted society and determined its functioning (Karl Marx). It further developed into a search for subjectivity and agency (Max Weber and later on symbolic-interactionists and phenomenologists) and the privileging of difference and decentred approach in understanding social reality (poststructuralism and postmodernism). Social theory came into its own when a series of events of momentous significance happened in Europe (Enlightenment, French Revolution, industrial Revolution and others). Social theory was an attempt to make sense of changes which followed these events. It needs to be recognised that social theory nurtures interdisciplinary sensitivities (Habermas and Herbert Marcuse, for example) and therefore much wider and broader than disciplinary theories such as sociological theory, political theory etc. with their own distinctive methodologies.

The question of revisiting social theory becomes relevant when one asks oneself whether social theory has been raising the right questions and if not, what are those questions which escaped the attention of social theory and the answers of which help us have a better grasp of social reality. One is not suggesting that the questions raised in the past are inconsequential. But what one is suggesting is that as societies change (some more rapidly than others), whether new and more relevant theoretical questions need to be asked.

Social theory faces a difficult challenge in the context of India which is known for diversities of immense nature and whose interaction with one another produces great challenges for any social theory in terms of how it can capture them. The challenges become even greater when one engages with the societies of the North-East India. That probably explains the absence of theory in most of the work done on the North-east. Scholars have acquired considerable amount of data about the societies in the North-East but unfortunately it is difficult to find a work which is theoretically well-grounded which would help us make sense of data we have on the North-East. There is an innocent assumption that an empirical work need not be theoretically located without realising that no empirical work can be theoretically neutral. There is therefore a strong need to realise the importance of theory while doing work on the North-East India.



International Conference
(Virtual Mode)
16th and 17th of November, 2022
on
**Revisiting Social Theory:
Challenges and Possibilities**
Department of Sociology,
North-Eastern Hill University
Shillong- 793022
Meghalaya, India

The following are some of the suggested areas where one can possibly see if any new questions can be raised which would contest the existing social theories leading to the possibility of formulation of new and reflexive social theories. What is common to the following substantive areas is the attempt to examine them theoretically afresh.

- 1.The development of social theory and its problematics.
- 2.Nationalism and the contesting approaches to it.
- 3.Racial and ethnic relations and their engagement with modernity
- 4.Democracy, civil society, market, the state and the dialectics involved in their relationship.
- 5.Environment, development and their dialectical relationship
- 6.Feminist theory- the challenges and contradictions it faces
- 7.Interrogating secularism both as a principle and as a practice
- 8.Social theory and the North-East India.

The above areas should be treated as suggestive in nature. Contributors are free to reflect on other areas where fresh and serious theoretical questions could be raised.

Important Dates:

1. Dates of the International Conference:
16th and 17th of November, 2022.
2. Last date of receipt of complete papers along with the abstract (150-200 words): **1st of October, 2022.**
3. Date of communication regarding the acceptance of the paper for presentation: **31st of October, 2022.**

Guidelines for paper-presenters:

- 1.Papers with adequate theoretical engagement will be encouraged and stand a better chance of being accepted for presentation. Data-based papers without suitable theoretical insights will be discouraged.
2. Since accepted papers will also appear in an edited volume (editor: Prof. D.V. Kumar) after the conference, paper-contributors should take care of the issue of plagiarism. This is to ensure that papers which are accepted for presentation are not rejected later on because of plagiarism. It would be greatly appreciated if contributors can attach a copy of the plagiarism report with their article. In almost all the institutions of higher education, plagiarism testing facility is available. Efforts will be made to get the papers published in an edited volume by an international publisher of repute.
3. In order to ensure some stylistic uniformity throughout the edited volume, it is desired that the word limit for each paper is 4500-6000. The APA style should be adopted for citation and references. All documents must be submitted in Microsoft Word format using Times New Roman, in font size 12 with spacing of 1.5 lines.
- 4.Paper contributors should clearly mention their name, institutional affiliation, Email ID and mobile number.
5. Papers can be sent to: socnehuconfe@gmail.com

Organising Committee:

1. Prof. D. V. Kumar
2. Prof. B. Panda
3. Dr. Rekha M. Shangpliang
4. Md. Yusuf Khan
5. Corrine War
6. Yarthotchui Houshu Shimray
7. Thomas Malsom
8. Rubina Thapa

Keynote Speaker:

Patrick Baert

*Professor of Social Theory
University of Cambridge*

Convenor of the Conference

Prof. D. V. Kumar

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