

ZMO-Colloquium

Thursday, 28 November 2019, 5 pm, ZMO

The Purva-Paksha of the Indian Modern: History, Critique, and Constructive Philosophy

Lecture by **Rakesh Pandey** (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi)

Theories and philosophies are as much habitations of the mind as of locations, both of which have been seen as a preserve of the Western world. While this sounds commonsensical for the large part of modern humanity, it is equally true that theoretical conscience and philosophical wisdom has evolved in all societies. However, they are generally perceived as the bearers of traditional knowledge rather than the ground for new thinking. This has been starkly evident in the case of modern social and human sciences, where theory has been singularly Western in orientation. In this presentation, I propose to look into the three moments of history, critique, and constructive philosophy to trace the ways in which the ground of the Indian modern was laid out. I begin by looking into the ways in which Euro-centrism in modern thought was a result of the rise of comparative method and move on to the issue of the emergence of modern humanistic knowledge beyond Europe. Finally, I consider the realms of Indian philosophical thought, language habitations, and social imaginary for a possible task of creating a new theoretic conscience. Based on this any possible imagination of social and human

sciences beyond the Euro-centric frames would require reimagining the conceptual, linguistic, and social realms in tandem. I tend to argue that the asymmetries of the theoretical or philosophical kind can be addressed by revisiting these three purva-pakshas or presuppositions in the rise of the Indian modern. This way the emerging alternate frames would become as much the ground for specificity as of plurality.

Rakesh Pandey is a fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. His research interest lies in the area of intellectual and cultural history of modern India, with particular focus on knowledge formations, philosophy of culture, and historical theory. He has recently finished a monograph dealing with the aspects of colonialism and ancient cultural knowledge. He has been further exploring the conceptual history around modern interpretations of precolonial textual traditions in India and the philosophical aesthetics of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He obtained his doctoral degree in intellectual history from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He has previously taught modern history at the University of Hyderabad, India.

* Purva-paksha: The term 'purva' literally means that which is prior and 'paksha' is known to be the side, flank, or wings. Purva-paksha is thus the recognition of the existing, alternate, and contending views.