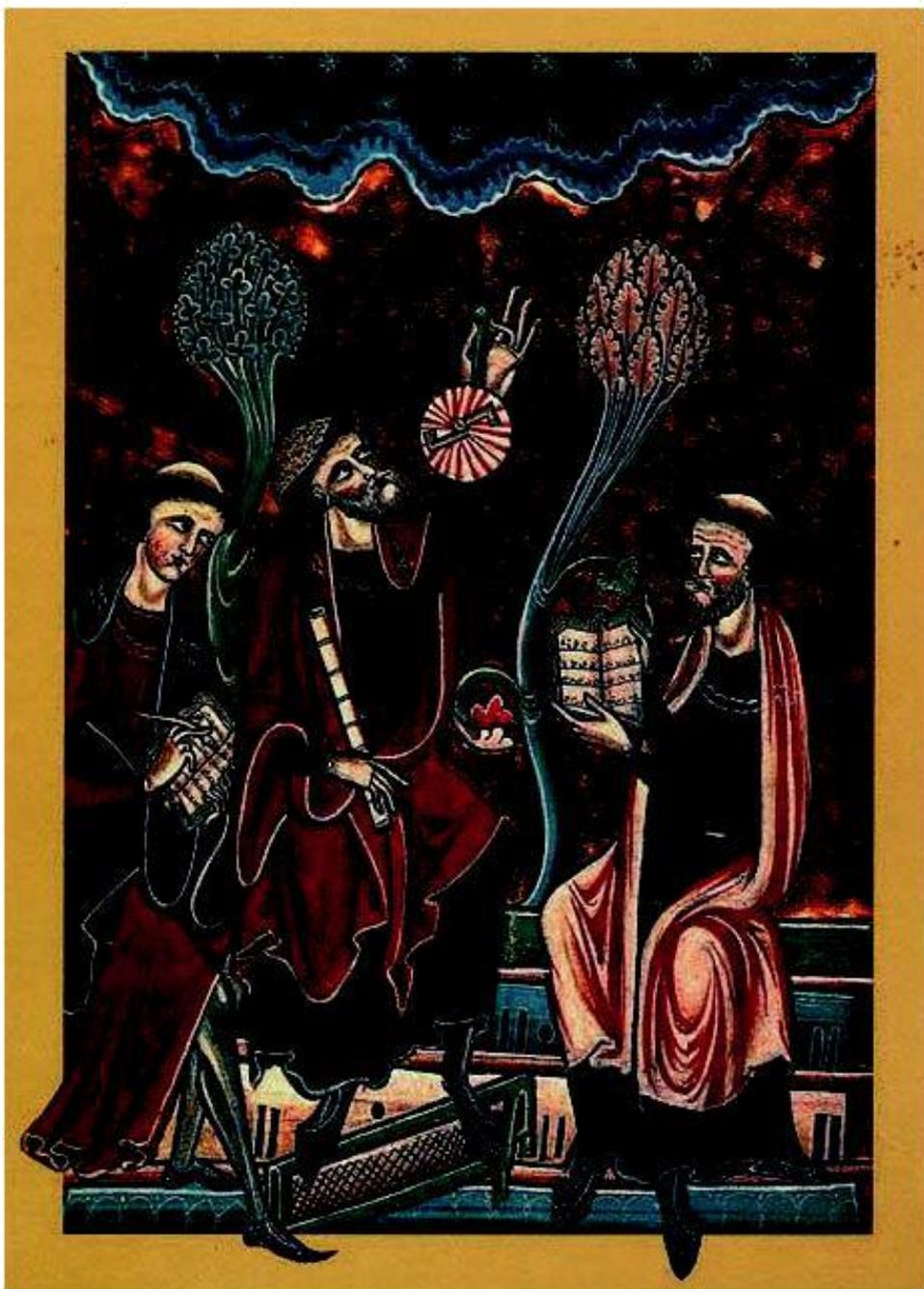


International Conference
Scientification and Scientism in the
Humanities

Committee Room, JNU Convention Centre
25-26 November 2015



**Scientification and Scientism
in the Humanities
International Conference**

**Center for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New
Delhi 25-26 November 2015**

ORGANIZING INSTITUTIONS:

**Freie Universität Berlin
Jawaharlal Nehru University
Heidelberg University
Manipal University**

ORGANIZERS

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VENUE

Convention Centre, Committee Hall

CONCEPT NOTE

The nineteenth century has led to the establishment of a number of new disciplines, such as history, religious studies, classical studies, indology, anthropology, sociology, educational science (pedagogy), psychology, etc. These academic changes led not only to a professionalization of knowledge but also to a special humanities approach to cultural phenomena. However, many of these disciplines have adopted methods that are taken from or modelled after the ostensibly “better” verifiable and empirically testable sciences.

Thus, in India and Europe, the importance of the humanities for the development of civil society is often seen as secondary to sciences and social sciences, which are regarded as more expedient and bring more relevant and practical results. In this competition between humanities and natural sciences and life sciences, the humanities often strived for adopting scientific methods in an attempt to turn cultural processes and phenomena into an enhanced scientific structure. “Scientifically proven” has become a label attached to many areas.

First the conference will concentrate on Indian and German examples of phenomena and developments labelled as “scientifically proven” and will analyse the use of this label for political and economic interests as well as interests of the scientific community. It will analyse the dependency of the results of scientific research on beliefs, values and value judgements as prerequisites of research. In Germany the “Positivismusstreit” dealt with some aspects of the conference. In the meantime the frame of reference has changed. A new attempt to analyse these issues is needed. By focussing on India and Germany the cultural dimension and the preconditions of knowledge considered as scientific will be made explicit.

Second the conference will show that there are other forms of knowledge which cannot be labelled “scientific”, and still are of great social, cultural, and political importance. Many forms of practical and embodied, implicit and tacit knowledge are part of socially and culturally significant knowledge. Due to the high significance attributed to scientific knowledge these forms of knowledge are not adequately valued. Their social, cultural and political importance often is devalued.

Third the conference will analyse the ambivalent character of many forms of traditional cultural knowledge and show that sometimes referring to the “scientific” character of this knowledge suggests unacceptable social and political consequences.

Such ideas and processes not only led to a scientification in the production of cultural knowledge but also to a certain scientism (Szentismus, Wissenschaftsgläubigkeit). Several strategies and methods can be noted: the quest for empirical data, statistical methods and scales, application of tests, the need for tangible and visible results, the use of prognostics, the widespread and heterogeneous notion of (mechanical, electric, spiritual) power, behaviourism, etc.

However, according to Habermas (*Erkenntnis und Interesse*, Frankfurt/M. 1968, p. 13), scientism implies an understanding of scholarship that excludes other legitimate possibilities

for the production of knowledge. Humanities therefore have always defended their approaches as equally legitimate and regard the positivistic scientification as a form reductionism.

As a consequence, one can note in politics and in parts of the general public a lack of awareness of the methodological independence of the humanities and the central role they play in society. The planned conference intends to question such developments and tensions between the methods of verification in humanities. It will critically investigate forms of scientification and scientism in a historical approach and related to present day concerns.

Key themes in the conference:

- Environmentalisms in cultural studies and geography and agriculture, especially studies focusing on the cultural use or misuse of water
- Extortive use of statistics, scales and prognostics (in economics, psychology, sociology, linguistics)
- Mathematization of humanities (e.g., Vedic Mathematics, economics)
- Allopathic methods in Ayurveda
- The effects of alchemy
- Digitization as a strategy to make topics more “scientific”
- The psycho-physical functions of yoga and in meditation (based on empirical tests etc.)
- The notion of power in (esoteric forms of) religions and politics
- Application of technological methods and the mechanical worldview
- Categories of rational vs. irrational, definition of causality, methods of proofs and falsification
- Traditional crafts and its “modern” technologies
- Practical, tacit, and incorporate body knowledge

Another aim of this Indian-German conference is to raise broad awareness of the cultural and social relevance of scientific and technological developments. For this to happen, it is important to help the public understand the significance of these discoveries, to disseminate them and develop ways of translating them into social action. There have been many studies that have shown the extent to which scientific and technological research depends on the humanities to elucidate their concepts, making them more accessible, so that their relevance or irrelevance for society can be revealed. It has become quite clear that the humanities have an important role to play in “translating” the results of this research into everyday language and into the contexts of people’s daily lives.

The organizers of the conference will publish the proceedings. They also want to use the gathering of experts to elaborate a plan for future research cooperation. A possible topic for this cooperation is an interdisciplinary and intercultural project on practical knowledge and its social and cultural importance.

Conference Program

Wednesday, 25th of November

9.00-9.30 *Opening Session*

9.00-9.05 Welcome by the CSSS Chairperson Prof. V. Sujatha 9.05-9.10

Introductory Remarks by Christoph Wulf/Harish Naraindas 9.10-9.20

Opening Remarks by the Vice Chancellor, Prof. S.K. Sopory

9.20-9.30 Remarks by the Dean, School of Social Sciences, Prof. C.P. Chandrasekhar

Session I -Challenges and Limits of Sciences

Chair: Surinder Jodhka, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU

09.30 – 10.15: Sundar Sarukkai (Manipal):

How science itself challenges

scientism 10.15 – 11.00: Christoph Wulf (Berlin):

The dominance of scientific knowledge and the devaluation of other forms of knowledge

11.00-11.30: Break

Session II -Health and Medicine

Chair: Gordon McOuatt, History of Science and Technology Programme, University of King's College, Halifax

11.30 - 12.15: William S. Sax (Heidelberg):

The Birth of the (Exorcism) Clinic: medicine, media and the

jinn 12.15 – 13.00: Ananda Samir Chopra (Heidelberg):

The science in Āyurveda – forming contemporary Āyurveda between modern science and traditional knowledge

13.00 – 14.30: Lunch

14.30 – 15.15: Harish Naraindas (New Delhi):

Techno-sacramentalism: magic, religion and science in German medicine

15.15 – 15.45: Break

Session III - *Nature, Agriculture, and Nutrition*

Chair: Ram Ramaswamy, School of Physical Sciences,

JNU 15.45 – 16.30: Susan Visvanathan (New Delhi):

Thinking about agriculture in an industrializing

economy 16.30 -17.15: V. Sujatha (New Delhi):

Food: A numerical value. Understanding nutrition and body weight in the global South and North

17.15- 18.00: Daniel Münster (Heidelberg):

After the agrarian crisis: alternative agronomics of natural farming in South India

Thursday, 26th of November

Session IV - *Mathematics and Computer Sciences*

Chair: Girish Nath Jha, Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies, JNU

09.00 – 09.45: Anand Mishra (Heidelberg):

Sanskrit and computer science

09.45 – 10.30: Axel Michaels (Heidelberg):

Mathematics and Vedic mathematics

10-30-11.00 Break

Session V -*Philosophy/Religion and Sciences: A difficult relationship*

Chair: Gopal Guru, Centre for Political Studies, JNU

11.00 – 11.45: Franson Manjali: (New Delhi):

Modernity, colonialism and the emergence of a scientific approach in language studies

11.45 - 12.30: Jan Houben (Paris):

The Art of Grammar: 'science', human interest, and the construction of cultural and political worlds

12.30 – 14.00: Lunch

Session VI-*Language / Subjectivity and Science*

Chair: NN

14.00 – 14.45: Babu Thaliath (New Delhi):

The Scientism of Early Modernity and the prevailing scholastic discourse on *principium individuationis*

14.45 – 15.30: Almut Renger (Berlin):

Legitimation strategies of a spiritual authority figure.

15.30 - 16.00: Break

16.00 – 16.45 Dhruv Raina:

“Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods.” Albert Einstein

Session VII - *Final Discussion and Planning of future joint research on the relationship between practical knowledge and science*

16.45-17.45

Concluding Remarks and Vote of Thanks by Harish Naraindas/Christoph Wulf

CSSS conference faculty committee: Divya Vaid, G. Srinivas, V. Sujatha.

Rapporteurs: Kaushiki Das and Purbasha Mazumdar

CSSS Student Volunteers: Kaushiki Das, Purbasha Mazumdar, Lakshmi Krishnakumar, Akhilesh Roshan, Tanmoy Sharma, Hannah Johns, Shobhana Sharma, Kumuda Panigrahi, Mitushi Gupta, Komal Yadav, Vijayanti Bezbaruah, Smriti Tandon, Swati Sourav, Sreya Sen, Bhawna Shivan, Ekta Jain

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Images from Kaushiki, Purbasha, Tanmoy & Lakshmi.

Notes:





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