

International seminar on 'Cosmopolitanism in the History of Science' (09-10 August 2016)

Concept Note:

As the world becomes 'global', so too should its history-especially its history of science. Contemporary histories of knowledge have drawn our attention to the importance of multiple sources, communicative networks, and circulation of scientific knowledge in the making. This refocusing has come with a closer sensitivity to the multitudinal genealogies and movements of knowledge. It also presents us with a new set of general questions about doing local and global history of science.

Two years ago, the EHESS, Paris organized a workshop on 'Cosmopolitanism in early Modern South Asia'. The collection, as published in a special issue of the journal *Purushartha*, focused on specific case-studies of knowledge circulation and cosmopolitanism in South Asia, recognizing the interpenetration of the local and the global. The idea of the workshop could now be pushed further to re-examine some of the concerns of social theory that are linked up with the history of science. This exploratory meeting will explore those re-examinations.

In unpacking 'cosmopolitanism' in the history of science, such a re-examination would entail commencing with a categorical distinction between the 'trans' -cultural or -national, or whatever metanarrative one adopts to engage with our historical concerns, and the cosmopolitanism of objects, things, actors, texts etc - that we confront in our investigations; something which perhaps may not be in the reckoning of the historical actors concerned.

Further, it is equally important to understand how the politics of knowledge plays itself out in the contact zones between the little and high traditions. Playing fields are hardly ever level. For example some recent research reflects on itinerant medical practitioners from Korea who travelled to China and became the mediators between several medical traditions, while at the same time raising questions of their high professional status in Korea and a diminished one in China.

Finally, beyond the debate on what cosmopolitanism means or when was cosmopolitanism, the frame of 'cosmopolitan science' enables an engagement with the diversity of agents, objects and things constituting more than the material culture of science, transgressing the boundaries of national and civilizational history. In branding or labeling a tradition or school or practice as cosmopolitan the gesture is always towards an essential diversity, of a multitude of genealogies, objects and flows. The politics of cosmopolitan science urges further explorations of authority, privilege and cultural capital to be possessed by the practitioners of a cosmopolitan science.

The seminar was directed towards a dialogue that would then flag a set of important issues for further research and problematise cosmopolitan science, rather than celebrate 'nos sommestoujours cosmopolite'.

The objective of the seminar was to bring together scholars studying narratives of a non-exclusivist history of science. It sought to examine the issues, problems and materials involved in building a globalized history of science that is both sensitive to the 'local' and open to trans-local exchanges, circulation and translation of knowledge. By focusing on the concept of 'cosmopolitanism', The aim

was to explore new ways of narrating a non-hierarchical world history of science. In order 42 to do so the seminar hoped to discuss the possibility of developing a long term collaborative research network bringing together researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and specialties.

An International seminar on 'Cosmopolitanism in the History of Science' was organized at IAS during 09-10 August 2016. Professor Dhruv Raina, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi was the Convener of the seminar. The welcome address was given by Professor Chetan Singh, Director, IAS. Professor Dhruv Raina, Convener of the seminar gave introductory remarks.

PARTICIPANTS

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- Dr. Robert Michael Brain, University of British, Columbia, Department of History, Canada
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- Professor John Bosco Lourdasamy, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, Chennai
- Professor Dhruv Raina, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
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