

The call for papers is open to contributions related to India and to countries from the Global South from different disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Call for Papers

Rethinking Knowledge, Reshaping the University

Academic knowledge and its transmission have long been a matter of elites arrogating to themselves access to it. The centres of knowledge in ancient India trained apprentices to specific trades or initiated young people to memorize the Vedic texts in Sanskrit. This helped create a certain Brahmin elite, which, as social mutations and other phenomena associated with migration and changing social cultures, diversified over the years, giving rise to the development of other languages, creating other spaces and practices, and other focuses of study (Thapar 2015). The accounts of travellers in ancient India attest to the existence of exchanges between scholars and students from other countries. Although these ancient "goals" of knowledge transmission and hospitality are still the preserve of the modern university, the ways in which knowledge is accessed have undergone profound transformations over the centuries.

In the Indian context, the heavy dependence and investment in technical and technological education led to an imbalance in the value of university degrees over the course of years. In the age of Informatics, Big Data and Spatial Conquest, the possession of knowledge constitutes India's "soft power". In Lyotard's terms (1979), the construction of knowledge and disciplines is a matter of government in the digital age. The current government has been privileging a certain reading of history where the conflation of contemporary sciences and ancient Vedic texts written in Sanskrit has become a marker of Hindu Nationalist supremacy discourse (Subramniam 2019). Knowledge, in this sense, becomes an instrument of politics and power, rather than a question of teaching, learning, or of the construction of subjects through transmission and exchange.

Although the "democratization" of education today makes access to knowledge easier, the cost of this access remains unaffordable for many in the Indian "sub-continent" and the material conditions of many institutes and colleges remain far from satisfactory (Chandra 2017). When it comes to higher education, about 8% of the Indian population has a bachelor's degree¹, with disparities in access to technical and vocational courses between urban and rural areas. In a country with more than one billion inhabitants and an increased population density in certain regions, and which has to face the problem of malnutrition and other endemic issues, the question of knowledge can seem both remote and close to social concerns.

The university is one of the places (among others) of training, production and transmission of knowledge. If the goal of training is to participate in the process of social transformation, universities are one of the "unconditional" spaces (in the words of Derrida) to exchange with one's contemporaries².

The university remains a place where people mix, where people meet and where hospitality as a value still holds true to some extent. These attributes can also make it a place that can generate power struggles by holding up a mirror to society. For example, the movements against the colonial government and against social inequalities in the pre-independence period (Ghosh 2014) as well as the conflicts in recent years in India (around the politics of quotas, minorities, left-wing movements, alter-globalisation movements, citizenship, etc.) are prominent examples of the university as an agora.

How do we understand the past in the light of what is happening in the contemporary world? "Market" conditions (supply and demand) seem to dictate not only the objects but also the results of research in certain

¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/only-815-of-indians-are-graduates-census-data-show/article7496655.ece> , last accessed 14th January 2022.

² There are other spaces, and other milieus (associations, grassroots organisations etc.) which contribute towards the subject formation and citizenship consciousness (Cody 2013).

cases³. The problem of the "commodification of teaching" becomes even more complex in societies with strong pressure on academic "performance" where teachers are led to ask themselves whether excessive score-dependence does not devalue the "content" of the course, or even the evaluation itself.

How to continue to "produce"⁴ and share knowledge in the face of endless liberalization? What choices, what paths, what research projects can be on offer in the training programs at universities in the 21st century? How can we rethink knowledge and reshape the university? How can we reinvent the missions of academic transmission and research to meet the challenges of our time and anticipate those of the next generations? How can we maintain the space for exchange and debate?

In order to reply to these questions, the proposals can follow one of the following axes:

Axis 1: Universities as spaces of exchange, reflection and struggles

- History of ideas of/about the university
- The university as a place of sharing and hospitality
- The writing / rewriting of knowledge in the contemporary context
- Relationship to knowledge through the historical lens

Axis 2: Transmission, economic stakes, and societal transformation

- The different forms of knowledge and their transmission
- The transmission of knowledge through the prism of digital technology
- Reflections of contemporary transformations in the arts (literature, visual arts, theatre, fine arts etc.) and discourse
- Social inequalities and access to knowledge

Axis 3: Politics of Knowledge

- Freedom and creativity in the face of knowledge regimes
- Ethics and politics of academic research
- Merit and hegemony in the access to knowledge
- What knowledge to transmit to whom, why and how?

Bibliography

Chandra, Pankaj, *Building Universities That Matter: Where are Indian Institutions Going Wrong*, New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2017.

Cody, Francis, *The Light of Knowledge: Literary Activism and the Politics of Writing in South India*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013.

Derrida, Jacques, *L'université sans condition*, Paris, Galilée, 2001. [Original title of the Conference : "The Future of the Profession, or the Unconditional University (Thanks to the 'Humanities': What *Could Take Place Tomorrow*)"]

Ghosh, Suresh Chandra, "The Genesis of Curzon's University Reforms, 1899-1905", in Rao, Parimala (ed.) *New Perspectives in the History of Indian Education*, New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2014, p. 224-268.

Lyotard, Jean-François, *La condition postmoderne : rapport sur le savoir*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.

Subramaniam, Banu, *Holy Science: The Biopolitics of Hindu Nationalism*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2019.

Thapar, Romila, *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, (1st ed. entitled *Early India*, Allen Lane the Penguin Press 2002) reprinted in Gurgaon, Penguin Books India, 2003, re-ed. 2015.

³ As witnessed by some researchers :

<https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-grande-table-idees/harcelement-precarite-universite-le-grand-gachis> last accessed 8th January 2022.

⁴ The use of the term "product" (or output) has gradually been generalised to many domains in the contemporary world, including texts based on scientific research. <https://www.hceres.fr/fr/guides-des-produits-de-la-recherche-et-activites-de-recherche> last accessed 8th January 2022.

This multidisciplinary colloquium will be held at the Université Toulouse 1 Capitole in hybrid mode or online, subject to the health crisis situation in France in June 2022.

Authors can send their proposal (200 words) in French or in English with a provisional title and a biographical note (name, university, research centre affiliation, position held and research interests) to madhura.joshi@ut-capitole.fr and to ahmed.al_mulla@yahoo.fr

Deadline for submission of proposals : 8th April 2022

Notification to authors: 18th April 2022

Publication of conference programme: Mid-May 2022

Conference Dates: 16-17 June 2022

Scientific Committee

Madhu Benoit, Université de Grenoble-Alpes
Corinne Bigot, Université Toulouse 2
Michel Naumann, Université Cergy Pontoise
Tejaswini Niranjana, Ahmedabad University, India
Jean-Marie Prieur, Université Montpellier 3
Ludmila Volná, ERIAC Université de Rouen,
Charles University, Czech Republic
Nishat Zaidi, Jamia Milia Islamia University, India

Organising Committee

Fabien Chartier, Université Rennes 1
Madhura Joshi, Université Toulouse 1 Capitole,
CAS Université Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès
Ahmed Mulla, Université de Guyane
Jitka de Préval, Independent Researcher,
Specialist of Indian Cinema
Caroline Trech, Université de Rouen