



Azim Premji University Faculty Seminar Series
presents a lecture on

“Metabolism as Metaphor: Imagining an Ecology of Labour”

Speaker
Purnendu Kavoori

Date: July 22, 2015 (Wednesday)

Time: 02.30 pm to 04:00 pm

Venue: Activity Room, First Floor, Pixel B, Azim Premji University

About the Topic

Conversations between the Humanities and Sciences have a long and productive, if contentious, history. The emerging field of ecology and society is one such area where both Humanities and Sciences can inform each other in a useful way. In this paper, we explore parallels between Marx’s analysis of value as developed in Capital and certain important and influential concepts in the history of mainstream ecological theory. Taking his understanding of labour as the central means for the production of value, we try to map the analytical framework developed in Capital with the framework of analysis developed in the study of ecosystems in the natural sciences. Taking Marx’s concept of metabolism as a starting point in the analysis of human-nature interactions, it is argued that forms of production and development are closely tied to the structure of the systems that produce them. While eschewing any naturalistic interpretation of social systems, it will be argued that the basic structure of relations as these develop in social and ecological systems have, at a fundamental level, much in common. The diverse forms of inequality, characteristic of distinct historical societies have interesting and suggestive analogies with the way diversity and reproduction vary in different ecological systems. Consequently, questions of sustainability need to be grounded in understanding the trade-offs between social systems which may be highly productive and those which may be less productive but more efficient, not merely in terms of the patterns of resource utilization, but as also reflecting the varying ways in which labour is incorporated in the production process.

About the Speaker

Purnendu is Professor at Azim Premji University. Purnendu completed his MA and M. Phil in history from JNU, Delhi. From 1984 to 2011, he was associated with the Institute of Development Studies, in Jaipur, Rajasthan. He did his Ph.D. from the Institute of Social Studies in Netherlands in 1996 on the subject of 'Pastoral lives in Rajasthan'. This work later got published by Oxford in 1999.

Purnendu continues to work on the lives of pastoral communities and his writings have been published in a number of international and national journals. His current research interest is to further explore the ecological dimension of society and culture.