



Colloquium: Thinking in the Bhashas

Speaker:

Rakesh Pandey, Associate Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi

Date / Time:

April 18, 2013 - 3:45pm - 5:15pm

Venue:

10th Floor, Auditorium, Pixel A, APU

Abstract:

Languages are like silent screens where one may read what is in store for human societies. One may open up the great language question in modern India to reflect upon the way various speech communities lay claim over their perceptions of the world. An important version of this issue has been evident in our public and intellectual life regarding the adequacy of Indian languages as the medium of rigorous and critical thinking. The widely held belief that Indian languages might lead to the recovery of Indian ways of thinking has been subject to criticism. Much of the complexity lies in India's colonial past and the way it transformed our intellectual horizons. In colonial perceptions, the cognitive abilities of the native mind were harnessed to the kind of language one carried in one's head. Barring exceptional occasions, Indian languages, even for their generous proponents, have been often seen as the carriers of creative expression rather than critical thinking. For many, languages are about abilities and usefulness, where Indian languages inevitably become a poor choice. To some they are worn out citadels and need to be saved from the imminent death. Why claim a particular language, while thought requires none, some of us may ask. Are there specific cultural, ethical and political choices involved in choosing a language for shaping ones ideas? This question needs serious consideration. We revisit some of these issues in this conversation by taking up the question of language and conceptual innovation and the figure of the intellectual and bilingualism in modern India. We will attempt to rethink the cliched divide between the language and the world while thinking of the bhashas.

A Note on the Speaker:

Rakesh Pandey is Associate Fellow, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi. After earning a master's degree in Modern History at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, he did his doctoral work on the making of archaic and classical forms of cultural knowledge in colonial India at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK. His major research interest lies in the area of cultural and intellectual history of modern India with particular focus on knowledge formations, philosophy of culture and moral

orders. He is currently working on a monograph based on his doctoral work and is pursuing researches in three broad areas: (i) on the interpretation and appropriation of traditional texts and the critique of modern civilization, mainly based on the works of aesthetes, scholars and writers such as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, among others; (ii) on the making of philosophic and folk knowledge in modern India as part of a larger study on knowledge formations; (iii) on the history of moral cultures and ideas. He has been actively involved with the Programme in Social and Political Theory at the Centre under which he conducts a study group around the life and meaning of Indian epic traditions (particularly the Mahabharata) and is also part of the Indian Language Programme and the Teaching initiative. He has previously taught Modern History at the University of Hyderabad.