



Azim Premji University Colloquium Series
presents a lecture on

“Understanding Soft and Hard Irrationalism”

(Note: This is the annual lecture in memory of Narendra Dabholkar)

Speaker

Gopal Guru

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Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Date: October 29, 2015 (Thursday)

Time: 2.00 pm to 3.30 pm

Venue: 10th Floor Auditorium, Pixel A , Azim Premji University

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About the Lecture

In the present talk, I would like to make an analytical distinction between soft and hard irrationalism. For many, such a distinction might appear to be problematic especially when one looks at a phenomenon such as irrationalism that does not operate in fragments but articulates itself as totality thus creating an enduring, socially pervasive impact. However, it can be argued that irrationalism in its avatar of operation does not entirely empty out its repressive weight on people’s social consciousness. On the contrary, I argue, it operates on a particular conundrum thus taking both soft and hard turns in its social effect. As a part of this claim, I would then argue that soft irrationalism acquires a form of illegitimate arrogance that results from electoral majoritarianism, while hard irrationalism takes an aggressive and violent form which does not have an independent social origin and, in fact, is derivative of this arrogance of majoritarianism.

Since irrationalism is based on prejudice, its function is to dissuade such a prejudiced person to submit himself or herself to self-examination. It, in fact, defines itself in terms of its inability to comprehend contradiction which is constitutive of its emergence. In order to explain this point further, I would then argue that, while irrationalism takes objection to other’s (rationalists) intervention into the social life of people, it fails, at the same time, to provide any ground as to why such irrationalists seek to intervene on behalf of the religiosity of other people. To put it differently, such irrationalism refuses to acknowledge others’ moral right to speak for embattled entities that are in need of such rational intervention. Ironically, those who ride on the high tides of irrationalism arrogate to themselves the right to speak for everybody. I would like to address

the question, why should one intervene in the social imagination and social practices of others? What are the justificatory grounds for such intervention? Finally, I would like to explore the possibility of evaluating the nature of social criticism and ask: which among the two forms of criticism, i.e. scientific and humanistic, is more effective in terms of addressing the issue of irrationalism.

About the Speaker

Gopal Guru is Professor at the Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His research and teaching interests include Indian Political Thought, Indian Politics and Critical Theory. He is the author of *Dalit Cultural Movements in Maharashtra*, Vikas Adhyan, Publication, Mumbai (2000) and the co-author of *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press (2012). He has also edited *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press (2009)