



Azim Premji University Faculty Seminar Series

presents a talk on

“Theorising the Informal Sector in India”

Speaker
Rahul De

Date: 05 August 2015 (Wednesday)

Time: 11.00 am to 12:30 pm

Venue: Somapura Campus, Azim Premji University

About the Topic

This presentation is based on a chapter in Rahul’s PhD dissertation which theorizes a framework to understand the development of capitalism in independent India. In western developed countries, capitalist development has occurred with increasing proletarianization and formalization of the labor process. However in India 90% of employment and more than 60% of the GDP is generated by the informal sector. The importance of the informal sector in the growth and development process in India has increased over the last two decades. An understanding of the dynamics of the informal sector vis-à-vis the larger economic structure is crucial to understand the contemporary economy.

The informal sector has received sufficient academic attention, however it is well established (Bremar, D’mello, John Harriss) that there is a dearth of distinct analytical categories to study the informal sector in India. This is partially because there is a serious lack of primary data on the informal sector in India. Scholarship on informal labor has tended to study geographically specific labor processes and have made a generalizable model based on their observation on the field. However these generalizations hasn’t lent itself to further analysis or concrete conclusions.

In this paper Rahul uses Michael Burawoy’s concept of labor process to theorize informal labor in India. Rahul describes the modalities of the informal labor processes in India and how they are embedded within the larger accumulation structure. It further conceptualizes mechanisms within the labor process which aid in reproducing them in the face of uncertainties and de-stabilizing forces. The conceptualization of labor processes will aid us in understanding why informal labor plays such an important part in Indian economy, and why the rigidities of the informal labor market remain. The paper makes an attempt to create an abstract framework to understand labor process is to contribute to scholarship attempting to engage in understanding the dynamics of informal labor processes in India.

WORK CITED

Breman, J. (1976). A Dualistic Labour System? A Critique of the 'Informal Sector' Concept, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11(48), 1870-1876.

Burawoy, Michael, (1982). *Manufacturing Consent*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

D'Mello, Bernard, (1992). Thinking about the Labour Process: Some Clues from Western Studies, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27(22), M63-M65+M67-M70.

Harriss, John. (1982). Character of an Urban Economy: 'Small-Scale' Production and Labour Markets in Coimbatore, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17(23), 945-954.

About the Speaker

Rahul De is a senior lecturer at the school of liberal studies, Azim Premji University. He has been closely involved in developing the curriculum for the economics major to be introduced as part of the UG programme at APU. He is currently writing his PhD dissertation titled 'Regimes of accumulation in Independent India' under the supervision of Dr. Vamsicharan Vakulabharanam. This thesis attempts to periodize the historical dynamics of capitalist development in India and identify the institutional configuration that characterize every regime. The key question he explores in his thesis is whether a postcolonial variant of capitalism would differ from the development of capitalism in western developed countries. It also theorizes the role of state intervention and dynamics of informal sector in India's development experience.

His research interests include Political Economy, Macro-economics, capitalism and Mass Media studies. He has worked in the educational sector in different capacities. He has taught at Vidyanaraya high school in Hyderabad. He has also worked at Pratham, a developmental NGO which works with primary schools and dropout students around India.

Publications and Writings

"If the US sneezes India need not catch a cold": Representation of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis in the Indian Print Media", *Journal of Creative communication*, Sage: Ahmedabad, India, Vol 7, March and July 2012.

Vakulabharanam. V and Rahul De: Growth and Distribution regimes in Independent India" Awaiting publication

Modules for UGC E-pathshala (online learning) cultural studies course. Modules are on: "understanding the 'packaging' of sporting cultures in age of television and "development of concepts of ideology/hegemony in cultural theory."