



## **ICAS:MP Cross-modular conferences: A Note**

ICAS:MP planned to organise a cross-modular conference (CMC) on 'Concepts and the Idea of Political' in October 2020 followed by another in 2022. Due to the global coronavirus pandemic, the event had to be shifted to 2021. The main co-conveners for the first CMC in will be Rajeev Bhargava and Neeladri Bhattacharya who will work as part of a wider team of coordinators including the co-directors.

The principal theme of the conference is the social and historical life of concepts. Our focus will be on how a small range of key terms have been used by social and political actors both in the past and in the present and on tracing the trajectory of changes in their deployment. However, the conference seeks to shift the discussion of social and political concepts beyond existing frames, in three specific ways. First, we wish to stay away from large, macro-concepts and carefully, intensively study micro-concepts. We hope to focus on lived ideas, experience-near, thick, context-specific concepts, rather than thin, decontextualized, universalistic categories of theoretical discourse. Second, since, no concept works in isolation from others, we shall study concepts in close relation to one another, conceptual clusters that express similar ideas, emotions and perceptions in different historical and locational contexts. Identifying relevant conceptual clusters – which of the many concepts that potentially resonate with one another do actually work in close alignment in particular contexts – will itself be a major goal of the conference. Focusing on clusters will allow us to explore analogous concepts – those that are similar but not entirely; and in unpacking distinct terms we will figure the meaning of their heterogeneity. Encoded in such diverse terms with family resemblance would be histories of difference. Third, by working across languages (minimally, English/ German/ Hindi/Urdu or some other regional Indian language) the effort will be to understand terms in their global and comparative dimension. Implicit in such an enquiry is the idea that similar terms in different languages are not always synonymous: in deriving synonyms, we often erase semantic specificities. Some part of the meaning is often lost in translation. This problem of translatability of terms is itself an issue to be explored.

To sum up, the conference focuses on experience-near, micro-level conceptual clusters in the historically constituted everyday life of ordinary people available through the examination of languages in different regions of India and Europe (Germany).

Three further clarifications are in order. (a) this exploration is different from (though related) to a study of keywords. Because, first, our focus is on clusters rather than single words. Second, it has a strong comparative dimension. Third, such comparisons might result in a study of a concept crystallized around one word in one language but spread over many words in the other language. (b) Textual analysis will not suffice for this study. While we encourage a study of concepts found in the texts of the past, it must necessarily be related to the study of words as they are used by people in their present or in the recent past. In short, our focus remains on the relationship between the past and present of words and concepts. (c) Our study will keep in mind the theme that frames our entire programme- metamorphosis of the political. Indeed, we plan to have at least one session (most probably the final session) devoted to politics and the political.

Consider a term that we have not included in the list- 'Dharma'. A look at ancient or early Indian texts reveals that the term stands, among other things, for law, ethics, virtues. None of these, not even law, is universalistic. Dharma in the sense of ethics or virtues are definitely context-, group-, and region-specific. It had no relation to 'religion' as we understand today, a comprehensive system of beliefs, practices and morals that sharply demarcates one rival group from another. But today, when we use the term 'dharma' it invariably refers to religion in the modern sense, as in 'sarva dharma sambhaav' (equally well disposed to all religions). Although it has not altogether lost its link with group-specific ethic, the predominant use of the term today is a synonym for the Christian/western sense of 'religion'. How did this transformation occur? If we were to study 'dharma', it will be part of this larger story.

As mentioned above, our focus is on experience-near concepts. All experience-near concepts have a descriptive, affective and normative component. While each scholar is free to emphasize any one of these, the aim of the workshop is to study these concepts in all these dimensions. As scholars who study these concepts, we shall invariably introduce an experience-distant dimension in the study of all categories. It will be helpful if we remain self-conscious of both these levels: experience-near (thick, context specific, lived, micro) and experience-distant (self-reflective, general, analytic, theoretical, macro).

In the conference the concepts will be organized around thematic clusters that refer to the ICAS project “Metamorphosis of the Political”: languages of entitlement; languages of solidarity; languages of victimhood; languages of hate/anger; languages of hope/aspiration.

These are suggestive clusters. The final clustering can be altered.

### **1) Languages of solidarity**

Sorge, care, empathy, dhyana, dekhbhaal, dekh-rekh, madat

Friendship, neighbourliness, brotherhood, bhaichara, Freundschaft, Brüderlichkeit,

Belonging, identity, citizenship, pahchan, Zugehörigkeit

Fairness, unfairness, insaaf/be-insaaf

Barabari, samta, samanata, unch-nich, treatment as equal, recognition, Anerkennung,

Gleichberechtigung, Gleichbehandlung,

Reciprocity, len-den, karz chukana, parasparikta, sharing, mil-batna,

Dialogue, samvad, Dialog

Masculinity/femininity, purusatva/striatva

Gesellschaft, Gemeinschaft, community, society, samuday, samaj

### **2) Languages of victimhood/ suffering**

Wound, hurt, vulnerability, taklif, pira, chot, ghav, Verletzlichkeit

Suffering, pain, dukha, dard, Schmerz, Leiden

Tiredness, exhaustion, fatigue, boredom, sadness, melancholy, Melancholie, udasi, klanti,

Dar, bechaini, ghabrahat, Angst, fear, anxiety

Envy, irsha, jalan, daah, Neid

Langeweile, depletion, Müdigkeit, Erschöpfung

### **3) Languages of love/hate**

Rage, anger, gussa, narazgi, Wut

Love, ishq, pyaar, mohabbat, bhakti, desh prem, Liebe

Gratitude, kritagyata, ehsaanmandi, abhar, Dankbarkeit

### **4) Languages of entitlement/responsibility**

Rights, haq, adhikar, Rechte

Riti-riwaz/j, pratha, custom, norm, practice, tradition, Gebräuche, Gewohnheiten  
Duties, Pflichten, zimmedari, farz, dharma  
Fairness, unfairness, insaaf/be-insaaf  
Debt, karz, Schuld, Verpflichtung  
Aazadi, freedom, Freiheit  
Barabari, samta, samanata, unch-nich, treatment as equal, recognition, Gleichbehandlung, Gleichberechtigung, Anerkennung  
Dignity, shame, humiliation, izzat-bezzat, Würde, Scham, Demütigung  
Janshakti, democracy, jansatta, ganatantra, janatantra, lokatantra, prajatantra, Demokratie  
Truth, satya, sach-jhuth, Wahrheit  
Needs, zarurat, Bedürfnisse  
Nature, prakriti, Natur  
Gesellschaft, Gemeinschaft, community, society, samuday, samaj

### **5) Languages of hope/aspiration**

Hope, despair, ummid-naummid, asha-nirasha, bharosa, Hoffnung, Verzweiflung,  
Trust, faith, vishwas, bharosa, Vertrauen  
Dignity, shame, humiliation, izzat-bezzat, Würde, Scham, Demütigung  
Growth/de-growth, Wachstum, pragati, patan, giravat,  
Progress, regress, loss, Fortschritt - Verlust

There are, of course, categories that overlap and that might be more difficult to assign to clusters such as, Karma, action, Handlung, handeln  
Context, mahaul, vatavaran

We trust a reflection on such constitutive categories of social and political experience will energise all the modules, and help us to understand the everyday life of categories of the political