



WEST BENGAL STATE UNIVERSITY

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The Centre for Comparative Social Theory

**Department of Sociology
West Bengal State University**

The Centre for Comparative Social Theory (CCST) is an interdisciplinary centre operating from within the Department of Sociology at the West Bengal State University encouraging collaborations with theoretically inclined researchers across social sciences and humanities and across the North South divide. ‘Social’ for us is broad – it involves the literary, the cultural, and the political. Given the insistent need to decolonize knowledge forms and institutional practices, and to conceptualize the ecological and social dilemmas along ever-increasing inequalities on several social axes, our critical theories, concepts and practices need to be continually transformed. CCST proposes to continually re-conceptualize critical theory and practice in the backdrop of our third-worldly realities globally entangled through movements of population, capital, and philosophies. It is grounded on the conviction that theories provide a sense of social concern and accountability.

We begin from the postulate that the social sciences, as also the humanities or the natural sciences, are in principle comparative fields. The more we go beyond simple descriptive versions into the realms of analysis we are inescapably engaged in comparisons. To be more exact, what appear to be simple descriptions do also need comparative analyses, explicit or implicit. The sociological, the historical and the literary, to name only three of the disciplinary formations, flow into each other. One needs to differentiate the specific features of diverse social circumstances and interactions from their more generic, universal types yet remain aware of their co-constitutivities. In this process, social theory plays a central role by providing frameworks through which comparisons and analyses can be made.

The work of comparison operates across disciplines as well across as the intellectual hegemonic divide between the West and the ‘rest’. To put it in simplistic terms, we intend to work on and within western theory with the aim of debunking its hegemony, while attending to, comparing it with and bringing in interruptions from ‘other’ and/or vernacular theoretical discourses. The move is to go beyond efforts of ‘retrieving’ the regional only in the form of archival sources of ‘raw materials’ to theorize upon. Conceding this as a significant task, we want to go beyond the efforts of archiving the indigenous (not to undermine the importance of that act). Our aim is to engage with the theoretical arguments of the local/Bengali intellectual traditions and work with them at an international, or rather planetary, register. This is to work against extant academic practices in vernacular, Bengali for instance, which circumscribe (if not ghettoize) Bengali texts within a local circle.

Theory in general and social theory in particular refer to the concepts and arguments, explanations and thoughts about how material and ideational formations are constantly created and altered, dissipated and dissolved, yet work through particular formations. They provide perspectives or standpoints to outline the implications of on-going social events. Theoretical research in the social sciences and the humanities thus continue to critically analyse social realities as well as anticipate future possibilities, experimenting with and interrogating extant and new methodologies. Besides several other questions, social theories incite queries concerning hegemonies, both global and local, in their transcendental and immanent articulations.

The Centre upholds critical thought from multiple positions, disciplines and languages in constitutive encounters with each other, aiming to be one of the finest locations for doing comparative social theory in the upcoming years.

Brief Course of Actions

- Publication of Occasional Papers
- Research Projects
- Publication of Journal
- Reading groups and Discussions
- Lectures, Seminars, Workshops and Conferences
- Building up a net-work of theoretically oriented scholars
- Digital Archiving

Based in the Department of Sociology, WBSU the Centre has members across disciplines (social sciences, humanities, media-studies and history). CCST tends to create an open and inclusive space for substantial and meaningful conversations in the social sciences, humanities, media, arts and beyond.