

Second National Seminar

25-26 March 2011

Venue: IIT Gandhinagar

The Enigma of Health: Maladies and the Politics of Healing

Introduction

The Second National Seminar of Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences will be held in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology on the theme *The Enigma of Health: Maladies and the Politics of Healing* during 25-26 March 2011 at IIT Gandhinagar.

A Brief Outline

The Seminar will look into the issues on health and healing by seeking insights from Alfred Korzybski (Science and Sanity) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age). Human beings are exposed to various degrees and kinds of maladies (real and metaphoric) which they dread and try to conquer. The consequences of illness can be fatal and devastating; besides having to suffer physical pain and trauma one often becomes a victim of social attitudes and stigmas while being ill. No wonder much has been said and written about physical and social ailments. On the other hand, health as a concept and experience needs to be looked into with more analytical insight. While it is essential to look at a human being as 'an organism as a whole in an environment,' one should also realize the politics involved in interpreting 'health' and 'illness,' 'sanity, and 'madness.' The 'fear' of sickness is partly related to issues of social acceptance and perception of pain and suffering with reference to body and mind. The 'fetish' for health and physical and mental well being has become a modern malady. Despite the obsession with health in the contemporary culture wherein one feels complacent amidst diverse technological and spiritual means that assure physical and mental 'fitness,' sanity and longevity, it is curious to see how health still 'evades' us. The outlook towards illness and health are formed by religious, political and market forces within a socio-cultural context. The stigmatization of certain ailments on ethical and moral grounds and the marginalizing of the sick have been social phenomena that manifest differently in various cultures in several historical contexts. The body/mind dynamics implicit in the understanding of health and sickness necessitates a critique of institutional practices of medical and psychiatric establishments and also market forces. This kind of a critique is required especially because 'fitness' is defined and interpreted to a great extent by not only the medical and psychiatric establishments but also media through programs meant for generating awareness, dialogues with doctors and psychiatrists, yoga training sessions, programs on health and healing, advertisements for health and beauty products, etc. The standards of fitness are often ratified and endorsed by celebrities who assume an authoritative tone while doing so. Some sort of conformity is

demanded and obtained from an uncritical segment of the public. In short, 'fitness' implies 'fitting into certain standards of health and well being. This is an alarming situation.

These topics may be utilized for preparing papers:

- a) Health and Illness, Sanity and Madness: The Politics of Interpretations and Definitions
- b) Clinics, Mental Asylums and Other Institutions: The Nuances of Subjectification and Normalization
- c) Technology and Biopolitics: New Modes of Compassion and Control
- d) Trauma and Death
- e) Health and Beauty: Market Strategies and Media Images
- f) The Stigma of Certain Ailments and the Process of Alienation and Marginalization
- g) The Eco-Politics of Health: Nature and Humanity
- h) Allopathic and Alternate Medicine: Modes of Competition and Convergence
- i) Mental Health: Clinical Psychology, Psychiatry, Philosophical Counseling, Rational Emotive Therapy and Other Options

Submission Deadline

300-word abstract of the paper is due by **15 February 2011**. The abstract should be sent as an email attachment to: prafullakar@gmail.com marking a copy to koshy@iitgn.ac.in Selected participants should send the registration fee and full paper by **10 March 2011**.

Registration Fee

Each participant is required to pay a registration fee of Rs. 1000/ (Rupees one thousand only) through a bank draft in the name of **Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences** on any Bank in Baroda. The fee will take care of the cost of the lunch and tea during the seminar. The fee is non-refundable. The participants have to make their own travel arrangements. The accommodation will be arranged at the Guest House of the IIT Gandhinagar on request.

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