



## OBSERVATORY FOR INDIAN EPISTEMOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, CIRCULATION & VALIDATION

The **Observatory for Indian Epistemological Systems (OIES)** aims to develop an extensive and open collaborative multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and transnational research. To be launched in India [...] by the University of Lisbon (CFCUL). It wishes to advance three interrelated activities: research, teaching and field work, through different modalities of partnership. Its programme specially addresses tangible and intangible dimensions of local systems of Traditional Knowledge, Practices and Experiences (TKPE).

This is intended to be a joint venture for the creation of an international network that challenges different ways of thinking and acting out based both old and new well-known and well-shared patterns and paths. Team members should feel free to assume that there are no epistemological constraints or politico-epistemologically correct approaches.

Considering we are still groping to understand the subtle subjective experiences made possible by present-day changes, we may feel as if we were at the crossroads of knowledge and practices. However, we are actually towering above these at an overpass that we will call "observatory". It will connect the various delicate paths of human experience from where we plan to look into the feats that did and do consistently change the main route of "evolution" and "development". Here, conservatory, laboratory, observatory, will all converge and merge into an ideal recyclatory, preserving, experimenting, observing and renewing TKPE.

Knowingly, raising the difficulty of launching an academic project that also calls for non-academic expertise, contributions are encouraged not only due to their typically academic deemed skills, but also for the sources of wisdom emerging from other capabilities and expertises. The OIES not only acknowledges the societal need to preserve and renew wisdom, but also hopes to offer a fresh perspective on academic the understanding of emicity, involving people and institutions in joint projects, fostering innovative approaches.

The **purposes** that will guide our activities at the Observatory as listed below:

- To learn to look at
- To identify sciences/knowledge/methodologies exclusive to India
- To recognize knowledge systems and practices in transition
- To disentangle today's multifarious links between orality and literacy in the cognitive process
- To readdress basic epistemological assumptions, bringing in new methodological approaches and views on the prevalent scientific scenario

- To question the translatability & commensurability into the scientific mainstream of local modes of knowledge production
- To create awareness of ethno epistemological issues within academic milieus
- To train in situ. researchers and practitioners on field work
- To survey local systems of knowledge production, transmission, circulation and validation
- To create transcultural tools for acceding, recycling and transferring endogenous practices



## **Prospective framework**

### **1. Translatability and Commensurability**

Still open to debate, as another problem in the effort to find footbridges leading to intelligibility and communication, is the translatability between languages. The ambiguity and equivocity arising from phrasing the cognitive experience inevitably raise a variety of problems related to the possibility of meaning. How can a lexicon, as a local production meant for local use, be maneuvered in order to speak globally? How can a translated meaning still refer to the same milieu, context and atmosphere from which the word emerges -including its sustaining cosmo-physical foundations, its articulating modes of thought, its legitimizing psycho-social interactions and its verifying operations?

If a translation is always a negotiation of differences, interrelating supposedly comparable images and experiences of the world, seeking the passage of the different to the same making them equivalent, we may be drawn to the imperceptible philosophical and anthropological prejudices underlying this negotiation. We may also observe how a translation (while pretending to mirror a language in the light of another language, an experience in the light of another experience) gives shape to the translator's iconic experience. It is at the core of his way of relating to the world (as we

see for instance with *ojas, prabhava, virya, akasha ...*) that meanings become lost in translation since no common image can be affixed to them.

In this context, since science became a globally institutionalized practice, its unquestioned investment as a meta-rule for all other epistemological practices points out a rather salient quandary we inevitably have to deal with. We will then possibly enquire about the local knowledge, practice and experience systems that do not respond to any conventional scientific methodology or to any transposable technology, in order to explore the many issues of their incommensurability. Despite and against such apparent restrictions, a wide space will be opened up for the meeting of idiosyncratic paradigms, systems and technologies, in order to discover the ways of inviting, welcoming, receiving or importing them. Conversely, the suitable or possible modes on offer, transpose or export one paradigm into another, identifying the zone within which they may coexist and blend together their efficacies. In this way, questioning the status of scientific borders through a multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach will smooth those spatial, temporal and epistemic boundaries amounting for narrow band positions. Hence, at the risk of concluding that modern science is an ethnoscience, the Observatory will endorse the challenges of (in)commensurability, questioning frequently unquestioned agendas.

## **2. Iconic Experience at the crossroads of tangible and intangible**

Though the rules of local traditional knowledge and experiences are complex and differentiated they can be analysed and understood. If some, the tangible ones, act on the body, the world and the person, others, the intangible ones, seem to act on their image. Its study may demonstrate that, in fact, the image is imaginary. The quid being the status and the role assigned to imagination by European epistemology, after having stripped off and removed a proficiency that is still well nurtured in other milieus, such as in Indian epistemology.

It will be questioned how today the active or passive presence of some TKPE still activate or resolve different kinds of iconic experience. Would it be uttered by the means of its production, circulation or suppression, or also by means of, for example, communication practices, uses and political decisions, environmental effects, body or gender shaping? An overview on the systemic dynamics of all these floating systems could show how they draw an itinerary “mapping” of their connections to the world, and how transfers of all kinds of technology between groups and regions build up fresh iconic experiences.

When, at times, the experience appears to evolve between reality and imagination, across their often exchanged grounds, we may feel challenged to understand how imagination creates beings that are and act below the minima perceptible, beyond the thresholds of ordinary interactions. Observing their effects on the gross level, the image seems then part of the dense material universe, triggering those experiences of mostly iconic genesis we come across quite often as the defilement, the gift, the “magic” or the mimicry. We could explore their emergence from a physics that assists the mimetic operation of inter-subjective and inter-objective exchange and observe how, due to their fluidity, images change form and mix more easily than solids.

Being the image such a fluid object, we may be led to realize that the world is perceived through iconic rather than conceptual devices; or to wonder whether the image of the world is not

the world itself, i.e., the world just as it is perceived. To which extent each image of the world would be "mondificatrice" [world maker] as Bachelard graciously seems to translate the concept of *māyā*? In that case, if to create an image is to create a cosmos, in the double dimension of "cosmofaction" and "cosmofiction" mastered by the magician, the lover, the pujari, the tantrika or the healer, we could venture to find the intangible ownerless key that opens and closes the access to different worlds.

### 3. Tradition and Preservation

Traditional Systems of Knowledge, along with Practices and Experiences, often show characteristics of flexibility, interchangeability, polynomiality and irreducibility to mainstream proof system, with natural reference to invisible worlds. Distinguishing them from popular knowledge could show the ways traditional systems merge with each other and the different conditions for their emergence, production, access, circulation, distribution, reproduction, preservation, revitalization, replacement, erosion and suppression. That could suggest, for instance, a research line looking close at the differences between local health systems (ayurveda, unani, homeopathy, siddha, allopathy), home remedies, healing pujas, tribal nomenclatures and urban «health salads», mapping the differences between Techniques, Practices and Know-how.

To observe the multiple issues of preservation (why, what, how, by whom, with which purpose) could be attempted by identifying in each field what has been done and what awaits being done. As suggested by some research clusters, this could be carried out from any chosen point of view (anthropological, philosophical, esthetical, historical, philological, etc.), in any domain (health, religion, education, culinary, literature, painting, farming, storytelling, etc.), embracing tangible and intangible activity within the traditional way of relating to and merging with the world.

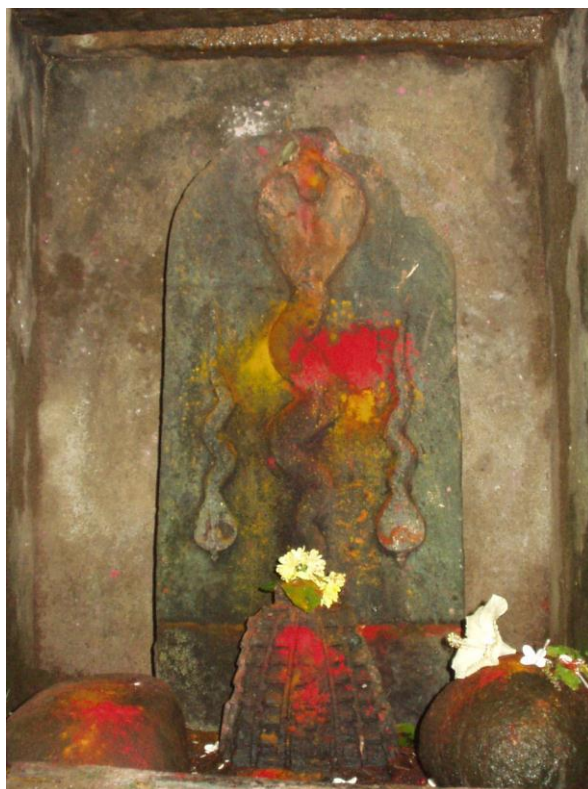
We could then quest which is nowadays (everywhere in the world) the role of institutions as archives, museums, libraries, exhibitions, documentaries, that try to give visibility to what would, otherwise, remain out of scene or evanescent. What is the purpose, legitimacy and accuracy of preserving and revitalizing objects, techniques and practices – and in whose interest is it to do so? How can cultural managers, making up the intangible heritage as a product, define its profile, create parameters to fix it accountably, to estimate profit and loss? In what way would such concern with protection from destruction and disappearance, follow along with, or oppose to, the natural flow of life that evolves to death, vanishing from the visible to the invisible?

### 4. Power, empowerment and dissipation

The Observatory is not concerned with the formation and evolution of societies as such. However, since some power and counter-power movements impact the production, circulation and suppression of traditional knowledge, practices and experiences (TKPE), some "political" survey could be attempted. Tentatively, a departure from the tutelage of governments, or other empowered institutions, hospitable to some "politically uncontrolled" ventures for legitimizing procedures – as validation/invalidation, exclusion/inclusion–, would be considered. The researcher could then proceed to minimal movements towards de-assistance, attempting to abandon the presumption of representing, monitoring, or of sustaining sustainable development, for instance. The spurt in the

growth of Ayurveda, fostered by the Ministry of Health advertising it on the television, promoting it, along with the Government policy for encouraging overseas medical tourism, distinctively illustrates this.

The underlying modalities of protectionism (to speak at the place of another, to encourage, to stimulate, to sustain, to protect, to nourish, to develop ...), which are increasingly leading to questions about how to be protected from such custodies, may be thoroughly explored. A look into actors involved with protection and regulation could be undertaken, along with the scrutiny of the role of the public domain and its power, empowerment and disempowerment, of the law, the rules and of the onus of responsibility itself. In what way can material and immaterial objects, techniques and practices be elements for shaping, or reinforcing, the power networks through which the social links are fixed? The administration of human groups, through the apprehension and identification of their practices, seems to be using them as devices to interfere in the conditions of such groups (e. g., dalits, adivasis, etc.). We could come to ask how, through management procedures, the invisible and often intangible part of the scenes, where the action and experience take place, succeed to convert subjects into objects safely governing them, dispensing fastidious negotiation procedures, as occurred around the sacred groves in Maharashtra.



## 5. Nature, humans, livings and experience

The human being seems to be an integrated system (i. e., interdependent through a wide network of interrelations, competitions and control) in a plurality of systems, of which the social and the ecological are the most evident. As a living system, it is also an open system, continuously in exchange with the environment, liable to changes occurring mostly in the zones of interconnection. There, even some microscopic fluctuations and small differences succeed in provoking a new

functioning regime of the whole system on which one who knows (as the healer, the sorcerer, the tantrika) can produce exceptional changes at a distance from the common functioning patterns. Such triggered mechanisms are generally unknown to technological sciences because numerous features of the living matter remain inaccessible to the laboratorial verification procedures. It could be from within such region of the human experience that we could unearth the range of modes for the passage to the non-human inhabiting the human - variously called divine, demoniac, savage, super-human, etc.

Once our cultural discourse on humanity, human, man and manhood still takes the person as an “individual”, separated from all other beings, from all other living systems sharing the same symbiotic space, it is noteworthy to take into account all beings, visible or invisible, intangible for the most of them. They are diverse complex living systems with which we are intermingled regardless of our awareness of them, of their elusiveness to our common sensorial technology, but that belong to as yet not consistently understood forces.

### Welcoming note

- The OIES strongly encourages diversity and a driving dynamic interaction of conceptual, methodological and empirical domains, among and across members, fields, networks.
- The OIES encourages researchers to put forward new epistemological approaches, to develop new and innovative instruments for a better understanding of the specificities and complexities of traditional societies.
- The OIES fosters research on modes of production, transmission, validation and circulation of local knowledge, exploring the multiplicity and diversity of scientific practices and questioning the idiosyncratic modes of thought, categorization, communication, transmission and codification raised by cognitive evolution.



## Methodology

The new operative mode entailed for a new intelligibility and a new experience invites the Observatory to attempt diversified atomic interventions. Such can be, for instance, in our milieu where images are a predominant local mode of access to knowledge to build up video and audio recordings for the creation of impacting epistemological units. Unsurprisingly, we may put forward less papers but more field work, more images, more films, more web, more community work.

In terms of research methodology, the Observatory will involve a broad range of procedures from the conventional survey, data collection, qualitative studies, ethnography, comparison or linguistic studies, to less conventional methods, such as the coalescence of pluri/trans/synchro disciplinary approaches, systemic approach, bridging research, karmic explanatory model and serendipity.

The systemic approach, taking each geographic and temporal zone, scientific, academic and lay communities as clusters, will assist to disclose the systemic dimension of local knowledge, practices and experiences and to maximize the potential to unveil their interconnectedness.

Serendipity will welcome sudden and unexpected events to avoid the rigidity entailed on the saturation of the methodological play, a creativity and imagination, and thus better answering to the stochastic nature of the cognitive production.

The web syndication will proceed to the most of the web3 technology, making use of its crucial resources for the overall advancements on the key challenges to global research. Far-reaching data collection and circulation once accumulated, stored and de-contextualized converts knowledge into what is no-longer knowledge, turning a static data corpus into dynamic knowledge through its use and appropriation. Thus, endowed with new meanings and put into practices, it will leave the academic arena to answer to individual and social needs and aspirations.

A case-sensitive translation will manage footbridges of intelligibility and communication beyond the strictly linguistic settings, avoiding the negotiations on differences at stake (of dissimilar images and experiences of the world) that bleach the passage of the different to the same.

The theory of *karman*, that is an explanatory model fully attempted in Indian epistemology that has not yet percolated into "western" explicative systems. With it, we shall attempt to ground some sort of "conceptual experimentation" that underpins the locus of control of human action, of one's own act. Then, by raising awareness about issues of individual and collective ethics, cosmopolitical choices, engagements and acts of urgent relevance to global development, the karmic paradigm could become the most empowering paradigm for our time.

In different ways the synchro-disciplinary approach is likely to show a means beyond the constraints of the comparative approach. Taking any object of research as a cluster, where space, time, discipline and pertinence are intertwined here and now, pinpointing the crossing times, spaces, disciplines and trajectories, may lead both to the "extreme different" or to the "extreme same", to the in-commensurability or to the invariance.

The Observatory gives priority to field work inviting the elaboration of new tools and daring to invent other methodologies, such as impregnation and feigning. Since the experience is an "event" produced by a cluster of micro-changes, globally acting as causes, we could venture to move from within the experience by a kind of "impregnation". Impregnation, close to the participative

observation of ethnographic work, calls for the porosity of the researcher in situ, and seems to be a suitable way for crossing gaps of experience. Furthermore, feigning is an attempt of ontological play (*lila*), consisting of a complete simulation, so that we are the other, in such a way that we effectively become the other. It helps out to suspend, as much as possible, the researcher's own borders, conditionings and patterns, allowing him to be aroused by the other. What's more, to reshape actively the interlace of cheerfulness, seriousness and playfulness, could soften the desire for control, rule, protection, guardianship and other such empowering hierarchic ways of interaction.

### Research clusters

- **Nadipariksha.** Starting from a comparative synchronic and diachronic survey of pulse reading technology, this cluster will resort to transfer function modeling for developing an experimental model and build an operative interface for Ayurvedic pulse reading technology, thus assigning it a place in the global therapeutic agenda.
- **Nadigrantha.** Challenging theories of time, this cluster will conduct anthropological and epistemological research on the practice of reading the so called *nadigrantha*, disclosing it through the synchrodisciplinarity of its linguistic, historical, anthropological, psychological and epistemological strands. The methodology will try to solve, or at least smooth, the inherent problems of ethnoepistemology for its basic epistemological alterity relating to the features of local knowledge and experience of *karman* and time; of ethnography for the case sensitive process of data collecting; of ethnology for the oral and modes of construction, preservation and transmission of the tangible (leaves) and intangible memory (text of the leaves); of akognosy for the broad sense of dis-ease, embracing misfortune and "evil", with *parihara*, as a therapeutic endeavour; of linguistics for its polyglossy and indeterminacy modes of translation set up.
- **Ecology of rhythm** in therapeutic landscapes. Addressing the seminal role of rhythm analysis in scientific milieus and its current outburst, this cluster will explore the scientific landscapes from where it emerges and towards where it evolves, with special stress on the therapeutic ones and their link with Indian science. Rhythm will be trailed as a common investigation line for dissimilar epistemological and medical paradigms, addressing diversified levels of contemporary problematics and, furthering the epistemological debates around ethnosciences, it will attempt the epistemic paradigm of a bridging research.
- **Ethnoecology.** Updating old techniques for recycling new materials, involving producers, schools and local networks to raise awareness of the wider, systemic enfolding connectivity of the modes of construction, preservation and reprocessing of human productions.
- **Jyotishshastra.** This cluster aims to uncover the underlying epistemic principles within the indigenous Indian systems of knowledge on physiognomy, omens, portends, bio-astrology that are part of the *Jyotishshastra*. These forms of knowledge, tapping into another kind of cognitive process, for the most part ignored with the advent of "modern" science, will be studied as specimens re-discovered through shastric philological studies alongside ethnographic work of their alive traditions.
- **Ethnobotany.** Building up inter-disciplinary research to define, with Ayurvedic parameters, medicinal properties of European plants not mentioned in Ayurvedic *nighantu* (*materia medica*).



Increasing its spectrum, the major output will be to reduce the strain on the already strained Indian Ayurvedic plant resources.

These are samples of clusters with some work in progress, but any topic can be added, from *marman shastra* to *tantra yukti*, from surgical practices to *rishta/arishta* in the medical *samhitas*, from ayurvedic pharmacy to harvesting technology, from *vastushastra* to recycling procedures (*punarnava?*).

### Activities

The central activities of the Observatory include research, publishing, education and training, networking with involved communities (scientific as non-scientific), collecting and disseminating knowledge and awareness by available means.

The activity of research clusters include research and field work, web-networking, periodic meetings, coordination of seminars, workshops and training courses, tutoring and coordination of research projects & educational programmes.

### IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- To establish the legal recognition
- To synergize staff and establish network of congeners
- To launch ideas about next public events
- To organize a workshop on Pulse Reading (Jejuri, February 2013) in order to prepare the International Seminar: Recontextualizing Pulse Reading Technology (Goa, November 2014)
- To delineate guidelines for investigation

