



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

# Modernity, Colonialism and Social Theory

Department of Sociology and Social Policy

## Speaker

Sujata Patel  
Indian Institute of  
Advanced Study

## Seminar Chair

Dr Susan Banki  
The University of  
Sydney

## When

12:30pm – 2:00pm  
24 February 2020

## Where

Room 341,  
Social Sciences Building,  
Science Road  
The University of  
Sydney

## Abstract

Since the 1970s when globalisation processes provoked a churning in social sciences, both social theory and theory of modernity have been reconstituted. While on one hand social theory has now defined its contemporary agenda as being a discussion on epistemic and praxiological concerns, the theory of modernity articulated in the global north frames globalisation as a perspective that relates to reflexivity, reflexive modernisation and risk society. I would instead argue that it is the theories emerging with the process of decolonisation initiated since the 1940s in the global South that provides a different take to both globalisation, modernity and social theory. These theories such as that of indigenous and endogenous perspectives, or of colonial and alternative modernities and that of the decoloniality not only present an epistemic alternative, but assert that modernity is a cultural and ideological project of organising an unequal and interdependent and interconnected history of capitalist globalisation across 500 years. It suggests that an inclusive theory of globalisation is possible only when Eurocentric positions on modernity are deconstructed and displaced and a new theory that embraces an inclusive comprehension of modernity is constituted. The above mentioned perspectives are rooted in particular contexts and are in turn based on praxiological concerns. These articulate ways to study of the economy, politics, cultural and environmental implications of contemporary global modernity. The presentation will also argue that the differing concepts and social theories suggest a need to accept theoretical diversity while attesting that it is the process of inquiry organizing social theory that asserts its universality rather than the substantive concerns of theory itself.

## About the Speaker

**Sujata Patel** is National Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla. Earlier she taught sociology at the Universities of Hyderabad, Pune and SNDT Women's University. An historical sensibility and a combination of four perspectives-Marxism, feminism, spatial studies and post structuralism influence her work, which covers diverse areas such as modernity and social theory, history of sociology/social sciences, urbanization and city-formation, social movements, gender construction, and caste and class formation in India. Patel is also an active interlocutor of teaching and learning practices, and has written on the challenges that intervene in its reorganization within classrooms and in University structures. She has coordinated a postgraduate online teaching and learning resource of 15 courses in Sociology for UGC/MHRD titled Epathshala; is the author of more than sixty peer reviewed papers/book chapters and the Series Editor of *Oxford India Studies in Contemporary Society* (Oxford, India) and *Cities and the Urban Imperative* (Routledge, India). Patel has been associated in various capacities with the International Sociological Association and been its first Vice President for National Associations (2002-2006). She was the President of the *Indian Sociological Society* from January 2016 to December 2017.

