

KARVAN-E-FIKR, 2012-13.

**CALL FOR PAPERS !!**

**THE INFORMAL CITY**

March 13-14, 2013.

A Two day Inter-University Student Seminar, organised by the Subject Association, Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi as part of its Annual Fest, "Karvan-e- Fikr" - 2012-13.

Venue: Mir- Anis hall, Mir-taqi-mir building, JMI

**Concept Note**

The Informal City till a couple of decades ago, by implication, meant only informal settlements. Today, it applies to a plethora of services and activities that the informal sector provides to the city and to the formal sector. A look at the literature will reveal varied attempts by structuralists and neo-liberals to describe and explain the causes of urban informality, as it is academically referred to.

The attention given by ILO to the term informal sector since its anthropological inception by Hart in 1970s led to its wide acceptance and popularity in academic and policy circles. While the introduction of the term "informal" served its explicit purpose of dismantling the notions of "culture of poverty" and "marginality" associated with the urban poor, it had one severe handicap. We are here referring to the dualism of formal vs informal and its varied avatars and forms such as occident/orient, "homo economicus"/"homo socialis", industrial/agricultural, city/ countryside, dynamic/ static, legal/illegal, manifest/hidden, licenced/unlicenced and organised/unorganised that have been reproduced till the end of the previous century. This dual conceptualization tended to obliterate the complex differentiation in the economy. Some of the recent research, taking note of this lacuna seems to avoid viewing the informal and formal as being on two opposite poles. There is a growing realisation to look instead at the "interstitial spaces" where the two merge to fully comprehend the fragmented character of the economy. Despite the ambiguity of the concept of informal, today it can safely be established that informal is not just something that resides outside the formal, organised, capitalistic, industrial, official and regulated. The inter-linkages between formal and informal, urban and rural, immigrants and city dwellers, legal and illegal are only beginning to emerge in the contemporary works surrounding informality. This entails looking at questions of inclusion, equity, sustainability, ecology, gender, diversity, and plurality with respect to processes of urbanisation and urban development.

Informality is not a purely urban phenomenon, as made out earlier. However, its various manifestations in the context of cities are an emergent concern because for the first time, in human history, the urban population surpassed its rural counterpart in the second half of last decade. The rate of urbanization also accelerated at an unprecedented rate for the first time since industrialization began. The majority of this urban growth is centred in metropolitan cities of the South. The implications of these facts on urban housing, employment, workforce, public health, sanitation, infrastructure, goods and services are quite scary. Further, given the spurt in illegal urbanisation of agricultural land and accelerated informal development within as well as outside the

cities under the conditions of globalisation and liberalisation, the focus of epistemological enquiry has now shifted to “urban”.

There is no doubt that issues that are clubbed under the rubric of “informal” have well marked historical antecedents in the Marxist and Liberal thought. The contemporary discourse, however, is centred in the Latin American empirical and planning tradition which some researchers hold can be a great source of analytical framework especially relevant to South Asia, Africa and Middle East. This framework goes beyond providing descriptive accounts of urban informality as seen in numerous monographs of slums in cities across the globe but also provides cues to address the political economy of the informality. The Brazilian planning experiments to rehabilitate and relocate the famous or rather infamous *favelas*, that have been heralded by critics, surely offer a critical ontological perspective to evaluate the role of different stakeholders and actors in urban governance to create a “slum free India”. Empirical reports by international agencies such as ILO, World Bank, and UN attest to the immense contribution of the informal sector to growth of the economy despite it being outside the purview of the official parlance. In this seminar, we propose to arrive at fresh insights based on theoretical, empirical and ethnographic work in the context of contemporary urban milieu.

**Original academic and research papers are invited around the following themes:**

- Theoretical debates around urban informality.
- Political economy of land acquisition, housing for urban poor, public health and sanitation.
- Issues surrounding the eviction, relocation and rehabilitation of residents of informal urban settlements such as slums, JJ clusters, redeveloped colonies at the centre and the periphery of the city.
- Implications of the spatiality of informal work and labour on gender, class, and ethnicity.
- Interventions by civil society, artists, filmmakers, journalists, architects, planners and informal urban actors to subvert the formal city.
- Politics of urban space and challenges for inclusive urban planning, development and governance.
- Debating the policies of and processes of de- informalisation in a comparative context.

Please note that the outlined themes are indicative and suggestive only. Papers touching upon other relevant issues around the theme of “The Informal City” can also be considered for presentation. The call for papers is open to UG and PG students, research scholars or research assistants/associates, studying in government approved educational institutions from all streams such as social sciences, humanities, law, management, art, architecture and planning. The presentations may use audio-visual materials wherever relevant. The expected length of the final paper to be submitted my range from 2500 – 4000 words to be presented in 15 minutes. Local TA will be paid to the paper presenters, chairs and discussants. The interested participants should e-mail an abstract of 250-300 words to be screened by the Faculty of the Department of Sociology, JMI to the following by February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

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# **KARVAN-E-FIKR**

Annual Festival Organized by  
Department of Sociology

## PROGRAMME

7<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 - Cultural Programme

(Details to be announced)

13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> March 2013 – Seminar on

“The Informal City”

(*See Concept Note*)

**Call for Papers:** Please send abstracts (not more than 500 words) to [Kulwinder10@gmail.com](mailto:Kulwinder10@gmail.com)