Abstract and Call for Papers

Re-imagining Religion, Caste, and Social Justice in South Asia
Third annual international conference on the Unfinished Legacy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar

Friday afternoon April 28 through Sunday April 30, 2017
at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA

Religion has been a major influence for thousands of years in defining and dividing South Asian societies. It continues today to play a decisive role shaping legal, constitutional, secular democracies and abetting or constraining economic growth. In several of the region’s countries, religion has been an instrument used by ruling political parties in South Asia to advance nationalist movements that exclude religious or indigenous minorities and sustain ancient systems of social division.

Religion and caste interrelate in complex ways in world religions present in South Asia and can lead to discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of groups within legal and democratic systems. It can affect economies graduating to middle income status dependent on expansion of a skilled workforce. Questions of gender and sexuality complicate the phenomenon of caste and religion in South Asia when studying mechanisms of social exclusion and apparatuses of oppression.

The conference will add a comparative approach with other religious and philosophical traditions in which religion has been a vehicle for liberation and social progress. One of the main questions we want to pose in this year’s conference is whether religious reform is possible in the South Asian context in comparison to other contexts, for example overcoming racial injustice in the U.S and poverty and oppression in Latin America.

The conference also invites papers on topics other than religion and that explore caste and social justice perspectives of South Asian societies.
The Call for Papers

Review of proposals for papers, panels and poster sessions will begin January 15, 2017
Deadline for proposals: March 4, 2017
Authors will be notified on the status of their proposals in a timely manner

Paper proposals should be between 500-1000 words. Papers should anticipate a 20-30 minute presentation. Submissions should be formatted as a PDF or Word and sent to: gds@brandeis.edu. Please put “GDS 2017 Conference” in the subject line. In the text of your email, please include your full name, affiliation, and contact information.

We invite papers that address any issues or questions related to theme of religion, caste or social justice in or comparative to the South Asian context. We also invite papers on topics other than religion that explore caste and social justice perspectives. Selected papers may be considered for publication with permission of the author in our new online, open access, peer reviewed journal on caste to be launched the summer of 2017. More details to follow.

- Religious reform empowering leadership and movements for inclusive democratic societies
- Religion and Representative Secular Democracy
- Religion and Social Policy
- Can religions and religious leadership address durable inequalities
- The growth of Islamophobia in South Asia
- The effects of religious and caste discrimination on economic growth
- The Philosophical and Religious Foundations of Caste
- Comparative dynamics of caste in different world religions within the South Asian context
- Interpreting religion in relation to the modern world view of secularism, modernization, gender equality and the formation of nation-states
- Toward liberation theologies in the South Asian context
- Similarities and differences on the influence of religion on social justice across two or more nations of the South Asia- India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.
- Empowering reform movements within majoritarian religions
- Religion, Ideology and the State
- Comparative Religions and Social Movements
- Religion, Society, Culture and Law
- Religion and the Political-Economy
- Minority Rights
- Religions in Comparative Contexts- South Asia, U.S., and Latin America

Papers that do not address religion may be approved for general panels including:
- Caste and uneven development in representative democracies
- Introduction to caste issues in South Asian countries other than India
- Caste in diaspora communities
• Legal and constitutional issues of caste
• Caste as economic constraint on national development

Collaborating institutions

☼ Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi
☼ India China Institute, The New School, New York
☼ The Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy at National Law School of India University, Bengaluru
☼ Boston Study Group
☼ W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
☼ Ambedkar International Mission, USA

GDS Center, The Heller School at Brandeis University  http://gds.brandeis.edu
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