

2022 AAS-in-Asia Symposium
Cultivating the Humanities and Social Sciences:
Addressing the Multiple Marginalities of South and Southeast Asia
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Panel

“Inequalities, Welfare and Democracy in South Asia”

Organized by
The Faculty of Humanities at Savitribai Phule Pune University in India

Panel Description

Issues of inequalities, welfare and democratic governance have always remained key themes of research and public debates in South Asian societies. Often celebrated as one of the most populous and diverse regions of the world, the region of South Asia is also known for its multiple and intersecting marginalities- which remained deeply entrenched in its traditional social order and were amplified and complicated as the post-colonial projects of welfare and democracy unfolded.

In our collective efforts to understand these complex contemporary histories of marginalities in different parts of South Asia, the team of budding scholars mentored at SPPU will present micro level case studies based on their ongoing research.

In the first session of the panel the case studies mainly engage in spatial and temporal interrogations to decode processes of domination and subjugation. The second session of the panel mainly focuses on issues of gender inequalities and underlines how these issues often remained trapped in caste/ community-based identities leading to reinforcement of women's marginalisation. The panel will also discuss state policies of welfare and their impact on women's lives.

Session I

- **Amita Kumari- Interrogating Temporal and Spatial Demarcations in History Writing: The Tentativeness of Santal Past.**

Conventional history writing identifies historically ‘significant’ events and weaves them into a coherent chronology. As this is done, the events get fixed in time and space. This paper proposes to interrogate the conventional rendering of the past into temporal and spatial boundaries. It picks up two “events/ processes” from the colonial past of Santals (an indigenous community in Jharkhand, India) to emphasise that these “events” are malleable and tentative, with no ‘definiteness’. It argues that the area (Damin-i-Koh) that was demarcated with boundary pillars to resettle the indigenous peoples and that got supposedly “completed” was never “complete” and remained porous, contested and changing, thus significantly impacting the lives of Santals living on the frontier. Similarly, the process of resettlement of Santals in the region that is generally assumed as permanent was never so – they kept migrating, resettling and dislocating. Neither can we demarcate the region where they settled nor can we confine their settlement within brackets of dates. The paper, thus, also tries to complicate the idea of ‘homeland’ that is generally associated with settlement and consequent attachment to a land. Drawing on the archival sources and Santal folklores, this paper focuses on the everyday of Santal past, the micro day-to-day realities and thus attempts to emphasise the disjunction between the day-to-day micro past, that is tentative and moving, and the ‘demarcated’, ‘definite’ past, as narrativised in history books.

Keywords: Santals, history writing, tentative, Damin-i-Koh, resettlement, homeland, temporal-spatial boundaries

- **MD UMAR FARUQUE-British imperial creation of the Northeast: Region, people and process of subjugation.**

The Northeast comprises seven states often categorised as militarised, backward, and violent-ridden regions. Even after seven decades of India’s independence, peace is yet to prevail in the Northeast. We have seen, in this region, the conflict between the states, ethnic communities, and hills and valleys. The region is so ‘divisive’ and ‘diverse’. Neither the term Northeast existed in the pre-colonial nor had a single or joint political entity. It was the British that swayed the region under one political authority and which was later embraced by the post-colonial nation-state of India. A security-oriented approach dominates the current scholarship in the Northeast. This paper studies the Northeast as a ‘region’ from a historical perspective.

Keywords: Northeast, Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa, Region, Buffer, Frontiers, Geo-historical entity.

- **Swati Das-Shifting Dynamics of a Region: Understanding Bihar through the Orchestra Practice**

This paper is trying to understand the region (in this case Bihar) through its popular cultural practices (in this case orchestra practice). While doing so it argues two things: one, the region is not fixed, it is shifting, it is dynamic and it involves a very complex meaning. One can understand the complex meaning of the region by combining other factors such as caste, class, gender, culture and politics of the region, the economic and historical factors and so on. Two, these shifting dynamism and complexities of any region could be better grasped by studying its popular cultural practices in details. Further, the region and its popular cultural practices both shape each other and provides a different identity to both: the region and its popular cultural practices.

Keywords: Region, Bihar, Orchestra, Bhojpuri Songs, Dance, Popular Cultural Practice.

- **H.A.S.U.Geethanjale:Ideological & Democratic Transformation of Public Space (As a Study of ‘Gotagagama’ Protest Zone in Sri Lanka).**

Sri Lanka has suffered through one of the world’s worst economic crises, that prompted mass protest and a political crisis. Although, authorities closed the Galle Face Green citing land development, protestors stormed into Galle Face Green. The process by which such heavily guarded private space was transformed into a civil society protestor’s struggle (Aragalaya) zone or a public space is not just a common occurrence. It contains a number of theoretical and ideological implications, questions and features.

As a consequence, the main research problem is how can the hegemonic private space be transformed into a democratic public space through civil struggles? The objective of this study is to investigate the nature of a private space with hegemonic dominance becoming a public space and the democratic values represented through it.

Keywords: Democracy, Hegemony, Ideology, Public Space, Symbolic Politics

Session II

Titles and abstracts of papers :

- **Hameeda C. K- Between the State and the Sea: Understanding Marginalisation of Fishing Communities through a gender perspective.**

From the colonial period to the present day, the state has undertaken various programmes to develop the coastal regions and cater to the welfare of its fishing communities in Kerala. Rather than ameliorate the social and economic situation of these societies, these undertakings have aggravated their marginalisation. Furthermore, neoliberal policies and development activities such as mining, coastal protection, coastal highway projects and the construction of ports have resulted in environmental degradation and the displacement of communities. Coastal fisherfolk have responded to these exploitative and marginalising measures through numerous protests.

This paper will provide a historical analysis of the intervention of the state in the development of Kerala's coastal region. It will study the impact that these measures have had on the state's coastal communities. Based on fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2022, the paper will then explain how men and women of the fishing community have responded and resisted the implementation of these programmes which have often amounted to structural violence. It will evaluate the differential impact of the state's policies on fishermen and fisherwomen, and by the same token, it will also read the gendered response of the community's protest movements. Through this, the paper will provide the much needed gender analysis of state intervention and societal reaction in coastal Kerala.

Keywords: Development, Marginalised, Kerala, Fishermen, Coastal Community, Gender

- **Manju Verma-Gender, Society, and Development: Analysing impact of State led policies on the Baiga Adivasi women in Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh**

This paper, by adopting a post-development approach, attempts to locate the subjective experiences of the Baiga women in Kutelidadar village, Madhya Pradesh. The notion of 'development' was introduced within the policy discourse, promising to deliver equal growth and social justice among various sections of Indian society. However, a cursory glance at the ground-level reality reveals the hollowness of its tall claims. State interventions have been known to attack Adivasi cultures by terming them as 'underdeveloped' while their policies on the ground leaves much to be desired. So far, official accounts remain lacking in their knowledge of Adivasi communities, which is reflected in the policy-making. It is critical to identify a framework that adequately addresses issues of tribal identities and their relations with the modern Indian State.

This paper attempts to construct the body of the Adivasi subject within the Indian official discourse and contrasts it with their actual lived experiences gathered from the fieldwork. In doing so, it would like to shift the current trend among developmental practices from fixating on individual empowerment to focusing on the dynamic power relations in which a society operates. Lastly, the paper would argue that an efficient developmental paradigm can be designed by building it with communities who are the actual stakeholders of this process.

This paper critiques the universalized categorization of a woman and the homogenization of women's experiences in mainstream development schemes and empowerment programmes. The presentation shall pivot on highlighting the assertions of state power in its implementation of the designated policies based on ethnographic experiences in the field.

Keywords: Gender, Adivasi, Baiga, Post-Development, Marginalisation

- **Priyanka Dwivedi:** छत्तीसगढ़ के शहरी मलिन बस्तियों में महिलाओं की सामाजिक और आर्थिक स्थिति का अध्ययन: मेरे शोध क्षेत्रकार्य का प्रतिबिम्ब (The study of women living in the urban slums of Chhattisgarh: Reflections of my Fieldwork).

To encourage financial inclusion, the Indian government started the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) in 2014. The test of any policy depends on how far it can address everyday problems faced by disadvantaged sections in society. There are numerous problems women face in a traditionally and culturally patriarchal society like India. Even though socio-political and economic changes have brought decisive shifts in women's life, challenges are far from over. This research focuses on studying the effects of the financial inclusion policy, PMJDY, particularly on women living in urban slum settlements in the Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Qualitative methodology is employed for this study. The researcher visited slums in Bilaspur to conduct a field visit, and this study draws its conclusion from the visit.

Keywords: Financial Inclusion, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, women in urban slums, poverty