

**Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta
R-1 Baishnabghata-Patuli Township
Calcutta 700094, India**

**Orientation Programme for Schedule Tribe and Other Marginalized
Groups**

***Tribe, Caste and Region: Indian Nation-State and its
Discontents***

28-29 March 2016

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) is organizing an Orientation Programme for Research Scholars and faculty members belonging to Scheduled Tribe and Other Marginalized Groups on the theme *Tribe, Caste and Region: Indian Nation-State and its Discontents* on 28-29 March 2016 with support from Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR).

Concept Note:

The idea of Indian nation and the nationalist historiography have been the sites of many contestations in recent decades. There have been many widespread theories concerning the idea of India and its nation-formation which dominated academic scholarship until late twentieth century. The common thread in these theories, it can be said, is a presupposition of the existence of a bounded national entity. It has been argued by some that heralding nationalism as an uprising of oppressed people against their colonial oppressors was belied even before partition and that 'the becoming of a nation and setting up of a state system are two different things'. For some scholars nationalism and colonialism, rather than being opposites, are enmeshed in a value system that operates in the interests of middle-class elites. The problem with many theories today, even those that have a critical view of nationalist historiography, is at some level an implicit acceptance of this nationalist myth that with all its imperfections the 'nation' exists.

The crucial point of contention for those who argue that 'the nation failed to emerge' is the pervasive and exonerative existence of caste in Indian society. This led to an apprehension regarding the exclusion of downtrodden castes in nation-formation, as has been expressed at several occasions even before independence by Ambedkar, Periyar and others. To become an indistinguishable part of the conceived Indian

nation, downtrodden castes were expected to become part of the Hindu imagination of the nation which needed a forced forgetting of their violent past. There have been many instances of lower-caste consolidations and fierce and passionate political assertions to resist this. It is clear that caste continues to challenge the idea of Indian nation.

However, it can be said that caste operates in the most pervasive manner over social relations at the regional level. Despite having a coalition government at central Legislative Assemblies, no state within the Indian union elects more political representatives from lower castes than from dominant castes. This fact merely indicates the consolidation of highest political power by few dominant Hindu castes despite their low numerical strength which is made possible by their assertion at regional level. In this context, can it be argued that if 'nation' is a space for Hindu brahmanical imagination, then region is that of a shudra one, since social, economic and political power is mostly consolidated by dominant shudra castes in many regions of our sub-continent? This scenario urges a critical scrutiny of present regional formations in the form of states in Indian union based on linguistic and cultural identities. As Ambedkar has noted, smaller states would bring the numerical proportion of lower castes and tribes close to that of dominant ones, which would increase their social and political exigencies. Moreover, our present federal units before and after their formation have and continue to experience many regional/sub-regional insurrections demanding political autonomy based on various aspects, the most recent example being the formation of Telangana state.

The idea of the Indian nation-state has also been contested by various women's movements in the past. Indian feminist literature, in its engagement with these movements, has interrogated some basic assumptions about what constitutes the subject of Indian feminism. However, in recent years there have been many assertions by Dalit women of their identities as separate from caste-Hindu women. These assertions, in the form of struggles, originated as a result of increasing frustration against patriarchy (within lower castes) and caste discrimination within women's movement. Although these struggles are yet to evolve into a broader political vision, there has been a proliferation of life narratives, interviews, personal accounts of Dalit women as well as statistical account of the incidents of violence and quantitative data about their well-being like education, resources and so on. While the empirics have cascaded over the decade, a deeper understanding of the subject of lower caste and Dalit women in the context of the nation-state is yet to emerge. To complicate matters further, religion has engendered a different set of problems not just pertaining to religious freedom but of obscuring and suppressing other categories of affiliation.

There is a deficiency in scholarship that should attempt to unravel heterogeneous forms of identity and categories of affiliation, such as caste, within what has been known to us as 'minority' categories.

Apart from lower castes and women, religious minorities and lower caste converts within these religions and sexual minorities continue to face oppression and exploitation by the state. On the one hand, certain identity movements have the potential of pan-Indian consolidation, while region-based identity movements are clearly restricted. However, the former and the latter often converge at the regional level. This could lead to the question that in the attempt to form national consolidations, how do these identity movements negotiate with region-based identity movements? Tribal population of the sub-continent, on the other hand, has been completely excluded from the twentieth century national imagination only to be later included as part of Hindu national imagination by Hindutva organizations and as communities that needed to be 'civilized' by Indian state. While development narratives have overshadowed tribal imaginations in many regions and those of insurgency in states dominated by tribal population, a struggle to resist these processes and to assert their democratic rights and freedom is still unending.

The Indian political landscape is marked heavily with these kinds of struggles in the contemporary scenario but the authoritarian post-colonial state grows increasingly nervous with every uprising- even minor ones. It has almost always reacted by employing violence to silence and suppress the marginal voices which have questioned the supposed cohesion of the Indian nation-state. A vast amount of scholarship hitherto has provided different ways of understanding the aforementioned themes but the fact remains that there is yet to emerge a basic consensus within academic scholarship, at least in acknowledging the existence of these tensions. It is this very fact that facilitates the need to revisit these themes and explore Region, Caste, Tribe and Nation in this context. This colloquium aims to unravel certain connections between these concepts and underline the contours of our academic scholarship regarding the same while simultaneously providing alternative perspectives.

The event is aimed at doctoral and postdoctoral students and young faculty (preferably, below the age of 35) whose on-going or recently completed work focuses on one or more aspects of the broad theme. Each day will comprise morning and afternoon sessions and the first two slots of each session will be devoted to lectures by senior scholars while the remaining time will be allotted for paper presentations by research scholars which is intended to give young researchers an opportunity to share their work with some of the faculty of CSSSC and

other senior scholars in the field. They are required to present a paper around the theme of the orientation programme. Each panel of research scholars will be chaired by one faculty member from CSSSC and a senior scholar will be allotted as a discussant followed by an open discussion.

CSSSC will reimburse to and fro travel expenses to selected candidates in AC three-tier rail from the place of their stay to Kolkata and will take care of their boarding and lodging. Scholars from ST and other marginalized category who wish to participate in the orientation programme may apply with their current CV clearly indicating date of birth, educational qualifications, category, current academic affiliation, mailing address and email IDs. Applications must include a brief description (between 700 and 1000 words in typed pages) of the paper they intend to present on the theme of the orientation programme. Applications must be sent via e-mail to the faculty convener Dr. Kiran Keshavamurthy (kkmurthy2005@gmail.com) on or before February 10, 2016. Please mention the subject in the e-mail as 'application for orientation programme on *Tribe, Caste and Region*'.

Short-listing of applications will be done by a Screening Committee comprising CSSSC faculty which will be final and no correspondence in this matter will be entertained.