

Fifth International Conference on the Unfinished Legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Dalits in Global Context: Rethinking Gender and Religion

October 24-26, 2019

**India China Institute, The New School in collaboration with
Brandeis University
Columbia University**

**University of Massachusetts, Amherst
The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, India
SAMATA Foundation, Nepal
CASTE: The Global Journal on Social Exclusion
Ambedkar International Mission, USA**

Call for Papers:

The complex intersections of caste, gender, and religious hierarchies in South Asia and beyond have led to discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of vulnerable communities. Despite some increased legal protections in caste-affected countries within and without South Asia, the Dalit community continues to face indignities ranging from daily humiliations, to extreme poverty and servitude, to violence and murder. These indignities are still largely shaped by understandings and practices of religion and underlying notions of purity and impurity as determined by birth and exacerbated by gender relations.

This conference aims primarily to critically explore the politics of equal dignity and equal rights for Dalits in a global context, especially around contentious questions of gender and religion, which have been sources of solidarity as well as discrimination. The “global” is more significant than ever in the context of transnational migrations, the persistence of stigmatizing social structures (for example, “caste” in India or “race” in the U.S.) in the diaspora, and religious racism – all of which have generated political solidarities, comparative strategies, deep studies of existing inequities, and reimagined possibilities of liberation.

The second aim of the conference is to strengthen conversations between emerging scholars and reflective practitioners, to analyze caste-based exclusion, discrimination and violence in South Asia and beyond. This second aim carries on the work of past years’ conferences, which were likewise committed to bridging the gap between academic and activist discourse and practice. Building conversations between engaged scholars and reflective practitioners from within and outside South Asia allows us to acknowledge the incommensurabilities as well as explore new possibilities of active solidarities.

Caste is not exclusively “Hindu.” It has penetrated other religions, such as Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Islam. Religion has played a significant role in both structuring and dismantling modes of discrimination. Religion has been used by dominant political parties in South Asia to advance aggressive, exclusionary, nationalist movements, and Dalits have used religious conversion to escape the structures of the caste system and to carve out their dignity. Women have actively participated in these conversion movements in order to empower themselves. At the same time, religion has framed and governed gendered violence, and Dalit women are at greater risk of sexual abuse, violence and trafficking than other South Asian women. The Dalit community has seen increased mobility, but, as Dr. Ambedkar predicted, caste-based discrimination has followed the Dalit diaspora beyond South Asia.

For this conference, we invite papers that address issues or questions related to the theme of religion, caste, gender, global engagement and social justice in or comparative to Dalit equal dignity and equal rights. These questions might include:

- How can we rethink and reimagine established and emerging debates concerning these issues on methodologies, research, policies, and trans-boundary collaborations?
- How have the hierarchies of gender and sexuality affected and been transformed by Dalit women and men?
- What are the personal and political actions that Dalit women and men have taken to negotiate with patriarchy, both inside and outside the Dalit community?
- How do we engage with Dalit women’s lives at the intersections of gender, caste, class, and religion?
- How have Dalits used practice and faith to claim dignity and build solidarity? How have they expressed their experiences and aspirations in literary, visual and other art forms to resist injustice and inhumanity?
- In what ways have Dalit women (and men) carved out a new transnational political space to imagine a brighter future? How are digital spaces being mobilized toward increased dignity?
- How can we analyze the intersections of caste and religion beyond Hinduism, for example in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism or Sikhism?

In collaboration with reputed universities and think-tanks, India China Institute is excited to host this year’s conference at The New School as the university celebrates its centennial in 2019, and reflects on its early days. The ideas of one of its founders, John Dewey, the pragmatist philosopher, radically influenced education and pedagogy around the world. Later in life, displeased with the old model of higher education, he co-founded The New School. While studying at Columbia, Dr. Ambedkar was a student of Professor Dewey and was greatly influenced by him, especially by his teachings on education, democracy, reconstruction, and social transformation.

Deadline for Submission of Abstract: June 10th, 2019

Please send submissions to DalitDignityConf2019@newschool.edu

We welcome submissions from people of all backgrounds, and especially encourage submissions from early-career scholars and practitioners, women and members of the Dalit community.

Please include the following items in your submission:

- An abstract of no more than 200 words
- Curriculum Vitae/Resume (2 pages max.)
- Brief bio (300 words max.)

Also, if you are a **practitioner**, please include a brief statement outlining why you are interested in sharing your work with scholars, and what you hope to gain from interdisciplinary knowledge exchange. If you are an **academic**, please include a brief statement outlining your work and why you are interested in sharing it with other scholars and activists.

Paper Guidelines: If accepted, academics will be expected to prepare papers of 2000-2500 words, and practitioners will be expected to prepare analytical thought pieces of 1500-2000 words. Also note that select papers will be chosen for publication in *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*.

Limited Funding: Please note that funds for this conference are limited, but some funding may be available to help cover expenses for select deserving applicants. **Please also include** a list of expenses you expect to be able to cover through institutional or external funding, and how much you might need help covering (e.g. you can pay for airfare, but need help with housing). *This information will not in any way influence the committee's choice of papers to be presented at the conference.* It will only serve to help us in the planning process, as we work to locate additional funds and housing for conference attendees.

Rising Scholars Prize: *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* has launched a competition for early career scholars on caste. A jury drawn from the International Editorial Board will select entered papers meeting the criteria of the competition for the award of up to two Rising Scholar Prizes 2019. Winners will be brought to Boston and New York for an award ceremony and short residencies at Brandeis, the New School and Columbia to coincide with the Fifth International Conference on the Unfinished Legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Awarded papers will be published by the Journal. The Journal is an open-access publication of Brandeis University with a 35 member International Editorial Board of leading scholars from 10 countries. Please see the Journal's website for criteria and applications. The competition is open to people of all backgrounds. We especially encourage submissions from women and members of the Dalit community. <https://journals.library.brandeis.edu/index.php/caste/index>

Global Dalit Change-makers Workshop: India China Institute and collaborating institutions will convene a workshop, strategically aligned to coincide with this conference. The purpose of the workshop is to connect early-career, emerging scholars, practitioners and policy-makers who are already working on issues of caste-based discrimination in South Asia and beyond, and to establish a road map for a multi-year research and social change initiative. The workshop will take place during the week leading up to the conference, and will involve approximately 20 participants. Select submissions from the pool of conference papers may be invited to also participate in the workshop. Please indicate in your submission if you would be interested in being part of the workshop.

Schedule: Main conference events will take place at The New School in New York City on October 24th-26th, 2019, with the possibility of a few events at Barnard College, Columbia University. Further information on the program and keynote speakers is forthcoming.

As part of ongoing efforts to curate and extend conversations on Dalit issues, **please note** that Professor Anupama Rao will be hosting the Annual Ambedkar Lecture series on October 17th-18th, 2019. Conference participants are welcome and encouraged to attend this relevant and important event.