Call for Papers to an Edited Volume

Intersections of Caste and Religion in Contemporary India

Editors:

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Life-cycle events in India are often determined by identities or “master statuses” acquired at birth, such as caste, which play a significant role in an individual’s everyday social life. While extensive studies have been conducted on the role of caste in Hinduism, the interplay between caste and non-Hindu religions in India has received less attention. Therefore, the objective of this volume is to explore the complex, contingent, and multifaceted nature of caste beyond Hinduism, particularly, in non-Hindu religions.

Previous scholarship has examined caste practices among non-Hindu religions, including Islam (Ahmad 1978; Sikand 2014), Christianity (Roberts 2016; Mohan 2015; Mosse 2012; Sahoo 2019), Sikhism (Jodhka 2002), Buddhism (Omvedt 2003), and Jainism (Cort 2004), revealing that while the form of caste may differ from that of Hinduism, its presence is increasingly evident. Scholars have noted that untouchability and caste discrimination have spread to non-Hindu religions, despite the absence of official support for caste-based practices in these religions (Waughray 2010; Jodhka 2002). Further, the Deshpande Report found that in many social contexts, Muslim and Christian Dalits are “Dalits first and Muslims and Christians only second,” suffering from socio-economic and educational disadvantages as well as discrimination on the basis of caste (Deshpande and Bapna 2010). However, it should be noted that the legal recognition of Scheduled Caste status is only applicable to Hindus and to adherents of Sikhism and Buddhism- religions which have been “legally re-absorbed as Hinduism”(Waughray 2010).

Caste in Abrahamic religions and non-Hindu Indic religions is a ‘hard to describe’ force; visible but hidden, pervasive but incomprehensible, argued against the core beliefs of the religion but essentially practiced, and profane but exists as sacredness embodied. As improbable as it may sound, an enlightening way to understand how deep-rooted caste and caste discrimination is in Indian societies is to explore how they are practised, integrated, and (mis)interpreted by monolithic Abrahamic religions that present themselves as ‘egalitarian religions’ and Indic religions that emerged as a reform movement against the caste system in Hinduism.

Scholars have put forward the argument that affirmative action programs should aim to promote empowerment and eliminate exclusion in minority groups (Waughray 2010; Hassan 2012). However, the present state of academic scholarship and social policies falls short in addressing the issue of exclusion experienced by Dalits in non-Hindu communities (Hassan 2012). To critically analyze the complex intersections between caste and non-Hindu religion
in India, this edited volume endeavours to explore the multifaceted ways in which caste operates as a pervasive and pan-religious phenomenon in the Indian subcontinent.

In pursuit of this objective, a formal call for contributions has been extended for an edited collection that is currently being developed for a reputed publishing house. The proposed edited volume seeks to centralize non-Hindu religions in the caste debate in India and solicit chapters that offer insights into how various religions in India practice and embody the caste system. The volume invites scholars to examine the intricate relationship between non-Hindu religions and caste in India.

We invite papers on a range of themes and questions, including:

- What is the impact of caste on the social, economic, and educational status of Dalits in non-Hindu communities?
- How do caste and religion intersect with other forms of identity, such as gender and class, within non-Hindu communities in India?
- How has caste affected the life-cycle events, such as birth, marriage, and death, in non-Hindu religions in India?
- In what ways has culture or tradition been used as a proxy and justification for caste oppression, and how can demands from the oppressed be considered as paths to reconciliation and healing?
- How do micro-events perpetuate caste discrimination and humiliation, and how do the dominant group use them to maintain their status quo, ethnic superiority, privilege and status, cultural hegemony, and control of Bourdieusian economic, social, cultural, and political capitals?
- How have non-Dalit members of non-Hindu communities perpetuated or challenged caste-based discrimination within their own communities?
- Why does caste survive in non-Hindu religions and how do different political interests either support, reject, or banish the institution?

Please send us an extended abstract of around 500-800 words highlighting your research questions, arguments and data sources and a brief CV (max 2 page) by 30th June 2023, in Word format (.docx) to workshop.hss.iitd@gmail.com. We will send our decisions on abstracts by 15th July 2023. Accepted papers will be due on 30th September 2022. The length of the final manuscript is expected to be between 5,000 and 7,000 words (including all end notes and bibliographies).

References


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