

6th South Asian History Conference 2019
on
Mapping the Marginalised in South Asia with
Special reference to the Legacy of Guru Nanak Dev

In commemoration of 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev (1469- 1539 A.D), the apostle of peace and founder of Sikhism, the Department of History, Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab) will be organizing its 6th South Asian History conference from 1-3 February, 2019 at Punjabi University Campus. As mandated this Conference aims to bring together historians, academicians, research scholars working on the countries of South Asia viz. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Myanmar to cover the gaps in South Asian historical studies.

The post-colonial discourse in South Asia with reference to the marginalised is the result of the dialectics between continuity and change, tradition and modernity. At the close of the twentieth century, South Asian society has emerged through various social, economic, educational, religious and political transformations. After gaining independence from the imperial powers, the countries of South Asia took steps to build themselves on sound political, economic principles and to build egalitarian societies with varying success, although efforts in this regard had been started by socio-religious reformers and national leaders during the colonial rule itself.

The present state of the marginalised groups is not static or inert and issues of change, contradiction and dissonance are easily discernible. Amidst growth oriented development in South Asia, there is a lot of discontentment which reflects the increasing problem of marginalisation. Economic growth does not effectively solve the problems of the marginalised in the face of challenges like regional disparity, gender inequality, poverty, unemployment, social security, etc. As the roots of the present distress lie in the past, an historical analysis of marginalisation and exclusion which has prevented individuals and groups/communities from full participation in social, economic and political life as opposed to the dominant class is necessary. Among these, may be included women, dalits, tribal groups, adivasis, denotified tribes, the nomadic and semi-nomadic, industrial workers, marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and the like.

One of the significant groups among the marginalised in the South Asian region has been the women. Guru Nanak Dev and other social reformers since the 15th-16th centuries have stressed upon the upliftment of the status of women. But despite consistent efforts from time to time it is observed that the women as a class in South Asia have been victims of patriarchal set up of societies and

women of marginalised sections are doubly victimised on the basis of class and caste. This has resulted in forays into Gender Studies, with Women empowerment as the core remedial measure for the ills afflicting the society such as; female foeticide, female infanticide, honour killings, female suicides, dowry torture, women trafficking, sexual harassment, rapes and so on. Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing gender equity and the professed commitment of the state to bridge the gender gap, still there are reports of gender discrimination in varied forms across the countries of South Asia.

Guru Nanak Dev laid emphasis on the need of building an inclusive society and fought against the Brahmanical Varna system and advocated equal rights for the lower varnas. The problem continued to prevail in society with further exclusion and marginalisation of the Dalits, which is closely associated in the denial of property rights, civil rights and lack of access to education through different periods of history. This deprivation was further accentuated by the practice of untouchability. There were movements among the Dalits and others to fight for their basic rights for a dignified life. These movements were also a revolt against a socio-religious system which failed to provide a meaningful response to Dalit needs and aspirations. The emergence of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as a national leader for weaker sections was the beginning of a new era of social reform movement in India. The principles of Dr. Ambedkar's politics were based upon the inclusion of every individual in the public sphere in which he could participate like anybody else.

The social construction of modern Indian society, with legislations in place has to a major extent helped in ameliorating the cause of the deprived/marginalised sections of the society. However, the current studies on the marginalised sections, highlighting the centuries old deprivation of certain groups, have only strengthened the stereotypes, creating much bad blood and will undermine all the efforts done by the State and various groups in developing a harmonised society as a whole.

Agricultural stagnation has led to agrarian distress and the large scale suicides by small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers especially in India, which points towards a major agrarian crisis. The lot of the industrial workers is no better. Similarly, the tribal people still practise primitive modes of production and live a nomadic life based on hunting and food gathering. The vulnerabilities of the tribes in terms of poverty, landlessness, illiteracy and marginalisation in the context of Forest Rights Act need to be examined.

There are many layers to the marginality of these groups which makes their problem more complex. Although the margins continue to have basic rights but they are characterised as deficient in relation to the dominant class, which is elite in character. It has taken a long while for the margins to gain centrality of focus in academic debates. Studies on them have moved from being peripheral to

central but they need to be studied with a pinch of salt because in an effort to highlight the deprivation of the classes since ages, they might, on the contrary, create ill will and rancour, affecting the moral fabric of the society.

Another debate on this issue centres around the equality and egalitarian approach within the deprived/marginalised sections. The aware and the generations of the erstwhile deprived sections who have made good use of the legislative measures and the doles extended by the successive governments since 1947 and who henceforth enjoy all the affluent features of life needs to be studied. Are these affluent groups within the Marginalised sections willing to allow the privileges to percolate down to the actually needy and the deprived sections needs to be analysed. If not, it will lead to an intra-class conflict and will further complicate the issue.

Certain questions need to be answered. What has been the impact of socio-cultural forces, political dynamics, religious formations and economic development on marginalised groups in South Asia? How far have the State institutions, norms and procedures contributed to the existing disconnect between the state and the marginalised? There is a dire need to evaluate the various efforts made by the contemporary governments in South Asia to reach out to the poorest and the most marginalised communities to ensure the holistic development of society.

While celebrating the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, an effort is made to study the different aspects of Guru Nanak Dev's life from historical perspective. The aim of the conference is to see how far the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev are relevant even today in touching upon various common problems afflicting the society of South Asian countries.

Themes suggested but may not be limited to the following:-

- 1. The Marginalized in South Asia: Theorizing, Mapping and Assessing.**
- 2. Categorization of the Margins**
- 3. Multiple levels of marginalities.**
- 4. Customs, Practices and Beliefs of the Marginalized.**
- 5. Guru Nanak Dev and the contemporary world**
- 6. Guru Nanak Dev's message to humanity.**
- 7. Guru Nanak Dev's teachings and its relevance in South Asia.**
- 8. Guru Nanak Dev's travels in South Asia.**
- 9. Guru Nanak Dev and Social Reforms.**
- 10. Guru Nanak Dev and his Writings.**
- 11. Efforts of Socio-Religious Reformers of Nineteenth century.**
- 12. Role and input of the Government and State institutions.**

13. Policies of Social Exclusion towards the Margins
14. Role and Impact of the intellectuals and Political leaders.
15. Role of NGOs, society and the private sector.
16. Media and the Margins.
17. Marginalized Groups and Democratic Transitions
18. Literary writings, Cinema and Margins.
19. Legislative Measures.
20. Impact of Globalisation and Liberalisation.

Call for Abstracts: The soft copy of the abstract with a maximum of 500 words, double spaced (in Times New Roman, font size 12) written in English should be sent for acceptance at sahcptaabstracts@gmail.com on or before 10th January, 2019. After scrutiny of the abstracts the authors will be notified regarding the acceptance of papers on 15th January, 2019.

Final Submission of Papers: The soft copy of the full paper, double spaced (in Times Roman on size 12), within 15-20 pages written in English should be sent at sahcptapaper@gmail.com. The deadline for paper submission is 25th January, 2019.

Registration: All participants are required to register. The scholars are required to register before or on 25th January, 2019. The registration fees (which includes accommodation and food for three days) for Indian Scholars is Rs. 1250/-, for scholars of other countries is 50 USD. The registration fees for Indian research students are Rs. 1000/-, for research student of other countries is 30 USD.

Mode of Payment: The details regarding mode of payment will be conveyed shortly.

Accommodation: The organizers will provide accommodation to the paper presenters only.

Publication: The proceedings of the conference will be duly published by Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala.

Other Information: Further details about the programme will be updated online.

Contact Information: Send in your queries at sahcptaqueries@gmail.com or contact the under mentioned.

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