

# **43<sup>rd</sup> All India Sociological Congress, Lucknow University**

## **Neo Liberalism, Consumption and Culture**

### **Titles and Abstracts of Speakers**

#### **Presidential Address**

##### Rethinking urban studies today

Sujata Patel, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad

In order to understand the nature of urbanisation, sociologists generally start by assessing the data made available in the census to examine the levels of urbanisation and classify the 'urban' into small, medium and large towns together and further into metros and mega-cities. For historical reasons, urban sociology have focused their research gaze on big cities such as Bombay, Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata which grew during the colonial period and rarely on small and medium towns which are proliferating today. Additionally, when studying megacities a large number of studies have focused on slums suggesting that these represent both poverty and inequalities. The surfeit of such studies has made urban sociology in India analytically weak and methodologically poor though in recent times some path breaking new studies have attempted to change this orientation.

In the last few years, interventions by demographers, economists and geographers have alerted sociologists against relying solely on census data. This literature has instead suggested the need to examine how capital accumulation, state policies, migration and mobility have organised complex spatial patterns creating new regions and how these regions are related to each other in uneven manner across the country. Social scientists have given this patterning terms such as intermediate urbanism, subaltern urbanism or rururbanisation. Using these positions, the paper asks what kind of questions sociologists need we ask, what kinds of data can they use to answer these questions and what kind of analysis can they make in order to comprehend the complex processes that organise contemporary urbanisation. The paper discusses in particular the following three issues: intersections of class, caste and gender in structuring work and labour, the organising of spatial inequalities and exclusions and the nature of contemporary elite domination.

The paper argues that that a deconstruction of existing academic discourse on the 'urban' will help sociologists to understand contemporary modern India, of its patterned caste-class-

gendered interlinkages and of its relation with spatial inequalities. It thus asks whether a study of urban India is essential to understand contemporary modernity in India. If so, what kind of old and new theories of modernity and that of capital accumulation do we need to engage with when we do urban sociology? It concludes with a discussion on some of these theories.

## **Radhakamal Mukherjee Lecture**

### The Vulnerability of Expert Knowledge: Observations on a Global Intervention on TB in an Indian City

Veena Das, Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University, USA

Most discussions on expert knowledge in public health interventions posit an opposition between the power exercised by experts and the vulnerability of forms of knowledge that stand outside the techno-scientific enterprise. In this lecture I offer an analysis of an ongoing public health intervention aimed at reducing time to diagnosis and increasing treatment adherence for tuberculosis in the city of Patna in Bihar. I argue that though the rhetoric of public health interventions draws upon expressions of messianic time and heroic battles against disease, the unfolding of the actual interventions is much more like a bricolage in which various bits and pieces ranging from production of estimates, to figuring out the nature of provider markets have to be assembled and constantly revised in view of local exigencies. An understanding of milieu and of the ecology of intervention, as well as the specificity of tuberculosis as a biological and political entity, draws from the quotidian register of life much more than public pronouncements of international and national organizations would have us believe.

## **Plenary One**

### **The Urban Transformation of India**

#### Globalizing the Provincial: Translocal Circulations and Urban Change in Regional Towns

Carol Upadhyya, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru

Urban sociology in India has focused mainly on social and economic transformations and patterns of urbanization in large metropolitan cities. While sociological interest has recently extended to small towns, provincial urban centres are usually framed as nodes within regional networks serving rural hinterlands and connecting them to more distant sites. However, many

regional cities and provincial towns across India have become directly linked into wider transnational or translocal networks, due to international migration, global capital investments or other kinds of mobilities. These networks in turn serve as conduits through which people, capital, cultural products, political ideologies, and new social imaginaries circulate into and through these 'provincial' spaces, influencing development agendas, local economies and property markets, political aspirations, urban planning and governance practices, alignments of class, caste or community, or the social mobility projects of diverse groups. Drawing on research carried out in smaller cities or towns in three states (Mangalore, Karnataka; Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh; Anand in central Gujarat) between 2010 and 2015, the paper explores some of the ways in which urban development processes are reshaped by translocal social ties, transnational financial flows, diasporic interventions, and the interests of international capital, multilateral development agencies working in consonance with regional political elites. The discussion focuses in particular on how real estate markets in regional towns and adjoining rural areas have become imbricated in transnational circuits of accumulation centred on speculative investment in land, and how these processes of 'provincial globalisation' are inflecting processes of urbanization, rural transition, economic change and class formation in the three regions. This comparative exercise will hopefully provide insights relevant to understanding urban and agrarian transformations more broadly in India.

#### Indian Cities and Its Current Forms of Capitalist Urbanization: A Case of Amaravati

Purendra Prasad, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad

The development of Amaravati as the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh has drawn wider attention for various reasons: for its 'success' in pooling thousands of acres of productive land from the farmers 'voluntarily' in a short span of time, its stated vision to build a world class city like that of Singapore almost entirely by foreign capital, adopting swiss challenge method to select a managing partner company to build the city etc. If Amaravati and Naya Raipur in Chattisgarh are emerging as future models of new capital cities, the old metropolitan cities such as Delhi and Kolkata have new inner (outer) cities Gurgaon and Rajarhat respectively signaling the new sign posts of becoming world class cities. In this imagination, every city in India today small, medium and big are aspiring to be part of world class cities discourse, which is being facilitated by the state's smart cities project. This paper tries to analyse the underlying forces that have been contributing towards the current moment of urban transformation in India. The story of Amaravati will be presented to explain the transformative process particularly how speculative capital and rapidly changing land market has been shaping the urban space more so different categories of labourers. It will be supplemented by the secondary literature from other Indian cities to generate a discussion on the nature of transformation of urban space.

## India's Emerging Risk Urbanism: Cities, Commons, and Neo-liberal Transformation

D.Parthasarathy, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

Recent debates and discourse on the urban commons have thrown up new issues beyond those elaborated in the scholarly and activist discourse on ecological or resource commons, as well as cultural and knowledge commons. With stalwarts like David Harvey entering the fray, the privatization, appropriation and commodification of ecological and civic commons is being linked to processes of neo-liberalism, entrepreneurial governance and their urban impacts. Based on long term research in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, and studies of emerging trends of urbanism in India's coastal zones, this paper attempts to recast the debate on urban commons from a sociological perspective, focusing on emerging risk urbanism that threatens small and big cities, rural hinterland and urban peripheries alike.

The discourse on urban commons has broadly borrowed from three theoretical perspectives, Marxist and neo-Marxist, Institutional, and Cultural-Ecological. There is some theoretical confusion however, and Indian scholars are still finding their feet in attempting to conceptualize and theorize sound empirical research based on a grounded and 'global south' lens. The urban commons are created, used, and transformed by the state and capital, at different scales and regional locales, even as enclosure and expropriation of populations from a range of commons threaten lives and livelihoods, as part of a larger process of urban transformation.

Deploying a social geography of law approach, this paper frames of the problem in terms of coastal urbanism, intermediate urbanism, and new claims and contestations over the commons, facilitated by new governance arrangements based on spatial zonation, and new urban and environmental institutions. Where the commons are already under severe stress due to climate change, environmental degradation and resource exploitation based capital accumulation strategies, new forms of urbanism are emerging that exacerbate risks and vulnerabilities not just for entire cities but also for specific communities, groups, and urban systems that are already marginalized owing to their caste and class status, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location.

### **Plenary Two**

#### **The Middle Classes and its Aspirations**

## Spatializing Class: New Urban Spaces and the Making of New Class Identities in India

Sanjay Srivastava, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi

This presentation discusses the making of class identities through processes other than relationships with means of production. It explores class as an aspect of new forms of urban development and the ways in which class identities derive from new forms of alignment between different actors such as middle-class NGOs and Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs), private capital and the state. Through focusing upon two specific spaces in the privately developed city of (new) Gurgaon, the discussion seeks to illuminate the meanings of class as series of entanglements between multiple processes of urban modernity. The spaces I utilize as case studies are the 400 acre Bio-diversity Park and the leisure space known as Raahgiri where streets are cordoned off to vehicular traffic.

## The Muslim Middle Class: Structure, Identity and Mobility

Tanweer Fazal, Centre for Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Beginning from the early 1990s, the policies of economic liberalization and the attending socio-cultural changes have revived interest in the study of the middle class. The new middle class is purportedly the principal cheerleader for a market-centric polity and economy. But does the expansion of the middle class suggest the rise of new social groups hitherto outside the frame? As we come to comprehend the impact of these changes on the Muslims of India, several questions follow. Has the re-structuring of the economy prompted a rise or expansion of the middle class amongst them? Since empirical studies have ascertained that a large section of the Indian Muslims are self-employed, do the new recruits into the middle class depend on self-employment and skills of entrepreneurship? In what terms is this new middle class among Muslims, socially and culturally, different from the earlier salariat class that depended largely on public employment? The subject of middle class formation allows for yet another exploration, one pertaining to the social composition of India's Muslim middle class. Is the new middle class socially diverse that embodies the middle caste *ajlafs* and the lowest, *arzals* thus suggesting a process of upward mobility? A co-relation therefore needs to be built between self-employment, caste based occupational pattern and opportunities that market driven economy has facilitated. Therefore, what constitutes the Muslim middle class is a subject to be probed, but beyond that, in what ways are its cultural attributes and aspirations incongruent with middle class standards and norms, need to be examined. The paper is based on an ongoing project on Muslim middle class and draws from a variety of data sources---narratives, statistics and life-histories --to comprehend the route, process and impact of middle class formation among Indian Muslims.

## Markets, Aspirations and Contestations

Aseem Prakash, School of Public Policy and Governance, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad

In the current scheme of socio-economic development, markets represent the ideal enabling individuals to transcend sectarian identities and traditional boundaries to make choices and freely pursue a vocation that expresses individual potential and personality. Against this backdrop, based on a primary field survey of Muslims and Dalits engaged in various sectors of the 'new economy', this paper explores how different social identities and class locations perceive the potential of the market, engage with it, negotiate their participation and contest privileged class and social identity.

The paper is arranged in four sections.

The first section explores the theoretical underpinnings of market based development and how it shapes the aspirations of the individuals /social groups who have avowedly been left out of the 'hitherto' state based development initiative. The section concludes by theoretically reflecting on the state versus markets dichotomy in the context of aspirations of individuals/ social groups and argues for a more synergetic yet critical reading of the opposing theoretical locations. Within the ambit of the framework outlined in this section, the subsequent two sections are elaborated.

The second section is based on field narratives of Dalits and Muslims who are either self-employed or are the owners of firms in the 'new' economy. It builds on the field narratives and financial data of economic activities of Dalits and Muslim in the 'new' economy.

The third section conceptualises the aspirations of individuals through analytical categories such as, 'stepping up', 'hanging there', and 'thinking of moving out', that elucidate their views on state institutions, markets (peers) and civil society. More importantly, the experience of success in the first category as well as 'range' of failure in the latter two categories not only re-shapes the aspiration but also clears spaces for a variety of contestations.

The fourth section concludes by spelling out an alternative framework to understand aspirations and contestation in the context of markets based development.

## **Plenary Three**

### **Cultures of Power, Domination and Hegemony**

## A churning public discourse and a new hegemony

Maitrayee Chaudhuri, Centre for Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

India has witnessed significant social transformations over the last three decades, since the onset of liberalization in the early 1990s. There is considerable debate on the scale and nature of this development. This is not what one addresses here. What it does address here is the makeover of India's public discourse and the unprecedented role of media in this. It seeks to enquire how the media has helped unsettle old established modes of thinking and create a new hegemony. This I argue has been made possible with a 'tangible' expansion of democratic participation in public discourse, a fact not unrelated to the extension of India's middle class on the one hand and the exponential growth of the media on the other. Choice rather than constraint is the buzzword of not just market driven advertisements but state driven policies. A new common sense defines new India: profligacy rather than thrift; self rather than the collective; presentation rather than content; image rather than text. These shifts mark a carefully cultivated new sensibility of instant information and shortened span of attention.

My central argument is that what defined the logic of commercial advertisement- its 'closed circle of ideas'- its magic system have over time suffused public discourse. Today, common sense—wisdom of the 'ordinary' person, knowledge so self-evident that it is beyond debate—has become a powerful political ideal globally. We thus have a paradox of greater 'choice', wider 'participation'; instant SMS polls; antagonistic sound bites; on one hand and concomitantly less investigative reportage coupled with complete innocence of history on the other. The paper rests on the understanding that an analysis of this media led new hegemony has to take into account both context and text; and importantly revisit the concept of 'ideology'. One further argues that there is a symbiotic relationship between the new form of media presentation and its substantive content. To understand this, a couple of points needs to be taken into account: (i) redefined relationship of the media to the state and the market; (ii) a reconfigured state and market, initiating a refashioned India; (iii) new media and the blurring of boundaries between the old and new; (iv) the ascent of a managerial discourse that defines media content and form; (v) and finally ubiquitous presence of media-old and new- in the everyday lives of people.

## Neoliberal Economic Transformation and Rural Elites

Sonalde Desai, University of Maryland College Park, USA and Senior Fellow, National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi

The past decade has seen rising demands for reservation from a variety of relatively prosperous agriculturist communities such as Jats, Marathas, Patels, and Gujjars. These demands and underlying frustration have crystalized in a decade when the economic narrative tends to focus on high rates of growth and declining poverty. How do we reconcile these two competing trends? Using data from the National Sample Surveys between 1983 and 2012, this paper shows that before the adoption of neoliberal policies, Indian economy was dominated by large and medium farmers who were both numerous and able to earn a reasonable standard of living. However, the past decades have a decline in their economic power, turning once prosperous farmers into subsistence farmers. Simultaneously, there has been substantial increase in the incomes of white collar salaried workers and professionals, while job opportunities for white collar work has experienced only a modest growth.

Data from India Human Development Survey show that many agriculturist families find almost all avenues of upward mobility blocked. Successive pay commissions have created a rising gap between salaries of lower level government workers and workers in private sector, making government job highly desirable. However, shrinking government employment makes this an almost impossible dream. Coveted modern occupations in private sector demand skills and credentials that are beyond the reach of most rural students. Although educational attainment in rural India has grown, a vast proportion of rural students attend institutions that fail to equip them for the modern world. Not surprisingly, these blocked mobility aspirations coalesce into a demand for reservations in government jobs and institutions of higher learning resulting in political mobilisation of agriculturist communities.

### The Middle Class and the Gender Dividend in India

K S James, Professor, Centre for Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

A young population consequent to demographic changes and an expected emergence of middle class are considered to be critical part of harnessing demographic dividend opportunities for India. The impact of demographic dividend on effecting economic and societal changes in a country is now well recognized. While the demographic dividend potential is well recognized, there are many pessimistic views expressed on the ability of the country to take advantage of demographic changes due to several institutional constraints. Of these, lack of significant improvement female labour force participation and other gender related indicators have attracted wide attention. It is widely accepted that to become demographic dividend a reality, promoting gender equality and increasing women's labor force participation are more important which ultimately improves the lives of all, women and men. It means that gender dividend become a pre requisite to take advantage of a demographic dividend. This paper

examines the demographic dividend opportunities for India through a gender lens. First it examines the concept of gender dividend in the context of demographic dividend. In the process, the paper discusses the economic, societal and familial changes that are expected during the demographic dividend stage with particular attention of gender dividend. Subsequently, the paper looks at the empirical evidence from India on taking advantage of demographic and gender dividend that was possible within the rapid demographic changes taking place in the country.

## **Plenary Four**

### **Regional Plenary: Neoliberalism, Consumption and Culture in Uttar Pradesh**

#### Understanding Consumption Growth and its Distribution in UP under “Neoliberalism”

Ravi S. Srivastava, Centre for Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Country-wide, neoliberal growth has delivered strong gains in income and consumption to the top deciles of the population with much smaller and more volatile changes occurring at the bottom. The acceleration in growth that took place in the period of the economic bubble, combined with certain social policies, further pulled up the income of wage earners in this period. Although this phase of high growth has ended, the patterns of consumption that were associated with this period remain, and recent policy measures are systematically aiming at reinforcing income and consumption growth at the top of the pyramid.

However, regional patterns of growth and accumulation have remained quite diverse in India with increasing inequality among states and regions. The case of UP is one where slower growth has increased the gap between the state and the all India levels of living. But at the same time, the greater integration of markets, especially labour markets, has had different implications for different groups in the state.

The adoption of a neoliberal growth regime by the Central government in the early 1990s paved the way for provincial governments to fashion neoliberal agendas in the light of their own circumstances. UP embraced this agenda in the early post-liberalisation period, announcing changes in its labour and industrial policies. Further, land acquisition and crony deals were expected to attract big businesses and foreign capital. But contrary to expectation, new capital inflows remained tightly concentrated in the national capital region while older centres of growth in the state deindustrialised. The slow growth experienced by the state was

not a result of a more disinterested pursuit of the neoliberal agenda (which may be seen to be the case, when the state is compared to some of its neighbours), but because it failed to fashion a broader strategy of growth and development. These failures were not only a consequence of neoliberalism but of a political economy followed by successive regimes. Two major elements of this failure manifest themselves in the quality of the education system and the inability of the system to produce the quality of jobs demanded by educated youth.

The slow growth of the material economy is further associated with spatial disparities (regional, rural/urban) in income and consumption growth. However, while the rural elite are able to bridge the rural-urban gap by finding a foothold in the urban areas, sections of the rural poor are able to increase their share of consumption through intra- and inter-state migration and by being absorbed in the informal sector and wage economy. The pattern of population mobility is clearly an important factor with implications for consumption preferences and the consumption pattern of the mobile population in the state. This may have had the effect of dampening aggregate disparities in consumption to some extent (to the extent that data is available, we would expect consumption disparities to be lower than incomes originating in the areas). But the same changes may have led to greater intra-group disparities and new patterns of social, economic or political exclusion and marginalisation. These are issues which we hope to explore in this paper.

Moreover, the crisis remains severe (at a different level) for large numbers of youth who seek regular employment and who are unable to compete for jobs outside the state. The media industry has homogenized economic aspirations to a very large extent. The failure of being accommodated in the real economy leads to the kinds of swings in the political preferences of the youth that has been witnessed in the state in recent years and in successive elections.

This paper will use macro data and surveys (CSO, NSS) to explore some of the above issues.

### From Social Justice to Aspiration: Changing Politics of the Lower Castes in Uttar Pradesh

Sudha Pai, National Fellow, ICSSR, and Retired Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

During the 2000s lower caste politics has undergone significant transformation in Uttar Pradesh (UP). This change is part of the larger shift in UP from the *politics of social justice to aspiration* among the lower castes. While the 1990s experienced rise of political consciousness among the backwards and Dalits demanding social justice. The 2000s have witnessed the weakening of identity politics and return to an agenda of development based on aspiration in an era of globalization; and second, decline of the SP and BSP, providing space for the revival of the BJP.

The latter taking advantage of these changes has attempted to create a more socially inclusive party. Beginning in the early 2000s and during the 2017 electoral campaign, the BJP used a twofold strategy - based on the ideology of 'non-Brahmin Hindutva'- of development and caste/communal mobilization to attract the OBCs and Dalits. With the decline of the social justice parties, the BJP leadership attempted to create a *new Hindutva social coalition* consisting of the upper castes and sections of the OBCs and Dalits to build a larger vote bank, giving the lower castes a feeling of being included within the 'Hindu' identity. Simultaneously, UP being a backward state Narendra Modi's campaign promises of bringing in rapid development raised the aspirations of the backwards and Dalits of catching up with the better-off states and improving their economic status.

The paper will be in two parts: the first will illustrate how the BJP through its inclusive neo-Hindutva strategy of mobilization was able to gain the support of the OBCs and the Dalits. The second will discuss the 2017 election to understand the massive victory of the BJP based on the twin agenda of Hindutva and development.

#### Neo-liberalism and Dalits: Narratives of the Most Marginal Communities of Uttar Pradesh

Badri Narayan, G.B.Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad

Neo-liberalism is seen as opportunity-provider and resource-builder for all citizens. It produces strong growing market, infrastructure, real estate and many other things necessary for development. In this lecture, I will try to reflect upon how many of most marginal Dalit caste has become victim of this neo-liberalism. On the one hand, it provides many opportunity and on the other, it snatches space of survival from some of the Dalit communities and forces them to convert as mere labourers. It discards Dalit castes with their traditional skills and indigenous knowledge and compel them to become unskilled labourers.

I will discuss communities such as Bansfore (Bamboo cutter), Sapera (snake charmers) and sarvan (who traditionally use to clean ears) of state like Uttar Pradesh. They are in dilemma that how to deal with this neo-liberalism. They don't know how to negotiate with market carrying their traditional occupation, ignorant of language of modern state, unaware of what position they should take regarding modern form of marketing. This lack of adaption pushes them to periphery. They were forced/ displaced from villages but were not accepted in cities too. They get space in slums, fringes, towns located on periphery of cities. So marginalization become part of their everyday life in both ways- real and constructed.

This lecture will also discuss how the neoliberal culture includes the assertive margins in its sphere and excludes many of the small, marginalized Dalit castes as a by-product of its functional character. These communities amongst the dalits are unable to demonstrate their presence. This lecture will try to understand the dialectics of contradiction in the neo-liberal India with special reference of Uttar Pradesh. It also investigates the elements and factors that constitute exclusion of the marginalized in this neo-liberal society.