



## INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES KOLKATA

SALT LAKE CAMPUS ● 27/D, DD BLOCK, SECTOR I, SALT LAKE, KOLKATA 700 064

### *Call for papers*

Papers are invited for a three day multi-disciplinary conference on *Examining Intersections: Caste/Gender Narratives in India* to be held from **8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016**, in the Salt Lake Campus of the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK). A five-hundred word abstract in English of a paper written for this conference may please be sent to Dr. Nandini Ghosh / Dr. Supurna Banerjee at **idskcastegender@gmail.com** by **18<sup>th</sup> September 2015**. Authors of selected papers will be informed by 5th October, 2015. Full paper will have to be submitted by **January 8, 2016**. The Concept Note and the themes of the conference are given in the next page.

Director, IDSK

Concept Paper for Three day Conference on

## **Examining Intersections: Caste/Gender Narratives in India**

**8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016  
Institute of Development Studies Kolkata**

Identities are narratives, stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are and who they are not. People's identities are not homogenous or discrete, but almost always intersect, wherein there are both collaborations and conflicts based on the identity one prioritises at any point of time. Sociologically all identities subsume hierarchies, whether structural or graded inequality both on a global as well as in local spaces. Different class, gender, racial, caste and other locations along the social and economic axes are marked by differential power positioning. This has a clear impact on the structuring of relationships and life experiences of people encased in such power differentials. Explorations of structural hierarchies have usually prioritised single dimensions of power relation, ignoring that stratification implies oppression based on multiple axes of identities that shape the specific conditions of existence and belonging. This indifference of social research is perhaps compounded by the methodological difficulties in engaging with intersectional identities. Researching and writing about multiple forms of differentiation without essentialising these categories or not fragmenting the research subject, poses a significant methodological challenge.

In a multi-layered society like India the social hierarchy is determined by one's position within these complex webs of social identities. Prominent amongst many other significant dimensions of identification are caste and gender identities, both which are based on culturally accepted and valued notions regarding bodies, pure or polluting, dominant and dangerous. For a long time, the intricate interconnections between caste and gender in India were largely ignored, if not negated by people, both in academia and in social movement. In the last few decades, however, there has been greater engagement with caste and gender, using multiple and plural perspectives, aligning modern enquiry with contemporary social and political developments. The women's movement in India has had to recognise and reconcile the challenge of interpreting caste in terms of the multiple markers of marginalization – of which gender remains the most significant. On the other hand the dalit movement also has to resolve the lack of recognition of gendered discrimination, in terms of determining hierarchies or distribution of resources, within caste oppression. Genderless caste and casteless gender has thus characterised our understandings of these markers of social stratification and the politics surrounding it. Some perspectives assume that caste is solely a Dalit question and bypass the need for critical interrogation of the complex histories of caste and gender oppression. Imbuing the caste question into analysis of gender actually brings to fore triple marginalities—class, caste and gender enabling us to unearth how in various complex and everyday ways these intersect to shape the conditions of marginalities. These

are clearly indicated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu, the Dalit literary and autobiographical upsurges in Maharashtra during the 1960s, prevailing incidents of honour killing, atrocities against the lower caste women—all incidents index that the centrality of caste discourses and hierarchies in the gender narratives.

While speaking of multiple marginalities as expressed through the caste-gender-class nexus, there is a danger of overt focus on victimhood. Without ignoring the conditions of difficulties, it is important to also focus on the agency of those studied. Whether through activism, protests or through everyday modes of resistance, they have carried on struggles for their existence. This voice also needs to be unearthed from the multiple narratives of deprivation which generally characterise such studies. Finally, while a large section of such work tends to focus on gender and caste from the woman's perspective, there is a need to also understand the inter-linkages of caste discourses with discourses on masculinity. How do caste discourses define masculinity? What does caste-class mobility spell for changing notions of masculinity? These are important questions which need to be addressed to arrive at a holistic understanding of caste-gender intersectionality.

The aim of the conference is to explore this complex relationship between two powerful ideologies of caste and gender through raising certain questions. How can we interrogate caste as a resilient social institution from a gender lens? How can the hegemony of a homogenous feminism as a default frame of reference be challenged? How can we conceive of studies on caste beyond the discourse of victimhood? How can the private lived experiences and public practices of anti-caste struggle be brought into the analysis of caste and gender?

We invite papers with a strong empirical core on the broad themes of

- Gender-caste discourse: Concepts, theories and methods.
- Labouring Bodies – Education and Livelihood
- Polluting Bodies: Caste Repositories/Representation, Sexuality, Violence
- Spatial Bodies: Space, Culture, Community
- Activism and agency: Identity politics, political awakening and reactions