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18th AJEI Workshop

March 29th-31st 2016 / Pondicherry

AJEI - French Institute of Pondicherry

“Multifaceted Inequality in Contemporary India”

The “Association des Jeunes Etudes Indiennes” (AJEI) is a student organization whose members are young researchers coming from various disciplines of the human and social sciences (from masters degree to postdoctoral level) whose area of research is South Asia. Every year, a research seminar in France and a workshop in India bring students and scholars together in order to discuss the topics and papers presented.

Since 1998 the AJEI organizes an annual workshop in India with the support of international and local partners. This year we propose a three day workshop with an opening lecture, daily presentations discussed by senior researchers, methodological workshops, and a concluding session. One of our goals is also to interact informally, and build relationships, towards creating a strong international network of researchers.

Call for Papers:

India has a long history of discrimination and exclusion based on interdependent relations of power and domination between social groups. The resulting hierarchical organization has contributed to the persistence of an unequal access to resources, public services, and rights among the population. Inequality, which appears to be intrinsic to the social fabric of India, requires special attention in the changing context of contemporary India.

The structural economic changes based on the liberalization process that began in the 1980s [Kohli, 2006]¹, have been accompanied by a process of spatial reconfiguration, as well as a transformation of social and cultural structures. The social polarization of the economy² and the spatial segregation between urban and rural areas as within urban areas³, has led to much evidence of inequality, which has persisted and sometimes even deepened in the last decades. If some have claimed that there has been a period of unprecedented improvement in living conditions thanks to liberalization [Bhalla, 2000]⁴; others consider the 1990s as a period of widespread impoverishment and rising inequality, attributed to structural adjustments policies implemented by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund [Shiva, 2001]⁵.

International institutions and intergovernmental organizations⁶, generally think of inequality as a quantitative phenomenon and base their policy making process on quantitative indicators such as the Poverty Index (developed by the World Bank) or the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index the (UNPD⁷). However, these indicators are built on measures of economic well-being and appear not sufficient to evaluate the uneven access to development or to encompass the complexity of the socio-economic and cultural factors determining inequalities in India⁸. In fact, inequalities in contemporary India are embedded in a complex

¹ Kohli A., *Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005, Part I: The 1980s*, Economic and Political Weekly, April 1st 2006.

² Harriss-White B., *India working: Essays on society and economy*, Vol. 8, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

³ Deaton A. and Drèze J., *Poverty and Inequality in India. A Re-Examination*, Economic and Political Weekly, September 7, 2002, pp. 3729.

⁴ Bhalla S., *FAQ's on Poverty in India*, mimeo, Oxus Research and Investments, New Delhi, 2000.

⁵ Shiva V., *India Corporatisation of Agriculture Disastrous*, The Guardian, March 7, 2001.

⁶ In particular: UNDP (United Nations Development Program), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund).

⁷ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/understanding/indices>.

⁸ Oommen M.A., *Bank and Poverty Reduction, A Critique of World Development Report 2015*, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. L, No 38, September 19, 2015.

system of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and perceptions and analysis of cultural, historical, social, spatial and political factors is required for a comprehensive analysis of their dynamics.

In addition to a macro level, inequalities need to be considered at a micro and meso level, enabling overall analyses that could include the overlapped sub-realities, in terms of spatial scales and social classification. Empirical studies are needed to apprehend the individual and collective behaviours that tend to reproduce the inequalities, as well as to enlighten the structural conditions for their resistance, enforcement and weakening.

This workshop aims to bring together Indian and French students from a variety of disciplines to debate the possibility of going beyond the simple quantitative measure of inequalities by integrating a wider vision of this phenomenon. The intention is to develop an intersectional and multi-level analysis of the concept of *Inequality* - including discussion of the ways in which it is defined, the forms in which it manifests, and ways of countering it - in the contemporary Indian context. We propose to contribute to an heuristical vision of inequalities, with the help of in-depth case studies, which will allow inclusion of spatial, social, cultural and symbolic capitals in the analysis, alongside economic capital. We strongly encourage contributors to put forward work that discusses methodological issues and presents explorations with experimental mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Inequality along three axes:

Inequality in theory and practice: expanding conceptual and methodological frameworks

We propose, as a starting point, to question the concept of Inequality which can refer to different definitions and imply different means of action. Indeed, activists, trade unionists, non-governmental organizations, politicians, policy makers and academics have mobilized different approaches regarding the ways in which inequalities can be measured and addressed. We encourage contributions that conduct a thorough analysis of definitions, and their implications for means of action and goals in inequalities studies. This could include theoretic work on understanding, deepening, or broadening definitions and empiric work on assessing parameters and measures to study Inequality as a multifaceted concept. This raises the question of the methodology that can be used to analyze the complex and multidimensional

aspects of inequality. We invite discussions regarding comprehensive approaches to designing and carrying out research in this area.

Power and Status: Domination, Social Exclusion, and Inequalities

Inequalities in contemporary India are often grounded on class, caste, religion, or gender-based hierarchies which intersect and reinforce each other. The key role of social segmentation⁹, in shaping inequalities, needs to be reassessed in the context of the complex spectrum of socio-economic arrangements, affiliations, positions and hierarchies that determine capitalistic structures of accumulation and deprivation [Harris-White, 2003]. In fact, with the intensification of social interactions and economic competition in the neo-liberal context, the gap between the social groups who are able to achieve or maintain monopoly over resources and those who are kept in a marginalized position is reinforced by the social capital. As Breman asserts in his great contribution on Indian informal economy, a large part of the population is maintained in a state of social and economic immobility resulting from the chains of exploitation, precariousness, and violent forms of social discrimination¹⁰.

Therefore, if the emergence of the “Indian middle-classes” – that brings important changes in consumption habits, collective aspirations, uses and representations¹¹ – reflects the economic dynamism of the country, this should not overshadow the mechanisms of social exclusion underlying the *Shining India*. For this axis we invite work that aims to study and understand continuities and evolutions of the various forms that Inequality can take through the reconfiguration of status and power structures.

Fighting against inequality: individual, collective, and institutional response

The fight against inequality, whatever its form, is based on different levels of contestation or action. Whether it is an individual initiative to denounce some inequality in a remote village, a collective response through a political party or a caste association, a citizen movement or even a national scheme implemented by Central Government, all these actions have a role to

⁹ Bhattacharya [2004 : 38] defines *social segmentation* as “*cleavages along caste, community and class lines [which] creates divisions among them*”, in (eds) Bhattacharya *et al.*, *Interrogating Social Capital, The Indian Experience*, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2004.

¹⁰ Breman J., *At work in the Informal Economy of India: A Perspective from the Bottom Up*, Oxford University Press India, 2013.

¹¹ Deshpande S., “The Centrality of the Middle Class”, *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 125-150.

play and require particular attention, especially since they are strongly complementary. These actions, whatever the scale, may reduce social and economic discriminations, but on the other hand, may create other forms of inequalities¹². We propose in this third axis to pay special attention to the way in which mobilizations against inequality, according to these different levels of actions, take form in India, and to discuss their efficiency.

Descriptions of axes are only indicative and communication proposals can fit into one or more axes or pertain more generally to the theme of the workshop.

Propositions of contribution:

To submit a proposition of contribution, you should first send an abstract (500 to 1 000 words), in English, before **January 4th 2016** to the following address: ateliers.ajei@gmail.com. After deliberation by the Organizing Committee, a **notification of acceptance** will be send to the author by **January 20th 2016**. In case of acceptance, the **full text (8 000 to 10 000 words)** will be requested in English before **March 4th 2016**.

Each presentation will be done in English, will last about 20 minutes, and will be discussed by a specialist. Please include with your proposal: your last name, your first name, your disciplinary field, your level study, your institution(s) of affiliation and your research topic.

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¹² Overdorf J. and Asenkat I., “Lutter contre les inégalités : la politique de discrimination positive”, in *L'Inde, l'autre géant économique*, 2005.