

# AJEI

Association  
Jeunes  
Études  
Indiennes



## CALL FOR PAPERS – AJEI



23th-25th of April, 2019

**Venue : Centre des Sciences Humaines, Delhi**  
**2, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Road, New Delhi 110011 India**

21st AJEI workshops :

## **Of mediation and power : Intermediaries in the South Asian societies**

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The Association des Jeunes Etudes Indiennes is a 20-year-old association, which has always been powered by young scholars and researchers, passionate about South Asian studies. Its aim is to bring together South Asian and European young researchers in a space of knowledge sharing, support and networking. As the association members keep working continuously to wave ties between the contemporary fields of South Asian research and the young researchers who contribute at shaping it, its two main academic events are the seminars in France, and the workshops in India. We are thus proud to announce that the 21st workshops of AJEI will be held this spring in Delhi.

South Asian societies are characterized by a certain salience of the clientelist and paternalist power structures (Ramirez, 2000), be it in the working life (Breman, 1985, 1996), but also in the so-called “traditional” village structures (Dumont, 1967). The South Asian

political life is often marked by overwhelming practices of corruption (Gupta, 2012 ; Parry, 2000), and by strong connexions between the political world and the organized crime (Sanchez, 2010) : exerting one's power is thus an impossible task without the intermediary's help. Thus, numerous academic works have been published on labour intermediaries (*mistris* - Picherit, 2012) and the political ones (*dalals*) who can easily be the same men (Picherit, 2018). Like a two-faced Janus, the intermediary is by essence an ambiguous figure that people searching for protection cannot avoid. Therefore, what role do these labour and political parties middlemen, these moneylenders and musclemen play in the production or reduction of inequalities in South Asia? Why is the intermediary simultaneously evoking so-called old-fashioned and coercive social structures and overwhelming everyday social practices? Questions about intermediation are not only circumscribed to individual trajectories. Bodies like the Unions, the NGO's, and the local political branches act as intermediaries between the people they pretend to represent (Dutoya, 2016) or to defend and the State or the corporate world. For this workshop we would like to propose five problematic axes, which are not exhaustive but shall give ideas for the future participants.

1. Politics and intermediation : middlemen, and the representative bodies.

South Asia is an area where the politics are heavily determined by clientelist policies, therefore studying the role of the political intermediaries in South Asian politics is without doubt a heuristic object for political scientists. For this seminar which aims to be the place of expression for a multiplicity of political approaches, we shall consider quite a broad definition of the intermediate in politics : the agent who plays a role of a drive belt between the people and the State. He can be a local *gunda*, a big man representing in a clientelist way the dwellers from a slum, or a local *dalal* going from home to home to exchange services against votes. Proposals may then question the apparent paradox that these clientelist policies seem at a macro level to exacerbate inequalities (Gupta, 2012) but still constitute a trusted way of representation by many social groups who see into them people who can "get things done" (Michelluti, 2010 : 46). Is it because there are "survivances of a customary tradition" (Landy, 2014), because they are filling holes left by the State in terms of public service ? Contributions may also question the role of the intermediate political bodies, for example local political parties, in the making of national political life and the construction of the national identity.

2. Labour and intermediation : representation of the laborers or politics of exploitation ?

Two main stakes are arising in this thematic axis. The first one is the well-documented but still fruitful question of the labour intermediaries : be them called *mistri*, *thikedar*, *sirdar*, in the different South Asian languages, they remain central, since the colonial times, in the recruitment processes. They remain key elements in controlling the labour but have in certain circumstances been also determining agents in defending the workforce (Ruthven, 2006). Becoming a labour gang leader is also a difficult but typical trajectory of social mobility among subaltern workers. The study of labour recruitment networks and of pathways of social mobility through these networks add stimulating possibilities for research, and in these regards, the intermediaries may also be the connecting agents, which are not always the jobbers. The second stake concerns the unions. As the unionization is globally decreasing in the Indian Industrial worlds with the informalization of the labor market, new ways of getting benefits through direct demands to the State, by the welfare programs (Agarwala, 2006), or new union political movements of peasants, for example, are leading to new research questions on the

worker's representation and on the intermediate bodies involved in it. While the study of the conventional unions remain a central topic on South Asia's labour history (Ahuja, 2002). Contributions aiming to enlighten all these new and older issues would be very welcome in our seminar.

### 3. Intermediating the economic exchanges.

These thematics are undissociable from the question of the economic intermediates. Even older than the one of the jobber, the figure of the moneylender was central in processes of land dispossession, in particular the one of the tribal people, and in dynamics of bonded labour in the colonial era. It is then a euphemism to say that their reputation has been far from good. But the introduction, in the early 2000s of so-called alternatives at the moneylender system such as the microloans, have given mixed results, in terms of reducing inequalities and offering possibilities of social mobility (Guérin, 2015), while moneylenders see, indeed, to remain essential elements in South Asia contemporary economic life. Works studying the stakes related to the informal loan practice in South Asia would be then more than welcome. Intermediaries are also key agents in connecting the small Indian companies to the Global Value chains. Sales agencies and Marketing firms are blooming nowadays and constitute a good object of study for the ones who may desessentialize intermediations, as it is often seen as a negative and parasitic practice.

### 4. Intermediate bodies : a just advocacy ?

« What kind of relationship – of complementarity or competition, of mutual help or mutual hindrance, of convergence or divergence – are the NGOs likely to develop with the governmental organizations that work in broadly the same fields into which they are entering ? (Béteille, 2000 : 318).

The fourth axis that can be discussed is the burning question of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as intermediaries in social, economic, political and health development in India. If NGOs have an important place in political and social life as a dynamic process of collective life transformation of development and democracy in India (Béteille, 2000), we may wonder how such organizations take place as intermediation program between populations which they help and pre-existing public and state policies action programs in India (health care, environment associations, etc.). Such as the work of Fabienne Martin on *Sarthak Manav Kushtashram* lepers helping associations in Rajasthan (Martin, 2005), the Association Jeunes Études Indiennes would be pleased to discuss about emerging forms of tension and/or cooperation between local and national NGOs (the « civil society participation », Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu, 2002) and state sovereignty (Atlani-Duault and al., 2005) dealing with social care of Indian populations. Talking about involvement of NGOs tends to raise the question of who has the authority to exercise decision-making power over public policy issues. Thus, a discussion about global welfare intermediaries will be an opportunity to focus on the mode of action of international NGOs, concerning their ability to actively respond to the demands of local populations and their ability to act for the well-being of individuals. But the role played by international NGOs and humanitarian aid is nowadays extremely controversial. The mode of action of such organizations, supported by a social and solidarity approach, also tends to reflect a past colonial domination (Siméant and Dauvin, 2004 ; Farmer, 2009, 2013 ; Giles-Vernick and Webb, 2013). Are international intermediaries the active representation of a

structural violence of social and economic inequalities that are still played between worldwide North and South populations ?

5. From aristocratic patrons to trendy agents : intermediaries and the production of cultural goods in South Asia.

The figure on the intermediary is central to the world of arts : they produce, promote, fund, market the artists (Roueff, Sofio, 2013). In a South Asian context, Nita Kumar has shown on her monograph on Banaras' popular culture how practices of patronage were essential to its musical life because it was the local noblemen and patrons who were organizing the festivals and venues, sometimes directly inside their palaces (1988). Therefore they were unavoidable intermediaries between the people and Banaras' famous classical Hindustani music performers. Julien Jugand's historical anthropology of Patronage in Banaras' musical milieu, showed how this role of intermediary as producer and promoter shifted gradually from the local patrons and elites to the State in the post-independence period (2014). We would love contributions watching at these historical processes in other Indian cities, or, for example, in South India, which could encompass the dancing practices. Then, are the producers and promoters the only intermediaries? Christine Ithurbide's work shows us that in the Indian contemporary artists subcontract the production of their installations to makers who may themselves subcontract again some parts of the production to other artisans or labourers (Ithurbide, 2016) : the chains of art making lie then on a complex network of intermediaries rather than in the hands of the one renowned artist who signs the artifact. We would welcome researchers working on these specific issues but all contributions looking and intermediaries and cultures would be greatly appreciated, even if their focus goes beyond the scope of the questions listed above.

6. Intermediaries in South Asia : A Reflexive and Methodological Concern.

For it is a young researchers' interdisciplinary community, the Association Jeunes Études Indiennes has a great interest in the fieldwork in the data analysis and into methodological research. In a context of decolonization of the thought in the Social Sciences, and in a geographic area which has witnessed the emergence of post-colonialism (Appadurai, 1996) and the subaltern studies (Spivak, 2013), the questions of the conditions of knowledge production and of the relationships of power which take place within the situation of data collection are more essential than ever. The Association is also interested in the methodological reflection that the issue of this Workshop could hold, suggest and question. Thereby, we also cordially invite young researchers to come and talk about issues encountered in the course of their fieldwork research, dealing with the exploration of the notion of intermediaries and intermediate bodies (such as the examples presented in this project).

Proposals of contributions (max : 500 words) shall be sent by March, the 1st, 2019 at [ateliers.ajei@gmail.com](mailto:ateliers.ajei@gmail.com). The papers (max : 40 000 signs) will be due by March, the 25th.

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