

**Department of History and Culture  
Faculty of Humanities and Languages  
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi**

**Invites you to a Panel Discussion**

On  
***Caste Across Time and Space in Indian History***

**Speakers:**

1. **Prof. Kumkum Roy:** *Caste and the Aryan Question*
2. **Prof. Nandita Prasad Sahai:** *A Caste in Transition: Sunars, Social Mobility and Disciplining the Household in Early Modern Rajasthan*
3. **Dr. Padmanabh Samrendra:** *The Misnomer Called Caste*

*Date: 31.1.13 (Thursday)*

*Time: 12.15 PM*

*Venue: Seminar Room, Department of History and Culture, JMI*

**Caste and the Aryan Question**

The presentation attempts to explore the implications of the Aryan question, one of the hardy perennials of ancient history and urban upper caste/ middle class perceptions of the past. This will be done in terms of a series of issues (a) discussing the association of Aryan with a language-speaking group and how this shapes our understanding of caste identities/ relations (b) the (mis) representation of the Harappan civilization as an Aryan/ Vedic civilization (c) the issues around the 'homeland' of the Aryans and the question of the indigenous origins (d) the connections with Vedic rituals and issues of stratification and possible ways ahead.

**A Caste in Transition: Sunars, Social Mobility and Disciplining the Household in Early Modern Rajasthan**

That the 'caste system' was not a rigidly frozen structure ever has been long acknowledged. Social movement of 'castes' in the Middle Period, however, has been usually studied in the context of heterodox sects, mostly the Bhakti and the Sant tradition in north India and the Varkari in south India, providing avenues for mobility. This paper, through a case study of the *pavan jat* Sunars or goldsmiths of 18<sup>th</sup> century Rajasthan, maps the process of their 'Rajputization', related transformations in gendered household practices, and their use of written records to assert claims to superior entitlements.

**The Misnomer Called Caste**

Caste is not the same as either *varna* or *jati*. It is a new concept produced in the course of and because of the census operations in the second half of the nineteenth century. The social form that is imagined in contemporary academics through the category of caste never existed before in the Indian society. Hence, the use of the term of caste in place of *varna* and *jati* in historical explanations or in the framing of the policies of the state can only be misleading.

**About the Speakers:**

- **Prof. Kumkum Roy** teaches History at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her publications include *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India, (c. 8<sup>th</sup> -4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC)* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994). She has edited an anthology titled *Women in Early Indian Societies* (New Delhi, Manohar, 1999). Her more recent works include *A Historical Dictionary of Ancient India* (Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2009) and *The Power of Gender: The Gender of Power* (New Delhi, OUP, 2010). She has also been involved in preparing History text books for school children. Her areas of interest are political institutions, social history and issues of gender.

**Prof. Nandita Prasad Sahai** teaches Medieval Indian History at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her book *Politics of Patronage and Protest: State, Society and Artisans in Early Modern Rajasthan* examined state formation 'from below'. Currently, she is looking at the proliferation of record-keeping and related social transformations as signifiers of early modernity in Rajasthan. She is also interested in Gender history and the varieties of households in pre-colonial India, focusing mostly on legal materials.

- **Dr. Padmanabh Samarendra** works at the Dr K R Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He is interested in understanding the processes of the formulation of the concept of caste in the nineteenth century and the nature of social forms that existed prior to that. His publications include 'Census in colonial India and the birth of caste', *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 13, 2011.