

National Seminar
On
Shifting Paradigm: Re-Envisioning Minority issues and
Minority Studies in India
Organized by
“ETHNICITY & MINORITY STUDIES” (Ad-hoc group)
Indian Sociological Society
&
Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi
September 8-9, 2015

CONCEPT NOTE

India, like many of the countries of the postcolonial world, remains to a great extent an artificial construct of the colonial era. Beneath the surface, it is a country burdened with ethnic, religious and linguistic conflicts. Even so, minority issues are increasingly taking centre stage in Indian politics, whether in the form of separatist movements, demands for increased political representation, or the need to provide protection to its many religions and cultures. Many of these conflicts are yet to be resolved, and the challenge for India will be to put in place processes that enable minority problems to be discussed and resolved for the benefit of the country as a whole, while ensuring the collective survival of the many minority people who form an integral part of the country.

In common parlance, the expression “minority” means a group comprising less than half of the population and differing from others, especially the predominant section, in race, religion, traditions and culture, language, etc. The Constitution of India uses the word ‘minority’ or its plural form in some Articles – 29 to 30 and 350A to 350B – but does not define it anywhere. Article 29 has the word “minorities” in its marginal heading but speaks of “any sections of citizens...having a distinct language, script or culture”. This may be a whole community generally seen as a minority or a group within a majority community. Article 30 speaks specifically of two categories of minorities – religious and linguistic. The Supreme Court rulings suggest that for the purpose of Article 30 a minority, whether linguistic or religious, is determinable with reference to a state and not by taking into consideration the population of the country as a whole. Incidentally, ‘scheduled castes’ and ‘scheduled tribes’ are also to be identified at the state/UT level.

Sociologically the concept of minority groups refers to more than merely a numerical distinction. In sociology, members of minority group are disadvantaged when compared with the dominant group (which may possess more wealth, power and prestige). It refers to a groups' subordinate position within society rather than its numerical connotation. There are many cases in which a 'minority' is in fact a 'majority'. Women are sometimes described as a minority group, while in many countries of the world they form the numerical majority. Because women tend to be disadvantaged in comparison with men (the majority) the term is applied to them. In apartheid period, blacks in South Africa constituted the minority but numerically they were the majority. This is because the term 'minority' signifies their subordinate and disadvantaged position in society.

Scholars have also used the term 'minorities' to refer collectively to groups that have experienced prejudice and discrimination at the hands of the 'majority' society. However, this over simplification may result in generalizations about discrimination and oppression that do not accurately reflect the experiences of specific groups in society. The prejudices and discrimination faced by the sexual minorities (LGBT), for example, may be completely different from the experiences of Dalits as a minority in India. The way in which a two different minority groups faces discrimination and oppression in society is far from identical. The only commonality between them is that they are treated not only as different but also inferior with the rest of the majority population.

Thus, through this seminar, an attempt will be made to understand how the minority groups in India are always victims of marginalization and exclusion from the broader political and social framework; looking through the intersection of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, caste etc. Apart from this, the seminar focuses on conceptualizing the changing shift in understanding certain minority groups in India with special emphasis on those minority sections which have been ignored by academia to a large extent like sexual minorities (like LGBT), women of colour (within the same race) and immigrant or refugee groups who deserve to be studied in a common forum.

Again one of the major challenges to minority-majority relationship in India is the phenomenon of communal violence and ethnic separatism. The periodic outbreak of communal violence has dent the secular image of the country. The strained relations between majority and minority and the insecurity feeling of the minorities in a majority dominated society develop the atmosphere for communal conflicts. Each successive government in India after coming to power has the tendency towards minority bashing and it is escalating towards an upward swing presently. Attack on minorities,

especially Muslims and Christians, has increased. Love jihad, *ghar vapsi*, attack on institutions belonging to minority communities has created an atmosphere of perpetual threat and insecurity. Moreover, ethnic groups living in different parts in India are also not spared from this majority-minority divide. For example, people from North-eastern states of India are always alienated and many a times they are the soft target of violence whenever there is a clash of identity. Thus, basically, the fear psychosis in minorities arising out of this majority-minority divide has increased considerably which is utterly neglected by our State machineries. The proposed seminar is interested to involve serious discussions on these issues.

Having said that, emphasis on the need of Minority Studies as a concrete discipline is also one of the discussions this proposed seminar would like to focus upon. This is because, while all over the world, ethnic and minority studies is established as a field of study, India fails to establish it as an academic agenda in most of its universities. When it comes to minorities in India, they are mostly thought of in religious terms, but a separate department for it exists out of the academic circle, except in a few cases. This leaves open to us the question: Why the absence of minority studies as a separate field of enquiry in academic disciplines and especially in Sociology?

Finally, the proposed seminar tends to promote a critical rethinking on broader understanding of the concept of minority. It will try to see how the very concept of minority is again based on a constructionist discourse where minority identities are nothing but the result of social imagination created through narratives and representations rather than being a group with watertight social demarcations. The seminar would touch upon certain critical questions such as how minority is minoritized and marginalized through the process of communalism, radicalization of religion and discrimination on the grounds of caste, race or cultural grounds. Again what leads to the formation of a minority groups especially in the context of Indian society at large is also a point of discussion.

There is no dearth of argumentation and this note is not a final articulation, and the seminar welcome divergent views and fusion of knowledge to disentangle the issue of Minority in India. We appreciate scholars from divergent disciplines of social sciences participating in this discourse. Following are the proposed themes/subthemes for the seminar:

Sub-themes of the seminar:

1. Mapping Minority Studies in India
2. Re-thinking the conceptual discourse of 'Minority'
3. Stereotypes, prejudices and identity formation
4. Minorities: From the lens of Gender, Caste and Race
5. Ethnicity, Separatism and Social Movements
6. Communalism: Revisiting Majority-Minority Relationship
7. State, Law and Minorities
8. New Minorities in India : Sexual Minorities and Immigrant Minorities
9. Globalization, and 'Radicalization' of Religion

Papers on the above mentioned and related themes are invited. Priority will be given to empirically/fieldwork based papers which help in the understanding of the dynamics involved in the question of ethnicity and minority, particularly in Indian context.

Important dates to remember:

- Last date for submission of abstracts (not more than 300 words): June 15th (**EXTENDED UPTO JUNE 30th**), 2015.
- Communication of accepted abstracts: July 7th, 2015.
- Last date to submit full paper and Registration (approx 6000 words): August 14th, 2015.
- Date of seminar: September 8-9, 2015.

Note* Abstracts/papers should be sent to the specific email id of ad-hoc group ethnicityminority@gmail.com only. Participants should mention their respective names and sub-theme of the seminar to which they are submitting their paper in the subject line of the email.

For other queries one can contact any of contact persons given below.

Organizing Secretary & Convenor

Dr. Arvinder A. Ansari, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi
Mobile: +91 9899451465)

Co- Convenor

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad Ansari
Mobile: +91 9891486123

Co-Ordinator

Trishna M. Thakuria, PhD. Research Scholar, Sociology
Jamia Millia Islamia
Mobile: +91 9891282919

Registration:

Early Registration: 14th of August, 2015

Last date of registration: August 20th, 2015

Fees:

- Registration including Membership of ad-hoc group (valid for 1 year) - Rs. 1200/-
- Registration fee for existing Members of ad-hoc group - Rs. 1000/-
- Registration Fee after due date/ On the spot registration- Rs. 1500/-
- Date of seminar: September 8-9, 2015.

***Registration fees** can be paid through Bank Draft to be drawn in favour of Dr. Arvinder A. Ansari (Convenor), Ethnicity and Minority Studies (Ad-hoc group), ISS, and sent at Department of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025, and India.

Travel and Accommodation:

Delegates are requested to make their own travel expenses. However, the organizers will provide free boarding and lodging with a registration kit from 7th September evening to 10th September Morning 2015.