



Call for Papers

to the Workshop on

Cultural Elites in Contemporary India: Constructions and Deconstructions

5-6 May, 2015

Organized by Contemporary India Study Centre Aarhus (CISCA)

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Concept Note:

Elite studies have primarily been focused on political or politico-economical elites, and a significant part of elite theorizing has aimed at conceptualizing elite formation and their social function, usually starting from a Western point of view and tracing how new elites are established or establish themselves — either *circulate(d)*, *transform(ed)* or sometimes *reproduce(d)*. Though theorization of elites has been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's broadening of the concept of "capital" (economic, social, cultural – or religious, artistic in a wider sense) as fundamental to social relations, these ideas have not been applied in a comparative Indian perspective, nor the literature on Indian elites has critically engaged with the shifting definitions and significations of Indian elites in a sustained manner. Such an endeavor has become almost an imperative now given that new and old elites are redefining not just themselves and their exercise of (soft) power, but also contemporary Indian society.

Contemporary India is a site of many new era elite identities in the arenas of technology and media, neo-religious movements, indigenous and subaltern groups, new social movements, films and sports to name a few. In the intellectual and cultural spheres, a new community is emerging as avant-garde or thought leaders, wielding immense clout as well as celebrity capital. This new pattern is replacing the old binary of elite and mass leading to a new idea of political community and citizenship. Similarly lower caste leaders have created an aura around themselves as champions of justice, though often compromise their subversive politics by allowing themselves to be coopted by the mainstream political parties. Activists and intellectuals too exercise immense influence in terms of their capability in building public opinions on the people they represent by offering new visions of politics and development.

Starting with a broad understanding of elites as "makers and shakers" in influential positions in society (frequently associated with notions of agency, hegemony, power or authority) the workshop aims to expand with Bourdieu's insights and explore the shifting

landscape of elite discourse in conversation with existing literature and research. We would like to emphasize cultural factors explicitly because culture has become the new social/economic where struggles over truth and meaning are taking place more than ever before, forming strong public opinions, affecting people's lives thereby leading to both manufacture of consent (Lippmann 1922, Chomsky 1988) as well as manufacture of dissent.

Though ideationally and operationally, these elites are different, they all carry what we may call "influence or celebrity capital" and may even share a conviction that an ideal society is a society without elites. It is this disavowal which distinguishes the cultural elites from the traditional ones. This workshop would attempt to broaden the critical discourse on the social processes through which elites are constructed and create frameworks through which such performativity can be deconstructed. The social, political and economic understanding of elites would be interwoven through the fabric of culture, which we hope would encourage a more nuanced and mediated theorizing not limited to the typical tropes. Therefore, elites would be viewed not only as a constructed category but also as an imaginary in its various hues.

Workshop Questions:

The workshop is expected to bring out a broader canvass so as to analyze and critique various cultural elite formations vis-à-vis domains of religion, activism, academics, media, subalternity, sports and films among others. Papers are expected to make use of any one domain or multiple ones to map new elitism in India while being responsive to existing theoretical/critical literature. The broad range of questions could be (but not limited to):

- A) What kind of capital a particular group possesses and how do they go about reproducing that capital
- B) How does this capital get converted into new social/power currencies
- C) What are the social origins and functions of such capital and how does it help maintain specific desirable social relations
- D) Are elites interest groups, or do they mutate into identity groups in changing social environments
- E) How do old elites retain their power, how do they transform themselves and with whom do they cooperate/compete with – how do old and new elites interact
- F) Do the elite reflect a new social order or create one; are they conscience keepers of a society or do they raise particular consciousness
- G) How do cultural elites position themselves vis-à-vis the state; do they derive legitimacy from complementing or confronting the state; how do they get coopted
- H) Do they consider themselves elites; how do they define their role vis-à-vis the people/mass

Deadlines:

- 1) 31st of March: Indication of interest
- 2) 15th of April: Submission of abstract

For further information please see cisca.au.dk and contact: cisca@hum.au.dk