

**BA-BASAS PLANNING WORKSHOP ON POVERTY IN SOUTH ASIA –
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, MARCH 30th - 31st, 2010.**

The South Asia Panel of the British Academy, in collaboration with the British Society of South Asian Studies, is proposing to hold a small and fairly informal ‘planning workshop’ on the general theme of poverty in South Asia. The daylong workshop will be held to coincide with the second day of the annual BASAS Conference to be held at the University of Warwick, that is on Tuesday 30th March, 2010. As a *planning* meeting it will be confined to a limited group of 15 – 20 participants. There will, however, be a 90 minute ‘report back’ session on the following day (31st March) that will be open to any conference participants who are interested.

The main intention is to get a better grasp of the work that is being done on this theme in universities in different parts of Europe, and to plan for a larger and more ambitious conference to be held in 2011 or 2012 that would involve a number of younger and less established researchers. We also aim to explore the possibilities for collaborative research on this theme with partners located elsewhere in Europe and the opportunities for funding it. Though it is not certain at this stage that we will be able to find grants for the larger conference, the issues are so manifestly important that we are optimistic. The South Asia Panel is applying to the British Academy for some funding for this more ambitious event (and the outcome of this will be known before the Warwick workshop); and we are also looking for supplementary funding elsewhere. Quite apart from these future plans, however, we are confident that a stocktaking meeting of this kind would in itself be useful and instructive.

The ‘closed’ workshop on the 30th will be divided into four main sessions of 90 minutes each. The format of these will be three presentations of 15 minutes each, followed by 45 minutes for a general discussion. Two of the three presenters will be from universities in other European countries, and one will be from Britain. Speakers are asked to briefly report on important work on that particular theme that is being done by scholars in their own country, though also with some reference to other work that they know about that is going on in other European countries. A final 40-minute session at the end will be devoted to a review of the sessions and to future plans.

The themes for the four sessions are admittedly very broad and open-ended, but they are intended only a basis for organizing a discussion which will inevitably spill over the boundaries between them. The sub-themes are intended as suggestive rather than prescriptive, and speakers are asked to address the main heading in the way that they find most productive. The four sessions will be on:

1. *Poverty in an historical perspective.* This might cover such issues as ‘the poor’ as a distinctive social category; the idea of ‘poverty’ as a major social problem, and the idea of ‘unemployment’ as a serious social evil.
2. *Politics and the poor.* This might cover such issues as the support base for the Naxalite movement; other forms of political activism aimed at mobilising the poor,

like attempts to unionise informal sector workers; and the part played by the truly disadvantaged in the Hindu nationalist movement. It might also review recent work on the way in which the relatively affluent dominate and exclude the poor by, for example, obstructing measures ostensibly aimed at an amelioration of their condition through corruption, bloody-minded foot-dragging or straightforward intimidation.

3. *Poverty, caste, 'ethnicity' and gender.* Amongst other things, this session would focus on work that deals with the congruence between inequalities of class and identities based on caste, religious community, regional origin and gender.
4. *Citizenship rights and state provision for the poor.* This session would cover work on the effective rights of citizenship that the poor are in reality able to claim from the state – in education, health and with regard to the legal apparatus of the state. It might also deal with studies of the actual workings of measures like the Indian government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

The 90 minutes 'open' session on the following day will take the form of a report to interested conference participants on the previous day's deliberations. One speaker from each session will be asked to summarise in not more than 15 minutes the most salient issues arising from it. The remainder of the time will be available for comments and questions from the floor.