

# **Post-Exotic India**

## **A New Narrative in Making**

**Graduate School of International Development Studies (Institute for Society & Globalisation), Roskilde and SASNET, Lund**

Two days Intensive PhD Workshop 26-27 September 2007

**Organisers:** Ravinder Kaur, Laurids Lauridsen, RUC and Staffan Lindberg, Lund University

**Venue:** Roskilde University

**ETCS:** 3 points

### **Background:**

The 1990's economic liberalization programme in India is often seen as a sharp turning point that transformed India from an aid recipient developing nation to a fast growing global player. In less than two decades, India has become the new Asian success story comparable to China. New global buzzwords – outsourcing, call centers – have found inextricable Indian associations. In short, India speaks and is spoken of in a new global language, the lexicon of which is derived from its historic economic growth. The exotic – foreign, distant, mysterious and veiled – produced through the oriental gaze no longer dominates the imagery. The post-exotic of 1990's seeks to produce a new narrative of India.

As India posts 9.4% growth rate for the first time in its 60 years of Independence (1947-2007), an unprecedented public euphoria tinged with scepticism seems to be fast gaining ground. The reasons for euphoria are evident in the impressive statistics produced by the government that show high growth, low inflation, large flows of foreign direct investments and ever growing foreign exchange reserves. India has seemingly found a new comparative frame vis-à-vis China – a global entity on fast track – unshackling it from its historic 'other' Pakistan – one half of the Indo-Pak duo mired in regional rivalry and conflict over Kashmir, low intensity conflicts and wars. In short, India is on its way to become a global player with impeccable democratic credentials, and a gigantic, prosperous middle class composed of highly educated and competitive professionals.

The successive governments, since 1990's economic liberalisation, have tried to capture the spirit of new India in catchphrases and slogans such as 'Shining India' and 'Incredible India' to captivate people's imagination in India and abroad. These media driven campaigns have been received sceptically as they gloss over uncomfortable facts of mass suicide deaths among farmers in, for example Punjab, Karnataka and Maharashtra; growing rich/poor gaps; social inequalities and falling levels in the human development

index where India ranks two notches below at 126 since 2004. Equally uncomfortable is the occurrence of communal and caste conflicts that threaten to mar the euphoria from time to time. Recently, violence erupted in Rajasthan over claims staked by newly mobilised caste groups to the reservation quota; clashes took place in Punjab where orthodox Sikhs, comprising of landed peasantry, took offence to appropriation of Sikh revered symbols by a sect of low caste Sikhs and Hindus. These events are neither isolated nor infrequent, rather fresh episodes in a long history of inter-community violence, for instance the 2002 Gujarat massacre that took hundreds of lives and triggered off spatial, social and economic segregation of Hindus and Muslims.

The new Indian narratives emerge out of this tension between unfettered national pride, spurred by economic success and global recognition, and deep discomfort at premature celebrations by the prosperous and burgeoning middle class. At the heart of this tension lies the struggle over representation of authentic India, for instance, an early 20<sup>th</sup> C Gandhian vision – “India lives in its villages” – that saw rural India as the definitive feature of the country; versus outsourced call centre businesses in Gurgaon skyscrapers and ‘India’s silicon valley’ in Bangalore that symbolise entrepreneurship, technological innovation and global competition. Clearly, this historic tension has reached a defining moment that is evident in the competing narratives.

This two day intensive workshop is aims to posit and explore the post-exotic India through following themes:

- a. processes and affects of 1991 economic liberalisation ,
- b. emergence of a vocal, mobile and astute middle class,
- c. global ambitions of India, and
- d. its regional implications in South Asia.

**Invited Speakers:**

Nicholas Dirks, Columbia University  
Pritam Singh, Oxford University  
Thomas Blom Hansen, Amsterdam University  
Staffan Lindberg, Lund University  
Ravinder Kaur, Roskilde University  
Srirupa Roy, Amherst, USA, SSRC New York (TBC)  
Pamela Price, Oslo University  
Anna Lindberg, Lund University  
Arild Engelsen Ruud, Oslo University  
Jørgen Dige Pedersen, Aarhus University

### **Structure of the workshop**

The training course is structured around two elements:

Day 1: Presentations by the invited speakers, and

Day 2: Presentation of PhD-papers. The latter will take place in smaller groups. There will be made plenty of time in the programme for discussion, in plenary as well as in the small working groups. Each participant will write a 5 page paper focussing on the following issues:

- Abstract or fundamental research question.
- Specific questions (argued in relation to fundamental research question).
- Data and fieldwork strategy.
- Fieldwork techniques.

### **Participation requirements:**

The first day of the workshop is open to all. The second part of the workshop is open to all PhD students upon application by July 15th to [rkaur@ruc.dk](mailto:rkaur@ruc.dk). A maximum of 20 PhD students can participate in the work shop sessions. Each participant *must* prepare a short paper (no more than five pages), presenting her/his research design and setting, main questions regarding fieldwork and data collection techniques. This text should be submitted to the organizers at [Inge@ruc.dk](mailto:Inge@ruc.dk) no later than August 15<sup>th</sup>. Ultimo August, information about working group composition as well as the different papers will be circulated to the participants. Participants in a working group are expected to have carefully read and commented upon each of the fellow participants' texts. 15-20 minutes will be given for each presentation in the working groups.

### **Funding Possibilities:**

The Graduate School appreciates that the cost of participation may be prohibitive to some students. We therefore offer two travel grants for students who would otherwise be prevented from participating in the course. The beneficiaries will be selected on merit. Application for the travel grant should accompany the application for participation in the course and include a letter of recommendation from the supervisor.