

International Conference on 'Intimacy and Belonging in Contemporary India' (04-06 April 2016)

Concept Note:

The Latin etymology of the word 'intimacy' conveys the following meaning: it is making known (intimare) what is innermost (intimus) to a close friend (intima). Intimacy, thus, incorporates a notion of sharing by acknowledging an urge of belonging together, almost inseparably. The questions arise then: Out of all that we develop, how many are intimate relations for us? Out of all that we feel, how many can be identified as the innermost feelings and how much of even 12 those can we express intimately in a familiar circle? The paradox of intimacy lies in the fact that it is objective but personal, somatic nonetheless psychological, affective in its dimension yet without having a firm reflective/self-conscious foundation. Most importantly, intimacy of the 'self' is dependent on 'other' and yet belonging together in such a manner as if the sharp distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' is annihilated in an act of intimate destruction. The notion of Intimacy thus proves that the 'self' cannot resist from belonging to the 'other'. To be specific, the 'self' can only be known through the 'other', where it seems possible that the innermost qualities can be shared. Here comes the question of choice. Unlike the bond with and among the non-humans, intimate bond among human beings depends on, firstly, the palpable possibility of sharing and, secondly, on the mutual consensus and commitment of belonging from both the parties. Is the tangibility of such probability of intimacy purely apolitical? Are the motivations for belonging, through closeness/fidelity, fully impulsive sans politics? What is the politics that drives us from the intimate awareness of belonging-to (externally related) towards/against belongingwith (related internally)? What is the politics that often adds an esoteric dimension to intimacy?

Initially viewed as the 'sociology of personal life' as a part of the discourse of everyday life, intimacy now has been recently melded with the complex broader issues related to labour, economies, social justice, commodification and body shopping. The possibility of finding new ways of belonging together cannot be understood without understanding the complex connection of intimacy with changing notions of nationhood, citizenship and community. From the ancient erotic practices of 'shringara' to 'prem', the armed debate on valentines' day to interreligious, interclass, intercaste romances/marriages and their consequences, including shaming, stigmatizing to honour killing—all are symptomatic of the progress of intimacy in Indian hands in new and newer forms.

This conference, focusing on the emerging forms of intimacies in contemporary India, is also an attempt to understand/address the politics behind the changing notion/nature of belonging. What causes or inhibits intimacy and what restricts or disfigures one's identity of belonging? Questions can be asked, if at all the transformation in the modes of intimacies--resulting from transnational ties, migration/ immigration, rise of alternative socio-economic doctrines, new communication technologies and/or transnational media, and thereby giving rise to intimate spaces/ intimate settings for intimate encounters—have in actuality, paved way for transversal and emancipatory structures that can politically challenge the hegemonic, traditional, Indian concepts/norms of belongings, erstwhile restricted to the rigid boundaries of class, caste, religion, region and normative conformity.

Specifically, these are the questions we are asking: What are the benefits and challenges of crosscultural/unconventional/non-human intimacies? What is/possibly be the politics of belonging if the contemporary forms of intimacies ever attempt in the intersecting of the issues related to geographical location/ethnicities, class, race, disability, age, (dalit/tribal)subalternity, (religious/ 13 gender and sexual) minority and thereby aim at germinating alternative sub-cultural praxes? Can one relate the emerging trends of belonging in India with the concepts of intellectual intimacy, spiritual intimacy and the intimacy of the past through memory? Is there an essential politics behind the fusions of intimacy, commodification, bodies, labour, care, and social justice? How can one apprehend the politics and possibilities of the transformation from naming and relating— like friend, companion, lover, partner, spouse—to poly-amorous desires, dissident eroticism, anonymous/unnamed bonding or even collective belonging in a temporal manner? How can one also make sense of intimacy's paradoxes, such as domestic violence?

An International Conference on 'Intimacy and Belonging in Contemporary India' was organized during 04-06 April 2016 at IIAS. Dr.Kaustav Chakraborty, Fellow, IIAS was the Convener of the seminar. The welcome address was given by Professor Chetan Singh, Director, IIAS. Dr.Kaustav Chakraborty, Convener of the seminar gave introductory remarks. Inaugural Address was given by Dr. Sudhir Kakar, Pulwado Pequeno, Benaulim, Goa.

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