

Understanding Asia: Gender and Power

Renegotiating Gender: land, labour and indigineity in contemporary India



(Scan for registration)

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Hybrid event

In this presentation, I recount the everyday struggles and agency of indigenous (locally termed adivasi) women and men in India, primarily the Santals, to lead dignified lives. The multiple crises they confront have led to an undermining of processes of social reproduction, including the value systems and meanings of work and contributions to social life. New forms of land and labour alienation are visible and there is no option but for men and some women to migrate for survival (5 million in 2017-18). The nature of labour regimes provide little opportunity for upward mobility for the majority. Yet, they seek not just welfare, but a renegotiation of power and knowledge hierarchies across institutions of the state and society. Rather than being categorised as ‘poor’, ‘simple’ or ‘voiceless’, they seek recognition and respect as individuals. Nuanced attempts to create new forms of mutuality, resist hierarchies, and build alternate definitions of power and agency are increasingly visible – manifest in everyday lives and actions. The insights are drawn from my research and engagement in the Santal Parganas region of Jharkhand state from the mid-1990s, as an activist, researcher and friend.

Nitya Rao is Professor in Gender and Development at the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom and Director of the Norwich Institute for Sustainable Development. She has worked as a researcher and advocate in the field of women’s rights, gendered wellbeing, and justice, with a focus on food, nutrition, health and livelihood security for close to four decades. She has published extensively on the gendered changes in agrarian relations, migration and livelihoods, especially in contexts of climatic variability and economic precarity. She has consistently engaged with policy and practice, at both the global and local levels. Apart from supporting networks of women farmers in India, she served on the Global Advisory Committee of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative for over a decade and on the Steering Group of the High-Level Panel of Experts to the Committee on World Food Security for two terms. She is currently Commissioner, EAT-Lancet 2.0 on healthy and sustainable diets, member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub, member of the UKRI International Strategic Advisory Group, External Adviser, People-Centered Food Systems Project at Columbia University, amongst others.

The colloquium series is a joint cooperation between four working groups (**WG Missbach**; **WG Nguyen**; **WG Winkel** and **WG Vasilache**) of the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University.

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