



Azim Premji University Colloquium Series presents a talk on

“Revisiting Caste, Re-imagining India”

Speaker:

Surinder S Jodhka,

Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Date: February 5, 2015 (Thursday)

Time: 2.00 to 3.30 pm

Venue: 10th Floor Auditorium, Pixel A, (Azim Premji University)

About the Topic

The popular textbook view of caste tends to approach it almost purely in cultural terms, a uniquely Indian practice that distinguished the traditional way of life of the region from the modern West and its cultural moorings. In this popular view, as an ancient institution, caste was embedded in the religious ideology of the Hindus. It drew its operational legitimacy from ideas like *Varna*, *Karma* and *Dharma* pronounced in a book called the *Manusmriti* and some other ancient texts. These ideas were socially translated into a hierarchical order, structured around the notions of purity and pollution. While a wide variety of scholarship has pointed to the orientalist roots of this formulation, it remains popular, not only among the lay public but also in scholarly writings. Underlying this formulation is also a notion of India and its presumed civilisational unity, a belief that operationally expresses itself in the ideas of caste, village and Hinduism. Against this common-sense, I will try to argue for a more nuanced understanding of caste as a regional formation. I will also present some of my recent work on the reproduction of caste in contemporary times and the possible modes of its understanding and articulations.

About the Speaker

Surinder S. Jodhka is Professor of Sociology at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is also an affiliate Senior Fellow at the Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences, New Delhi. He researches on different dimensions of social inequalities – old and new – and the processes of their reproduction. The empirical focus of his work has been the dynamics of caste and the varied modes of its articulation with the nature of social and economic change in “neo-liberal” India; studies of agrarian social change and contemporary rural India; and the political sociology community identities. His publications include, *Caste in Contemporary India* (Routledge, 2014) *Interrogating India’s Modernity* (ed. OUP 2013); *Caste: Oxford India Short Introductions* (OUP 2012); *Village Society* (ed. Orient Blackswan 2012); *Community and Identities: Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India* (ed. Sage 2001). He is editor of the Routledge India book series on ‘Religion and Citizenship’. He is among the first recipients of the ICSSR-Amartya Sen Award for Distinguished Social Scientists, for the year 2012.