

# Gender Nation and Community: Representations and Contestations

## Concept Note

Is nationhood a constitutional, political, social, economic, cultural, historical or geographical formation? Is it an 'imagined' community of modern times or a primordial, eternal, pre-ordained and given community? How do religious, caste, or linguistic diversities and identities mark nation and nationhood? What of vast economic disparities – old or new? Is nationhood an ideological position or a political stance in a struggle contesting global inequalities? These are questions that have triggered major debates across the world since the eighteenth century. India has been one of the significant sites for the unfolding of these debates with its colonial history, multi-religious context, linguistic diversity, caste hierarchies, economic disparities and geographical contours.

In the contemporary context these issues have taken on a new urgency. On the one hand, we hear the rhetoric of modernity and economic growth. On the other, we are not only witnessing frequent caste atrocities, but also counter-mobilizations, extreme religious and cultural intolerance expressed both in speech and in aggressive actions, growing economic inequalities and aspirations for a better life, along with powerful student protests on several university campuses. The unleashing of violence and attempts to use state machineries to 'settle' social and political differences have become part of the backdrop for debates in an already fraught environment.

As diverse publics battle their positions in relation to the nation and various self appointed 'guardians', we need to look afresh at how these issues and debates are affecting women from diverse backgrounds. In many ways nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century provided the context for a charged and wide-ranging discussion on women's position in Indian society. The women's movement in India pushed for reforms and changes across the country's diverse milieu, even as a consensus on several issues was not easily possible. Questions related to community honor, religious practices, family law, education, political participation, representations in the media, sexuality and economic rights. All of these issues have been debated and pushed further by activists, scholars, journalists, cultural workers, religious heads and political leaders as they have placed women within a complex and turbulent situation.

Not only are young scholars and journalists affected and engaged with these issues in their everyday lives, they are also attempting to study, understand, and write about the events and processes unfolding around them. This two-day workshop invites participants with a view to invigorate the debates on the relationship between **Gender, Nationhood and Community** in light of the recently witnessed debates in the public

domain. We are interested in research papers that address the past, the present and the future of the country's negotiation of gender in and through representations and contestations of community and nation in various locales, such as in political debate, policy and law, institutional structures, educational curricula and initiatives, visual and other cultural forms, including the entertainment industry, media, or academic work. We welcome a range of approaches and wish to create the context for a provocative and stimulating debate. We also welcome research based features by young journalists.

There are no restrictions on the topics as long as they adhere to the basic vision of the conference. We invite abstracts of not more than 1000 words length.