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SASNET online conference: Rethinking the politics of memory in South Asia

December 9-10, 2020

The current debates around the politics of memory and memorialization reinforce that the act of remembrance and forgetting in the present does not exist in isolation from the past that informs them. This mnemohistorical continuity becomes even more apparent in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic which has highlighted, like never before the structural and systemic nature of privilege and inequality. The groups and categories of people who have been most adversely affected by the pandemic are also those who have been at the receiving end of historical injustice and oppression and in turn also the most likely to fall through the cracks of the meta-narratives of history and collective memory. Further, what makes the on-going discourse on memory politics immensely relevant is its universality in that it resonates with and speaks to experiences and histories of marginalization, exploitation and exclusion across national borders and cultures. For example, in the US the murder of George Floyd and the world-wide protests in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement that it sparked, has brought questions of race, historical injustice, the institutionalised remembrance of difficult pasts, construction of 'national memories', their silences and how they are contested into sharp focus. It is not as if these are novel concerns that have suddenly erupted as a response to the current tragedy. How and what we choose to remember and forget as collectives and individuals has always been a politically fraught issue as it is intricately connected to notions of power, belonging and exclusion.

Ironically, in India and South Asia in general, the global BLM protests received considerable traction, especially across the various social media with numerous posts expressing solidarity with it, including those from prominent public personalities, celebrities and film stars. And yet, the globally significant discussion on race and prejudice assumes myriad hues and dimensions in the South Asian context and needs to be acknowledged as such. This is so on account of a socio-political fabric deeply enmeshed in and shaped by religion, region, caste and class and their intersectionalities. How, and to what extent, do these play into and inform the processes of crafting and curating national histories and memories in South Asia? What are the silences that exist within it and how are they contested? What are the alternative modes of remembering, marking and accounting for 'difficult pasts' beyond the confines of state regulated memorial projects? Also, what events constitute dominant and rightful entry points into the field of memory studies and what are ignored? These are some of the questions that constitute the focus of this conference that calls for a rethinking of memory studies in South

Asia beyond the analytical lens of the Partition that has tended to (and deservedly so) occupy center stage in scholarship on the politics of memory in the region.

Abstracts of not more than 300 words are invited for original papers for consideration for presentation at the *Rethinking the politics of memory in South Asia* conference organised by SASNET on (but not limited to) the following broad themes latest by October 3, 2020.

- Heritage politics and national memory
- Collective trauma and public history
- Remembering collective violence
- Navigating sites of memory in urban spaces
- Remembering displacement
- History writing/teaching and the politics of memory in South Asia
- Historical injustice and collective memory
- Memorial landscapes of the South Asian diaspora
- Memory as a tool for negotiating 'otherness' and 'belonging'
- New media as an arena of 'memory work'

Given the constraints on mobility imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to facilitate as wide-ranging participation as possible, the conference will be held on an entirely online platform.

The conference organizers are keen on collecting selected papers presented at the conference for publication either as a journal special issue or an edited volume. Hence, we would appreciate it if your submissions are not already published or committed for publication elsewhere.

Please send in your abstracts along with a short biographical note (100 words maximum) to Dr. Isha Dubey at isha.dubey@sasnet.lu.se. Decisions regarding the inclusion of proposed papers in the conference shall be mailed out by the first week of November.

Conference conveners

Isha Dubey (Post-doctoral Fellow, SASNET)

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