

## **Workshop Summary**

### **Caste-ing Nutrition: The Politics of Health and Food in Modern India**

**Date and Venue: 22 June 2018, IAS Seminar Room, University of Warwick**

This one-day workshop was organized by Shrikant Botre, a doctoral student from the Centre for the History of Medicine and an IAS Early Career Fellow at the University of Warwick. Its purpose was to produce a research agenda for thinking about the cross-cutting relations between food and caste hierarchy in India. While critically reflecting on historical and social constructions of food, nutrition, and health in colonial and late colonial times, it also looked at what analytics of caste can - and can't - do for comprehending multi-dimensional Indian food politics. The event was attended by faculty and research staff and postgraduate students from across disciplines including History, Sociology, English and Comparative Literary Studies, Political Science, School of Law, Warwick Medical School, Life Sciences, Mathematics and IAS.

There were five presentations from cultural historians working on food politics. Along with reviewing the global emergence of nutrition, these scholarly interventions underlined the historical power relations involved in conceptualizing food and caste by elucidating on issues like reproduction, anti-caste resistance, sociability, and food advertising in early 20th century India.

Beginning with the discussion of the global history of nutritional science, Prof. Rebecca Earle (Warwick) provided a wider context to the later presentations. This analytical journey unpacked the nutrition discourse in its relation to the modern reframing of labour, race, gender and class. Channelling the discussion to late colonial India, Shrikant Botre (Warwick) then unfolded the role of nutrition 'rhetoric' in reconstituting caste relations of domination and subordination by examining the late colonial Marathi constructions of sexual science produced in Maharashtra. While demonstrating the centrality of nutrition to interwar times' eugenic reproduction discourse, his paper reflected on caste-coded and gendered fashioning of the Marathi 'modern.'

Further papers focused on comprehending food politics by examining the socio-historical making of specific food substances and beverages. Dr Rachel Berger (Concordia University) commented on the relationship between food, nutrition, and the social order by analysing the role of *ghee* (clarified butter) as a mode of social protest, with reference to upper castes versus Dalit conflict over *ghee* eating in late colonial western India. Prof. Douglas Haynes (Dartmouth College) extended the discussion of *ghee* in the form of *dalda* (cooking oil) along with Cocogem. The paper commented on the making of the Indian middle class by analyzing advertisement strategies of cooking oil products.

Going beyond food into the realm of beverages, Prof. A.R.Venkatachalapathy (MIDS, Chennai) examined the caste politics of coffee drinking in colonial Tamil south India. While analyzing the upper caste versus Dalit conflict over consuming coffee, his historical account operated at the intersection of law, the public sphere and commensality to understand the making of colonial Tamil modernity.

Each presentation was followed by lively discussion. Informal plans were proposed to continue the interaction in future events and a possible edited volume.