

**Panel 5:** Inequality and Affirmative Action in South Asia

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**Abstract:** This panel invites scholars to consider inequality and affirmative action in South Asia. The debates over affirmative action policies of positive discrimination, quotas or reservations for historical redress of social inequality in South Asia remain hotly contested. In India, controversies over the classification of particular peoples have been reinvigorated by a new identity politics through which several groups are violently seeking to be included into reserved status. The challenges of incorporating the most marginalized and the needy, which draw on a long history of debates of caste versus class issues, continue - the Supreme Court for instance has ruled that the more advantaged amongst the OBCs should be excluded from reserved status. At the same time, economic liberalization has gone hand in hand with new demands of meritocracy but also pressure for the corporate sector to be more inclusive. In Nepal, the new Maoist-led Constituent Assembly is debating constitutional provisions for reservations. The next Nepali census, to be conducted in 2011, will become the primary demographic reference point for the subsequent implementation of affirmative action and undoubtedly the site for a politics of recognition of groups seeking both indigenous nationality status and the provision of OBC classification. Neoliberal influences of the international development industry and its classifications in Nepal will affect the country's policies on affirmative action. We welcome papers that will explore crucial issues facing the future of affirmative action policy in India and Nepal but also papers that describe comparable dynamics elsewhere in South Asia, particularly Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

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