



WORLD ANTHROPOLOGY CONGRESS

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# WORLD ANTHROPOLOGY CONGRESS-2023

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## ROUND TABLE TITLE:

## DEBUNKING COLONIAL CONSTRUCTS: CASTE AND TRIBE

CO-ORDINATOR: N.K. VAID

### ABSTRACT

Caste, derived from the word 'casta' in Portuguese and 'castus' in Latin, owes its origin to the two countries but used and abused in India for all the malice faced today. 'Caste', based on purity of blood, never existed in India. In the earliest recorded period of Indian history, the society was divided into four occupational groups, called Varāṇas. The divisions, very loosely defined, were present for over two millennia. The system was destroyed and overhauled by the British by enforcing the system of Jātis, the status determined by birth. It was first used by the British for the people of the west coast in 1670s. Today, caste is known as a synonym for Jāti. Not satisfied with this segmental division of Indian Social System, the colonisers created further divisions and subdivisions on the pattern of Roman Empire and western model. Today, caste forms the basis of most of the socio-political discourse and actions.

'Tribe' too is a Colonial Construct. From old French 'tribu' and Latin 'tribus', in modern time was first used by the Spanish in 16th century to denote the people of their colonies. Originally used for the people of Africa, South America, and Western Pacific Islands' communities for differences in colour, physical attributes, social and political institutions, and exotic customs. It was used in India indiscriminately beginning with H.H Risley, the Census Commissioner for the Census of 1901. Further categories were generated to create divisions within this group of communities. Even after Independence, the country remains trapped in the web of divisive forces that persist with the colonial agenda of creating dissensions and fragmenting Indian polity. The British fabricated our texts to undermine our history and culture. Ironically, our own historians and other social scientists (including anthropologists) have done nothing to expose the designs of our colonial rulers. The onus of telling the truth of Indian society and culture now rests in the hands of young anthropologists. This is critical to challenge false narrative and agenda of those forces that want to persist with divisive designs. They continue to propagate old policies of the British imperialist covered with emperor's clothes. To sustain our ancient traditions and culture, our extraordinary knowledge systems within the context of rising Indian Democracy, this round table wants to make a beginning with forthright conversations on debunking colonial constructs and reconstructing histories and future.

### Speakers:

Prof. P. C. Joshi

Prof. Deepak Behera

Prof. Shalina Mehta

Prof. Vijoy Sahai

N. K. Vaid (Co-ordinator)

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