ICHR Lecture Programme

Title: Foundations of the Caste System

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Venue: ICHR, New Delhi
Date: 9 November 2016 at 4:00 PM

Abstract

In caste studies today there is certainty about the existence of a caste system in India. This certainty extends to the existence of such a system in the Indian diaspora. However, whenever an assessment is attempted as to what the properties of the caste system are, we encounter anomalies. Yet the awareness of anomalies does not lead to the questioning of why there is certainty about the existence of the system. This lecture presents the results of collaborative research which is due to be shortly published as a book. The research shows that when the caste system idea is interrogated more deeply one cannot maintain the stance that such a system exists in India at all. Rather, we can now show that the caste system is a feature of Western culture and its way of coming to terms with its experience of India. Hence our book bears the title, Western Foundations of the Caste System. We can now show that contemporary ideas about the caste system and the certainty about its existence are dependent on Christian theological reflections on Indian society and culture. Multiple questions are consequently raised about what various movements in India said to be fighting the caste system, what the laws and policies of caste-based reservation, what legislation against caste atrocities, and what the recent law against caste discrimination in the UK, are really meant to be doing. If their foundations are false then critical new questions should also arise about what our understanding and future study of India should be concerned with.
**Speaker**