



Azim Premji University Faculty Seminar Series

presents a talk on

"People, Princes and Purifiers: The Holi Festival in Nineteenth-and-Early-Twentieth-Century Punjab"

Speaker
Anil Sethi

Date: September 9, 2015 (Wednesday)

Time: 11.00 am to 12:30 pm

Venue: Seminar Hall, 10th Floor, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

About the Topic

This paper will examine the ways in which the Holi festival was observed in nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century Punjab. For ordinary people, social licence, frenzy and pollution were important elements of Holi and the festival marked a symbolic reversal of familial, class and caste hierarchies. These reversals served to affirm the control of the dominant groups. Even so, there were limits to this topsy-turvy of social roles and status.

The 'safety-valve' upturning of hierarchies was not the only function that Holi served in the nineteenth century. Ranjit Singh used it in quite another way: as a premier vehicle for the display of monarchical pomp and power through an exhibition of the nobility's corporate effervescence each year that day.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, purifiers – Sanatani, Arya and Sikh – made concerted attempts at changing the festival, removing elements of revelry (which they thought to be intemperate and Rabelaisian) and instituting a *pavitra* celebration. The Sikhs also popularized the alternative Holi Mohalla.

About the Speaker

Anil Sethi is Professor of History and History Education at the Azim Premji University, Bangalore and was earlier Professor of History at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi. He has taught at various universities: Delhi University, Osaka University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, University of North London and, as Visiting Professor, at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. He has researched the history of communalism, especially its linkages with everyday life. He has also helped develop a Tokyo-

based oral archive on the Partition of India. His interests include the social and religious history of modern South Asia, the history of the Indian National Movement, and History and Social Science Education.

Anil was a Commonwealth Scholar at St. Catharine's College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK from where he got his Ph.D. for a dissertation that dealt with religious identities in nineteenth and early twentieth century Punjab. He has also been a Centre of Excellence Fellow at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan.

Anil has helped develop various History textbooks published by the NCERT. He has written for the current History textbooks for Classes VIII, XI and XII of the NCERT. He has lectured and imparted training on History Education and Social Science Education including Education for Peace, both within the country and abroad, notably at Seeds of Peace, Maine, USA. He has also led NCERT missions to Sweden and Afghanistan

His publications include *School, Society, Nation: Popular Essays in Education* (Delhi, Orient Longman, 2005) that he co-edited with Rajni Kumar and Shalini Sikka.