



## **Colloquium: Natural Inequality: Conceptualising Justice in Brahminical Discourse**

Speaker:

Kunal Chakrabarti, Professor of Ancient History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Date / Time:

January 23, 2014 - 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Venue:

10th Floor, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

Abstract:

The Brahmanical law-givers believed that as human beings are arranged in an order of precedence in terms of their relative purity by birth and that this hierarchy is divinely ordained from the origin of the human race, they naturally deserve differential rewards and punishments for their actions. This talk looks into the implications of these assumptions for an understanding of the Brahmanical idea of justice. From the repeated assertions in the normative texts that miscarriage of justice leads to the destruction of the universe, it appears that the Brahmanical concern for the need to uphold justice appears to be genuine. However, justice -- both as an idea and an operative system -- must function within the parameters defined by them, for it is understood that many members of the society are simply excluded from the opportunities and are treated differently for the same act. It required a strong theoretical justification for such a severe system to function effectively over a long period of time. The system had to hold out some promise of improvement of their present condition in the future for the lower orders to bear their current deprivations with fortitude and hope. This purpose was served by the formulation of the twin concepts of *karman* (action) and transmigration of the soul. The talk ends with a discussion of a few folk-tales to suggest how popular wisdom subverts and yet conforms to the world-view of textual Hinduism on the question of justice, at least in the premodern period.

A Note on the Speaker:

Kunal Chakrabarti is Professor of Ancient Indian History at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He specializes in the study of social history of religions of the premodern period. His publications include *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2001) and *Historical Dictionary of the Bengalis* (Scarecrow Press, 2013).