

HISTORICITY AND MODERNITY OF CASTE

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The engaging panel on Historicity and Modernity of Caste explored various social, economic, religious, cultural and ritualistic dimensions of caste in India. The panel discussed the themes of Geography of Yelemma devotion; moral economy as opposed to land economy to legitimize caste; capitalism and quest of African Americans in U.S. South for political rights and claims to capital. Lucinda opened the panel by discussing the role of Yelemma women in Modern India. Using her thorough observation, she cross-examined the identity of Yelemma women - low caste women who are married to god - in the progressing society of India. She argued that the Yelemma ritual exists because they enforce a status-quo in land economy: the landless depend on land owners for wages; the land owners depend on landless for cheap labor. Anuparna Rao - Associate Professor of History at Barnard College - discussed the secularization of Hinduism and impact of affirmative action in favor of caste in the backdrop of expanding democracy in India. The panel was closed by Narender Sharma - Associate Professor, Anthropology, MacGill University - drawing similarities between the struggle for political rights of African American Americans in the Deep South and the lower caste in Southern India. He highlighted how far these groups were able to use these changes to extend their political rights and change their social, economic and living standards.