



January 2, 2020

## SEMINAR NOTICE

Topic: "Touch thee not: Group conflict, Caste Power, and Untouchability in Rural India"

Speaker/s: Professor Indraneel Dasgupta, ISI Kolkata

Chair: Professor Ajit Mishra, Director, IEG

The seminar details are as follows:

Date & time: **FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2020 AT 03.30 P.M.**

Venue: A.M. Khusro Room  
Institute of Economic Growth,  
Delhi-110 007

All are welcome.

**(Oindrila De)**

### **Abstract**

We investigate the impact of community power on the practice of untouchability - the avoidance of physical contact – engaged in by upper and intermediate caste (OBC) Hindus vis-à-vis 'scheduled' castes (SCs) in rural India. Despite legal prohibition, the practice remains common, limiting access of SCs to public spaces and facilities as well as informal social and professional networks. Yet, the question of what determines its extent has received scant attention. We develop the novel argument that an upper caste or OBC household's propensity to practise untouchability is determined not solely by its own characteristics but, crucially, also by the inter-group distribution of resources across both caste and religious divides, via the mediation of a process of political contestation. Our theoretical model predicts that any increase in the collective resource endowment (power) of SCs, or, more interestingly, that of Muslims and Christians, will reduce the likelihood of an upper caste or OBC Hindu household practising untouchability. A marginal redistribution of resources from OBCs to upper castes may reduce it as well. Identifying a community's power with its population weighted land share, we find support for these hypotheses in data from the India Human Development Survey 2011-12.