

Prospective Roundtable (Annual Conference on South Asia at Madison, Wisconsin)

Title

A Global History of the Peasant? An engagement with Navyug Gill's *Labors of Division*

Abstract

This roundtable assembles a diverse group of interdisciplinary scholars to discuss the contributions and implications of Navyug Gill's new book *Labors of Division: Global Capitalism and the Emergence of the Peasant in Colonial Panjab* (Stanford University Press, 2024). The book explores the landowning peasant and landless laborer as novel political subjects forged in the encounter between colonialism and struggles over culture and capital within Panjabi society. One of the most durable figures in modern history, the peasant has long been a site of intense intellectual and political debate. Yet underlying much of this literature is the assumption that peasants simply existed everywhere, a general if not generic group, traced backward from modernity to antiquity. Through a careful interrogation of a disparate archive - settlement reports and legal judgments to labor contracts, vernacular poetry, and family budgets - Gill challenges the givenness of the peasant by explicating the ideological and material divisions that transformed power in Panjabi society as well as global history. Drawing on the disciplines of history, anthropology, and economics, the panelists will put Gill's work in conversation with debates in several fields: religious identities (Gilmartin), commodity studies (Besky), social hierarchy (Suhail), diaspora politics (Deol), and political economy (Khan). By implicating economic logic with cultural difference, this book roundtable will allow us to re-think the itinerary of comparative political economy alongside alternative possibilities for emancipatory futures.