

**Thematic foci of the 2nd ESIND Training School “Comparative Research on European Representations of India: ”, July 7<sup>th</sup> – July 9<sup>th</sup> 2025, Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic**

As India and Europe are becoming increasingly important to each other as economic, political, and strategic partners, sensitive issues arise in their encounters. Today, it is crucial to gain insight into the ways in which Europeans have (mis)understood India and how this has shaped their interactions with Indians in the past and present. The Training Schools of ESIND will examine the development of Europe’s representations of India and their impact on encounters between the two regions, using the expertise of both its experienced members and invited scholars.

The second ESIND Training school will focus on seeking assessment of the project’s second hypothesis, as formulated in ESIND MoU (p. 4):

*The interests, motives, and biases of European authors and their audiences determined why certain ideas were embraced as facts about the people, culture, and society of the Indian Subcontinent. Colonial and postcolonial power relations formed the framework for dominant European representations of India and set the terms for interactions between Europeans and Indians.*

In the second Training School, experienced trainees will focus on debates about caste as characterizing and determining Indian society. Such an effort needs to follow several trajectories, as briefly indicated in the ESIND’s MoU. First of all, it should assess critically the kinds of evidence which are used as a source of the European understanding of Indian culture. Secondly, it is necessary to consider the soundness of the European theories about the Indian practices, ideas, stories, etc., in terms of the openness of these theories to re-formulation, or even refutation of their claims when there is convincing counter-evidence. Finally, we should consider possible assumptions which could have shaped the European understanding of the distant culture. In other words, we should attempt to make explicit what is presupposed, and often, what is not even recognized to exist in the debates dominating research on India today. Several specific points will be addressed in this regard, all indicating basic disagreement among scholars, but also among lawyers, policy-makers and others:

*How are castes different from other kinds of human groups and how are they to be classified?*

*How did the caste system come into being and what does sustain it?*

*What is the relation of the caste system to ordering social hierarchy?*

*What are the constitutive and necessary properties of the caste system?*

*What is the relationship of caste to social conflict?*

The Training School will also include interactive session where young researchers will have opportunity to present their own research and discuss it with the trainers and peers. There will be also out-door activity and time for informal exchanges between the participants.