

Marginalisation of Dalit Muslims with special reference to Democracy, Identity and Livelihood

Dalit Muslims in India are a section of society, which is completely absent from the Constitution, parliamentary democracy and the debates of mainstream politics in the country. The census report usually records the number count of different castes included as Dalit and a brief outline on their present status. But in these reports, we do not find any trace of the population of Dalit Muslims. The deeply disturbing fact is that the public sphere of our society doesn't even deem it necessary to hold discussions on this group. Keeping this situation in mind, a process of debate and discussion has been initiated with the active participation of the vocal representatives of the Dalit Muslim organizations and members of the community.



In this context, Deshkal Society, in association with Heinrich Boll Foundation, organised a seminar on 'Marginalisation of Dalit Muslims with Special Reference to Democracy, Identity and Livelihood', on 14 July, 2002 at Patna. The seminar aimed at generating wider debates and discussions on the socio-economic status and identity of Dalit Muslims within the Muslim community as well as in relation to non-Muslim communities, and their place in the larger society and democratic polity of the country. It was participated by a large number of Dalit Muslim community leaders, representatives of Dalit Muslim organisations, other Muslim leaders sensitive to the issue, media persons, particularly from Urdu media, and researchers and academicians who have worked on the



problems of Dalit Muslims. The discussions in the seminar and the feedback and insights from various sections of participants helped in developing an ideological framework and perspective for dealing with the socio-economic and political issues and problems of the Dalit Muslim community.

This seminar was extremely useful in providing insights for understanding the social conflicts within the Muslim community, and how the issue of Dalit Muslims was gradually acquiring the form of social and political questions and tensions in the public sphere, especially in Bihar. Even in the other parts of the country, issues pertaining to Dalit Muslims, both within and outside the

Muslim society have led to serious discussions in the recent past. The papers presented in the seminar have been compiled and published as a booklet, and are being disseminated among social and political activists, Muslim community leaders and organisations, journalists, and the intelligentsia for generating wider debates and dialogues, and for facilitating the process of recognition of Dalit Muslims as a distinct social category for the purpose of national policy and planning.

