

National Seminar on Dalit Studies and Higher Education: Exploring Content Material for a New Discipline

Second Session

Who is a Dalit? Overview of Dalit Studies in India

Saturday, February 28, 2004: 01:30 p.m. to 03:30 p.m.

Chair: Anand Kumar, Chairperson, SSS, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Speakers: Gail Omvedt, Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi

Aloysius, Professor, Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Anand Kumar is currently Chairperson, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His key interest area is Social-political theory and his books include, *State, Society in India, Nation Building in India* in English and *Parivartan ki rajniti aur rajniti ka sankalan* in Hindi. He has been involved in knowledge-based activism since his student life at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is constantly active not only within the university campus but in society on the key issues of students, teachers and social problems.

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A Proposal for Dalit Studies

Abstract: Gail Omvedt

"Dalit Studies" should focus not simply on the "Scheduled Castes" (Dalits in the narrow sense) but on the entire system of exploitation and on providing alternatives to this. In doing so it would take a review of Indian history, society and literature, teaching and using advanced techniques of the social sciences. Analysis of the changing modes of production and ideologies, especially the thinking of Brahmanism and of the various alternatives to it, the nature of Buddhism and the *shramana* tradition, of the bhakti movement, of the anti-caste alternatives rising under colonialism, would all be part of it. Finally it should focus on teaching the students critical thinking and self-reliance, as an alternative to the destructive "guru tradition" which leaders such as Ambedkar had criticised so thoroughly.

Profile: Gail Omvedt

Gail Omvedt has been living in India since 1978, became an Indian citizen in 1983, and works as a freelance writer and development consultant. She has also worked actively with various social movements including the Dalit and anti-caste movements, farmers' movements, environmental movement and specially with rural women.

Besides having undertaken many research projects, Dr. Omvedt has been a consultant for FAO, UNDP and NOVIB and has served as a Dr. Ambedkar Chair Professor at NISWASS in Orissa, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Pune and an Asian Guest Professor at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen. She is currently a Senior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and Research Director of the Krantivir Trust.

A prolific writer, Gail Omvedt has published a number of books including *Dalit Visions* (1975), *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (1993) and *Violence Against Women: New Theories and New Movements in India* (1991) besides having translated *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. Her latest well-acclaimed book is *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmins and Caste*.

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Towards an Inclusive and Critical Agenda in Dalit Studies

Abstract: G. Aloysius

Dalit articulations and assertions do not unfold in social vacuum. As aspirations and attempts to appropriate their share of social capital, they do so within multiple constraints and conditions, and in contestation with several antagonistic forces. Not the least of these is the initiative of the elite to represent and lead them. Such representation and leadership by the elite, however well-intentioned they might be, cannot be taken at their face value. Within the logic of differential social-power positions the groups occupy, the elite interpretation and intervention, that is, definition and determination of the Dalit collective life, often does have the unhappy, though unintended consequence of controlling and containing it, instead of valorising and carrying it forward. Systematic reflection or academic consideration of Dalit social reality, also necessarily falls within this wider framework of sociology of knowledge.

At present, what goes by the name of Dalit Studies, particularly within the academia, dominated as it is by traditional elite, cannot be on the whole considered a faithful representation or a meaningful interpretation of Dalit aspirations and collective struggles. Dalit struggles and Dalit Studies are tangentially related to one another. The proposal is: first, to historically locate the rise of distinct Dalit consciousness; second to derive the Dalit intentionality and trajectory; third, in the light of which to critique the existing academic practice; and fourth, to propose an alternative agenda of Dalit Studies. This last, it is claimed, will be in consonance and continuity with the history of Dalit struggles in the recent past.

Profile: G. Aloysius

G. Aloysius is Professor, Ford Foundation Endowed Chair in Dalit Studies, at the Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia. He has two major works to his credit. One is *Nationalism without a Nation* in India published by Oxford University Press. It has already been reprinted several times. The other is *Religion as Emancipatory Identity*, a study of the Buddhist movement among the Dalit Tamils around the turn of the twentieth century. He has also published several articles on Nationalism, Religion and Caste, all from a Dalit-subaltern perspective. Earlier he has had several years of field experience among the tribals of Jharkhand.

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Third Session

Dalit Perspectives on Society and Sociology

Sunday, February 29, 2004: 9:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Chair: Rajendra Ram, Retd. Professor, Patna University, Patna

Speakers: Bhagwan Das, eminent lawyer, Delhi

P. G. Jogdand, Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Mumbai

Suguna Ramanathan and Jyotsana Macwan, Feminist Scholars, Ahmedabad

Marxism and Buddhism have been key areas of Rajendra Ram's research. He has written several articles on the problems of caste and class in Bihar. His book *History of Buddhism in Nepal* is well-acclaimed and *Rahul Vimarsh* is a recent publication.

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Untouchability Today

Abstract: Bhagwan Das

These are the issues apparent in the paper.

Untouchability- What does it mean? Why was it not defined in the Constitution as well as the untouchability abolition law? Is it or is it not part of the religion? Untouchability practised in other countries of Asia and Africa and the role of upper caste Hindus. Untouchability practised by converts to Sikhism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Has law helped in abolishing untouchability? Untouchability practised by some of the Scheduled Castes. Untouchability in urban and rural areas. Untouchability not visible in major cities. What should be done to abolish untouchability?

Profile: Bhagwan Das

Bhagwan Das is one of the few intellectuals of contemporary India who has been an associate of Dr. Ambedkar. He has been reflecting on the sensitive issues of caste, untouchability and Buddhism for six decades. His reflections can be read in his books *Thus Spoke Ambedkar* (Volume I-V), *Ambedkar on Gandhi and Gandhism*, *Balmiki Jayanti aur Bhangi Jaati*, *My Days with Baba Saheb Ambedkar*, *Baudh Dharma*, and *Main Bhangi Hoon*. His forthcoming books include *Buddhism-Revival of Scavengers in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh* and *Main Mahar Hoon, Main Chamar Hoon*. He has been the founder president of World Conference on Religion and Peace held in India in 1998. In 2002 he was elected as the Chairman of Human Rights Commission held in Korea at the meeting of ACRP. For decades he has been an eminent practising lawyer at the Supreme Court of India.

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Caste System in India: Dr. Ambedkar's Perspective**Abstract: P. G. Jogdand**

Dr. Ambedkar has laid down his thoughts and also his theory of genesis, evolution and annihilation of castes and caste system in his *Caste in India* (1916)- the paper presented to his Anthropology Seminar at Columbia University which was published in 1917; *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) the undelivered presidential address prepared for the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, Lahore; *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946); and the *Untouchables* (1948). While analysing his ideas and the theory on the Caste System, we will have to refer to the themes or the issues that these books have dealt with.

Before formulating his own theory of the genesis, mechanism and evolution of castes in India, Dr. Ambedkar criticised and discarded a number of existing

theories on the subject. He did consider the earlier works on the origin of castes produced by the western as well as Indian scholars. While appreciating the scholarship in these works, Dr. Ambedkar offered constructive criticism of the way the analysis of caste was presented by eminent people such as Senart, Nesfield, H. Risley and Ketkar. Dr. Ambedkar maintained that none of the theories or definitions are correct or complete and all have missed the central point in the mechanism of the caste system. All these scholars, except S.V. Ketkar, defined caste as an isolated unit by itself, and not as a group within, and with definite relations to, the system of caste as a whole. To Dr. Ambedkar 'Caste in the singular number is an unreality. Castes exist only in the plural numbers'. There is no such thing as a caste: There are always castes. Hence the genesis of a system, i.e. the caste system.

Dr. Ambedkar highlights two major characteristics of the caste system. One, he says that there is no interconnection between the various castes which form a system. Each caste is separate and distinct. Secondly, the caste order is vertical and not horizontal.

Profile: P.G. Jogdand

P. G. Jogdand is currently Professor of Sociology, University of Mumbai, Mumbai. Earlier he has also taught at Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad and University of Pune, Pune. He has written and published largely on Dalit movements, gender issues, human rights and empowerment of weaker sections.

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Resolving Dalit Identity: Vankars, Chamars, Valmikis

Abstract: Suguna Ramanathan and Jyotsna Macwan

This paper attempts to describe some of the problems confronting Dalit communities in Gujarat today. Vankars, Chamars and Valmikis constitute the largest Dalit groups in the state; yet there is little unity among them. Vankars have developed the most and Valmikis have made the least progress, while the old Vankar-Chamar rivalry has not disappeared. The affirmative action programmes of the government (reserved quotas in educational institutions and employment opportunities) have introduced more divisions than before. BAMCEF, an organisation that could work for forging Dalit unity, seems to be present in only one area and to be dominated largely by one group-- Chamars. Valmikis are still retained as sweepers by urban municipalities under the label 'safaikamdar' and the prospect of certain employment in these positions encourages them to continue in their

age-old profession. The proliferation of religious sects further divides the Dalit community. What is to be done in these circumstances? Is perhaps continuing the struggle under Human Rights the way out?

Profile: Suguna Ramanathan

Suguna Ramanathan was Dean, Arts Faculty, and Head of the Department of English at St Xavier's College Ahmedabad. She has co-edited a study of the cultural universe of Dalit women titled *The Silken Swing* (Calcutta: Stree, 2000), and co-authored *Journeys to Freedom: Dalit Narratives* (Calcutta: Samya, 2004). Her other publications include critical studies of novelists *Iris Murdoch and C. P. Snow* (London: Macmillan) a translation in collaboration, *Selected Modern Gujarati Poetry* (Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1998), and a novel titled *The Evening Gone* (Delhi :Penguin India, 2001).

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Profile: Jyotsna Macwan

Jyotsna Macwan is currently working at the Behavioural Science Centre in Ahmedabad as manager, Human Rights Cell. She has been conducting various training programmes for the small NGO's head for strengthening their skills and capacity to the organisation for a decade. She has edited the publications in collaboration with Fernando Franco and Suguna Ramanathan, *The Silken Swing: The Cultural Universe of Dalit Women*, with Isudas Vaghela, *Azadini Adadhi Sadi ane Gujaratma Dalito* and with Shobhana Parmar, *Hirno Hinchko*.

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Fourth Session

Exclusion and Empowerment: Dalit Experiences of Democracy

Sunday, February 29, 2004: 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Chair: Papiya Ghosh, Professor, Patna University, Patna

Speakers: Anand Chakravarty, Professor, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University, Delhi

P. Sainath, eminent Journalist, Mumbai

Mukul Sharma, Country Director, HBF India, Delhi

Bela Bhatia, Associate Fellow, CSDS, Delhi

Chair: Papiya Ghosh

Papiya Ghosh teaches at the Department of History, Patna University and her research interests include Partition, diaspora, refugee, gender, backward and Dalit studies and more recently, Bhojpuri cinema and cassettes. She is currently working on three volumes---*Partition and the South Asian Diaspora*, *Community and Nation: Bihar in the 1940s* and *Caste, Region and Nation: Essays on Bihar*.

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Ending the hijack

Abstract: P. Sainath

When ICSE-prescribed textbooks used at elite schools in Mumbai carry half a page on ‘The Merits of the Caste System,’ you know that something very basic is wrong. Yet, there is little or no protest about this. The debate over ‘Dalit issues’ has been hijacked for a long time now. In the media and its middle class audiences, that debate has been mostly reduced to one over reservations. Ask students at any city college what they know of ‘Dalit issues’ and the first word they recognise is: reservations.

To an extent, Dalit issues also figure in the media when there are major, spectacular atrocities. These are soon forgotten or buried to the extent that the perpetrators usually go scot free as in the case of Karamchedu in Andhra or Kumher in Rajasthan.

What’s much less in the public eye is the day-to-day breaking down of the spirit that countless millions in this country regularly experience. The systematic and routine humiliation of the human spirit that comes in a hundred ways. From seating Dalit children separately at midday meals to the undermining of Dalit *sarpanchas* and other elected representatives. Right down to Dalits and Adivasis bearing the brunt of regressive economic policies.

This side of existence, constituting an incredible violation of rights and dignity -- the largest of its kind in the world -- is in danger of being further sidelined. The more so in an era where the establishment is unabashed in its defence of fundamentalist beliefs, including caste. We need a return to the basics. To highlighting these issues and rescuing the debate from a media and elite society that increasingly allows its privileged to believe that they are victims rather than oppressors.

Profile: P. Sainath

P. Sainath is one of those freelance journalists who have reported extensively on the issues of poverty and starvation, downtrodden people of the society and the adverse effects of the new economic policy of India. At the beginning of his career he was associated with the weekly *Blitz*. In 1993 he received *The Times of India* fellowship. Under this fellowship he reported for nine most poverty-stricken districts of the country. This work is published in his famous book *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*. This book has been translated into several languages and is part of the curriculum of journalism in 30 Universities apart from Universities in Britain, Canada and Australia. He has been awarded The Lorenzo Prize of the European Commission journalism award.

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Dalits, Exclusion and the Question of Democracy: A View from Bihar

Abstract: Anand Chakravarty

In a fundamental sense, a genuine democracy presupposes that there is an egalitarian social order encompassing all citizens. I do not believe that adult franchise carries any great significance for defining democracy. A genuine democracy implies that various *basic freedoms* and *justice* are available to all members of the polity. The former includes freedoms such as, of thought and expression, of association, of the right to dissent. The latter covers in a broad sense social, economic, and political justice. Unless all citizens have access to basic freedoms and justice, in the sense spelt out here, it is impossible for them to participate in the life of the community of which they are a part, or have any agency whatsoever in shaping the course of their lives as well as that of the

community in which they live. To speak of democracy unless these basic conditions are fulfilled is to do a major injustice to the essence of the term.

Any person who experiences a range of exclusions – social, economic, and political – can never hope to participate with dignity in the life of her/his community, or shape its destiny. Therefore, a Dalit in a community controlled by dominant castes can never experience true citizenship, nor can she/he part of a democratic process in any meaningful sense. An exploitative social order can never be democratic.

The countryside in Bihar is dominated by sections belonging to both the traditional and new dominant castes. The former include, in particular, Bhumihaar and Rajput, and the latter include the well-to-do sections among the upper layers of the Other Backward Classes, comprising Yadav, Kurmi, and Koeri. The Dalits, the overwhelming majority of whom are landless labourers, continue to be at the receiving end of the social, material, and political power of such groups. This is evident from the atrocities perpetrated on them by members of these groups during the last thirty years. It is ironical that Dalits have been subject to atrocities for simply asserting basic rights to land, livelihood, and dignity.

The nexus between state power on the one hand and caste and class power in the countryside on the other compounds the exclusion and exploitation of Dalits in Bihar. The Dalits in the state can never experience democracy in the sense understood here unless this nexus is broken. This demands a major structural change in the existing configuration of political forces.

The paper demonstrates the exclusion of Dalits from the democratic process by drawing from field experience in certain parts of Bihar.

Profile: Anand Chakravarty

Anand Chakravarty is a Professor of Sociology, University of Delhi. The result of his intensive fieldwork on local level politics in a village in Rajasthan, originally a Ph.D dissertation, was published in 1975 as *Contradiction and Change: Emerging Patterns of Authority in a Rajasthan Village*. Subsequently, his fieldwork on agrarian class relations in a village in north Bihar was published as *Social Power and Everyday Class Relations: Agrarian Transformation in North Bihar*. This book is necessary for all those working on India's agricultural structure.

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Where are Dalits in Indian Environmentalism?

Abstract: Mukul Sharma

The Indian environmentalism has a history of glorification of the past. Many 'radical and progressive' forces also upholding traditional and community rights of the people have compounded this. However, what about the Dalits, whose history of the past has no such rights? Unlike the upper caste discourse of nostalgia for the past and a sense of loss of domination and power, for the Dalits the memory of history, past and tradition is only one of deprivation and subjugation. Even today they do not have community assets basic to a community. Materially rich and dominant communities are intact because they have the resources, and a desire to use the logic of community in order to protect their power. This situation questions the alternatives that are being suggested by traditionalists, environmentalists and Gentrys. Why should the Dalits fight for the restoration of traditional community-based occupations, when it is precisely these that support their ghettoisation and do not empower or improve their situation either in the realm of civil society or the market? Why should they feel and work for the conservation and promotion of traditional water bodies and water harvesting systems, when leave aside the issue of ownership, they are not even allowed to take water from those ponds, tanks and wells?

Profile: Mukul Sharma

Mukul Sharma is Director of the Indian Office of the Heinrich Boll Foundation. He has been active in fields of journalism, voluntary organisations, trade unions and social movements for the last two decades. He has also published a dozen books and booklets in Hindi and English related to these subjects. His recent book is *Landscapes and Lives: Environmental Despatches on Rural India*.

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In the Eye of the Storm: Dalits of Chakwada Village in Rajasthan

Abstract: Bela Bhatia

Chakwada, a little known village around 50 kilometres from Jaipur city, has been in the midst of a social upheaval since late 2001. The Bairwas of this village attempted to secure bathing rights in the village pond, which was denied to them traditionally. This resulted in a major counter-mobilisation of the dominant castes and social outrage, unprecedented in the recent history of the region. A series of punishments including fines, social and economic boycott were imposed. Respect for *parampara* (tradition) or *bujurgon ke niyam* (rules made by the ancestors) was invoked as reasons in defence of the practice of untouchability. Not only those in the village who wanted to maintain the status quo but also officials who were keen to maintain “law and order” and “peace” invoked this plea, the latter even at the cost of Dalit rights. Even though the sustained struggle of the Bairwas secured them the bathing right, their confidence that this will continue remains tenuous.

The contemporary face of untouchability in Chakwada and surrounding areas, nuanced in some respects, blatant in others remains a major social evil that causes pain, humiliation, and rage amongst the victims. Increase in education amongst the Dalits has played a crucial role in growing awareness regarding their rights and has led to greater assertion. The present resistance by the Bairwas is an attempt at breaking the status quo that prevails in the region not only with respect to bathing rights but also other issues such as temple entry.

The nature of official response, as the course of this resistance reveals, speaks volumes about the difficulties that Dalits undergo on a regular basis in order to attain justice. In spite of positive constitutional provisions and related laws on paper, in practice, a large majority of Dalits in our country are unable to access these laws, or get them implemented in their favour. In the eyes of the law-enforcing agencies Dalits remain unequal citizens.

Profile: Bela Bhatia

Bela Bhatia is an Associate Fellow at CSDS, New Delhi. She has co-edited the book *War and Peace in the Gulf: Testimonies of the Gulf Peace Team*, with Jean Dreze and Kathy Kelly and co-authored *Unheard Voices: Iraqi Women on War and Sanctions* with Mary Kawar and Mariam Shahin. She has been writing regularly in *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Seminar*, *Frontline* and *Hindu* on Naxalite movement, human rights, hunger, land rights and gender issues.

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Fifth Session

Dalit, Patriarchy and Gender

Sunday, February 29, 2004: 2:30 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Chair: Uma Chakravarty, eminent feminist historian, Delhi

Speakers: Padma Velaskar, Professor, TISS, Mumbai

Smita Patil, Research Scholar, JNU, New Delhi

Nandita Bajaj, Assistant Development Commissioner, Paounta Sahib, Himachal Pradesh

Uma Chakravarty is a feminist historian who lectures at Miranda House, Delhi University. She is on the visiting faculty at the Institute of Women's Studies Lahore, IWSL and has worked and written on issues of caste, labour and gender and is active in the Democratic Rights and Women's movements. Amongst her published works are, *The Delhi Riots*, *Three Days in the Life of a Nation* (co-authored with Nandita Haksar), *Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism and Rewriting History: Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*.

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At the Intersection of Caste, Class and Patriarchy: Exploring Dalit Woman's Oppression

Abstract: Padma Velaskar

It is now fairly well-accepted that any adequate theoretical account of gender power relations and women's oppression must be firmly located in societal power contexts. A contextualised, relational understanding of women would mean very fundamentally in the Indian context, situating women in the caste (and also separately and more contemporaneously in class and other contexts) to which they belong by birth and socialisation and acquire a position and identity more or less firmly rooted in structural and cultural realities. Situated at intersections of caste, class and patriarchy, which express power relations in the politico-economic, social and cultural domains and their legitimising ideologies, Dalit women's gender oppression cannot be understood decontextualised from caste and class.

Rooted in both feminist critiques of sociological theories of power and inequality and the Dalit feminist critique of the Indian feminism, the paper explores some aspects of the interface between caste and patriarchy in order to understand the specificity of Dalit women's oppression. A basic assumption underlying the exploration is that the structural principles of division and hierarchy upon which the system of caste and untouchability are based would socially construct gender and structure patriarchal forms in specific and socially significant ways. Phule's radical critiques of Hindu patriarchy and Ambedkar's formulations on the linkages between caste and patriarchy have laid the basis for an Indian theory of patriarchy. Drawing upon these foundational ideas, this paper presents an "ideal typical" framework that has been developed to illuminate facets and sources of Dalit women's subordination.

The analysis is based on insights gained from extensive fieldwork with Dalit women and from Dalit feminist thought and literary writings, critical feminist, Dalit and other non-feminist theory. It suggests that neither caste, class nor gender alone can adequately explain Dalit women's positions and experiences. These are intersecting and interconnected and not discrete systems of power. For the Dalit woman who is located at the bottom end of these systems, is produced a simultaneity and multiplicity of oppression in production, social reproduction, sexuality and culture that is experienced in interlinked ways and is qualitatively very different in manifestation and form from the oppression of high caste women.

In posing fundamental challenges to existing linkages between knowledge and power and between curriculum and hierarchical power relations and cultural/ideological hegemony, Dalit critical theory must continue to build upon social structural analyses of caste and patriarchy that are prefigured in the writings of Phule and Ambedkar and further develop Dalit feminist theory. Feminist rejections of totalising, universalising and homogenising frameworks of patriarchy have already paved the way for deconstruction. There is need to develop Dalit feminist theory which will uncover ideological and material specificities that constitute Dalit women and grapple with the problem of unjust gender relations, at both subjective and objective levels and recover women's oppositional histories/positions. We also need to account for the complex differentiation and relationalities that shape contemporary patriarchal form and changing social and political lives of Dalit women. Finally, even as it struggles for space on a hitherto high caste terrain, critical Dalit theory must engage with the issue of intersubjectivity across society if it is to pursue its agenda of social justice.

Profile: Padma Velaskar

Padma Velaskar is a Professor at the Tata Institute of Social Science, Mumbai. She has researched and published in the area of Sociology of Education, with a focus on caste, class and gender issues in education and in the area of Caste and Patriarchy. She has been awarded the Times Fellowship for research on Dalit women of Maharashtra.

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Dalit Women's Writings: A Sense of the Struggle

Abstract: Nandita Bajaj

This paper takes literature to be a representation of the collective consciousness of the Dalit community. It provides a comparison of male and female writings to trace the areas of convergence and differences through which the different sociological experiences of Dalit women comes into sharp focus. It also treats writings as an instrument whereby the agency of women is articulated. This paper analyses writings by Dalit women to substantiate the claim that they 'talk differently' and that issues of gender need to be specially highlighted. I intend to use Dalit women's writings as a text from which to explore, extract and map out the elements of their consciousness.

Dalit women write differently from Dalit men because of their different sociological experiences. They do not represent themselves, as the male writers do, as mere symbols for the debasement of the Dalit community. They see themselves as speaking and acting agents for the community, though, ironically, the focus remains on the male child as a symbol of hope for the community. They are also conscious of an individual gendered identity beyond the family and community, though this is not rigorously pursued. The category of Dalit and the category of woman in a constant engagement with each other, opening up spaces of both convergence and divergence. As Dalits the women are conscious of being victims of caste oppression in which men and women of the upper class/caste participate. They call for an end to this system. As women they face patriarchal violence and control from men both of the upper caste/class as well as of their own community. They also recognise that all women face patriarchal controls - albeit in different forms. They are not conscious of any specific way to end this - especially violence within the family and patriarchal community practices. For this they do see spaces for alliances of women of all castes and classes. They see themselves as exploited economically and sexually - and to both they add the dimension of exploitation by their own community members. Their ultimate aim, however, remains liberation of human kind.

Profile: Nandita Bajaj

Nandita Bajaj has been involved in research and is keenly interested in issues related to women in society. She couples this with her interest in literature. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from St. Stephen's College, Delhi; Master of Arts in English literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and an M. Phil in Sociology from JNU. Her M.Phil dissertation was entitled "Dalit Women: Education, Politics and Literature in the 20th Century" and interrogated the position of women in Dalit society. She is an I.A.S. officer (2001 batch) in the Himachal cadre and is currently posted as Assistant Commissioner (Development) at Paonta Sahib.

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Feminist Consciousness in Dalit Literary Forms

Abstract: Smita Patil

This paper seeks to explore feminist consciousness in Dalit literary forms. It specifically examines the historical background and how the Dalit Panther movement introduced a new essence into the literary forms of Dalit literature in brief, which also led to the Dalit women's literary consciousness. Thus, the main focus will be highlighted on the autobiographical writing to see the patriarchal domination within and outside community in the specific context of Dalit women as a caste and gender.

Profile: Smita Patil

Smita Patil is working on her Ph. D. programme from the Centre for Political Science on 'Caste and Gender', JNU. She has done her M. Phil on 'Dalit Feminism in Maharashtra' from JNU and has presented a paper on Dalit Women: Educational Equality and New Horizons at the Dalit International Conference in Canada, 2003. Apart from her deep academic commitment, she has been associated with committed NGOs.

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Sixth Session

Quest for Identity: Colonial and Post-Colonial

Sunday, February 29, 2004: 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Chair: Sumathi Ramaswamy, Programme Officer, Ford Foundation, New Delhi

Speakers: Ashok Aounshuman, Fellow, UGC Career Award, K. P. Jaiswal Institute, Patna

Ritambhara, Lecturer, TISS, Mumbai

Ramaiah, Reader, TISS, Mumbai

Ashok Singh, Freelance Journalist, Delhi

Sumathi Ramaswamy is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and is currently on assignment with the Ford Foundation, New Delhi as Programme Officer for Education, Arts and Culture. She studied for her M.A. and M. Phil in ancient Indian history at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. She also has a Masters in Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania, and

graduated with a Ph. D. in History from the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (University of California Press, 1997) and has recently edited a volume entitled *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India* (Sage, 2003). Another monograph entitled *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* is forthcoming from the University of California Press in June 2004. She is currently working on a new project on the social life of maps and the formation of cartographic culture in modern India. Entitled "Body Politics: Maps and Modernity in India," this project has been supported by funding from the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Institute of Indian Societies, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

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The Subaltern Brahmins and the Process of Identity Construction of the Lower Castes in Colonial Bihar

Abstract: Ashok Aounshuman

The paper explores the process of identity construction of lower castes in Colonial Bihar under the aegis of Ramanadi Vaishnavite and Dasnami Shaivite sects and a class of degraded Mithila Brahmins. It underlines how they shaped or tailored the respective caste origin myths and their attempts of re-allocating their position in the social hierarchy and their role in the efforts of colonial states in reinforcing/restructuring the lower caste, position on a ritual scale.

Profile: Ashok Aounshuman

He is teaching history at B. R. Ambedkar University, Muzzafarpur, Bihar. He is currently working under the U.G.C. Career Research Award on the impact of Colonial Gangetic river revenue policies and the growth and expansion of East Indian Railways on the life ways of fishing and boating communities of Bihar, drawing their sustenance from the river Ganga. His forays into the rural history of Bihar began with understanding the understanding of its agrarian aspects and has now narrowed his focus on the peripheral sections of the rural society of Bihar.

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Abstract: A. Ramaiah

It is often claimed that India lives in villages and these villages are understood to be ‘little Republics’ where everyone’s needs and aspirations are met in a mutually complementary manner. This is the view held by almost every popular nationalist and social reformer including Mahatma Gandhi who all belong to the ‘upper caste’ background. This may be called the Brahmanic view. Against this, there is another view: Democracy in Indian villages is not meant for every village community, but only for the people belonging to upper castes. This has been the view held by most of the nationalists and social reformers from Dalit background. A few liberal-minded non-Dalit intellectuals also hold this view. Though this view was articulated in the early 1920s itself by no less than the principle architect of the Indian Constitution Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, it has not been given due recognition in any of the social science discourses including sociology.

While the Brahmanic view is a known one, the views of the marginalised or oppressed caste groups like the Pallars is relatively unknown.

Based on the experiences of the Pallars, the author has come to the conclusion that though every village is inimical for the Dalits to experience democracy – social, economic and political, the scope for Dalits experiencing democracy is relatively higher in villages predominantly inhabited by their own caste people. The Pallars residing in villages predominantly inhabited by the caste Hindus have experienced relatively a higher degree of untouchability and atrocities. There was hardly any scope for experiencing any type of democracy.

In the light of this conclusion, it is suggested that there is a need for reconsidering Ambedkar’s suggestion that the ‘Untouchables who are socially and culturally different from the Touchables should be settled in separate settlements comprising only of Untouchables’.

Profile: A. Ramaiah

A. Ramaiah is a reader at the Tata Institute for Social Sciences, Mumbai and has done his Ph. D. on ‘Protest Movement and Scheduled Caste Identity: The Impact of Constitutional Provisions on the Scheduled Castes in Selected Villages of Tamil Nadu’ from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has done innovative research on Factors Responsible for High Rate of Acquittal in Cases Registered Under the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act

1989: The Case of Southern Tamil Nadu, India. He is a regular contributor to *Economic and Political Weekly, Mainstream, Link and Tribune*.

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The Category 'Rural' Revisited: Dalit Voices from a Village in Maharashtra

Abstract: Ritambhara Hebbar

As Tonnies' 'Gemeinschaft' (Community), village life has quintessentially characterised face-to-face interaction and, in the Indian context, Srinivas' 'horizontal' and 'vertical' solidarity. But subsequent literature has contested these representations. Here I refer specifically to perspectives from below, that is, to the perceptions of untouchables of village life. But discussions on the category 'rural', despite its focal point being the 'village', has not been able to draw upon these altercating voices in deliberations on issues of rural development and social change.

In view of the above, the paper presents the experience of village life; its past and present from the perspective of the Dalits in a village of Maharashtra. In particular, the paper draws upon the life and work of a person from the Mahar sub-caste, known in the village and the area for his exemplary efforts in bringing about revolutionary changes in the village. Thereby the attempt is also to reflect upon the implications of his perspective on the popular and academic understanding of the category 'rural' as well as the larger issues of rural reform, development and change.

Profile: Ritambhara Hebbar

At present Ritambhara Hebbar is working as Lecturer in the Unit for Rural Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She has co-authored and co-investigated a project titled Rural vs. Rural-An Exploration of the Category in Rural India with special reference to Maharashtra. Recently she has submitted her Ph. D. thesis on 'Hos and their Environment-A Case Study in Singhbhum District' to the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi. She has published an article on 'Tribal Self-Rule and Life Support Systems' in September 2002 in *The Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems*, Unesco, London. She has been a regular contributor to *Economic and Political Weekly, Seminar* and *Social Action*.

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The Story of a Dalit Family from a Sleepy North Bihar Village

Abstract: Ashok Singh

The paper encapsulates the story of a Dalit (Chamar) family that broke the age-old bondage of enslavement after a long but silent struggle against the prevalent forms of social and economic exploitations. The family of bonded labourers concentrated on the education of their young children (sons) with messianic zeal. The village they belonged to saw radical changes in the land-labour relations in a period of a quarter of a century. But the changes were brought about quietly, almost stealthily. There were no violent edges to the changes, through there were occasional outpourings of emotions.

Significantly, the established political and cultural parameters, and also some affirmative actions acted as the agents of changes. Some of the notable agents of changes were education, mass media such as Radio and Elections.

Of the two Chamar boys, one is a school teacher and the other a deputy collector in the Bihar Administrative Service. The elder of the two, Anand Ram, was caned one day by the village landlord because he dared to fold his two hands to greet the landlord instead of bowing low to pay his obeisance. He should have said, “salam malik” instead of mumbling “pranam”, the landlord demanded.

In due course, Anand Ram’s younger brother joined the Bihar Administrative Service. Posted as a deputy collector, he invited some young Rajput boys of the landlord’s family to attend the celebrations of his first son’s birthday. The upper caste boys quietly drove to the local town to oblige the young officer. The wheel had turned full circle.

Profile: Ashok Singh

Ashok Singh is a senior journalist. In a career spanning over two decades, he held senior positions in the mainstream newspapers as well as television. He has worked as Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer* and Executive Editor, BiTv. He has also worked as political correspondent, *The Indian Express*. Currently, he is a columnist with *The Pioneer*, *Sahara Times* and *Navhind Times*. He has been associated as consultant for Television channels.

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Seventh Session

Dalits and Literature: Creating a Subjectivity

Monday, March 1, 2004: 9:30 a.m. – 12 noon

Chair: U. R. Ananthamurthy, eminent writer, Bangalore

Speakers: Rajkumar, Reader, Delhi University, Delhi

Omprakash Valmiki, Dalit writer, Dehradun

Sheoraj Singh Bechain, Reader, Delhi University

Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, Reader, IGNOU

U. R. Ananthamurthy has been acclaimed as one of the most prolific writers and thinkers of the Indian sub-continent. His contribution has been historical in the field of creative writing, particularly novels and literature. His original works have been in Kannada but have been translated into English, Russian, French, Hungarian, Hindi, Bangla, and many more languages. The film *Diksha* was based on his famous novel *Sanskar*. He has been visiting Professor to Iowa University and Tufts University of America respectively in 1975 and 1978. He was Vice-Chancellor of Mahatama Gandhi University, Kottayam and has been the Chairman of the Sahitya Academy. He has been conferred India's most prestigious award in the field of literature, the Jnanpith Award.

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Dalit Literature: A Perspective from Below

Abstract: Raj Kumar

The objective of this paper is to discuss the historical context of the emergence of a new literary genre called Dalit literature which reflects the growing identity, awareness and consciousness of the Dalits during the colonial period and post-independence days. Attempts will be made to analyse the nature of literary representation of Dalit problems and the emerging consciousness in the writings of selected Dalit scholars, in view of the pluralities that exist in India, especially due to different languages and culture. It will be interesting to compare and contrast the sensibilities articulated in Dalit literature coming out from various Indian states. Finally, attempts will also be made to evaluate the literary values and to see whether it can be part of the world literature.

Profile: Raj Kumar

Presently, Raj Kumar is a Senior Lecturer in English at SGTB Khalsa College, Delhi University. He is working on 'Dalit Personal Narrative: A Study of Autobiography, Nation and Community' for his Ph. D. from the Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has completed innovative researches on 'The Doms: A Scheduled Caste Community of Orissa' in 1995-96, 'The Dhobas: A Scheduled Caste Community of Orissa' in 1996-97 and 'The Sauras: Profile of a Scheduled Tribe Community of Orissa' in 1997-1998. Currently he is working on 'Dalit Personal Narrative: A Study of Autobiography, Nation and Community', Alienation, Consciousness and Assertion: An Interpretation of Oriya Dalit Narrative' and 'Bhima Bhoi: A Study of His Protest Poetry'. He has contributed articles to *Forum Gazette*, *The Fourth World*, *Mainstream* and *Social Action*.

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Abstract: Omprakash Valmiki

One has to confer that Dalit literature and Dalit society have several significant points of interaction. Despite disagreement and divergence of opinion with the proceeding literature, it has to be given a serious attention and reading. Very few of us actually realize that Dalit literature is beyond the echo and reflection of atrocities on their persona. The significance of the broader shoulders of Dalit literature would speak for its vision when it stands as a wall against all forms and types of injustice, atrocity and social inequality. Such postures alone would go on demonstrating the conscientiousness and ideological commitment of Dalit literature.

Whereas the earliest phase of Dalit literature was confined to verse and poetic expression, today it is manifested in several styles. Dalit writers primarily created a space for themselves as poets and now in recent times short stories, novels, reviews, journalism, autobiography and memoirs have come out to unequivocally affirm that Dalit Literature has come a long way.

Against all odds, pitted against the time and several other exigencies, Dalit literature is buoyant and hopeful for an enhanced life situation. It is to be appreciated that despite the suffocating and disgusting contestations, Dalit literature has ensured that it does not lose vigour and budding possibilities.

Briefly, the prospect of Dalit literature is literature alone, and Rajendra Yadav is very apt in his remark that the 'next century will belong to Dalit literature'

Profile: Omprakash Valmiki

Currently Om Prakash Valmiki is an officer at Opto Electronics Factory, Dehradun. He is an eminent Dalit writer and poet and his most acclaimed book is his autobiography *Joothan* which has been published by Radhakrishna Publications, New Delhi. Its English translation has been published by Samya Publications, Calcutta in India and Columbia

University Press in America. His other important books are *Dalit Sahitya ks Saundarya Shastra*, *Ghuspathiye* and *Salam* (story-collection) published by Radhakrishna Publications, New Delhi. He has been writing regularly for *Vartman Sahitya*, *Samkaalin Janmat* and *Samyantar*. He has been awarded the Ambedkar Rashtriya Puraskar in 1993.

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Abstract: Sheoraj Singh Bechain

Restricted life circumstances and an acute sense of deprivation was the hallmark of the early writers with Dalit identity. Undergoing the ordeal of proscription and prohibition, forfeiting opportunities and privileges appear true for all important signatures of Dalit literature. Ironically when the very phrase dalit began attracting appreciation, admiration and reverence from several social constituencies, there is a visible and sudden rush for the enlistment and inclusion in the Dalit category. So much so that many cast-Hindus would love to be listed as Dalit and would be willing to pay any price for the inclusion of their work as part of Dalit literature. Dr. Ambedkar did not consider the literary and poetic contribution of the dalit medieval poets/saints as adequate for he sincerely believed that they had left important worldly issues to the wishes of the divinity. They merely removed the leaves of the caste-based discrimination tree, while the need of the hour was to strike at the very root of the tree. But the same Dr. Ambedkar dedicated his classic *Achoot* to the memory and contribution of Nandnar, Chokhamela and Raidas.

But I am of the opinion that the philosophical contribution and ingenious literature of our ancestors be used as take off point for current practices and concerns. We should rather take a lesson from the supposedly upside-down-Hegel, who was made to stand straight and erect by Karl Marx. The Dalits must have a suspicious gaze towards even the evidently progressive and good ideas of non-Dalits, for there is a wide gap between the preaching and practice.

We do not wish to remain anymore the victims of deprivation, discrimination and injustice. We are precisely struggling for that golden day when the phrases like untouchables or Dalits would get confined in the lexicons alone. Or alternatively it will acquire independent postures such as of Muslim, Christian etc, for these expressions convey people of a particular religion but do not indicate anything pertaining to unequal social relation as they are alien to the Hindu Caste paradigm. Humanity and human values get eroded placed in proximity with proponents of inequality. Hence it is imperative to remain far from the Hindu customs and beliefs. Operating close with them and looking for the translation of constitutional safeguards and provisions into action are almost impossibilities and dignified treatment cannot be expected. History is a mute witness of thousands years of sanctions and rejections faced by the Dalits. Such enduring restrictions and sanctions suffered by the Dalits has resulted in the emergence of a new persona It is sheer irony that despite more than five decades of independence, Dalit expression was not provided with a forum. Dalit persona in nutshell appears to be a prisoner of war forced to live in worse sub-human condition than the worst of jails.

Profile: Sheoraj Singh Bechain

Currently Shivraj Singh Bechain is a Reader at Delhi University. His published books are *Hindi Dalit Patrakarita par Patrakar Ambedkar ka Prabhav*, *Croanch Main Hoon* and *Nai Fasal*. At present he is working on *Rashtriya Swarup ki Hindi Patrakarita: Ke Samajik- Sanskritik Dayitwa*. He has presented a paper titled *Hindi Katha Sahitya Main Dalit Vimarsh* at Antarrashtriya Dwitiya Vishwa Sahityakar Sammelan, London, in October 2002. He was a delegate to the Antarrashtriya Sammelan, Kanada, in May 2003. He writes frequently in the Hindi newspapers, *Hindustan*, *Rashtriya Sahara*, *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Amar Ujala*. He has been awarded the 'Ambedkar Samman' in 2002.

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Representation of Dalits in the Literature of Premchand

Abstract: Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay

Premchand and his literature have recently become a field of battle between writers not necessarily on politically opposite sides. On the one hand, there are those writers who consider that Premchand was not only sympathetic to the cause of the Dalits but also that he gave to the Dalits a realist portrayal and a voice through his literature. On the other hand, the Hindi Dalit writers react strongly to any such contention. They say that Premchand, like other Savarna writers, was not capable of realistically portraying the Dalits and their woes. In fact, they say, Premchand misrepresents them, and, in certain cases, like in 'Kafan', he has vilified the Dalits. The attack on Premchand by some of the Hindi Dalit writers is so severe that they even refuse to consider him as sympathetic to the Dalit cause. In this context, it becomes important to analyse the specificities of such a representation in Premchand.

The representation of Dalits in nineteenth-century Hindi literature was rare. It was only during the 1920s and 1930s that novels and stories were composed with Dalits as important characters. Premchand was among the first to create independent and recognisable Dalit characters in many of his stories and novels. We find Dalit characters in five of his novels and about fifteen of his short stories. *Premashram* (The Abode of Love, 1922), *Rangabhoomi* (The Stage, 1925), *Kayakalp* (Metamorphosis, 1926), *Karmabhoomi* (The Spell, 1922), 'Saubhagya key Kode' (Whips of Fortune, 1924), 'Mukti Marg' (Way to Salvation, 1924), 'Aga-Pichcha' (Dilemma, 1928), 'Mandir' (The House of God, 1927), 'Ghaswali' (The Grass-cutter, 1929), 'Lanchhan' (Stigma, 1931), 'Sadgati' (Deliverance, 1931), 'Thakur ka Kuan' (The Thakur's Well, 1932), 'Gulli Danda' (1929), 'Doodh ka Daam' (The Price of Milk, 1934), 'Mantra' (1926), 'Jurmana' (The Fine, n.d.), 'Meri Pehli Rachna' (My First Composition, n.d.) and 'Kafan' (The Shroud, 1936) are the stories depicting these characters. There are other instances where the castes of the characters are not given but they can be said to belong to the Dalit sections of the society. Here we are taking those works where the Dalit castes are specifically mentioned as well as those with nearest approximation. These novels and stories were published during the 1920s and 1930s, i.e. almost the entire period when he had started publishing in Hindi.

Considering the massive literary output of Premchand, the representation of Dalits as a social group with specific problems of their own is rather limited. The specific socio-religious problems of the Dalits are taken up only in two novels (more prominently in *Karmabhoomi* and

partially in *Godan*) and only in four stories ('Mandir', 'Thakur ka Kuan', 'Doodh ka Daam', and 'Sadgati'). The rest of the above-mentioned stories and novels deals with the Dalits as part of the poor and their particular social problems are discussed only to the extent that it is necessary for the flow of the narrative. Sometimes, as in *Rangbhoomi*, this social reality is almost completely ignored. In his journalistic writings, however, he paid more attention to these social issues. The accounts of Dalits with their own social problems were written in the late 1920s and the 1930s when the Dalit question had acquired national prominence in the wake of the Ambedkar-led movement.

The representation of the Dalits formed a broad spectrum in his literature. While, on one end, there is a character like Dukhi (in 'Sadgati') who totally accepts the spiritual superiority of the Brahmins, on the other end, we encounter Ghisu and Madhav (in 'Kafan') who mentally and emotionally exist outside the Brahmanical moral order. In between, we find the other Dalit characters occupying the middle ground where compliance and defiance are woven together.

In dealing with the Dalit issues in his literature and journalistic writings, Premchand derived from the Hindu reformist and socialist-marxist. Although he was aware of the lower caste protest movements given voice fully by Naicker, Achhootananda and Ambedkar, he largely ignored them but he bitterly criticised the orthodox Hinduism for upholding untouchability.

Therefore, it may be said that, viewed from today's Dalit perspective, Premchand remained confined within a particular framework which the Dalit movement has abandoned. However it will be unwise to ignore or reject the profound sympathy with which he wrote about Dalit issues and the creative sensitivity with which he portrayed the Dalits in his literature.

Profile: Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay

Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay is currently working as a Reader of History at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi. His publications include *Existence, Identity and Mobilization : The Cotton Millworkers of Bombay, 1890-1919*. He has published articles on 'Communalism and Working Class: Riot of 1893 in Bombay', 'Cotton Millworkers in Bombay, 1875 to 1918: Conditions of Work and Life' in *Economic and Political Weekly* and 'The Contested Terrain: Hours of Work in the Cotton Mills of Bombay, 1875-1920' in *Contemporary India*.

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Eighth Session

The Minority and the Marginal: Can there be a Muslim Dalit?

Monday, March 1, 2004: 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Chair: Wasi Ahmad, Retd. Professor, Magadh University, Patna

Speakers: Imtiaz Ahmad, Professor, JNU, New Delhi

Y. Sikand, Fellow, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, The Netherlands

Safdar Imam Quadri, Lecturer, Magadh University, Patna

Wasi Ahmad was the Head of the Department of Geography at the College of Commerce, Patna. During 1977-83, he was a member of the Legislative Council, Bihar. He was active in the University Teachers' Movement, was the Joint Secretary of FUSTAB and has been associated with the CPI. His area of special concern is Education and Minority affairs.

Marginalisation of Dalit Muslims

Abstract: Imtiaz Ahmad

Dalit, the term has to be defined subjectively. It is a debatable question who they are. Christian and Muslim Dalits have no privileges in the Constitution. This goes on to mean that those who do not subscribe to the caste ideology are excluded from the special provisions granted in the Constitution of India.

Hindus have the caste system and Muslims have the caste label. It is a myth that Islam is egalitarian. It is hierarchical, pro-stratification. The Quran states, "let the ones having a lot of money give all you can to your wife", at the time of separation.

There are categories, they share all the same categories (status of Hindu Dalits). Occupationally scavengers are excluded, untouchability is practiced. Have these changed over time?

This situation persists as there is not enough pressure on the state, as the contention is that no caste system exists in Islam. There is a lack of mobilisation on the issue of inclusion. The political parties afford to ignore the issue until they are able to mobilise en bloc of Muslim support.

Democratisation has to be in the wider society and within the Muslim community itself. Muslim Dalits are a recognisable category and the work is yet to begin.

Profile: Imtiaz Ahmad

Imtiaz Ahmad is a Professor of Political Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His most famous book *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India* has been a pioneering work in the study of social conditions of Muslim society. He has written a number of research articles in national and international magazines and journals on the politics of communalism, electoral democracy, and day-to-day cultural and social practices in popular discourse. Most significantly, he has been a source of motivation for young scholars and social activists.

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Islam and Caste Inequality among Indian Muslims

Abstract: Yoginder Sikand

This article examines the tension between the radically socially egalitarian ethics as contained in the Qur'an and the practice (*sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community, on the one hand, and the actual social practice of South Asian Muslim communities, on the other. It looks at how the Qur'an has been sought to be misinterpreted in order to bolster caste hierarchy among the Indian Muslims, particularly through the notion of *kafa'a* or 'suitability of marital partners' as contained in the books of *fiqh* or jurisprudence. It then examines the writing of a contemporary Indian Muslim scholar who critiques widely-held notions of *kafa'a* that are generally used to sanction caste and social hierarchy among many Muslim communities in South Asia.

Profile: Yoginder Sikand

Currently he is Fellow, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Netherland. His published books are *The Origin and Development of the Tablighi Jama at (1920-2000): A Cross-Country Comparative Study* and *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India*. His forthcoming books are *Muslims in India Since 1947* and *Madrasas and Islamic Education in India*. He has been a regular contributor to *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, *South Asia* and *Economic and Political Weekly*.

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The Untold Story of Meershikar Community

Abstract: Safdar Imam Quadri

In the heart of Bihar's capital, Patna, there is a mohallah of about three thousand population named Meer Shikar Toli. The residents are by profession bird-catchers. Meer Shikars relate themselves with Bairam Khan, the Mughal army head. Their traditional profession has come to an end when in post-independent India, the government banned the buying, selling and hunting of birds and animals. This community is a victim of continuous social, economic and cultural marginalisation. By this date, Meer Shikar is on the margin of the social map of the Muslim community. This paper explores how this community is struggling for survival and various kinds of crisis they undergo amidst the dual pressure of the state and community.

Profile: Safdar Imam Quadri

Safdar Imam Quadri is currently a lecturer of Urdu language and literature at the College of Commerce, Patna. Proficient both in Hindi and Urdu, he has authored as many as seven titles related to literary criticism, environment and sociology.

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Ninth Session

Knowledge, Pedagogy and Dalit Studies: Future Programme and Strategy

Monday, March 1, 2004: 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Chair: I. C. Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, Veer Kunwar Singh University, Arrah

Speakers: Prathama Banerjee, Lecturer, Lady Shriram College, New Delhi

Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, Deshkal Society, Delhi

I. C. Kumar is the Vice-Chancellor of Veer Kunwar Singh University, Arrah, Bihar.

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Profile: Prathama Banerjee

Prathama Banerjee teaches history in Lady Sriram College, Delhi. Her Ph.D. work is on "The Politics of Time: 'primitives' and history-writing in a colonial society". Her latest publication is "*The Work of Imagination: time and history in colonial Bengal*", in the forthcoming issue of 'Subaltern Studies'.

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Profile: Sanjay Kumar

Sanjay Kumar is a research scholar and social activist. Presently he is working on two projects, 'History, Culture and Anthropology on the Musahars of Gaya (Bihar)' and 'Reconstructing Contents and Methods of Teaching for Dalit Children'.

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