

**The draft of history curriculum with dalit perspective, proposed at a workshop organised by B.R. Ambedkar University, Muzaffarpur, and Deshkal Society. This draft is now a paper in the history curriculum of the university.**

- A critical review of existing history curricula — which are the silences and omissions regarding caste which we can identify in our graduate and postgraduate study programmes; silences not only about lower-caste protagonists of history, but also silences about the category of caste itself.  
A review of history in relation to other disciplines — why does history emphasise class while sociology caste? Does this imply that we do not possess a sense of the changeability of caste categories and identities? Is our thinking still plagued by a notion of caste as an age-old structural feature of Indian society? Should we then begin by formulating a historical conception of caste, by historicising caste.
- Identify the purpose and nature of our intervention — not only to develop an autonomous area of study called Dalit Studies, for this might leave it vulnerable to ghettoisation and boycott by mainstream academics — also, therefore, to subtly reorient the general study of history, both thematically and methodologically, in order to make it more receptive to serious engagement with the politics of caste.
- Identifying possible spaces within existing curricula where we could intervene — how far this can be done through suggesting additional topics, how far by alternative formulations of existing themes, — how much and what kind of change in the syllabi are we envisioning, — how to negotiate the existing orientations of Indian history writing and teaching in universities.
- It is possible to address the issue from two directions, — one, by formulating adjustments in the core papers of Indian history — namely, given our resources we could think of suggesting some changes in the Ancient India and Modern India papers. Two, by additionally formulating a new optional paper that interested students could study, something of the nature of 'Dalit Histories: The Culture of Protest'.
- At the first level, we could discuss possibilities of change in Ancient and Modern India courses, respectively. Talking of Ancient India, we could begin with the two conventional 'originary' questions — the question of sources. What does the historian's dependence on written archives, dominated by Sanskrit texts, imply for the study of caste? And two, the question of races, the Aryan invasion issue, and how far this conventional ethnological beginning of Indian historiography is actually the setting up of a caste problematic in disguise?

We could then follow up with issues like peasant-caste-state formation; gender-caste-community; the creation of the world of Sanskrit and of local/regional languages; the construction of religious formations cryptically named as Hinduism and Buddhism and so on.

A study of Modern Indian history could begin with the colonial invention of Indian society, defined centrally by the category of caste. How far was caste, as we understand it today, a colonial discursive and material construction? How far was this new caste an ethnological and how far a social category?

This could be followed by a study of early resistances to colonial rule (Chuhar rebellion, Santal rebellion, even the 1857 uprising) by various popular groups and their repression and consequent administration, which result in the categorisation of some communities as castes, others as tribes and so on .

We could also stage the late 19th century formation of the Indian middle class identity in terms of its caste orientation — showing how a main part of the history-writing agenda of this period was of writing caste/lineage histories, showing how the literary and historical genres were being formed in antagonism to ‘vulgar’ cultural forms like those produced by popular presses, etc.

The emergence of nationalisms — around self-conscious political identities like the Maratha, the Rajput or the Bengali — could also be posed as politics inflected by caste.

Early nationalist organizations — like the Congress — could also be studied by way of recognising their caste orientation, e.g. the de-industrialisation thesis vis-a-vis the *julah*, the swadeshi mobilisation vis-a-vis the Muslim peasant and so on.

The 20th century could be written up, symbolically, as a triangular contest between Gandhi, Nehru/Jinnah and Ambedkar and textured accordingly.

These could be some of the talking points on which we could base a future study programme, keeping in mind the immediate implementability and viability in the context of our universities.

- At another level, we could also think about framing an optional paper on dalit histories. This could be a paper divided into three sections — a history of the category of caste and its various usages; a study of alternative histories written by dalit writers, beginning from Phule to contemporary thinkers, and also including literary forms; a study of the difficult relationship between caste and nation in our 20th century political experience, including the experience of the writing of our constitution with Ambedkar as one of its main authors.

We could think about how far into contemporary times could we bring this course, keeping in mind the ready availability of literature.

Once again, all this is a starter, inviting your suggestions, both regarding individual themes and topics and regarding the general technique we need to follow in our attempt to reorient higher studies curricula. Also useful would be your assessment of the pedagogical systems of our universities, in the light of which we need to work out our strategy, and your thoughts on the target audience that we are facing in our sensitising project.

### **M.A. Optional Paper: Dalit Histories: Cultures and Protests**

*This is a special paper on the issue of caste, and demonstrates the changing uses and critiques of the Indian caste system. It also must emphasise the coming of age of the critical dalit voice in India. The paper also indicates the flourishing of dalit cultures and histories to a great extent autonomous from mainstream politics and academia.*

#### **Unit 1. History of Caste as a Category**

- Caste as colonial category — the use of colonial administrative technologies like census and survey for identifying and fixing caste; Orientalist discourses and caste; colonial policing and the listing of criminal castes; the question of caste vis-a-vis tribes.
- Nationalist uses of caste — the politicisation of caste as a basis for mass mobilisation — Gandhi and making the *harijan* a mainstream nationalist question
- Constitution and the listing of Scheduled Castes and Tribes; — Ambedkar and the writing of the constitution — caste as the locus of administration and State policies of welfare and development.
- The rise of the *dalit* as a rebel category — Dalit Panther Movement, etc.
- Mandal Commission and the rise of caste-identity politics.

#### **Unit 2. Caste as Historiography**

- Nationalist historiography and the Sanskritisation paradigm of caste mobility.

- Marxist historiography and caste as class.
- Subaltern historiography and caste as identity — relationship of caste subalternity to gender, race and communal politics.
- Alternative histories of caste — writings of Jyotibarao Phule and Ambedkar — local histories and oral traditions and their relationship to academic history-writing.
- Literature and caste.

**Unit 3. Caste and the Nation**

A difficult relationship — anti-Congress organisations that critiqued INC's caste position — Republican Party, etc. Ambedkar vs. Gandhi — the politics around Poona Pact — Durban Conference, Macwan and the debate around putting India and caste issue on the international human rights agenda.

**Draft of Ancient India History Curriculum with Dalit Perspective, Proposed by a Workshop Organized by B.R. Ambedkar University, Muzaffarpur, and Deshkal Society.**

**Ancient India  
(800 B.C. to A. D. 700)**

**Unit 1. – Evidence of Egalitarian Society: Comparative Study**

- I. Archaeological evidence
- II. Anthropological and sociological evidence

**Unit 2. – From Differentiation to Social Stratification**

- I. Economic (Livelihood)
- II. Decision-making Domain
- III. Ritual — Social Domain

**Unit 3. – Historising the Beginning of Exclusion (Up to A. D. 200)**

- I. Brahmanical sources
- II. Buddhist sources
- III. Sangam Literature

**Unit 4. – Forms of Resistance**

- I. Brahmanical tradition with special reference to Later Vedic Period
- II. Buddhist and Jain traditions
- III. Brahmanic notion of Kaliyuga

**Unit 5. – Margins, Mainstream and Frontiers: Kingship in Theory and Practice**

- I. Origin, myths of ruling dynasty
- II. Notion of Varnashankar
- III. Social policies of rulers (Maurya to Gupta) (Varnashram and Ashok Dharma)