

**Workshop  
on  
Emerging Dalit Studies: Problems, Potentials and Challenges in Higher Education  
(Saturday-Sunday, October 30-31, 2004)**

**Day-1**

**I Session** (11.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.)

**The Meaning of Dalit Studies**

**Chair:** Imtiaz Ahmad, Chairperson, Deshkal Society, Delhi

**Speaker:** Gail Omvedt, Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi

**Guest of honour:** Sachidanand, Chairman, A. N. Sinha Institute, Patna

Janardan Thakur, Vice-Chancellor, Patna University, Patna

**Profile: Imtiaz Ahmad**

Imtiaz Ahmad was 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.

**Abstract: Gail Omvedt**

**A Proposal for Dalit Studies**

"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: Sachidanand**

Sachidanand is presently the Chairman of the A. N. Sinha Institute, Patna. He has been an important pillar of establishing Sociology as a discipline in Bihar. His books are: *Tribal Villages in Bihar*, *Social Dimension of Agricultural Development*, *The Harijan Elite*, *Industrialization and Social Disorganization among Tribals*, *The Changing Agenda*, *Shifting Cultivation in India*. His efforts led to new dimensions in the Harijan cell of the A. N. Sinha Institute at academic levels.

**Profile: Janardan Thakur**

Janardan Thakur is at present the Vice-Chancellor of Patna University, Patna. He is a renowned physicist of India, acknowledged for his contribution in the field of black hole, gravitation and cosmology. He has published many research papers in the journal published by Indian Academy of Sciences named *Pramana*. Earlier, for many years, he was the Principal of Science College, Patna, i.e. one of the most prestigious colleges of Bihar.

**II Session** (2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.)

*Critiquing Existing Curricula: Exploring Alternatives*

**Chair:** Sumathi Ramaswamy, Programme Officer, Education, Arts and Culture, Ford Foundation, New Delhi

**Speakers:**

G. Aloysius, Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi

R. S. Arya, Professor, Patna University, Patna

Savyasaachi, Reader, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi

**Profile: Sumathi Ramaswamy**

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). Her latest book is *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (University of California Press, 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.

**Abstract: G. Aloysius**

**Inscribing Dalit Concerns within the Curricula of Higher Education: Some Comments**

Though the emerging academic focus on the collective life of Dalits and their concerns is merely a belated response to and recognition of an already changing social reality and further, a reluctant accommodation, it still is a welcome change. However ideological contestation for and against such an inclusion of Dalit concerns warrants some caution in its form and content.

If the objective of the proposed Dalit Studies is to inscribe the multiple and at times even contesting concerns of the worst victims of caste, then one should go about it differently than the current practice. Updating colonial ethnography albeit in somewhat post-modernized jargon would serve only to reinforce existing untouchability and ghettoization. One needs to put together anew elements of what potentially could constitute an emancipatory epistemology, an ethnography that is simultaneously an empowerment.

This is better done through a twin process of deconstruction and reconstruction of our existing and established knowledge of social relations in the subcontinent, particularly of caste. Without a thorough critique and exposure of the pro-caste bias at all levels in present day academics, a serious foundation for Dalit Studies within higher education cannot be laid. As for reconstruction, one ought to be warned about culturalism, that is conducting Dalit discourse at the level of culture and aesthetics, sharply differentiating between questions of identity and interests.

A needed corrective to these and similar pitfalls could be teased out from the emancipatory struggles of the Dalit castes themselves and the ideological articulation of its leadership in recent history.

**Abstract: Rama Shankar Arya**

During recent decades restructuring of curriculum of social sciences with the Dalit perspective has been taking place in different universities of Bihar. During this development, Ambedkar and Periyar were added to the Philosophy syllabus of Patna University and a postgraduate course in Ambedkar Studies was introduced at Siddhu Kanu University (Bhagalpur). Certainly, the space created in universities reflects the change in Bihar politics. It is well reflected in the new names of the universities such as B. R. Ambedkar University of Muzaffarpur and Siddhu Kanu University of Bhagalpur.

There are various inherent problems of this change. Three of these are worth mentioning here: (1) low number of Dalit teachers and students in the universities, (2) unavailability of reading materials in Hindi and, (3) hindrances from traditional power structure. To create more space for Dalit Studies in the universities, we need long-term planning, programmes and strategies.

**Profile: Rama Shankar Arya**

Rama Shankar Arya is a Professor of Philosophy at Patna University, Patna. Earlier he was the Vice-Chancellor of Veer Kunwar Singh University, Arrah. His books are *Katon Ke Beech Se* (collection of Dalit Poetry), *Ashrayheen Hota Dharma* and *Mukti Ki Avadharana*. His autobiography *Ghutan* will be published soon.

**Abstract: Savyasaachi**

**The Making of Curriculum to Undo Hegemony**

Dalit Studies can initiate the work for undoing hegemony preparing the ground for understanding the history of suffering of other marginalized groups as well and from this standpoint critique the dominant system. This could prepare the ground for developing a frontier discipline concerned with a decolonization of the mind and of practice. Unlike the first two options that can be facilitated by the heads of departments and the Vice-

Chancellor, the third option will require not only their support but also the involvement of the community.

The marginalized people are in fact the frontier people. The making of a frontier curriculum thus needs to be a carefully balanced process for building theoretical and practical skills. This would include a combination of fieldwork, lectures, discussions, seminar presentation and library work; a regular interaction with the larger social context, which includes the community and institutions of civil society; a system for critical reflections in place of assessment and evaluations and a network of libraries.

**Profile: Savyasaachi**

Savyasaachi is at present a reader of Sociology at Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi. He is the author of *Tribal Forest Dwellers and Self Rule: The Constituent Assembly Debate on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule*. For many years, he has been deeply involved in understanding and writing on education, culture and livelihood of tribals as well as Dalits.

**(Day-2, Sunday, October 31, 2004)**

**III Session (10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.)**

*Alternatives in Curricula Building: Experiments in Hindi, English and History*

**Chair:** Nihar Nandan Prasad Singh, Professor, Dept. of History, Patna University, Patna

**Speakers:**

Manager Pandey, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

K Satyanarayan, Lecturer, Central Institute of English & Foreign Languages,  
Hyderabad

Prathama Banerjee, Lecturer, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi

**Profile: Nihar Nandan Prasad Singh**

Nihar Nandan Prasad Singh is at present Professor, Head of Department of History and Dean of Social Sciences at Patna University, Patna. Earlier he was the Vice-Chancellor of B. R. Ambedkar University, Muzaffarpur. He received the Commonwealth Fellowship and did his Ph. D. On 'British Historiography and British Rule' at SOAS in London.

**Abstract: Manager Pandey**

**Need and Necessity of Change in Hindi with the Dalit Perspective**

One of the purposes to redesign the curriculum of Hindi with the Dalit perspective is to make it socially sensitive. Besides this, it is also important for the democratization of the education system. This change in curriculum will make the universities more lively and organic. In a larger context, this ideological journey is not just a mere academic exercise but is directly linked to the issues of society, culture and politics.

**Abstract: K. Satyanarayan**

**Dalit Studies as a New Perspective in the Indian Academia**

K. Satyanarayan has offered a series of courses under the rubric of 'Dalit Studies' at the

Centre for Cultural Studies in the last four years. He taught 'Dalit Studies: An Introduction' in August–November 2000, 'Classics and Dalit Literature' in January–April 2001 and 'Dalit Studies: Caste and Culture in India' in January–April 2004. At present he teaches 'Dalit Autobiography: Form and Politics'. These courses are offered as compulsory/optional courses in the M.A. (Literary and Cultural Studies).

There are several reasons for offering these courses. Firstly, teaching English canon reproduces the dominance of Brahminical elitism in the English departments. The students have been taught and re-taught Chaucer to Eliot. Shakespeare has always been a compulsory course. The students from Dalit and rural backgrounds find it extremely difficult to respond to English literature. The result is that there are several Dalit and rural students who drop out of the English literature programmes. Secondly, the Dalit movement brought into the public some new insights and theories. It is important to bring these new insights and theories into the elite, Brahminical institutions of our academia. Thirdly, 'Dalit Studies' is not just a new body of knowledge. It offers a new perspective to understand Indian reality. It is a perspective that cuts across all disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. It sets up a new agenda to redefine the existing disciplines.

In his paper, he will focus on 'Dalit Studies: Caste and Culture in India'. He will discuss the difficulties in terms of the availability of the reading material and the institutional hurdles. The paper highlights the success of this course in terms of student response and how this course opened up the new areas of research in Dalit Studies.

**Profile: K. Satyanarayana**

K. Satyanarayana is a Lecturer at the Centre for English Studies at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. His areas of interest are Dalit Theory, Cultural Studies, Indian Writing in English, and Dalit Writing. He has co-edited an Anthology on Dalit Writing in Telugu titled *Dalit Manifesto* (1995). His M. Phil work is on *Indians and Others: National Identity, Gender and Caste in Gandhi*. He is soon to submit his Ph. D. on *Dalit Modernity and Telugu Literary History*. He has been the Editor of *Kulanirmoolana*, a Telugu magazine that deals with issues of caste.

**Abstract: Prathama Banerjee**

**Change and its Disciplining : History-writing and the Category of Caste in India**

This paper seeks to explore a fundamental paradox in the development of history as a discipline in India – namely, that precisely because history is meant to be the study of change, it has always already effaced caste as a category of experience and mobilization. This is because all available theories of change till today have required a sense of ordered progression and explanation, which caste has never fitted into. So caste has either been given away as a gift to sociology, meant to articulate society as a structure, or caste has remained a sub-category in explanatory frameworks of history. Do we therefore need to rethink our sense of change itself, and of History therefore, in order to truly engage with what contemporary politics has thrust in our face as caste?

**Profile: Prathama Banerjee**

Prathama Banerjee teaches history at Lady Shri Ram 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 Studie*'.

**IV Session (1.30 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.)**

*Exploring Content Materials for Alternative Curricula*

**Chair:** Sachidanand, Chairman, A.N. Sinha Institute, Patna

**Speakers:**

Badri Narain, Fellow, G. B. Pant Institute, Allahabad

Braj Ranjan Mani, Freelance Researcher, New Delhi

**Abstract: Badri Narayan**

**Oppressed Communities, Knowledge Production and Democracy**

Due to various kinds of ongoing democratic processes in society and the urge of identity assertion, oppressed communities have acquired the power of writing and knowledge production. In this paper, I would like to focus on the phenomenon of writing popular booklets and explore the potential that lies in them to use as an alternative source of knowledge and argue for developing them as texts in the curriculum in Dalit Studies.

*Popular Booklets* represents the grassroots dissent and protest of the Dalit community in north India. Dalits have remained excluded not only from the economic and cultural mainstream of society but also from the ambit of the expression of their existential notions in the hierarchical order of the society.

It is interesting to know that most of these booklets are based on Dalit history, text of identity construction that are attached with their collective memories and community myths. These are also texts of social justice and political participation, which can be helpful in the long term in democratizing the domain of knowledge production and history as a discipline.

**Profile: Badri Narayan**

Badri Narayan is at present with the faculty of Social History, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad. He has published *Lok Sanskriti mein Rashtravad; Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contesting Memories and Dalit Political Discourse* and a number of research papers in reputed journals.

**Abstract: Braj Ranjan Mani**

**Producing Reading Material for the New Discipline**

The ongoing debate and discussion on the definition of Dalit Studies as a discipline, its core curriculum and its basic objectives have not yet crystallized into a definitive consensus. There is little doubt though that this emerging discipline is not merely an academic enterprise. Closely related to the Dalit aspirations and struggles, it is animated by an emancipative socio-political vision. It involves the whole of society and the entire gamut of pedagogy and politics of knowledge production comes under its purview. Since it is a new, open-ended and experimental discipline, what is needed first and foremost, is to enunciate its rationale in social and intellectual terms, and then, establish it as a viable academic discipline. This cannot be done without producing a substantial and definitive

body of literature in both social sciences and humanities. Besides introducing the subject areas of Dalit Studies, such standard works should establish the focus and rationale of the discipline as well as its alternative theories, paradigms, research methods and strategies. What should be the key characteristics of such a body of literature so that it can challenge the established academic formulations and bring a new and more egalitarian social science into existence? To succeed in its broader political and intellectual objectives, such works must be holistic, unreservedly critical, openly committed, and restorative of the subaltern resistance and creativity in past and present. Scholars like Gail Omvedt, G. Aloysius, Kancha Ilaiah and others have produced some outstanding works in recent years. Such works are not many but they can serve as models to produce quality reading material. Attempts should also be made to render them into people's languages. Knowledge, after all, belongs to the entire society. To produce an alternative knowledge system and then give it back to the people, who need it the most in their liberation struggle, should be the cherished aim of Dalit Studies.

**Profile: Braj Ranjan Mani**

Braj Ranjan Mani is a freelance researcher, journalist and social activist. Earlier, he had worked with *The Times of India* for many years. Actively associated with some committed NGOs, he writes on social and cultural issues in both Hindi and English. His book *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society* is soon to be published.

**V Session** (4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.)

*Summary and Future Programme*

**Chair:** Vijay Chaudhary, Director, K. P. Jaiswal Institute, Patna

**Speakers:**

Arun Kumar, Consultant, Deshkal Society, Delhi

Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, Deshkal Society, Delhi

**Profile: Vijay Chaudhary**

Vijay Chaudhary is presently the Director of K. P. Jaiswal Research Institute, Patna. He is the author of *From Kinship to Social Hierarchy: The Vedic Experiences* and edited *Readings in Indian History*. For some years he has been guiding archaeological excavation in Bihar.

**Profile: Arun Kumar**

Arun Kumar, a historian and documentary filmmaker, is currently working as Consultant with Deshkal Society. He is the author of *Rewriting the Language of Politics: Kisans in Colonial Bihar* (2001). Some of his publications include 'Violence and Political Culture: Politics of the Ultra Left in Bihar' (*Economic and Political Weekly*), 'Beyond Muffled Murmurs of Dissent?: Kisans in Colonial Bihar' (*Journal of Peasant Studies*), 'Gandhi and Gita: Beyond the Quest for a New Language of Politics' (*India Perspectives*). He has been a Consultant to Oxfam (India) Trust on Violence Mitigation and Amelioration Project and worked on the themes of Dalits and Social Conflicts, Human Rights and Law, Women in Conflict Situations; Widows of Political Massacres in Bihar and, Campaign against Violence.

**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'.