

Editorial

This bulletin arrives at a time when the entire country is rocked by debates on the question of reservation for the OBCs in the institutes of “academic excellence”. However, issues covered in this edition go beyond the debates of reservation and covers the larger frame of caste-based oppression and also the struggles against it.

The current bulletin contains a detailed report of the Dalit Intellectual Collective Conference that took place at Hyderabad, August 10-12, 2006. The three Day Conference was focussed on the theme ‘Caste and Democracy’ and was filled with lively debates on this question by dalit scholars, academics, activists and students. The report is an abridged form of the deliberations but, provides the reader with a brief idea of discussions and debates that took place.

Apart from the news items from the press and a review of the book ‘Untouchability in Rural India’ the bulletin pays tribute to Kanshiram for his contribution to the cause of Dalit political expression, celebrates the occasion of Alternative Nobel Price to Dalit women’s rights activist, Ruth Manorama and also recollects the 40th anniversary of the Black Panthers Party of the United States which forms an inspiration to the Dalit movement in India and commands formidable respect in the entire milieu. We also found it pertinent to publish some reports on the practice of ‘untouchability’ in the campuses of ‘elite’ academic institutions of India perpetrated by the ‘*crème de la crème*’ of the society.

We hope that readers would find the contents useful and not limited to a compilation of information but serious references to various struggles against oppressions in the society.

We would like to have your criticisms, feedback, suggestions, ideas and any proposal that would enhance our endeavour.



The exit of a powerful Dalit expression

Kashiram, the founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party departed in the wee hours of Sunday, October 8, 2006 leaving many shocked across the country. He shall be remembered best as a pioneer of Dalit political manifestation at least in the mainstream. He could accomplish a fact which was considered a utopia even in a couple of decades back. Especially, at a time when the Dalit movement had already made huge strides in the South; in the North, political power for Dalits was an alien notion. He was successful in being able to put the Dalit political discourse in the Indian political agenda and demonstrated that the Dalits were a powerful force to reckon with right in the Hindi heartland which has witnessed the extreme form of caste-based oppression and caste-complications.

BSP unsettled the applecart and within 11 years of founding, it managed to install Mayawati, a Dalit schoolteacher and his protégé, as chief minister of India's most populous and caste-ridden state in 1995. It was perhaps a defining moment for Dalit politics. He deserves the credit for being the first leader outside the Congress-fold to capture Dalit imagination after Ambedkar. However, Ambedkar was never really a force to reckon with in the North and Kanshi Ram could fill the vacuum that existed perpetually. Under his leadership, the Dalits became an important force to reckon with, notably, in UP and Punjab and also in a number of states in North India.

The party could achieve such commendable feat by speaking directly to the aspirations of the Dalits and its mixture of aggressive anti-Brahmanism with a strong electoral politics enabling Dalits, long oppressed by upper castes, to hope that they could actually aspire to positions of influence.

With Kanshi Ram's demise, the legacy, currently faces the danger of being co-opted even further to mainstream political forces and power at a moment it should have been gathering steam to become an all-India force. It's too premature to comment on the future of the movement he created and only time will be able provide answers.

Report Dalit Intellectual Conference, Hyderabad, August 2006

A group of scholars engaged in the study of Dalit situation and struggles got together in 1997 with the purpose of having a dialogue, exchange views, discuss specific areas of theoretical and practical concern and to attempt to evolve a Dalit Theory. This group decided to call itself Dalit Intellectual Collective (DIC). The DIC is essentially a dialogue and solidarity forum whose objective is to challenge prevailing hegemonic discourses and to evolve shared understandings of the Dalit universe.

The DIC conference recently held at Hyderabad (August 10-12, 2006) was organised by DIC and the Department of Cultural Studies, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages(CIEFL), Hyderabad and was well attended by Dalit intellectuals, students, researchers and activists.

The Conference took up the challenge to theorise the new conceptions of democracy proposed by the oppressed castes and other oppressed communities in India. The significance of the Conference is even

more striking since it was held at a time when there is a new definition and a new language of democracy coming from the Dalits with a rage against and a critique of mainstream democracy. The 3 day national seminar chose the theme of "**Democracy and Caste**" to debate some of the theoretical issues emerging in the context of Dalit and other oppressed caste struggles in different spheres of life and it also created an opportunity to connect the domains of literature, culture and politics. The conference was inaugurated by Prof V S S Sastry, Vice Chancellor, CIEFL who sought larger co-operation with DIC in nurturing debates and wished that the scope of the conference be broadened.

The inaugural welcome was made by Prof. K. Satyanarayana, Department Of Cultural Studies, CIEFL, Hyderabad who clarified the title 'Caste & Democracy' pointing out that in most of the discussions on Dalits & OBCs one only hears terms like 'welfare', 'benefit' or 'upliftment', implying that these issues are only for these groups., and have no implications for

larger structures. He emphasised on taking these struggles seriously examining their larger implications. Also speaking about the context of AP and the 'controversy' regarding the canon in Telugu literature he identified the anxiety over the new political assertion of SC/ST/OBC groups and that there has been a silence surrounding them as well as the desire to break the silence surrounding the questions raised by these groups and that in the area of electoral politics, this assertion has been theorised in various ways- 'the crisis of governability' 'breakdown of institutions', basically saying that caste is an exclusionist category; we should be 'citizens' and not Dalits or Brahmins or OBCs. Other scholars have described these movements as a 'secular, democratic upsurge', but this is because they have stalled Hindutva, having discovered the 'importance of their vote' etc.

Prof. Gopal Guru, Convenor, DIC in his opening remarks defined the role of DIC which sees the need for a dialogue across social categories. Thus, the focus is on issues facing Dalits, it is not, sociologically speaking, mainly Dalit - there are people from other backgrounds and that 'Dalit' is a universal perspective that needs genuine interlocutors. He spoke about the spaces like CIEFL and its importance in facilitating and providing space for thinking. He also pointed that today the language of democracy is coming from the Dalits; with a rage and a critique of mainstream democracy. He mentioned that the DIC has no universal (it has all kinds of people, from extreme left to nice liberals); and wishes a dialogue between the universal and the particular.

Prof Jodhka pointed the misconception about a 'casteless' Punjab since there is a Sikh majority and demonstrated that it operates in much the same way as in the rest of the country and the largest number of SCs is concentrated here are 28.5% of the population (Dalit Sikhs are legally recognised as Dalits, as opposed to, say, Dalit Christians or Dalit Muslims). He said that recently, there was a conflict over drainage rights between the Dalits and the Jats and in 2003, there was news of caste conflict from another village from the same region over a shrine built in the memory of a 'lower caste' artisan and recently turned into a gurudwara. Caste conflict was also reported in Hasanpur and is new to Punjab and increasingly, Dalits are demanding access to common resources.

He indicated the various ways in which caste has been theorised in various disciplines: anthropology, sociology, political science (M.N Srinivas, G. S Ghurye, and later Rajni Kothari, Rudolph and Rudolph) and sociologists observed that caste was not going to disappear with modernisation. e.g. Srinivas observed that there was a horizontal consolidation of caste

identities as development happened. Kothari looked at how caste and democracy had penetrated each other- caste organisation was becoming associational; thus, castes were consolidating themselves through democracy, and were a major feature of Indian democracy. He pointed the problem of Srinivas' conception of the 'dominant caste' as it studies dominance as an attribute rather than in terms of a relation. He summed up saying that the source of Dalit agency lies in the factors of disintegration of village communities and the 'jajmani' system with it, distinct from an agrarian economy- working on land is thought to reproduce memories of structural dominance and that of autonomisation of Dalits - the cultural institutions are separate, such as gurudwaras, panchayat ghars etc. and thus, although Dalit identity is only 6-7 years old, it has arrived and is here to stay. We need, in this context, to rethink our ideas of community and citizenship.

Sanal Mohan presented an analysis of one of the social movements of XXth century Kerala that tried to engage with the problems of material and spiritual progress in the context of modernity. The movement originated within the framework of missionary Christianity but, it moved beyond the limits of the missionary project and eventually offered a critique of it.

Prof. Gopal Guru challenged the idea of India's 'successful democracy'. He said that there are two universes of domination since independence – the dominance of democracy, belonging to Dalit; and the dominance of modernity, belonging to upper castes, or pyramidal Brahminism. There are the contending perspectives of high-profile democracy (electoral aspects) and more low-intensity democracy ('civil society', NGOs etc.). Liberal discourses are resilient, but they are also continuously under threat, being challenged. He posed the question - how democratic is the intellectual imagination of democracy? The discourse of democracy, hijacked by upper caste scholarship, robs its Dalit - Bahujan character; a 'corporate democracy', a neo-conservative ideal that requires, minimally, insulation from popular pressure. It undermines the popular basis of policy, and secondly, it assumes that the elite are concerned about the common people. Thus, policy becomes insulated from the norms of the universal, like justice, equality etc. Commissions cannot address questions of self-respect, dignity. They may discuss symptoms of social discrimination but not the structure. He described Brahmanism as the realm of the 'ideal' and the untouchable as in the realm of the 'real'. However, Brahmanism, for its existence and sustenance, requires the Untouchable. Brahmins are now left with conceptual resources, not physical boundaries and modernity is

one of the ways to maintain the boundaries. He also added that the sequencing of modernity before democracy is Brahminical and it has been used by upper caste nationalists, like Tilak and even Vitthal Ramji Shinde to draw the line between the 'ideal' and the 'real'. This sequencing produces the Dumontian logic according to which the Dalit is not yet fit to contest elections and thus, we have to put democracy before modernity as the Indian democracy as it exists today is a fake democracy- 'democracy by leakage'- and cannot hope to annihilate caste but the egalitarian content of popular democracy has proven to be strong. One of the reasons for Dalit complacency could be the dependence on subsidies. Dalits then ask for subsidised democracy. It has moral implications and fails to generate in a person a sustained sense of dignity and leads to a reproduction of dominance.

G. Aloysius stated that social sciences suffer from dual hermeneutics and these are objects on which there is a social science understanding/analysis, but also a 'common sense' understanding, the understanding of the masses. He also said that caste and democracy are confrontationist and conflicting hermeneutics. He raised the question of the compulsion to say that procedural democracy is democracy or should we look at the substantive part and judge it. His understanding was that in general, the critical content that the social sciences ought to have is missing here. When it comes to caste, the situation is worse. Caste is, in fact, an engulfing and constraining reality. During analysis, Dalit movements are seen as self-contained entities and several questions are asked of them. There is no understanding of the fact that these are subaltern movements, whose one move generates ten counter-moves. He iterated that caste for Dalits is not a 'bond' or a community, but a burden. This is why Dalits are 'in movement', that is, in social movements of various kinds, but also moving away, from one place to another, other lives, other societies, towards anonymity and ascriptive associations. The social science analysis of caste does not show any of these things. Peter de Souza felt that the current academic debate on Mandal left no place for a third vision since there was a mechanistic division of the society on it. He stressed on institutions and policies which beget them and unless we engage with policies we don't have the instruments to produce the outcome. Outcomes do not come with good intentions but, through a series of instruments that are to be crafted and crafted self-consciously. According to him, distinctions need to be made, that are not being made in the current debate on caste and reservations: between terms like compensatory discrimination, preferential treatment and affirmative action, for instance. Or terms such as discrimination and disadvantage, which surely entail

two entirely different sets of consequences. Preferential policies may have not a reparation element. Affirmative action may be a third model anchoring from which policies emerge.

Partha Chhaterjee's spoke about connection Ambedkar made to religion/shastras and stressed about Ambedkar's idea of an ideal society based on liberty, equality, fraternity and that he had no qualms basing it on liberal democratic values. He said that it is in the light of this background that one should read the current debates on caste and reservations. For Ambedkar, how do we understand whether this was a practical question, of policy; or an issue of principle, of rights and equality? He also expounded Ambedkar's thinking of annihilating caste (inter-dining and creating different group formations from those that exist currently and inter-marriage) and Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism. He concluded that under the conditions of Indian democracy, where the main thrust of the battle of caste is the state, Indian democracy will never annihilate caste. It will constantly shift the battle-lines from one location to another; casteism by other means. An instance of this is how the secular language of caste today doesn't talk about caste; it maintains the hierarchy of caste.

K. Balagopal discussed law in the context of changing or fighting caste, where caste was the law for centuries and the weak instruments even when the Constitution has outlawed caste and about the courts' bias for upper caste privilege and how they have struggled against the idea of caste as a fundamental reality, which is why for a long time reservations have been treated as an exception to equality. It took them 25 years to say that they are to further equality (1975) and how, the old understanding is now coming back again. He spoke about the Prevention of Atrocities Act which is an unusual piece of legislation, because it is in the cause of social justice and is actually well drafted. However, he warned about the loopholes of this Act as well.

Rajeev Bhargava made linkages between secularism and caste. He expounded the sectoral as well as the sectarian view of caste. He explained secularism and urged to understand secularism as a critical social doctrine. Pointing out the differences between western and Indian secularism, he explained how Indian secularism can take the meaning forward and be more inclusive.

Madhava Prasad emphasised the need to broaden the issues concerning Dalits beyond reservations and said that the reservations more as a means of caste interest than overcoming it.

P. Muthaiah spoke about the Dandora movement and the struggles of Madigas and remarked that common

reservation has been an instrument in the hands of the upper caste. He highlighted how the Madigas fought to use the name as a suffix and fought to see that the entire society saw it as a respectable term. However, his contention was that because of the sub-caste rivalry between Malas and Madigas the Bahujan movement has been severely hindered in Andhra Pradesh.

Prof. G. Nancharaiiah presented Ambedkar's perception on the concept of Democracy and economic implications, i.e. Ambedkar's firm belief on constitutional methods for the required social change in a democratic polity and a very active role of the state in order to bring these changes. State's obligation to plan the economy of the people in such away leads to the highest point of productivity without allowing the concentration of wealth in few hands. When Ambedkar talked about democracy, he was not just talking about political but also socio-economic democracy. In his view, political democracy can't be preserved unless we have social and economic democracy. Therefore there is a need to emphasise on social and economic changes. He added that caste is a fundamental cause for the backwardness of the country. The existing land tenure system is also conducive for rapid economic development and that the State should bring more egalitarian changes to bring rapid growth in social justice.

C. Lakshamanan talked about the refusal of Indian democracy and politics to accommodate Dalit struggles since a section of society wants to retain the undemocratic social order. He stated that the Dalits also seeks to change this by struggle. However, he pointed the shortcomings of this struggle as the Dalit movement is concentrating on political representation and not on basic education.

There was a panel of students from CIEFL, Hyderabad, Hyderabad Central University and Osmania University

who narrated the experiences of Dalit and Bahujan Students in the campus of these universities. They also spoke about the attempts by Dalit-Bahujan students in CIEFL to forge strong union as organise as a political force.

Prof A.S. Chalam spoke about Manu being replaced by bureaucracy which is divided on the Varna system protecting the caste structures. He emphasised the relevance of cultural studies as a public space for Dalits/OBC. He said that there is a challenge before the Dalits to fill up spaces in public offices.

Kancha Ilaiah posed the question of English in the context of the conference "caste and democracy". He said that the language question that had been asked in the recent reservation debates may be answered by providing English for all children in the same format of teaching in neighbourhood schools.

Valerian Rodriguez made a presentation on the Lothian Committee report or the franchise committee report which made substantial characterisation rather than formal characterisation about untouchables in India. He emphasised the importance of Lothian committee in the context of complications between caste groups due to shared reservation benefits. The committee is useful because it did not collapse the untouchables in the lowest rung of caste society, but considered them as different groups. He spoke about the context since 1920 in defining the untouchables and the role played by Ambedkar, Gandhi, the Simon Commission, The Lothian Committee and J. H. Hutton, the census commissioner.

There was a public meeting on this occasion at the Press Club, Basheerbag on the 11th of August which was addressed by Prof. Gopal Guru, K. Satyanarayana and Sivakami. This meeting was chaired by Prof. Susie Tharu of CIEFL.



News from across the country

Dalit massacred in Maharashtra

A Small village in Bhandara district in Maharashtra has been focus of attention when four member of one dalit family was slaughtered on 29/09/06. Victims are Bhaiyyalal Bhotmange's wife Surekha, 44, his daughter Priyanka, 18, sons, Roshan, 23, and Sudhir, 21.

The fact finding team of Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti visited on 06/10/06 the village Kherlanji to know the details of this barbaric killing and they were shocked to learn that, the victims were first stripped naked, dragged from their hut to the choupal 500 meters away and hacked to death by the entire village of the so called upper-castes. VJAS has moved with the fact

finding committee report to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for independent probe of this dalit massacre as all political parties and local administration are covering up the matter as till date no MLA or MP from Bhandara has visited the village or Bhaiyyalal more than a week after the gruesome killing took place. Two MLAs from Nagpur, ostensibly sent by the congress higher ups, visited Kherlanji, but did not make any noise. The police is not acting fast and the only two prime witnesses are under threat. Not a single villager's statement has been recorded. Neighboring villages are living with fear and terror, especially the minority lower castes.

October 16, 2006



Dalits' last supper: Goat carcass

Barachatti (Gaya): More than 15 Dalits have died in drought-hit Barachatti and Mohanpur blocks of Gaya district, some of them after consuming the carcass of a goat in a desperation. Starvation and disease stalks a vast population here and the total lack of medicare is adding to the toll of human lives. "People are dying like flies. We fear many more deaths in the coming days," says Baleshwar Yadav of Barwadih village. The words have a chilling ring of truth. This correspondent on Friday watched people dying, with foam trickling down their mouths and nostrils and their fingers twisted. In Jalhi village alone, 13 deaths have been reported. Overall, over 25,000 people are said to have fled their homes in Mohanpur block. Scenes of unimaginable agony abound, in village after village. As we enter Jalhi, news of Hiramman Man-jhi's son Baldeo (4) meeting a painful death greets us. At the neighbouring Boat village, Kari Devi (40) has just died and the body of Rita Kumari (6), daughter of Sukar Manjhi, is being taken out on its last journey. At Piprahi, a handful of villagers are returning after performing the

last rites of 45-year-old Basrath Manjhi. "The situation is horrible," says Ishwar Manjhi at Jalhi. In a span of less than a month, 13 villagers, mostly children, have died, he says. Most deaths were due to diarrhoea, villagers say. "No doctor ever came here, but from the symptoms we are sure it was diarrhoea," says Baleshwar Manjhi who himself lost his young son. Other villagers nod in confirmation. Even as Ishwar recalls the names of the victims, a woman rushes in, crying. She whispers something to a person and hurries back. The toll has just risen to 14. At neighbouring Bongia village, people confess the deaths began after some starving people dug out the carcass of a goat and ate it. Ramji Choudhary says although only a few persons had died in the village, the most likely reason was the consumption of spurious meat. Rambriksh Manjhi, whose father was one of the victims, confirms the account. At least three members of his family are still sick, a three-year old child being in a serious condition.

(Source: Times of India 17/9/05)



"Mangal Pandey" blanks out Dalit's role in history'

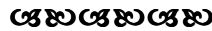
Lucknow, Sept. 13: Trouble for Ketan Mehta's magnum opus Mangal Pandey — The Rising continues to brew in Uttar Pradesh. After the court case slapped on the film director and crew by Mangal Pandey's descendants in Ballia for allegedly showing

the war hero in a poor light, it is now a UP-based Dalit organisation called Swayam Sudhar Samiti that is gunning for the filmmakers. The Dalits are enraged over the fact that the film makes no mention of Matadin, a Dalit, who had first informed Mangal Pandey

that the cartridges were being greased with animal fat and it was this that led to the 1857 war of Independence. The film shows a Dalit called Nainsukh informing Mangal Pandey of the use of animal fat in cartridges that were given to Indian soldiers for use. However, there is no mention of Matadin. According to Mr Dev Kumar, convener of the Swayam Sudhar Samiti, it is an established fact that it was a Dalit — and not a Brahmin — who first ignited the spark of revolt against the British

rule. The Swayam Sudhar Samiti has collected all relevant documents that detail Matadin's role in inspiring Mangal Pandey to revolt against the British and is now preparing to file public interest litigation against the filmmakers, demanding an unconditional apology for blanking out Matadin's role in the first war of Independence.

(Source: Asian Age 14/9/05)



Dalit's daughter is hostage

New Delhi, Sept. 13: Sixty-year-old Moolchand, a resident of Ballabgarh in Haryana, has lost faith in the police. Landlords of a nearby village have kept his 16-year-old daughter hostage for the last three months. Whenever Moolchand approaches the police, the policemen start beating him up and sometimes senior officials make derogatory remarks since he is a Dalit, he says. Talking to this correspondent, Moolchand said, "There is nobody in the village who will help me, simply because I am a Dalit. I know that my daughter is in the custody of landlords. Even the local police know that. When the landlords kidnapped my daughter, I lodged a complaint with the local police but no action was taken against the landlords." "After lodging several complaints, I requested police officials

several times to rescue my daughter. But now the policemen have started abusing me. Sometimes they beat me and pass derogatory remarks against me and my community. Now with the help of the local police, the landlords have threatened me with dire consequences. I am worried about my wife Sheila and four other children. The landlords sometimes threaten my family in my absence. I don't know what to do," said Moolchand. He further said, "I am a very poor man. It's really difficult for me to fight with the landlords of the village. The police has also become anti-dalit in the village. Last time when I visited the police station, one of the senior officials said, 'What will you do with your daughter, she is now pregnant?'"

(Source: Asian Age 14/9/05)



Demand for Hooda's dismissal by "Dalit Mahapanchayat"

NEW DELHI: A "Dalit Mahapanchayat" organised on Monday at the Ramlila Grounds here in the wake of the burning down of over 35 houses of Dalits at Valmiki Basti in Gohana village of Haryana on August 31 demanded dismissal of the Bhupinder Singh Hooda Government in the State and a thorough probe into the entire episode by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Held under the aegis of Akhil Bharatiya Valmiki Samaj, the meeting was attended by a large number of people from Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi and other States. In a resolution, the "panchayat" demanded dismissal of the Haryana Government and also demanded a compensation of Rs. 20 lakhs to each of the affected Dalit families and a CBI probe into the incident to unearth the truth. The "panchayat" also urged the authorities concerned to

initiate criminal proceedings against the area Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police as they had failed to prevent the incident despite information that the Dalits living at Valmiki Basti could be targeted after the murder of a financier, Baljeet, on August 27. After the murder, most residents of Valmiki Basti had fled apprehending an attack. The two officers in question have been transferred out following allegations of negligence on their part. The community leaders also asked for a compensation of Rs. 1 lakh to the next of kin of Baljeet. Some of the participants were of the view that the First Information Report pertaining to the murder should be set aside and a fresh investigation into the matter launched.

(Source: The Hindu 6/9/05)



Adivasi Woman paraded half-naked

BHOPAL, OCTOBER 4: A woman was allegedly beaten up, stripped and paraded by women in Dedgaon village of Harda district because a young girl from the village had been found in her house in a compromising position with an upper-caste boy.

Fulvatibai of Korku tribe alleged she was paraded naked in public. Four female relatives of the girl, who belongs to Gond tribe, and two upper-caste women allegedly also strung a garland of shoes around her neck.

According to Fulvatibai, she was tortured because she refused to give a false statement to the police that she invited the girl to her house and locked the house from outside. She claimed the girl had an affair with the boy and the two had entered the house in her absence. However, the girl's family in a counter-complaint alleged Fulvatibai of inviting the 17-year-old to her house where Madan was already present and he molested her.

SP (SC/ST) M.L. Solanki told The Indian Express that the women wanted to take revenge against Fulvatibai and paraded her half-naked with a garland of shoes around her neck. The women held her by hair and dragged her for some distance. He said they wanted to strip her but did not succeed. She was severely beaten up. Four women have been arrested and the

police are looking for Madan, an OBC, who is at large.

The police have also booked Fulvatibai for abetment to molestation on a complaint from the girl's father. The girl told the police Fulvatibai had invited her home when she was returning after immersing a Durga idol at night.

A team of state women's commission has left for the village to investigate the matter. The commission said it saw no reason to disbelieve the girl's statement but felt the women should not have taken law into their own hands.

A police official said the village panchayat met after the incident and wanted Fulvatibai to give a statement to the police that would save the girl's honour. When she refused to toe the majority line, the women decided to teach her a lesson, he said.

Ramesh, the girl's brother, has also been identified as an accused. The police had initially booked only the women for beating up Fulvatibai.

However, the case was later referred to the SC/ST Police Station, which registered offences under the Prevention of Atrocities Act under the IPC

(Source: The Indian Express, 05/10/06)



Equal and separate: In AIIMS hostels, SC/ST means you live with your own

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 25: A majority of SC/ST students at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the country's premier medical school which was at the heart of anti-quota protests recently, live in clusters in the college hostel as they feel "safe and comfortable".

Though they were allotted rooms randomly when they first joined the college, SC/ST students have sought reallocation to specific sections of the hostel after some of them alleged that they were harassed by 'general category' students.

Hostel records, obtained by The Indian Express under the Right to Information Act reveal that of the 45 male SC/ST students who have been in AIIMS for more than a year, at least 34 are living in clusters. Of these, 23 have sought reallocation from rooms which they were originally allotted when they joined the college, the records show. Of the total 306 students in AIIMS, 65

(21%) belong to SC/ST category. SC/ST students living in the clusters claim that while some moved to the clusters voluntarily as they felt "safe and comfortable", many were forced to leave the rooms allotted to them as they were unable to bear harassment by some 'upper caste' students. Hostel superintendent Dr G K Rath refused to comment, saying he was not authorised to speak to the press. Boys' hostel secretary Tarique Zaman said that "Dalit students move not because they are forced to, but because they want to live with their friends".

AIIMS spokesperson Dr Shakti Gupta maintained "there is no caste-based discrimination. Many students sought reallocation of rooms due to problems of water seepage and other maintenance problems in the rooms".

(Source: The Indian Express, 25/10/06)



Adivasis and Forests Rights Bill

The draft Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill 2005, prepared by the Ministry of Scheduled Tribes in late 2005 aims to provide India's Adivasis secure rights to forest resources and could 'rectify the historical injustice' by recognizing various rights of the adivasis. Many (it is claimed that more than 100,000) Adivasis were arrested in the western and northern India between June and November 2005 as part of their struggle to pressurize the government to table the Bill. The Bill was tabled in the parliament on 30 November 2005 and was later referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee for detailed study and discussion. There are allegations that interest groups with political patronage are keen to ensure that the Bill is not taken for consideration in the Parliament. It is reported that the Forest Department is opposing the Bill with some pseudo environmentalists and academicians. There are worries that their political influence and financial strength would override the strong will of the Adivasi organizations.

The draft Bill aims to compensate the "historical injustice" done to forest-dwelling tribes who were denied their traditional rights to forest lands and resources in the last couple of hundred years. In this period, lands they were dwelling on were declared 'forest land' as also wildlife protected areas, neglecting the traditional conservation ethos and dependence of tribal societies. The Bill aims to reverse the alienation of tribes from their own habitat, caused by past policies and laws. The rights proposed to be accorded to adivasis include granting of pattas to forest lands occupied before 1980

and a number of other rights are also to be granted: nistar (usufruct) or ownership rights to forest resources, grazing rights including seasonal ones of nomadic communities, habitation (for those classified as Primitive Tribal Groups), conversion of forest villages into revenue villages, and others. No tribal person is to be evicted from currently occupied land, till the process of determining rights is completed. The Bill places considerable authority in the hands of gram sabhas. This includes the primary function of recognising forest rights, regulating access to forest resources, and punishing those who violate provisions of the Act. But gram sabha decisions are subject to higher authorities. Sub Divisional Committees are to hear appeals against gram sabha decisions, and resolve inter-village conflicts. District Committees are to act as appellate authorities, and give final approval of the record of forest rights. A State Committee is to monitor the implementation of the Act. These committees include forest and revenue officials, and civil society representatives.

The Bill, if enacted, would mark a huge step forward in securing the rights of forest dwelling Adivasis and should also be extended to other forest-dwelling communities (especially small-scale dalit farmers), and to fishers and pastoralists occupying grasslands, wetlands, coastal and marine areas, of course with appropriate and strong conservation requirements. These sections of Indian society have been as under-privileged as adivasis.



Dalit chained for two years in Orissa

Kendrapada: The tropical rain lashes Upendra Naik's face as he sits on the veranda of a two-room asbestos house in Chauriberhampore village on the outskirts of Kendrapada town. The 32-year-old Dalit would have moved out of the rain, only if he could. For two years, he has been fettered there, his legs put in chains by villagers who believe he is "insane". Naik is a victim of the collective conscience of his village. In July 2003, a village committee ruled him "insane" and vigilantes tied up the man in the veranda. The darker irony is that the state government and the police all know about Upendra, but aren't doing anything to

unshackle him from his plight. Appeals by his wife, 27-year-old Suparna, for mercy and clemency have fallen on deaf and insensitive ears. Frustrated, Suparna left Upendra four months ago and moved back to her father's home, said Ananda Naik, Upendra's father. The old man in his seventies now cooks meals and brings them to his son three times a day. Upendra himself is tired of telling his story and tears well up before his lips can form words. "I am an innocent person. But some unscrupulous villagers have chained my legs."

(Source: Times of India 20/9/05)



Black Panthers turn grey, but don't lose their voice

On its 40th Anniv, Activists Remember The Revolution That Failed.

Berkeley (California): Bobby Seale never expected to see the 40th anniversary of the Black Panther Party he co-founded with Huey Newton. "A lot of times I thought I would be dead," he says.

The Black Panther Party – famous for its Black Power slogans and gun-toting members—officially existed for just 16 years. But its reach has endured far longer, something Seale and other party members will commemorate as they reunite in nearby Oakland this weekend.

"Grass roots, community, programmatic organising for the purpose of evolving political, electoral, community empowerment," he says. "This was my kind of revolution. This was what I was after."

The Panthers were born on October 22, 1966, the night Newton and Seale completed the Panthers' 10-point programme and platform. At the time, Newton was a law student and Seale was a social worker in Oakland. When they were done, they flipped a silver dollar to see who would be chairman. Seale called heads. Heads it was. Later, when he saw Newton looking sharp in a black leather jacket, he decided that members should wear something similar as a kind of uniform. They added berets after watching a movie about the French resistance in World War II.

Of Course, the Panthers' most infamous accessories were the (then-legal) weapons they carried when they began monitoring police activity in black neighbourhoods. In 1967, when state legislators were considering gun restrictions that eventually passed, armed Panthers showed up at the state Capitol in protest, grabbing national attention.

The militant approach, which frightened many white Americans, set the Panthers apart from other activist groups.

"They filled a critical kind of void in the civil rights struggle," says Charles E Jones, chairman of the Department of African-American Studies at Georgia State University. "At a time when folks began to reassess the utility of non-violence and turning the other cheek, the Black Panther Party offered an alternative."

Former Panthers point out that they were about more than guns. They ran breakfast programmes for children, up free health clinics, arranged security escorts for the elderly and testing for sickle cell anaemia—mainstream concepts these days, along with police conduct review boards.

At its high point, the party had about 5,000 members across the country, says Seale. Looking back, he still thinks the guns were necessary. A year before the Panthers were founded, he says, another group called Community Alert Patrol had tried monitoring police activity armed with tape recorders, walkie-talkies and law books. "After a month of them doing this, they in effect got their law books taken and torn up, their tape recorders and their walkie-talkies smashed up, with billy clubs their heads were cracked up and drug downtown and locked up," he says. "That's what happened to them."

A number of factors led to the Black Panther Party's demise, starting with government opposition, says Jones. In 1967, the FBI launched a counter intelligence programme—COINTELPRO—against what it termed "black hate groups" as well as other activists. Internal disagreement on tactics and leadership weakened the party further and, "ultimately, people just got burned out. It's hard being a full-time revolutionary in the US," says Jones.

Several Panthers were arrested and some still remain in jail. Seale, who turns 70 this month (the party was founded on his birthday), moved back to Oakland in the 1990s and keeps busy with speaking engagements. Hewton struggled with addiction and was shot to death by a drug dealer in Oakland in 1989.

Jones feels the continued interest in the Panthers comes down to "a certain kind of boldness. It stems from their community organising, their commitment to serving not only black folks but all oppressed people."

[Book Review]

Untouchability in Rural India

Ghanshyam Shah, Harsh Mander, Sukhadeo Thorat, Satish Deshpande and Amita Baviskar

Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2006

PP. 215. Price. Rs. 295

The publication 'Untouchability in Rural India' contains systematic evidence of the prevalence and extent of the practice of untouchability in contemporary India. It is based on the results of a very large survey carried out during 2001-02 in span of 565 villages across 11 states: Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The field data is supplemented by information about associated forms of discrimination which Dalits face in their daily lives, such as:

- ◆ The 'unclean' occupations open to them
- ◆ The double burden of Dalit women, who suffer both gender and caste discrimination
- ◆ The upper-caste violence with which any Dalit self-assertion is met

The book is not merely a pale documentation but a grim reminder of the caste-based oppression even after 60 years of Indian independence and it is in recognition of this unique problem of the untouchables. In spite of various legislations and provisions concerning untouchability, viz. Anti-Untouchability Act, 1955 and renamed in 1976 as Protection of Civil Right Act - PCR Act,* and the Scheduled Caste/Tribes Prevention of Atrocities of Act** the intriguing question is how the caste character of exclusion – a hegemony of a few traditionally empowered communities based on graded rights over the rest of the society – has survived in Indian societies in one form or the other, despite the fundamental ideological and structural changes that have taken place over a long period through the spread of religions like Christianity, modern secular and egalitarian economic model and public policies. The authors deserve special credit for making meticulous studies of the practices of Untouchability and its changing manifestation in different spheres of every day life of Dalits in rural India.

The study indicates the variance of such practices with varying extent and intensity in the 11 states surveyed. Kerala and Punjab had lowest incidences of untouchability confined to only a few spheres of private life, where as the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and

Andhra Pradesh had the highest occurrences of discriminatory practices. The study also ascertained that the state itself is violating the law as it is prevalent within the domain of the state services given the fact that untouchability has been explicitly outlawed in law and the constitution.

The authors also deal with Dalit efforts to overcome deeply entrenched caste hierarchies and to assert their right to live with dignity. While the evidence presented in this book suggests that the more blatant and extreme forms of untouchability appear to have declined, discrimination continues and is most prevalent in the religious and personal spheres with numerous incidents of prohibition from entering places worship in a majority of villages. The authors show that the notion of untouchability continues to pervade the public sphere, including in a host of state institutions and the interactions that occur within them and this book is worth reading for students, researchers, academicians, activists and policy makers and also for all those interested in social change.

* *The act provides for penalties for refusing admission to hospitals, educational institutions, hostels, or temples etc., for refusing to sell goods or vendor services, for preventing the exercise of any rights under Article 17 (which includes access to shops, public restaurants and places of public entertainment or wells, tanks, public bathing places, roads, and places of public resort), for demanding unlawful compulsory labour from the untouchables, like scavenging, sweeping, removal of carcasses, flaying animals, or removing the umbilical cord or any job of similar nature.*

** *The 1989 Act specifies the following eighteen types of atrocities for penalty: forcing the eating of obnoxious substances; dumping waste matter on land; intimidation during voting; mischievous litigation; false information; public humiliation; denudation; wrongful occupation of land; dispossession; bonded labour; outrage of modesty; sexual exploitation; fouling of water resources; obstruction of entry to a place of public resort; eviction of habitation ; mischief with explosive; destruction of building; and suppression of evidence.*



Alternative Nobel Prize to Dalit women's rights activist

Ruth Manorama of the National Federation of Dalit Women and Women's Voice is one of the three recipients of the 2006 Right Livelihood Award, widely known as the 'alternative Nobel Prize'. Manorama received the award "for her commitment over decades to achieving equality for Dalit women, building effective and committed women's organisations and working for their rights at national and international levels."

The other two recipients are Daniel Ellsberg, USA, and the Festival Internacional de Poesia de Medellin, Columbia. The Honorary Award goes to Chico Whitaker Ferreira, Brazil.

The idea of 'right livelihood' embodies the principle that each person should follow an honest occupation which fully respects other people and the natural world. It means being responsible for the consequences of our actions and taking only a fair share of the earth's resources. In every generation, there are groups of people and individuals around the globe who valiantly uphold these principles of right livelihood. The Right Livelihood Award was established in 1980 to honour and support such people.

The award presentation ceremony will be held in the Swedish Parliament on December 8th.

Sheddu, the side-effect of quota Caste on Campus

New Delhi: The reservation debate may more or less be over, but its side-effects are beginning to be seen across colleges and universities in the country. Schedule Caste students are being addressed with a new slang – sheddu and they are routinely abused by their upper caste colleagues. The caste lines have become stronger than ever.

Shy Jeetendra Kumar Meena left his hometown Dausa in Rajasthan to live his big city dream at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi. However, for this young Dalit, life has become a nightmare. He says he's abused almost every day. In this nerve centre of anti-reservation protests, no upper caste wants to be Jeetendra's friend. He says no one even talks to him. And now he has to vacate his room, because hostel number one of AIIMS, where he stays is mainly upper caste dominated. "They ask me to leave this place and go to hostel number three or four. That is your place the upper caste students tell me," says he. Jeetendra has complained, but says no one is listening. And since the key to his future lies here, he stays on – despite the humiliation. For Dalit students like Jeetendra, hard as they might try, there's no escaping their identity on campus. The merit list announces it and so do introductions during the ragging sessions. The result – ghettos in hostels.

Records show that of the 45 SC/ST students who've been at AIIMS, this past year, 34 are living in clusters. Says senior resident and general category student, Dr Kaushal, "May be it's just due to the inferiority complex that they want to live together. It's not just a question of residence. Dalit students are seldom elected to union posts and of late there are CDs being circulated which show some students burning Ambedkar's books.

Professor of Surgery at AIIMS, Dr Lakhiram Murmu, is a tribal. He says the caste divide existed even when he was a student here, but post the reservation ruckus, more cases are being reported. Says he, "The prejudice is very difficult to get rid of, but as far as the discrimination goes, that can be limited and that has been limited by the Constitution of India.

And it's not just AIIMS. In centres of excellence across the country, caste prejudice is a reality. Official policy may try and create equal opportunities by reserving seats but social attitudes remain fixed, untouched by official declarations. Even in a world of young highly educated achievers, a casteless society is a distant dream.

(Source: CNN-IBN, September 26, 2006)



Produced and Published by:

Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, D-1 Shivdham, 62 Link Road, Malad (W), Mumbai 400 064, INDIA

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Email : vak@bom3.vsnl.net.in

Website: www.vakindia.org

Design & Layout : Kartiki Desai

Printed by: **Sudhir Joglekar, Omega Publications**

2 & 3 Emerald Corner, Maratha Colony, Tilakwadi, Belgaum 590 006 ☎ 094481 - 44124