

National Seminar on ‘The Dalit Movement in North India: Theory, Praxis and Challenges’ (26-28 November 2018)

Concept Note:

The Dalit Movement in India has grown from the desire for freedom from subjugation. In this context, the Dalit Movement has not only proposed Dalit emancipation but also, by implication, the liberation of all people suffering from oppression and repression in general. Before the rise of Dalit political consciousness in the modern era, this tradition of resistance, which was very old, was present only in what we narrowly understand as social and cultural movements of the past. While Dalit political consciousness in the modern period has acquired traction from the general mood of our age, it has centrally drawn from that history and culture. We can see this in the writings and politics of Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar.

During the anti-imperial movement against the British rule, the discourses on the issue of ‘Who will get what freedom in free India?’ prepared the background for the modern Dalit movement, which is in fact a collection of many diverse movements. Whereas the Gandhian struggle limited itself to questions of social reform and welfare programs in relation to the Dalits, the Marxists were primarily interested in questions of class. The Dalit movement instead shifted attention to emancipation from caste-based subjugation, beyond the optic of nation and class. In the post-colonial period, this has continued to be its thrust. The Dalit movement is not a movement to capture power, to capture a province or to expand a state. This movement is a movement for dignity and against social exploitation and oppression.

Overall, mainstream academic concerns, due to the persistent influence of Nationalist and Marxist visions, have shown considerable indifference to the Dalit question. For example, take the case of History. Colonial history had portrayed Indian society as an unchangeable and static society. This type of history had not taken into account the struggle of the subaltern castes over the long past of the sub-continent. In response, nationalist history folded the memory of subaltern caste resistance into the story of the nation. Marxist history takes class and not caste as its primary unit of analysis, thus the question of caste is always secondary even though caste is a specific reality of Indian society. Similarly inclined, the Social Sciences as a whole have not quite given the Dalit question its due.

Yet the Dalit Movement has broken many myths created by these ideologies and the power-structures to which they are connected to the extent that everyone now recognizes its critical presence. Dalit struggles have paved the way for the entry of the Dalits into mainstream political power structures. They have successfully created pressure on the traditional ruling classes. For this reason, these movements have forced a section of intellectuals in the academic field to acknowledge and hence study and review their struggles and movements. Dalit Studies, which is centrally concerned with Dalit struggles, has impacted all disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities.

At the same time, new scholarship has also noted that despite advances, the Dalits have been limited to being a pressure group in mainstream politics. The revolutionary edge of the

campaign for social change is gradually becoming blunt. The Dalit Movement is today riven by internal tension on the one hand and beset by external challenges on the other. The continuing purchase of caste in society, the problems of democratic and state policy and globalization, among other things, are complicating the picture. Post Ambedkar, the contemporary Dalit movement has made strides but is also bogged down by new dilemmas.

This seminar was an attempt to bring together new research and thought on the Dalit Movement in this context to explore its nature and practices, successes, problems and challenges. Given the extensiveness of the subject, it limits itself to the study of Dalit Movement in North India, even though necessary and inevitable connections with other parts of the country may not be entirely forgotten. The following inter-connected questions were central to this endeavour and can be considered as possible themes for papers:

- What may we understand by 'Dalit Movement(s)'?
- What has been the history of Dalit Movements in North India so far?
- What principles/ideologies/visions have they been based on, shaped by and put forth?
- What has been their actual experience?
- What problems have they faced and negotiated, and what successes have they achieved?
- What has been the relationship between Dalit Movements and the Dalit question in mainstream politics?
- What has been the meaning and implication of diversity in Dalit Movements?
- How do these movements deal with the inter-related questions of history and identity, social change, democracy and citizenship, nation and state, liberalization, communalism?
- What are the contradictions in the contemporary Dalit Movement?
- How do we situate the Dalit Movement in North India in relation to other parts of the country?
- How has it dealt with questions of gender, class, OBCs and tribal people?
- To what extent, and in what ways, have the Social Sciences dealt with the Dalit question and movements?
- What has been the nature of the intervention of Dalit Studies? Can it be called a movement in itself?
- How have the Dalit question and movements been represented in cultural practices?

In the context of North India

- Studies of Dalit Movements
- History of the Dalit Movements
- Ideology in and of the Dalit Movement

- The Practice, Experience and Impact of the Dalit Movement
- The Problems, Challenges and Possibilities of the Dalit Movement
- The Questions of Gender, Class, OBCs and Tribal Peoples in the Dalit Movement in North India
- The Dalit Movement in North India in Culture
- Connections between and Comparisons of Dalit Movement in North India and other regions.

A National seminar on '*The Dalit Movement in North India: Theory, Praxis and Challenges*' was organized at IAS during 26-28 November 2018. Dr. Ajay Kumar, Fellow, IAS was the convener of the seminar. Professor Dambarudhar Nath, Fellow, IAS delivered the welcome address. Professor Sikander Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, HPU, Shimla chaired the session. Dr. Sutapa Datta, Fellow, IAS introduced the Chairperson and Key note speaker to the audience. Dr. Ajay Kumar, Convener gave introductory remarks. The Keynote address was delivered by Professor Vivek Kumar on '*Scheduled Castes (Dalit) Movement in North India*'. Dr. Ajay Kumar, Convener of the seminar proposed the Vote of thanks.

Participants:

- Professor Vivek Kumar, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- Professor Badri Narayan Tiwari, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Jhusi, Allahabad
- Professor Anand Kumar, 209, Ayachi Apts., Sector 45, Gurgaon, Haryana.
- Professor M.K. Raghavendra, 11, 24th Main JP Nagar I Phase, Bengaluru.
- Dr. Nishikant Kolge, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.
- Dr. Sanjay Paswan, Member Legislative Council, Bihar.
- Dr. Rajesh Paswan, Centre of Indian Languages, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
- Dr. Archana Singh, G. B. Pant Social Science Institute, (A Constituent Institute of University of Allahabad), Jhusi, Allahabad.
- Professor Bibhuti Bhushan Malik, Department of Sociology, School for Ambedkar Studies (Social Sciences), Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (A Central University), Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh .
- Dr. Ratnakar Tripathy, Shanta Sadan, Ghagha Ghat Lane, Mahendru, Patna.
- Dr. Prashant Kumar Trivedi, Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow.
- Professor Archana Kumar, Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.
- Dr. Shubhneet Kaushik, Satish Chandra College, Ballia (Uttar Pradesh).
- Shri Biplove Kumar, ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim.
- Dr. Faizan Ahmed, Lane No. 13, Near Harzatganj Chowk, Khangah, Munger, Bihar.
- Dr. Kamal Nayan Choubey, Dyal Singh College, Delhi University, New Delhi.
- Shri Ankit Pathak, Doctoral Candidate, Media and Film Studies, Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad.

- Dr. Jitendra Singh, Doctoral Candidate, Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute, Jhusi, Allahabad
- Ms. Debasmita Deb, PhD Student, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre, Ambedkar Bhavan, University of Pune, Pune
- Ms. Kanchan Sharma, Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi, New Delhi
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- Dr. Gaurav J. Pathania, The George Washington University, Washington DC-USA
- Dr. Satendra Kumar, Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla
- Dr. Rama Shanker Singh, Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla