

**Paper Title: The private and public life of social categories in India:  
Interrogating the 'Dalit'**

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**Paper Abstract**

**This paper is the second one in a trilogy of articles exploring the Dalit category and its representation. The first article (Futurity in words: Low-caste women politicians' self-representation and post-Dalit scenarios in north India' *Contemporary South Asia* 2010, 18:(1) 43–56) focused on the resistance to the usage of the Dalit label for self-representation by a number of low-caste women activists within the Bahujan Samaj Party in north India. Women articulated their resistance on the grounds of the Dalit label's *disempowering* connotations. Drawing on the different understandings of 'Dalit' in the public and private sphere, this paper takes the conclusive remarks of the above article further. The areas of inquiry are as follows: the dynamics of Dalit scholars' politics of experience vis-à-vis Dalits' politics of experience as analysed by non-Dalit scholars across geographical regions; the confines between the political and the analytical in the study of Dalits and their struggles for social justice; the identity *overlap* between victim and assertive subject and their co-constitution; finally, how and whether studies of Dalits across disciplines have shaped the directions of South Asian Studies.**

**Paper Title: Punjabi Dalits Negotiating Separateness**

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**Paper Abstract**

This paper is a part of a long term project to understand the formation of Dalit consciousness and their gendered and regional specific responses to socio-economic changes in Punjabi society - both in East Punjab as well as amongst diaspora Punjabis located in the UK. The paper builds on previous fieldwork in urban Indian Punjab and Wolverhampton (UK), published in Dhanda (2009) 'Punjabi *Dalit* Youth: Social dynamics of transitions in identity' *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March, 47—64. The proposed paper will present findings of further research based on planned fieldwork in the same locales in 2010.

The paper will trace the emerging collective assertiveness of Punjabi Dalits evidenced in recent protests against the killing of a Ravidasis' guru in Austria, allegedly by orthodox Sikhs. The mixed response of Punjabi Dalits to the media portrayal of the events and the damage limitation exercises of upper caste political leaders will be presented with a view to ascertain the strength of the separatist tendency amongst the Dalits vis-a-vis continuing attempts on the part of upper caste Sikhs to assimilate rebellion.

A qualitative analysis of interviews conducted in February – May 2010 will be presented with focus on the language used by Dalits to describe the changes in their relations to upper caste Sikhs and Hindus. The gendered aspect of their response will also be highlighted. The underlying concerns of Dalit negotiations for moving beyond victimhood to challenging upper-caste hegemonic discourses about them will be the central organising idea of the paper.

**Paper Title: Untouchability and the Cultural Dynamics of Dirt**

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**Paper Abstract**

The stigmatization of social groups under one or another indicator of prejudice is a phenomenon that is universal to all human societies. Throughout the ages human societies have witness the process wherein disadvantaged and Marginalised groups have been burdened with a stigma that legitimizes their oppression and exclusion from the rest of that society of which they are part.

Within Indian society the structural opposition of pure / impure has played a crucial role in hierarch sing social strata of Indian society. Thus it is believed both at the level of doctrine as well in the practices of everyday life that those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy are endowed with a defilement that is both unclean and doctrinally unholy.

The untouchables as they are termed have faced an enormous burden of oppression and exploitation as a result of this stigma of defilement. Notwithstanding the development of scientific thought and the growth of a rational spirit within modern Indian society, caste constructions of dirt continue to stigmatise the schedule castes undermining all efforts to demystify the prejudice and stigmatise the conception of dirt.

This paper seeks to explore the different ways in which upper caste Hindu society has sought to legitimize their status of purity by establishing a discourse of dirt that continues to regiment the human body and its externalities in terms of a caste consciousness.

Additionally it looks at how dirt comes to get represented within the modern idiom of class / caste relations in the every day world of rural and urban India. The paper seeks to suggest that notwithstanding the various material and cultural exclusions faced by Dalits in modern India, a crucial component of Dalit emancipation must consist in overcoming the caste consciousness of 'dirt' as represented and legitimized by a society deeply infused with an all pervasive caste sensibility.

**Paper Title : In the name of 'capturing political power': Dalit women, NGO activism and Panchayati Raj**

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**Paper Abstract**

**Through the case study of Dalit women first mobilised by NGO-led women's activism and subsequently choosing on their own to contest the Panchayat elections in southern Uttar Pradesh, this paper seeks to understand Dalit women's perceived, projected and real struggles for political representation and transformative change in their lives, and whether in and through these struggles caste oppression is subverted or reproduced in new and old ways. I first examine the Dalit women's motivations for contesting the elections, and the different sources from which they draw support and inspiration. I pay special attention to the women's relationship with the state in this regard. These women have already been involved in the work of a NGO, which has both collaborated with and challenged the state in ameliorating the condition of their kind. Why do these women now want to contest elections to institutions of local self-government? I then examine the NGO's position on the Dalit women (who are associated with it) contesting the Panchayat elections. I probe into the dilemmas that the NGO staff and leadership face when it comes to taking a clear stand on the issue of Dalit women fighting the Panchayat elections and aspiring to lead institutions of local self-government. Finally, I explore the factors that have determined the way the women have fared at the elections. I also ask how those who managed to win performed once they were elected, especially whether they were really able to capture and wield political power the way they had hoped.**

**Paper Title : Dalits in South India - Stuck at the Bottom - or moving upward?**

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### **Paper Abstract**

**A new presentation of data from a Ph.D. study of 5 villages in Karnataka in the early 1990'ies. The findings clearly demonstrates that Dalits who had obtained a better standard of living, all had had their economic ties to upper castes members broken and that the state had been the most important agent of change in terms of intervening into traditional dependency ties. Especially the policy of preferential treatment securing quotas to Dalits in education and at public work places had helped dalits in the villages. The presentation will address the possible contemporary political and theoretical consequences of these findings.**

**Paper Title Subaltern consciousness in post independence indian literature**

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**Paper Abstract**

**‘During harvest, all the people in our neighborhood used to reach their cultivable fields i.e Tagas to reap the crop. Removing sheaves of wheat in the midday sun is a very bitter and painful affair particularly at a time when heat of the sun strikes on the body. The naked ground gives a burning heat. The roots of the harvested wheat plants pricked one’s feet like spikes. The roots of the mustard and gram lentils scratch the feet even more. Majority of the labours were from the untouchable castes either from Chuharas or Chamars.’ (Jhoota in Hindi by Valmiki)’**

**‘Valmiki’s cousin, Surjan Singh was beaten black and blue by his teacher. “Although the students felt like enjoying the scene, Phool Singh went for Surjan Singh who was standing behind me. He began to kick and beat Surjan mercilessly. It didn’t like the act of a teacher for cutting his student to size. Rather it seemed like a goonda pouncing upon an an innocent. Surjan Singh licked to the ground, and Phool Singh kept on kicking and punching him without respite. Phool singh became tired of threshing Surjan Singh, who couldn’t rise from the ground. His face looked dispirited, and his body seemed drained out of everything’**

**My paper will highlight on the theme depicted above. It will voice the urge of dalits and the line of their emancipation .**

**Paper title Dalit Victimization by the Caste System through Their Own Experiment of Caste Annihilation in Karnataka**

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**Paper Abstract**

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.The Dalit Sangarsha Samithi of Karnataka adopted thoughts of Marx, Ambedker, Lohia and Gandhi. "Annihilation of Caste Conference" held against Brahminical thoughts gave it a momentum. The Dalit movement also sought the support of Non Dalits including Brahmins. The war waged against the rape of Anasuyamma, a non Dalit paved the way for the movement becoming a vehicle for all castes that were suppressed. The secular stance of the movement made it all inclusive and thus winning the support of even non Dalits.

The DSS decision to support the non-Congress government in 1983, gave rise to discontent among the Dalits. The movement's aspirations were affected when the infighting began. Earlier inferiority complex gave rise to superiority complex of a peculiar kind. The caste consciousness between Holeya, Madiga from amongst the Dalits was not a happy outcome. Caste annihilation movement giving rise to sub caste divisions was an unhappy omen. Thus caste walls within Dalits hampered the movement. The issue of annihilation of caste was sidelined giving rise to casteism. The paper attempts to identify how casteism entered the Dalit movement. It also attempts to show how rightist political parties take advantage of this infighting and cleverly introduce the touchable Dalits like Lambani's and so on to reserved constituencies. The paper also attempts to suggest the urgent need to study the whole phenomenon keeping untouchability out of the caste sphere of study.

**Paper Title : Jay Prakash Kardam's "Cappar" and Ajay Navariya's "Udhar ke log": Representing and transcending identity in Hindi Dalit novel writing**

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**Paper Abstract**

Eventhough a considerable number of Dalit authors in Hindi have produced fictional prose and poetry since the early 1990s, the number of novels is comparatively small. In my presentation, I will focus on two outstanding novels written by Dalit authors, Jayprakash Kardam's "Cappar" ("The hut", 1994/2003) and Ajay Navariya's "Udhar ke log" (2008). In contradiction to the majority of shorter Dalit fictional texts, the two novels display a positive belief in Dalit emancipation and social change as a possible success story.

Both novels try to deal with the difficult task of mastering and constructing a complex plot with a large number of characters to be followed over a long period of time. While Jayprakash Kardam's novel is a master piece of social realism – even though the plot itself is Utopian - Ajay Navariya's novel can be interpreted as an effort to transcend the stereotypes of social realism (yatharthvaad) and manierism (kalaatmaktaa).

The narrative structure of "Cappar" corresponds closely to the classical socially realistic narrative structure developed in the 1920s and 1920s, and to Premchand's Godan (1936) in particular. At the same time, the Utopian transformation of a village from a cast bound feudal society to a modern and egalitarian village commuty deviates very strongly from the pessimism in much of Premchand's writing in general and Godan in particular. This vision of how a new humanism replaces hierarchical order as a result of the resolute activity of a Dalit hero and the repercussions of his activities within the village as a whole is a somehow unique piece of Dalit literature, contradicting the social pessimism dominating fictional Dalit writing.

**Paper Title Beyond Victimhood in the writings of B. R. Ambedkar and M. K. Gandhi.**

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### **Paper Abstract**

The notion of Dalits as being victims of material and cultural deprivations has been an abiding theme that has often functioned to legitimize State measures to alleviate their inhuman condition. Yet despite the Indian State's use of constitutional provisions together with legal remedies, to uplift the Dalits, this condition of victimhood persists. Even Dalit participation within the democratic process has provided only some of the Dalits with a sense of political visibility and empowerment. How does one account for this persistence of Dalit victimhood in modern Indian society?

In this paper I argue that the continued reproduction of Dalit victimhood also serves to perpetuate Caste ideology and practice in modern Indian society. Not only does victimhood perpetuate the condition of dependency on State amongst Dalits, more crucially it deflects the Dalit struggle from a critical engagement with Caste annihilation. By inverting the caste gaze back onto its victims, untouchability and its debilitating conditions becomes exclusively a Dalit problem to be resolved by Dalits themselves with the help of an instrumental state apparatus.

In assessing the condition of Dalit victimhood in modern India, I critically engage with the ideas of both Ambedkar and Gandhi to understand the radically different ways in which they sought to bring Dalits out of Victimhood. In my paper, I suggest that both Ambedkar and Gandhi have been selectively appropriated and idolized by their respective supporters. Their effectiveness in the struggle against caste annihilation has thus been greatly diminished. Both Ambedkar and Gandhi envisaged a situation beyond Victimhood for the Dalits. Both saw the resolution of untouchability through a critical engagement with caste consciousness in modern Indian society.

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