

MARGIN AND TRANSCENDENCE

In Memory of Siddalingaiah



This issue is dedicated to Siddalingaiah, the face of Kannada literature, whose warm and gentle presence radiating kindness, succumbed to COVID 19, on June 11, 2021. May his memory be a blessing!

*I must have a word with you
O cactuses and thorny plants;
I must put a question to the moon who borrows his light;
I should free the beautiful rose from thorns.
Wells are waterless and ministers speechless
Constables move about like thorny bushes,
O world, I must have a word with you.*

Excerpt from 'Maatada Beku' by Siddalingaiah

Editorial

Laurence Simon

Two years ago, we published the first issue of *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*. One objective was to encourage and raise the standard for academic research into traditional birth-based, rigid, hierarchical systems of discrimination, the influences of which persist in the present despite constitutional provisions and laws against their iniquitous nature in South Asian countries. Few university courses across the United States, even those on South Asian religions, histories and societies incorporated caste studies into their syllabi. Important intellectuals and social movements associated with caste were absent or played cameo roles. One of our Editorial Advisory Board Members, the celebrated philosopher Martha Nussbaum, once said about her own studies in literature many years ago that if women were absent from the curriculum, they were invisible, they did not count.

One reason for the absence of caste studies is that caste is a hidden discrimination in America and is only now emerging as an issue in the public domain. Except for those of South Asian background, caste is merely a vague concept from a foreign land. Yet African American studies in the 1930s were more sensitive to histories and realities of oppression. They recognized caste in the plight of the descendants of enslaved persons in such classic ethnographies as Hortense Powdermaker's *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*,¹ and John Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*² both of which are discussed more recently in such reviews and commentaries as Jane Adams and D. Gorton's "Southern Trauma: Revisiting Caste and Class in the Mississippi Delta"³ and the more extensive Allison Davis et al., *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class*.⁴

¹Powdermaker, H. (1939). *After freedom: A cultural study in the deep south*. The Viking Press.

²Dollard. (1937, 1949). *Caste and class in a southern town*. Double Day and Company.

³Adams, J. and Gordon, D. (2004). Southern trauma: Revisiting caste and class in the Mississippi Delta, *American Anthropologist*, 106(2), pp. 334-345. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.2.334>

⁴Davis, A. Gardner, B.B., & Gardner, M.R. (1941, 2009). *Deep south: A social anthropological study of caste and class*. University of South Carolina.

Another possible reason for the absence of caste studies in many American universities may be the predisposition of faculty who believe that caste discrimination is a thing only of the past or, for some, perhaps turning a blind eye to an embarrassing or controversial tradition.

Brandeis being the first university in the United States to incorporate caste into our official non-discrimination policy has been influential with other universities, a few of which have followed suit. In a future issue, we will explore progress toward greater awareness of caste in scholarship and public affairs.

Our journal is committed to honest and critical scholarly analysis of caste-like systems of discrimination throughout the world. This commitment emanates from the founding of the university in 1948 when the trauma of the European genocide was still palpable and when Jews and other ethnic and racial minorities, and women, were confronted with discrimination in higher education in the United States. The founders established a nonsectarian research university that welcomed faculty and students of all religions and ethnicities.



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT of the United States holding a poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Lake Success, NY, November 1949. UN Photo

A fervent supporter of the university's founding was Eleanor Roosevelt who served on Brandeis' Board of Trustees from 1949 until her death in 1962. The widow of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, she was appointed in 1946 by President Harry Truman as a delegate from the U.S. to the United Nations General Assembly. In that role, she inspired and chaired the drafting committee for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 1 of which reads:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

This too was the founding principle for *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* and enlightens each of the articles and poems in the current issue.

Introduction

Laurence Simon and Sukhadeo Thorat

Rajesh Sampath's article *A Commentary on Ambedkar's Posthumously Published "Philosophy of Hinduism" – Part III* continues his multi-part analysis of one of B.R. Ambedkar's core texts. In part I Sampath walked the path Ambedkar took to arrive at his criteria for "justice" and "utility" which Sampath sees as shaping the modern conception of religion. In part II Sampath dove further into Ambedkar's concern that the dominant religious orientation of Indian society "forecloses the possibility of individual equality, freedom, and dignity." Part III now examines Ambedkar's engagement with the classics of Hinduism's philosophy. Ultimately, Ambedkar is undeterred in his original critique of the social and moral failures of the caste system, thereby intimating ambitious possibilities for its eventual eradication. And in carefully framed arguments, Sampath asks: "How does the 'concern' for the 'preservation' of life as the 'basis' and 'core' of religion [not the 'incidental means' of 'magic, tabu, totem, and fetish' (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 10)] become perverted into a logic of discipline and desire to humiliate, degrade, and ultimately vanquish any ounce of dignity in what it means to be a human being?" We await Sampath's Part IV.

Paul Divakar Namala's *Norm Entrepreneurship at the UN – Dalits and Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent* traces the journey of organizations representing Dalit and Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent in raising their concerns with United Nations agencies about human rights violations and abuses. Divakar, one of their leading analysts and advocates, pinpoints critical issues facing these communities of more than 260 million people subjected to social exclusions from caste and analogous systems. He speaks of the rising tide of their voices in international forums calling for recognition of their right to life and dignity and "to evolve norm emergence leading to norm adherence." Divakar expresses concern with the limitations of the core International Human Rights instruments in addressing the diversified forms of discrimination in Asia and Africa and urges expansion of the concept of work and descent to be inclusive of them.

Timothy Loftus' *Ambedkar and the Buddha's Saṅgha: A Ground for Buddhist Ethics* explores Ambedkar's reconceptualized *saṅgha* placing ordained monks and nuns at the center of his vision for social service helping the laity toward justice and egalitarianism and driven by an ethic of care. Loftus in a clear and articulate prose explains "the role of compassion in this ethical imperative of the monk." He describes Ambedkar's efforts "as a correction, writing the wrongs done by Brahmin scholars of the past and present." Loftus contrasts Ambedkar's vision not only to those traditional views but also to the popular understanding in the West. "The story of Buddhism in the West has often been told through the lens of the contemplative, filtered by the discourses of modernity and the biases toward individualism and meditation that come with them." And finally, he brings us back to Ambedkar's world, contrasting a "religion of rules" called Brahminism as against "the religion of principles" with the "morally-oriented, egalitarian Buddhism" of social engagement.

Christopher Queen's *Reading Dalit Autobiographies in English: A Top Ten List* introduces us to Dalit autobiography which he describes as having joined protest poetry in the genre of Dalit Literature. He says that his readings identified "recurring themes of social exclusion, poverty, patriarchy, survival and assertion...." Queen is a seasoned and astute interpreter of cultural India and presents his top ten list of Dalit autobiographies as "a needed corrective to mainstream portraits of modern Indian social history." He begins with a personal history of early encounters with Indian writers and activists which set the stage for him to see the writings in their true contexts. He reviews authors who describe worlds of exclusion and pain such as the involuntary criminals forced into thievery and whole tribes classified as "habitual offenders" under the influence of the caste system. Queen though also relates the lightness and irony of Siddalingaiah's marvelous work as well as the "intimate vignettes" where "we encounter blinding hunger and disease, confinement and squalor in village and city slums, violent death by suicide and murder.... But we also meet kindly teachers... enduring friendships." Queen beautifully and with deep passion unfolds the mind and emotion of Dalits through the self-experience of writers whose inner lives had found no expression in mainstream literature.

Joseph Kweku Assan's *Ethnic Identity, Discrimination and the Shaping of Remittance Culture in Ghana* continues the journal's exploration of birth-based discriminations outside of South Asia. His article discusses the influence of ethnic identity on remittance patterns and shows that migrants from ethnic groups with strong internal cohesion and less assimilation remit more than those from more ethnically heterogeneous groups. The study also shows that migrants from matrilineal ethnicity remit more than those of the patrilineal group. Assan's work highlights the importance of a researcher's deeper understanding of socio-cultural values and traditions among marginalized and deprived ethnic minority households.

Ishita Roy's *A Critique of Sanskritization from Dalit/Caste-Subaltern Perspective* explores the social purpose of Sanskritization in which, according to M. N. Srinivas, a 'low' caste or tribal group changes its customs, rituals, or ideology toward those of 'high' castes in order to claim a higher position in the caste or social hierarchy. Roy compares the thoughts of Srinivas and Ambedkar to understand the inner purposes and impacts of Sanskritization and concludes that it is essential to critique the process from a Dalit point of view. Rather than seeing it as a process of mobility and fluidity with caste structures, we understand instead its reinforcement of the very continuity and sustenance of the caste system. Many low castes are today, however, influenced by a process of social change that speaks of their inherent dignity, equality and freedom of mind and body.

Ashim Shil and Hemraj P Jangir in their *Exclusion of Tribal Women from Property Inheritance Rights: A Study of Tripuri Women of India* report on the role of gender in inheritance of property and how the traditional common exclusion of Tripuri women from property ownership affects their income and position in the household. Change does not come easy though as the authors show a correlation between female possession of property and violence against women in relation to access to their property rights under law. Affirmative action by the state has advanced the cause of Tripuri women to transcend the age-old practices of exclusion though the path is still long ahead.

Shriyuta Abhishek and Nanda Kishore Kannuri in their *On the Margins of Healthcare: Role of Social Capital in Health of Migrants in India* present the

findings of their study showing a link between social capital and healthcare access especially among women, disabled and elderly people. As the concept of social capital has remained largely unexplored in public health in India, this study is timely given the immensity of pressure internal migrants are under in the pandemic. The study adopts the WHO's framework for the Social Determinants of Health and relates it to a social capital assessment as influenced by caste.

Roshni Babu's *Tending Immanence, Transcending Sectarianism: Plane of Mixed Castes and Religions* explores the notion of hybridity in Ambedkar's reflections on mixed castes and the origin of untouchability. Babu utilizes Ganeri's idea of 'dissent from within' to understand the dawning 'Dalit milieu' which Babu gracefully and insightfully describes as "commanding assent-worthiness whereby adjoining communities constituting the least privileged in the caste system, and emergent fragmented communities, communities of mixed castes and half-castes, and half-religious minorities, communities who have been looking for a more inclusive secular platform, all find themselves clamoring to mobilize this canon under various names, whereby one of the more encompassing canopies of becoming assumes the form of becoming 'Dalit'".

In this issue's **FORUM** we have expressions of inner realities, longing and a search for transcendence from two young and inspired poets.

Ari Varutada A Poem by Chandni Girija

Reflection A Poem by Gaurav J. Pathania



And finally, we are pleased that *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* has recently been selected to collaborate with JSTOR to digitize, JSTOR preserve and extend access to our journal.