

Dalit Lecture Series

An important programme in the Dalit initiative was the Dalit lecture series. To introduce Telugu readers to the debates in Dalit Studies, Anveshi has initiated a Dalit Lecture Series, which include interactive sessions and public lectures with leading Dalit scholars and activists.

- We started our lecture series with a talk by Prof Gopal Guru in December 2005. His talk dwelled upon the relationship of Dalit with the state and government. He argued that the status of citizenship enables Dalits to partake of the space that they are entitled to whereas the status of the recipient of welfare benefits reduces them to the client of the welfare state.
- Well-known dalit woman writer Bama spoke about her understanding of the women's question at Anveshi during April 2006. She highlighted issues of dalit women's oppression during her talk and spoke about how they differ from those of upper caste women.
- As part of the 8th March celebrations in 2006 Anveshi held a discussion on Ramabai Ambedkar's Biography. J.Subhadra organized a discussion on Ramabai Ambedkar's biography written in Marathi by Shanti Swaroop Boudh and translated into Telugu by G.V.Ratnakar. Three eminent public intellectuals Dr.Vijayabharathi, Mallepalli Lakshmaiah and Jajula Gowri were invited to initiate the discussion. Vijayabharathi discussed the relevance of such biographies in the contemporary context wherein dalit women are raising issues of male dominance within the dalit families. She pointed out that such biographies opened out issues and demystified the personality of Ambedkar. Lakshmaiah pointed out that unlike other national leaders of his time, Ambedkar had neither financial nor other resources to lead his political life without setting aside the interests of his immediate family. Ambedkar's family shared with other dalit families of his time, the poverty, caste

discrimination and lack of access to health facilities etc. Lakshmaiah argued that to attribute the misery articulated by Ramabai to 'neglect by Ambedkar' would be totally misplaced. Jajula Gowri, a noted dalit short story writer discussed the politics of this publication in Telugu at this time. She questioned the rationale behind attempts to portray Ramabai as a devoted wife. Was it a way of quelling the activism of dalit women protesting against dalit men's patriarchal attitudes?

The discussion that ensued asked if it was valid to use this book to judge Ambedkar as a 'patriarch' in the conventional feminist sense? What was the politics of incorporating Ramabai into a feminist narrative, albeit a dalit feminist one? To what extent can we see map the conjugal relations of the past through the lens of the current ideologies?

- Noted scholar G.Aloysius spent a few days at Anveshi interacting and discussing with the researchers. He spoke on the concept of region in February 2006. While tracing the historical trajectory of this concept, he also discussed ways in which upper caste elites, hitherto disconnected, got a 'national' character with the formation of the Indian nation-state. Very often, the battles over regions, against the national sphere, have lineages in the political battles of the lower castes in the regions.

The researchers also had a discussion with him based on reading his two books 'Religion as an Emancipatory Identity' and Nationalism without a Nation in India. In the discussions with Aloysius, on his two books, Nationalism without a Nation in India and Religion as an Emancipatory Identity, the questions that came up were around religion as emancipatory for dalits in India.

- On 19th March, 2007 Anveshi invited **Katti Padma Rao**, a leading Dalit intellectual in Andhra Pradesh and the founder of the Dalit Mahasabha, to

deliver a talk. The talk was organized in a central and accessible location, Press Club. The meeting could be counted as an extremely successful as more than 200 people attended the meeting. Mr. Katti Padma Rao spoke on the subject *The Historical Necessity of the Dalit Socio-Cultural Revolution*. What was significant about the gathering was that most of them were Dalit students and activists. Padma Rao spoke for about three hours reflecting on the politics of untouchability and its linkages to language, the philosophy of Ambedkar and the project of Dalit empowerment. An important message of his talk was that Dalit youth should begin to write their particular social histories. Wide publicity was given for this talk so that many could attend.

- The judgement on Chundururu atrocity that came out in 2006, wherein 21 men belonging to the Reddy community (upper caste) were sentenced to life imprisonment and 35 to one year imprisonment. Members of Anveshi had been following the developments of this event when the massacre took place. Again when the case came up for trial in the special court established in Chundururu, the follow up was done to the extent feasible. Three teams of members went from Anveshi who wrote their observations on the proceedings that later were published, including one in Chadrabhan Prasad's Dalit Diary. B Chandrashekhar was appointed as the Special Public Prosecutor, to prosecute the cases of atrocity on behalf of the Dalits of Chundururu. Anveshi invited Advocate Chandrashekhar to give a talk on the various legal and other issues that were involved in defending a case of such mammoth proportions. It was a day long meeting, organised on 15th August, well attended by members of Dalit, civil liberties and other groups in the city.
- In 2007 a panel a panel discussion with three Chakkaliyar intellectuals from Tamilnadu, Sri Adhiyamaan, Founder, *Aathi Thamilar Peravai*; Madhavan, a well known poet, writer and activist, and Ramarajyam, research scholar from JNU was held. They spoke about the political complexities involved in the demand for sub caste reservation for Chakkaliyars among SCs in Tamilnadu. There was engaged discussion between Maadiga Dandora activists and the

Chakkaliyar intellectuals about the politics of sub caste reservation as well as the dynamics of caste and gender in the dalit movement.

- We also had a discussion with Professor TM Yesudasan who spoke on Poetics of Integration and Politics of Bad Faith : Experience of Dalits in Kerala Churches. Prof. TM Yesudasan is a leading light of the Dalit literary movement, key mentor of the Dalit students' movement, and an important figure in Kerala public life. He has been at the forefront of the Dalit Christian struggles within the Church of South India in the 1970's and 80's, known as the Janakeeya Viswasa Vimochana Prasthanam, that drew its sustenance from Black Theology.

Speaking from the context of Malabar Kerala, he emphasised that there were very few records available for the reconstruction of Dalit histories. He said that there should be serious efforts to excavate and build archives to understand the particular history of Dalit communities. He also said that in the mainstream history textbook there was a deliberate attempt to invisibilise charismatic Dalit leaders such as Toikayil Appachan, Ayyankali who had contributed enormously to Dalit communities. They have never been seen as social reformers on par with the other conventional list of social reformers such as VT Bhatta Piripad and Sri Narayana Guru. To the audience he also appealed that Dalits should start formulating their agenda for politics beyond constitutional reservations.

- In July 2007, Rekha Raj, a Dalit writer and activist who has published several articles on gender and caste in Malayalam. She spoke in July, 2007 on the theme *Gender and Caste: Dalit feminist Experience in Kerala* drawing on various aspects of Dalit status in Kerala and the mainstream part response to such activism.