

Invoking Ambedkar – Contributions, Receptions, Legacies

Date: March 11-12, 2011

A two-day seminar on *Invoking Ambedkar – Contributions, Receptions, Legacies* was held at the Salt Lake campus of the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK) on March 11-12, 2011. The aim of the seminar was to discuss the vast literature of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's life, politics and scholarship and his understanding of Indian history, society, politics, economy and culture by dividing it into three broad thematic spectrums.

The first broad thematic spectrum, called Contributions, reflected concerns pertaining to his life, political activities, speeches and writings, which, between them, had inspired Ambedkar himself, and his followers and other scholars, to come up with new insights and perspectives on Indian society, politics, economy and culture. This broad segment included presentations on aspects of Ambedkar's life and political and scholarly output emphasizing the ideological complexity, depth and durability of his thought and action in relation to the existing literature on Indian politics, society, economy, history and culture. In other words, this segment added up to our understanding of Ambedkar and his ideas and insights on history and historiography of India. The focus in this segment was to explore Ambedkar's own words and actions as the primary material under analysis.

The second broad thematic spectrum, called Receptions, included papers on the impact of Ambedkar, during his lifetime and especially over the half century since his premature death. It was during this period that there emerged a large and complex literature exploring the salience of his ideas and actions for the benefit of arguably the largest section of the Indian population, and given birth to entirely new political and scholarly perspectives. This section was devoted to a critical review of the career of these new political and scholarly perspectives as it unfolded over the last seven or eight decades. This session, by virtue of its proposed emphasis on secondary level scholarship on Ambedkar and his legacy, invited presentations reflecting on the influence that Ambedkar and his ideas had on Indian society, polity, economy and culture, and the continuities and changes wrought by this encounter.

The third thematic spectrum, known as Legacies, sought to explore new perspectives on Ambedkar and his contributions and receptions, primarily looking to sketch the outlines of a new range of theoretical perspectives and empirical initiatives. This section sought contributions setting the agenda for a new generation of works hoping to handle with more methodological sophistication and deeper political commitment the letter and spirit of Ambedkar's intellectual and political project. One of the key outcomes from this segment was to explore Ambedkar's insights to disciplines that had so far not paid them the attention they deserve.

The speakers in the seminar included:

- Sharmila Rege, Director, Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune
- Rowena Robinson, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT, Mumbai
- P. G. Jogdand, Department of Sociology, University of Mumbai
- Gopal Guru, Centre for Political Studies School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- Nandu Ram, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- Narendra Kumar, Dr. K. R. Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies, University of Jamia Millia Islamia

- Badri Narayan Tiwari, Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute Jhusi, Allahabad
- Shashi Bhusan Upadhyay and Swaraj Basu, Department of History, IGNOU, New Delhi
- Jagpal Singh, School of Social Sciences, IGNOU, New Delhi
- Debi Chatterjee, Jadavpur University
- Boneta Aleaz, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta
- Rajsekhar Basu, Department of History, University of Calcutta
- Kapil Krishna Thakur, Reserve Bank of India
- Biswamoy Pati, University of Delhi
- Sukhadeo Thorat, former Chairman, UGC

The introductory remarks were delivered by Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Director, IDSK.