

Workshop on Dalit Rights and Democracy

28 August 2017 – 1 September 2017

Concept Note

Institutionalised discrimination against group of persons earlier known as the untouchables and now as Dalits (officially Scheduled Castes) is deeply entrenched in the structure of the Indian society. It is embedded in the caste driven hierarchical social order of the Hindu community which has percolated to the social organisation of other religions in India as well. Dalits are placed at the lowest end of this social order. This is manifested in violence, individual and collective, inflicted on them by the higher castes, deprivation of material well-being, low level of human development, social barriers in accessing services and entitlements, denial of justice and lack of effective voice in decision making. Recognising the historical roots of this exclusion and oppression, the Constitution of India besides making such discrimination on the basis of caste illegal also provided for reservation in government jobs, entry to institutions of higher learning and legislatures at the centre and States and local self-government bodies. This was followed by laws to protect them from violence and discrimination as well as formulation of development programmes to address their lower level of material and human development. But these initiatives have failed to make significant improvement in their social and economic conditions. Violations of their fundamental human rights continue on a massive scale. The positive development in this otherwise disappointing scenario has been growing Dalit assertion – cultural, political and economic – to achieve a life with dignity and equality despite violent reprisal from the powerful upper and middle caste groups.

In this backdrop, the Council for Social Development is organising a week-long training workshop on Dalit Rights and Democracy where participants together with resource persons try to understand why these affirmative actions failed to achieve the desired change. The main objective of the workshop is to explore the intersectionality of human rights and Dalit rights. It intends to go beyond knowledge of the constitutional provisions and existing laws and look at the processes through which they have developed, social factors shaping them, institutional mechanism devised to give effect to them, progress or lack of will in implementing them, the extent to which they have been able to bring about improvements in the socio-economic conditions of Dalits, role of Dalit movements in breaking social barriers and the way forward. This participatory exercise is aimed at identifying challenges and strategies to achieve a just and equitable social order which would have a vital bearing on the working of our democracy. The programme involves lectures by scholars, activists and civil servants, interactive discussions, audio-visual presentations and visit to relevant institutions. Expected participants include research scholars, lecturers, activists, government officials and students.

The themes we intend to discuss in the workshop are:

1. Constitutional Framework and Dalit Rights
2. Protective Laws and their Implementation
3. Dalits, State and Democracy: Institutions and Processes
4. Development Interventions

5. Atrocities against Dalits
6. Dalit Women
7. Dalits and Education
8. Reservation and Development Interventions
9. Dalits and Media
10. Dalit Movements

Organising Committee: Professor K.B. Saxena, Professor Manoranjan Mohanty, Professor Zoya Hasan, Professor N. Sukumar and Dr. Harish Wankhede.

Coordinator: Dhruva Narayan

Participants Contribution: ₹1,000

Timing: 2:30pm to 7pm.