

## SHARP 2024 Global Book Cultures Conference

University of Reading, UK

July 1-5

### Panel Title: Caste, Power and Print

Dr Sayantan Mondal and Dr Jondhale Rahul Hiranman convened a panel at the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing 2024 conference titled, Global Book Cultures: Materialities, Collaborations, Access, hosted at the University of Reading (UK), from July 1st to the 5th, 2024. The conference aimed at foregrounding how books and texts are produced, distributed, and read in global contexts today and in the past. The proposed panel focused on Marathi, Bangla and Telugu periodical intervention from the marginalised (Dalit and Adivasi) communities.

#### Individual Abstracts:

##### Lower caste periodical press enterprise and the representation of caste question

Dr Jondhale Rahul Hiranman

The 19<sup>th</sup> century marks the beginning of print culture in Maharashtra. Initiated by the Bombay-based American Mission Press (1817) and Thomas Graham's typo-graphic innovation (after 1835), print production in Marathi in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century established a firm footing with "Ganpat Krushnaji Press" founded by Ganpat Krushnaji in the 1830s. Various writing cultures, including the periodical press that emerged during this time, significantly impacted the Marathi language, literature and society. It also had a close connection with caste in terms of ownership and thematic inclinations. One could witness how the upper caste group, historically the "Chitpavan Brahmins" in the Konkan and Pune region of Maharashtra, reinstated its dominance over society in general, as well as this emerging domain of knowledge production and circulation. Balshashtri Jambhekar's *Darpan* (1832), Jambhekar and Bhau Mahajan's *Digdarshan* (1840), Pandurang Bapu Joshi

Pavaskar's *Dnyanchandroday* and Vishnushashtri Chiplunkar's *Pune Pathshala Patrak* (1861) are some of the examples of such influence.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the following early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw this monopoly challenged by the progressive socio-cultural activism launched by Jyotirao Phule, followed by Dr Ambedkar. Periodicals brought forth by Satyashodhak Samaj like *Din Mitra*, *Din Bandhu* and Ambedkar's *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Samata*, *Janata* and *Prabuddha Bharat* resisted the continuation of caste dominance in the field of periodical press and brought the caste question on the pages of Marathi periodical press.

While tracing this genealogy of lower caste/Dalit periodical press, this paper will reflect upon the innovative ideas of production and circulation which fueled this resistance and also chart the contributions of the periodical press in initiating and shaping the public discourse on caste resisting/questioning Varna system of power and oppression.

## **Twentieth-Century Bangla Periodical Press and the Caste Question**

**Dr Sayantan Mondal**

The anxieties of purity and loss of control over knowledge production and circulation marked the entry of print in late eighteenth-century Bengal. Upper-caste Bengali society resisted print on the grounds of moral and caste codes. This resistance gradually transformed into debates over the choice of language, content and, arguably the outcome ensured the continuation of the upper caste dominance over the domain of print. Among the multiple, intersectional voices that attempted to resist and subvert this uninterrupted caste monopoly of letters through the transition from oral to print and owning a piece of the same machinery to shape the public opinion away in a different direction, lower caste enterprises are most distinct and consolidated. By the early twentieth century, all three major lower caste communities of Bengal - *Rajbanshi*, *Namasudra*, and *Poundra*- had their presence established in the field of Periodic press. *Namasudra Hiotoishi*, *Bratya Khsatriya Bandhab*, *Pratigya*, and *Pataka* are some examples of these early twentieth-century lower caste-owned and edited Bangla periodicals. While many factors such as colonial education facilities, community access to artisan's craft and missionary benevolence played a significant role in this battle over press

ownership in the early decades of the twentieth century, in the post-independence period, little magazine movement and a transnational network of print and innovation facilitated a bolder and more disruptive lower caste voice in the Bangla periodical press. Besides recognising the diverse network of technological knowledge and radical thoughts (across caste, language and national boundaries), this paper will reflect upon how the Bangla Dalit periodical press can be understood as a palimpsest of this more than a century-long power struggle. How did the caste question fare in this journey? What did it gain, and what was lost?

### **A Journal of Adivasi Resistance in Modern India**

Since publishing has been the monopoly of the upper caste elite in India, Adivasis<sup>1</sup> running a journal in the 1940s was unheard of. This paper presents a critical account of the political life of a little journal, *Adivasi*, which astonishingly ran for more than a decade during the formative days of the modern Indian nation and yet has not attracted the attention of scholars so far. While the Nehruvian national state's ambitious attempts at building modern India through economic initiatives have been well-documented (Chatterjee, 1993)<sup>2</sup>, *Adivasi* provides us with a critical understanding of how Adivasi communities responded to such state-driven governmental initiatives.

*Adivasi* was founded by three first-generation educated adivasis—Rameswaram Nagaiah (Erukala), Tiruvidhula Sambaiah (Yanadi) and Adipudi Subbaiah (unknown). Published from Vijayawada from around 1949 to 1960, it envisaged itself as the voice of the Adivasis of the entire Andhra state and a few other states. Its ambition was to mobilize the scattered adivasis—Erukalas, Yanadis, Lambadas, Pichigontlas, and so on—as one community to fight against the hardships they were facing, such as lack of food, drinking water, education, employment, oppression by the upper castes, police atrocities and so on. It also closely watched the government welfare schemes and their implementation and solicited short articles from its readers on these issues.

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<sup>1</sup> I avoid using 'tribal' due to the pejorative meaning attached to it.

<sup>2</sup> Partha Chatterjee. *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 1993.