

CACIM and Navayana
invite you to a
public discussion on

INTERNATIONALISING CASTE EVERYBODY'S ISSUE? OR NOBODY'S ISSUE?

June 4, Thursday, 2009
3.30 – 6.30 pm, India Social Institute, New Delhi

Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible... Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound.

B.R. Ambedkar, in *Annihilation of Caste*, 1936

The efforts to internationalise the issue of caste-based discrimination against the 260 million Dalits in South Asia and treat it on a par with racial discrimination, which had received a boost in 2001 at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban, suffered a serious setback at the Durban Review Conference held recently (April 20–24, 2009) in Geneva. While in 2001, WCAR had discussed caste euphemistically as “discrimination based on work and descent”, in line with terminology devised by the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference (DRC) has evaded even an allusion to caste.

More than a month after the Geneva event, there’s almost no public debate in India on the issue. Dalits have tried raising the issue of caste with various UN forums for over three decades now. The first effort at lobbying with the UN resulted in Dr Laxmi Berwa, an expatriate Dalit from the United States, presenting a testimony before the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on 31 August 1982.

- What is shocking has been the near-total absence of any debate in the Indian public sphere about the setback to the fight against caste at the international level.
- Why does caste continue to be an issue raised only by Dalits today? What is the role of civil societal groups in this?
- Why it is that society remains indifferent to atrocities on Dalits—even though every hour two Dalits are assaulted, every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered and two Dalit houses burnt?

- Why have NGOs come to dominate the UN interventions on caste? Are social/ political/ activist movements being left behind?

To debate and raise awareness on these issues and to broaden the scope of the global effort at fighting caste, we invite you to three sessions of debate and discussion:

THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONALISING CASTE: **Ashok Bharti** (National Conference of Dalit Organisations, [NACDOR](#)), **Paul Divakar**, National Council for Dalit Human Rights [NCDHR](#); **Colin Gonsalves** (Human Rights Law Network, [HRLN](#))

CASTE—THE MEDIA’S COMPLICITY AND SILENCE: **Neelabh Mishra** (Outlook Hindi) and **Pamela Philipose** (Senior Journalist)

CASTE AND OTHER QUESTIONS: RACISM, COMMUNALISM, IMPERIALISM: **Praful Bidwai** (Senior Journalist), **Annie Namala** (Director, Centre for Programming Inclusion and Equity), **Surinder Jodhka** (Director, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies)

Moderator: **S. Anand**, [Navayana](#)

Each panel will be for about 40 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of discussion. After the concluding panel, it will be an Open House.

Tea will be served at 3.30 p.m.

For further details contact [Madhuresh](#) at Cacim 9818905316 ([www.cacim.net](#)) or [Anand](#) at Navayana 9971433117 ([www.navayana.org](#)).

Click here for [ISI location](#).

A READY-RECKONER OF ONLINE REFERENCES AND RESOURCES:

1. The official [Durban Review Conference](#) website.
2. [Human Rights Watch](#) on how and why DRC failed on caste. The site also offers extensive background and position papers.
3. [International Dalit Solidarity Network](#) website. Offers joint statement by IDSN, HRW and NCDHR; plus a press kit.
4. [Caste and the World](#), S. Anand, The Hindu, May 24, 2009.
5. Caste: Racism in all but name? Shobhan Saxena’s [Times of India](#) report on DRC, 26 Apr 2009.
6. [Caste Out, Yet Again](#), EPW editorial on Durban Review Conference; May16 2009.
7. [Seminar](#), the monthly journal, devoted an entire issue (Dec 2001) to the Durban WCAR conference of 2001. Features articles by Martin Macwan, Kancha Ilaiah, Gopal Guru, Dipankar Gupta, Soli Sorabjee and others.
8. [Race and Caste](#), Andre Beteille, The Hindu, March 10, 2001. A controversial article that triggered a huge debate.

9. [Race and caste: A Response to Andre Beteille](#) by Kalpana Kannabiran, August 2001. Also see this [letter to The Hindu](#).
10. [India's Apartheid](#), Rajeev Dhavan, The Hindu, August 24, 2001
11. [Is Durban the answer?](#) Vir Singh, The Hindu, September 02, 2001
12. [Caste, race and sociologists – I](#), Gail Omvedt, The Hindu, October 18, 2001
13. [Caste, race and sociologists – II](#), Gail Omvedt, The Hindu, October 19, 2001
14. [Caste, Race and the Indian Anthropologists](#), Amarjit Singh, ambedkar.org
15. [The Durban dip can cleanse a billion sins](#), ChandraBhan Prasad, Aug 2001.
16. [En Route to Durban: Thoughts on Caste and Race](#), Vijay Parshad, n.d.
17. [CPI\(M\) official position statement](#) on WCAR, Durban; 3 August 2001
18. [Caste and the U.N. meet](#), Kancha Ilaiah, The Hindu, August 21, 2001
19. [Caste and Race](#), NAUNIDHI KAUR, Frontline, 6 July 2001
20. [PUCL's special focus](#) on the 2001 Durban countdown debates..