

Insight Young Voices Blog

| A Dalit Youth Magazine |

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Disclaimer](#)

[Subscribe](#)

“Don’t take benefit of reservations, if you can’t pay back”

An Interview with Dr. Umakant

By Gomathi Kumar & Sanjay Kabir



Dr. Umakant (b. 1970) is a well known Dalit activist and scholar and has represented Dalit cause at various levels. After his schooling in home state Bihar, Dr Umakant joined Delhi University and later Jawaharlal Nehru University for higher education. In the year 2000, he was awarded doctorate for his thesis ‘*Human Rights of Dalits: A Case Study of Bihar (1977-1997)*’. In JNU, he was one of the founder members of a Dalit student platform UDSF and later has worked with National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) and International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN). He also co-edited a book titled ‘*Caste, Race and Discrimination: Discourses in International Context*’ (2004).

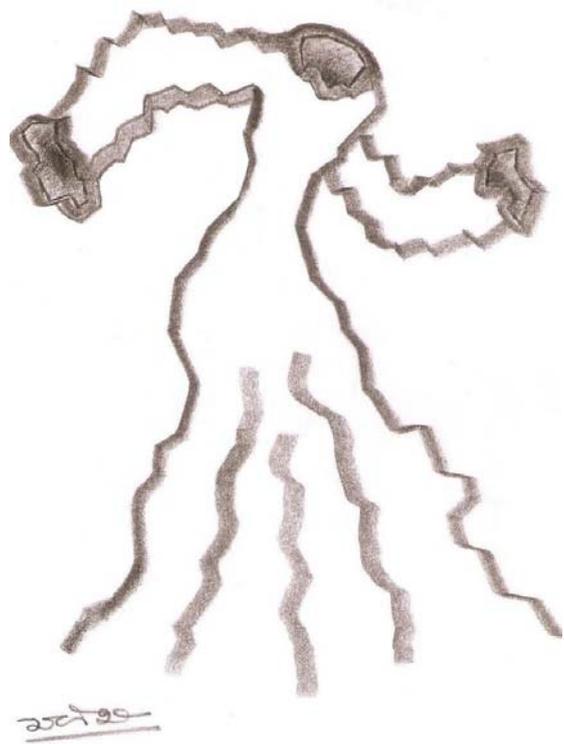


Illustration by Rajesh Kumar, JNU, New Delhi

For almost two decades now, you have been participating in the Dalit movement, first as a student activist and later as representing our cause at many national and international fora together with leading various campaigns for Dalit rights, how did you first get exposed to the Dalit movement and when?

My exposure to the Dalit movement started quite early. I got introduced to the Ambedkarite movement and philosophy at home itself thanks to my father who was very passionate for the cause. He introduced me to the literature published by BAMCEF, DS4 and BSP in my school days itself. However, my direct participation in the movement started in 1988, from my graduation days, when I came to Delhi and joined the Department of Political Science, Hindu college for my BA (Honours).

At that time our students were scattered and had no organisation or forum to come together, even informally. I started interacting with the Dalit students and tried to organize them, not by forming any separate organisation, but by bringing them together on certain issues. However, my participation increased in 1990 when the anti-Mandal agitation against OBC reservation took place and Delhi University became its main centre.

What was the impact of anti-OBC reservation agitation of 1990 on the Dalit students? Being a conscious Dalit student what was your response?

Lot of problems started cropping up for our students during that period. Though the Mandal commission recommendations were aimed at OBCs but it was the Dalit students who were being targeted by 'upper' castes. Our students were being victimised, ridiculed and things really became very difficult for us in the campus. The prejudices against us were always there but this agitation gave the 'upper' caste students an opportunity to display them quite openly.

It was very difficult to be a Dalit student in Delhi University during that period. Therefore I felt the need of meeting all our students not only from SC and ST backgrounds but also the OBCs, to instill a sense of self-respect and not to feel demoralized due to 'upper' caste students' castiest behaviour. Soon we were able to form a small group and started interacting with our students telling them not to get provoked unnecessarily but whenever there was a need, to give a befitting reply to the anti-reservationists and if

they resort to physical violence, to get united and defend themselves.

During this agitation we came across many cases of violence against Dalit students carried out mainly by lumpen caste-Hindu students belonging to feudal backgrounds from UP and Bihar. Thankfully in our college nothing of that sort happened but the whole situation during anti-Mandal agitation taught me the urgency of organizing Dalit students. In 1991, I joined Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi for my master's programme and became much more active in the movement.

You spent almost a decade in JNU as a student right from your post-graduation to doctorate. This campus has a wonderful history of Dalit student activism. What was your experience there and how did it shape your post-student life?

When I joined JNU, Dalit students here also were trying to organize themselves. I immediately teamed up with them and as a result United Dalit Students' Forum (UDSF) came into existence in 1991. I was one of its founding members and that is where my real involvement with the Dalit student's issues began and we got enough opportunities to sharpen ourselves, to become articulative and develop leadership skills. However, the best thing with UDSF was the concept of collective leadership in the sense that it was run by a central committee consisting of 6-10 members. No single person was allowed to take the credit. There is always a central committee and collective responsibility that actually lends much credit to an organization like UDSF. Also it helps to develop leadership qualities among our students.

UDSF was the best platform I had. I could become Dalit activist and do international advocacy at different United Nations (UN) bodies only because of my initial training as a member of UDSF. I feel happy that in such a short period I have contributed something for our cause and the entire credit goes to UDSF.

A Dalit student platform is notably absent in majority of Indian campuses. As a frontrunner and a possible role model, what were the main activities of UDSF?

In UDSF, we did many things right from writing pamphlets, making posters on Dalit issues, to writing memorandums, organizing public meetings and building campaigns on different issues both in JNU and outside. We ran study circle classes and organised public talks by inviting noted scholars like Eleanor Zelliot, Gail Omvedt and Owen Lynch - scholars who have done extensive work on Dalits. Then we had our scholars like Prof Kancha Ilaiah, Prof S.K. Thorat, Prof Jogdand and Dr. Ramaiah as our regular speakers. We had regular organisational meetings and used to participate in other public meetings also to raise our issues. Through these activities, we forced other political groups to take up our issues too.

The common perception is that students should not involve themselves in any activities other than studies. For Dalit students the dangers are much more given their weak socio-economic background. What are your thoughts on this?

I disagree. People don't have an iota of idea about the need and importance of platforms like UDSF in all Indian campuses. Let me tell you very categorically, all active members of UDSF from my batch are more successful professionally than those who chose to remain confined in their rooms. They are now in academics, in bureaucracy; some of them have even become full time activists. You can check this yourself.

They are successful because of the work they did in UDSF and the training they received there. It benefited them a lot in terms of exposure on different issues of our community and to develop interpersonal skills. Working for UDSF gave them a very confident public persona that is prerequisite for one's professional success. Given the prejudices and hostile campus environment such platforms are the only source for Dalit students to express themselves, have access to information, draw support from each other and become socially conscious members of the community.

Most of the Dalit students who were active in UDSF in their JNU days are still contributing to the movement in different ways. That is the real success of our organisation. It not only helps you in your career but also makes you grounded with Ambedkarite philosophy so that wherever you go, you are aware

of your duties towards the community. We need such Dalit student platform in each and every Indian campus and then you will see how things change rapidly in this country.

What are the major achievements of UDSF while you were in JNU that you cherish?

One achievement of UDSF, which I really cherish the most, happened in the year 2000 and had country-wide implications. In that particular year, University Grant Commission (UGC) came out with the decision that there would be no reservations for SC and ST students in Mphil and PhD programmes in the Central Universities.

That was an arbitrary decision, clearly aimed to curb any chance of our students for pursuing higher education. Given the level of caste-prejudices and weak socio-economic status, it is almost impossible for a student from SC/ST background to get admission in these premier institutions without reservation.

UDSF immediately took up this issue and started lobbying with different students’ groups and organizing Dalit students in the JNU campus. We met various cabinet ministers, members of parliament including HRD Minister Murali Manohar Joshi. We also tried to contact Dalit students from all over the country. The efforts of UDSF were remarkable in the sense that not many were aware of such decision and if UGC was allowed to go ahead, then it was the end of the road for SC/ST students for long time to come.

Due to our constant agitation and lobbying, the matter was taken up in the Cabinet meeting. There Ram Vilas Paswan (then a cabinet minister), with whom we lobbied hard, played a major role in putting the issue in right perspective. Within a week of our agitation and lobbying we got the order cancelled. I believe this is the biggest victory for UDSF till date. We fought really hard and won, benefiting thousands of Dalit students across the country.

Another important incident of my UDSF days dates back to 1994, when JNU was celebrating its Silver Jubilee after completing 25 years of its formation and having established its credentials as the bastion of progressive thoughts and ideology. We chose this particular occasion to highlight the hollowness of such claims.

What were the exact concerns raised by UDSF on this occasion?

UDSF initiated a campaign titled ‘what JNU has given to Dalit and Adivasis in the last 25 years’. We prepared the fact-sheet about how many SC and ST teachers have been appointed, how many students admitted and what percentage of SC/ST reservation has been fulfilled in JNU admissions in this period. As expected, despite all its progressive pretensions, JNU was woefully short of fulfilling its constitutional and social obligations.

We prepared posters with these facts and figures and posted in the entire campus. The then President Shankar Dayal Sharma was to inaugurate the function. We went there with black flags, posters, banners saying that JNU has not done justice to us. It created huge flutter and the programme got cancelled. Later, if you see, many teaching positions that were lying vacant were filled up with SC/ST candidates. Such was the impact of our campaign.

Apart from raising Dalit students’ issues in the campus and outside, how did UDSF involve itself with the concerns of larger Dalit community?

Our students were always very keen on raising the issue of caste-based violence. UDSF itself came into existence due to Tsundur Dalit massacre (Andhra Pradesh, 1991), where 8 Dalits were hacked to death. Then Dalit students felt the need of a platform to show their solidarity to the larger Dalit community as well as to put pressure on the government to punish the perpetrators.

If you notice, 1990s’ was the decade with maximum violence against Dalit community, especially in the rural areas. Almost every year there were incidents where Dalits were massacred for asserting themselves. UDSF, within its limitation, responded by organizing protests in and out of the campus, by sending

fact-finding teams, organizing relief to the victims and sensitizing the campus through public talks and meetings.

Here I will like to mention one such incident. In 1998, 61 Dalits were brutally killed by the 'upper' caste landlords in Lakshmanpur Bathe, Bihar. I was preparing for my civil services exams together with one of my batch mates Ravindra Kumar (at present faculty in IGNOU, New Delhi). We came to know about this incident on our last day of UPSC Mains exams. That whole night we spent organizing our students from one hostel to another.

On the very next day we held big demonstration inside the campus against the killings and took UDSF delegation to various government authorities in Delhi. Then our team went to Lakshmanpur Bathe and later published a fact-finding report and sent it to the President, Prime Minister together with other concerned authorities demanding severe punishment for the killers. Through our campaign, we tried to highlight the gravity of the crime and applying pressure on the authorities to provide justice. Again it was Ram Vilas Paswan (cabinet minister in then I.K. Gujaral government) who responded very well and undertook maximum efforts to bring relief to the community.

1990s was also the period of political assertion by Dalits. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was on ascendancy and for the first time Dalits were entering into electoral politics as independent players rather than puppets in the hands of the dominant castes. JNU has vibrant student politics and its students' union elections are keenly watched. Did Dalit students tried to enter into electoral politics there?

UDSF is a non-political platform in the sense that it does not contest students' union elections. During its formation, we deemed necessary that it should be like this only as we needed a common platform to raise our issues. We wanted to have participation of each and every Dalit students on our platform, irrespective of his/her political leanings.

But we were aware of the importance of electoral politics too and were much influenced and inspired by the political gains made by BSP. So we started Bahujan Student Front (BSF) in 1994. It was separate from UDSF but many of us worked for both. The idea behind the formation of BSF was that JNU student elections are the best platform to bring concerns and issues of our community in open. As you pointed out rightly that JNUSU elections are covered in media through out the country and has some resonance outside the campus, therefore we formed BSF and contested elections.

I contested, in 1995, for the post of general secretary as BSF candidate. Though we lost the election, which was expected, but we were able to set the agenda of the elections. The whole students' union election was fought around Dalit issues and for the first time our issues and concerns were debated in JNU campus. We had wonderful speakers like our presidential candidate Dr. M.P. Rana (presently a full time activist) who were able to catapult Dalit issues in the mainstream.

It was such an important event in JNU history and the best part was that we did this on our own, without any external support unlike other students groups who could maintain their presence because of their mentors outside. Though we lost the elections but the entire student community was very charged up and we received lots of encouragement from the students from marginalized sections.

BSF stood in JNUSU elections for 2-3 more years but as you know electoral politic has its own compulsion and many of us were also reaching to a point where academic accomplishment becomes an important factor. Given our weak socio-economic backgrounds we have to be very conscious of this fact and can't take many liberties as for not only our immediate family but for many others we are the only hope for their better future.

Thanks so much for enlightening us and we are sure that your experience in JNU campus as a student activist will inspire many. But when we look at the larger picture, we get hugely disappointed. The Dalit movement has, so far, not emerged at the national level as a force to reckon with. What are the challenges towards that?

It is quite natural. Like the fragmentation in Indian society, Dalits are also divided into different groups. Like you, I also wish for pan-India Dalit movement and have been quite agitated for the lack of it. Once, I asked Prof Eleanor Zelliot, who is a well known authority on Dalit issues, about why there is no pan-India Dalit organisation or movement. I will like to quote her exact answer here.

She said, “India is like Europe. Every region has its own culture, own language. Most of these regions have very strong local Dalit movements but the problem is that these movements are not able to transcend their local barriers, regional barriers. So you will find that in Tamilnadu, or in some parts of Tamilnadu there is a strong movement but the people of neighbouring states like Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra are not aware of it at all. Even in these states there might be grassroots or even state level movements but they have no linkages with their counterparts in Tamilnadu. That is how Dalit movement has remained fragmented region wise, language wise and it is so difficult to bring them all on one national platform without transcending these barriers.”

Ideally our people should have been very well organised after 60 years of independence and our intelligentsia developed enough to play a larger role in mainstreaming our issues. There is huge disappointment in terms of our political leadership too. Instead of having one strong political platform we have many with huge differences among each other. Even in terms of our social organisations and NGOs, we seem not to have one network through which their work could be coordinated, at least on similar issues.

But 60 years is lot of time for a movement to emerge at national level?

Perhaps for country like India, working for 20, 30 and even 40 years is not enough to bring pan-India change or even to have a pan-Indian identity for one organisation. Because of the diversity in the language, culture; it is very difficult to bring people together on one platform. Then Dalits themselves are not a homogeneous group and are divided in hundreds of castes themselves. It further complicates the matter.

It is not that attempts have not been made in this direction. In fact, in last 30 years, there have been various efforts for a pan-India Dalit organisation. The role of Kanshiram Saheb in organizing Dalits and other disadvantaged communities on one political platform was momentous. Today BSP is a party to reckon with and has presence in many states along with clear majority in one of the biggest and most populous state of the country. But you see the amount of hard work it required for Kanshiram Saheb to bring BSP up to this level. He gave his whole life for it.

We do not have very strong economic background and also lack social and cultural capital in terms of generating financial resources to run our organisations. To have a successful all India organisations you need crores of rupees. From where will you get this much money? Who will give you?

It is now that you will hear few Dalit NGOs getting decent fundings for their activities from the funding agencies. After 20-25 years of long struggle these NGOs are able to come up and locate some funding opportunities and many of them are doing commendable work at different levels.

Do you see any role of Dalit students’ activism, like that of UDSF, towards creating a pan-India Dalit movement?

There is strong need of some genuine efforts to create a pan-India Dalit movement. It will not happen automatically and that is where the Dalit students’ activism at premier institutions like JNU becomes important as these institutions have students from different states and through organisations like UDSF that represents all Dalit students, one can learn to transcend regional barriers.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that student life in campuses like JNU might not reflect the ground realities in totality and our training remains incomplete till we go out and work in the larger society. It is very important for a Dalit student activist to understand this fact because the idealism that fires your imagination, your spirit might not match with the ground realities. You might not find strong

Dalit organisations at different levels or unity among our people.

But if you are really sincere towards the cause, you can make whole lot of difference. You have to take initiatives. Either you take up issues in your own way or become a full time activist by either joining any social or political platform or NGOs working on our issues and contribute there with your best intentions. You will have to sacrifice a lot because fighting for Dalit rights is not an easy job. It might not pay you politically, socially or economically. If you are determined to work for your people, nothing will stop you from raising the issue, getting justice for our community. What is needed is a team of dedicated young people with good professional background and good training. With only rhetorics we will not go very far.

After completing studies, you have been associated with organisations working for our cause and participated in various campaigns for Dalit rights both at national and international level. One of them was Durban Conference, held in 2001. This conference is often credited for bringing global attention, for the first time, to the issue of caste-discrimination in India. You participated in this conference along with many other Dalit activists. What had been your experience there?

The World Conference against Racism (WCAR) at Durban, in my opinion, was the first ever international event where Dalit activists could successfully participate and bring international attention to the caste discrimination. Creating visibility on the issue was our only goal and we had fair success in doing so. If the Dalits activists had not participated there in large numbers our issues would never have appeared at the international level as prominently as they appear now.

National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) worked as a catalyst for this campaign. It not only mobilized Dalit activists from across the country but took the campaign to different levels simultaneously – from grassroots to international forums. While we were lobbying at Durban, we were also organizing rallies, yatras in different states inside the country demanding Dalit human rights.

In Durban, we were almost at par with African and Palestinian groups in organizing and highlighting our issues. The leader of our Dalit group was even invited to address 12 heads of states that included prominent politicians like Yasar Arafat, Fidel Castro and Thabo Mbeki.

It was a remarkable achievement given the complete lack of exposure of Dalit activists in international advocacy and campaigns. It is an important milestone in the Dalit movement as it brought global attention to caste discrimination. Now we are able to intervene in different UN bodies as well on various Dalit issues. Before Durban, UN bodies never paid attention to our problem. Just after Durban, Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) organised a thematic discussion on descent based discrimination. There, for the first time, any UN document mentioned the word ‘caste’! That’s how we could make a difference.

Highlighting the issue and making every one aware about caste discrimination at global level is very well but no international forum can directly intervene as caste is an ‘internal matter’ of the country. In such scenario, how beneficial international advocacy would be to the Dalits living in this country?

On the face of it, all these exercises may seem useless and to certain extent it is true. Going to UN and raising issue at international fora do not help you much, we know this. We never said that the participation in Durban conference will solve all your problems. But it certainly helps in creating conditions where you can demand accountability from the Indian state.

At the Durban conference our strategy was to create visibility on our issues and we did that quite successfully. After the conference, we tried to consolidate on the gains made at international level by taking up advocacy on Dalit issues at various other international fora. Also we never limited ourselves to international advocacy but are working at different levels. The unwritten motto of NCDHR is ‘we will work from village panchayats to UN level’.

So along with international advocacy we stated working on strategies to capacitate young Dalit activists to

work at grassroots level. More than seventeen hundred young Dalit activists from all over the country were given trainings to fight against cases of caste atrocities. They are trained for monitoring atrocity cases, compiling data, preparing the fact finding reports on such cases and then support Dalit victims through legal interventions. Through these activists we are also able to create a big data bank on the number of atrocities and its various forms which later could be used to demand for Dalit rights and to lobby for strong intervention from both the state and international bodies. The grassroots information has helped us in raising the issue in most effective way.

After Durban Conference, what have been the other achievements in international advocacy?

I will like to mention here about the appointment of two Special Rapporteurs, in 2005, by the UN to study caste discrimination and to prepare guidelines for tackling it. Unfortunately the UN body that appointed them got abolished during the restructuring of UN and the Rapporteurs have yet to present their reports, which are now hanging somewhere in the UN building in Geneva. We are lobbying hard to get them published so that we can at least use them as a tool to address our issues.

Then there was a conference organised in Geneva by Human Rights Council on April 10, 2008 where Indian government had to face international censure for not dealing effectively with caste discrimination. Here we submitted our report on caste discrimination and lobbied with the delegations from different countries to raise questions on the status of Dalits in the conference. In just two days, we met and presented our case to missions from about twenty countries.

You know how many of them raised our issue? Eleven of them. Indian government had to take notice and to reiterate its commitment to protect Dalit rights at the conference. This happened not because of two days of lobbying but due to our regular interventions at international levels. After Durban conference, we have used every opportunity to raise various issues on international fora - atrocities on Dalit women, untouchability, manual scavenging, lack of equal opportunities, poverty, discrimination in natural disaster relief and rehabilitations etc. Thus, most of the countries who value human rights are well aware of the caste problem and are willing to support us in pressuring Indian government to implement strict measures to empower Dalits.

Prior to the Durban Conference, were there any similar attempts to draw the global attention towards the problems faced by the Dalits?

It seems, in 1945, Babasaheb Ambedkar tried to take caste issue at international level. There is a reference in Babasaheb’s writings (Writings and Speeches Vol. 17) but what actually happened, we are not aware. Perhaps there was a conspiracy to stop Babasaheb to go to UN.

In 1945 when the League of Nations was preparing for the formal establishment of UN, there were many marginalized groups from different part of the world that were trying to submit memorandums so that their concerns also get reflected in Universal Declaration of Human rights and in other international treaties that were coming up. At Durban, we got to know that there were exchange of letters between Babasaheb Ambedkar and prominent Afro-American leader W. E. B. Du Bois. The Black leader wrote in his biography that, “I received a letter from Dr Ambedkar, leader of untouchables from India to coordinate together to submit a memorandum”.

After the death of Babasaheb few brave attempts were made to lobby international support against caste discrimination in the country. The efforts of Dr. Laxmi Berwa (USA), Advocate Bhagwan Das (Delhi) and Henry Thayagraj (Chennai) must be highly appreciated by all of us in this regard. However, these were at best individual efforts and it is for the first time, in Durban Conference, caste issues were raised in a very systematic way in UN bodies.

After Durban Conference and getting exposed on caste issues at international level, what have been the responses of Government of India?

At least the Government of India now has started admitting the problem that yes there is some thing called

caste-discrimination. Earlier they were not even doing that and kept on reiterating that caste problem is now our past. Now they are saying that we will take up the issue seriously and we will get things done inside the country. The problem is these pronouncements should also reflect in the implementation which still is not happening. For us it is going to be a long battle so that state is held accountable for all the atrocities that are committed on us.

Despite having an egalitarian Constitution and wonderful set of anti-discriminatory laws why the state is unable to implement them?

The problem lies at the way things are done at Government level. Babasaheb used to say that Manu is still alive in this country. People who are at the helm of affairs are still following manu-wad. That is why our people are having a miserable life even after 60 years of independence. Anti-discriminatory Laws and progressive constitutional provisions do not operate in vacuum. These are operating within a caste-society that does not recognize the Indian Constitution. The brahmanical social order does not recognize it. This social order decides the behaviour of dominant caste groups in our country – be it caste-Hindus, caste-Muslims, or caste-Christians.

And when such people constitute majority of those who are at helm of affairs of this country, how can there be any socio-economic change? That is why it is important for us to create a space in the decision making process and in governance of the country. One or two Dalit persons can never bring change. With one chairperson of some government body, one planning commission member or one member in the cabinet here and there, things are not going to happen. We need to mainstream Dalit rights and concerns every where, in every sector.

You have almost two decades of activism behind you starting right from your student life to representing the Dalit cause at various fora. What are your expectations from the Dalit students now?

We need people who are willing to work for liberating our community. We do not need people who have problems in identifying themselves as Dalits. Every person who has benefited from the reservation policy has the moral duty to pay back to the society. Don’t take benefit of reservations if you can’t pay back. You are being immoral otherwise. If there was no reservation, we would not have been here, talking to each other. You have also no rights to take reservation benefits if you are unable to defend the policy. Let’s be clear and honest to ourselves.

I feel proud to say that I am a product of reservation policy. It would not have been possible for me to get such a good education without it. Without good education, it would have been impossible for me to become an advocate of Dalit rights. My father was the first beneficiary of reservation and he struggled much to provide education not only to his children but to other relatives too. This is what every first generation beneficiary has done.

If you see around carefully, you will realize that most of educated Dalits from our parent’s generation had helped so many people, not just their own families. Every one who has benefited has paid back more than what they were supposed to. They have done their best, they have paid back to the community and it is now our responsibility to pay back.

[Gomathi Kumar and Sanjay Kabir did their Masters of Social Work (MSW) from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai in the session 2007-09]

December 7th, 2009 in [Assertion](#), [History](#), [Identity](#), [Interview](#), [Law](#), [Media](#), [Politics](#), [Protest](#), [Reservation](#), [State](#), [magazine](#) | tags: [Bihar](#), [Delhi University](#), [Durban Conference](#), [Geneva](#), [IDSN](#), [IIDS](#), [JNU](#), [NCDHR](#), [UDSF](#), [UN](#)

16 Comments

Pardeep Attridecember 7th, 2009 at 7:27 am

Great! Really motivating...I need more information about Dr Ambedkar's attempt to highlight caste issue at UN...pls email me detail if you can. Thanks again..

Ankit Vermadecember 7th, 2009 at 11:58 am

Brilliant Interview.. loved every part of it.... Thanks Gomathi and Sanjay Kabir. And Big thanks to Dr Umakant, You are our role model sir !!

[Gyanendra](#)December 7th, 2009 at 2:27 pm

Very informative, insightful and encouraging interview. I am sure many of the readers of this interview will get inspired and re-assert their commitment for the cause. I look forward to read the rest of the interviews of this series !

nishudecember 7th, 2009 at 2:53 pm

you are my role model sir.... we need people like you to reach our goal....

Sachin Khainrardecember 7th, 2009 at 4:39 pm

Very well said. !!!

Can we publish this interview in TOI ? It will be an eye opener for many people.

P.P. Lakshmandecember 7th, 2009 at 9:36 pm

This is a great interview, and recorded brilliantly. Should receive wider circulation.

Lakshman

Dec 7, '09

Email: pplakshman08@gmail.com

Ashok YadavDecember 8th, 2009 at 12:11 am

Very illuminating interview. Got a lots of informations as well as insights. As an OBC I feel that the interviewer should have put question on Dalit-OBC unity, why the unity is needed, what are the problems in achieving this unity etc. The manner in which Dr Umakant has come out in the interview provides indications that he must have had something important to comment on this. Many many thanks to Gomathi and Sanjay and even more to Anoop.

ashok yadav

patna

CynthiaDecember 8th, 2009 at 2:41 am

This is a really good interview. Great job. Looking forward to the others. This is nothing but the writing of our own history of struggle. Keep it up, team. Great going.

ranjudecember 8th, 2009 at 9:12 am

congrats gomathi and sanjay !

the fact that Ambedkar also wanted to bring the issue of caste to international forums needs to be historical documented. And such discourses should be brought to public/academic attention.

Attempts have been made these days from various academic/intellectual/statist circles to "claim" Ambedkar from 'Dalits' (the way Gandhi tried to claim Dalits from Ambedkar). At this juncture it is of utmost importance to assert and pose the 'political/intellectual Ambedkar' against such statist attempts.. Once again a great job. congrats !

RajvirDecember 8th, 2009 at 3:40 pm

Thanks

Gomathi and Sanjay Kabir.

I would like to thank Dr Umakant also for such a great interview.

Whenever, we met Dr Umakant, he always encouraged the people of our community. He used to tell a lot of stories of discrimination of our people. I would like to tell here it is a very small piece of his knowledge and work.

I Hope, he will remain continue his work for the cause of Dalit people.

Rajvir Singh

[Dr.Laxmi N. F.A.C.P,M.D,F.A.C.P.,U.S.A](#)December 8th, 2009 at 6:28 pm

I felt great after reading the interview of Dr. Umankant by Gomathi and Sanjay Kabir.Becuase it seems that we as Dalits have come of an age that we can talk in Queens language in its finest tradition like anybody else on the globe.Gomathi and Sanjay did a great job of interviwing Dr. Umakant digging the past, current and future of the Dalit movement.Congratulations to Gomathi and Sanjay.

Comming to Dr. Umakant himself, It was quite an inspiring life and continue to mature to guide in the future generation.His personal struggle, uniting students at famous JNU campus, I personally know many of them, I call them “JNU CLAN”.

LIke him ,I am too a Reservation product, I agree with him that all those who benefitted from Reservation must pay back to the society under whose banner they got the benefit of reservation.And they should attempt, whatever way they can to pay back the debt of Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar.As Dr. Umankant said Manuwadi’s still control the executive powers and give left over to us.Like him I too ,am disappointed with our politicians.May be we must do away with Reserve Consituencies, because of reasons known to everybody.i.e political impotence of Dalit lagislators.

This article must be widely disseminated.

[Ann](#)December 8th, 2009 at 9:34 pm

A really great interview. Jai Bhim from San Francisco. Educate, agitate, organize.

sanjaykabirDecember 8th, 2009 at 9:38 pm

i feel more happy, thanks for ur warm compliment .

rajkumarDecember 9th, 2009 at 3:57 pm

Dr. Umakant in his interview has made most significant observations with a crystal clear perspective, a rarity, on our emancipation and empowerment. His hard earned insight into the intricacies of our mission is remarkable, forthcoming and meaningful. His understanding is the direct outcome of his continuous engagement in the movement coated with great conviction and commitment. It also shows that now the second generation is ready to carry the baton ahead.The kind of confidence and exuberance exhibited by Dr. Umakant speaks volumes of maturity, our movement is gaining, and there is no scope for diffidence and we are on the verge of reclaiming our human personality. This interview may well be qualified as one of the masterpieces in our struggle of paying back to the society. looking forward for many more..... of the kind...congratulations Gomathi and Kabir...great job done.

uday bhanDecember 11th, 2009 at 1:39 am

I have been surfing and reading articles concerning with dalit issues for months . It is one of the best article or interviews I have read on internet. It is very inspiring for all Dalits who want to serve their community .

[kanta](#) December 11th, 2009 at 2:59 am

‘I feel proud to say that I am a product of reservation policy’.- i too am proud sir to say this . as we were systematically oppressed for ages it(reservation) was/is necessary for us to get some footing in the society. though increased privatization has lessened its effect a bit in employment sector, in educational sector its a boon to dalit students. we students should make the best use of the reservation policy and help our community..

“We need people who are willing to work for liberating our community. We do not need people who have problems in identifying themselves as Dalits.”- rightly said sir.

and all those who are benefited have a moral obligation to give back to the community.

many of my dalit friends are willing to payback to the community but v dont know how. here in karnataka we dont have a strong student union unlike JNU. a pan Indian, apolitical and secular dalit students union will help students to study/live without fear in campuses...

kudos to Gomathi Kumar & Sanjay Kabir for putting the words in such a simple yet powerful tone.

looking forward to many more articles from them..

jai bheem

-kanta

Leave a comment

Your comment

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

Submit Comment

Insight Young Voices

visit Magazine Web-page

Recent Posts

- [Celebrating Dhamma Chakka Parivartan Diwas in Hungary](#)
- [“Let us promote untouchability and humiliation at all cost”](#)
- [“Assault on any Dalit is almost never an attack on individual but targeted towards entire Dalit community”](#)
- [“Don’t take benefit of reservations, if you can’t pay back”](#)
- [Mapping Contemporary Dalit Movement: Issues and Patterns of Mobilisation](#)
- [A chair/A life](#)
- [Marichjhapi and the Revenge of Bengali Bhadrakalok](#)
- [A Forgotten Liberator - The life and struggle of Savitribai Phule](#)

- [Feminism or Womanism?](#)
- [Chengara / Varkala : Beware of the Dalit](#)

Recent Comments

- [Celebrating Dhamma Chakka Parivartan Diwas in Hungary](#) (1)
 - [Shurti](#)
- [“Let us promote untouchability and humiliation at all cost”](#) (2)
 - [Cynthia](#)
 - [Pardeep Attri](#)
- [“Assault on any Dalit is almost never an attack on individual but targeted towards entire Dalit community”](#) (3)
 - [Gyan](#)
 - [P.P. Lakshman](#)
 - [Cynthia](#)
- [Chengara / Varkala : Beware of the Dalit](#) (18)
 - [ranju](#)
- [Babasaheb Ambedkar and ‘the Dalits of Europe’](#) (26)
 - [rahul sardar](#)
- [Feminism or Womanism?](#) (62)
 - [Cynthia](#)
 - [Cynthia](#)

Archives

- [December 2009](#)
- [November 2009](#)
- [October 2009](#)
- [September 2009](#)
- [August 2009](#)
- [July 2009](#)
- [June 2009](#)

Tag Cloud

Authors

- [Anoop Kumar](#) (16)
- [Ranjith Thankappan](#) (34)
- [Pardeep Attri](#) (25)
- [Philip Vinod Peacock](#) (27)
- [Ashokan Nambiar](#) (1)
- [Karthik Navayan](#) (2)
- [Cynthia Stephen](#) (4)

- [Sudeep K S](#) (18)
- [Anu R.](#) (16)

Meta

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries RSS](#)
- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

Copyright © 2008. All right reserved Insightyv.com