

## EDITORIAL

India is a diverse country and so are its institutions, systems and ideologies. A succinct description of India is not possible without a generous mention of its colourful institutions like the quintessential caste system, the tenuous tribal situations, the vivacious gender problem, the hawk like surveillance of the caste institutions, the troubled areas of gender, the impending question of striking a balance between the majority and the minorities and the ever-increasing politicisation of these problems. We hope to get a bird's view of the society deploying all these areas which shall explore the nooks and corners of our society and help problematize the indefinite layers of the society.

The current volume of the Journal breeds a rich inter-sectional picture of the Indian society as looked through the lenses of caste, tribe, gender, media and politics. Instituted by the sole State Open University of West Bengal, the *NSOU Journal of Social Sciences* addresses not only the traditional academicians, but also extends its reach to the scholars of the open and distance mode of education. The sub-themes of this volume of the Journal are reasonably a collage of the changing times. The Journal sets its eyes on the contemporary areas in state, politics and gender. Each of the papers navigate the nooks and crannies of the Indian polity to trigger more engaging debates on caste, class, gender, minorities and other more enthralling areas of social exclusion. What is more fascinating about the current volume is that each of our papers help place their distinctive idiosyncratic narratives within the wider and more encompassing dialogues on politics, society, culture and the multiple planes of social exclusions. Each paper is unique since none of them have tried generalizing the trends of the society towards a homogeneous monochrome but have rather singled out the specificity of their distinct problem. In this sense we have applied an inductive model of research design throughout our Journal and have tried moving from the particular to the universal. The authors were not chased by the mad search for matching their presumptions with the empirical reality outside but have rather worked independently to problematize their areas of research as reasonably as possible. There was no definition of reality for them that they were supposed to conform to but had defined realities in terms of their research and their lived experiences. Herein lies the robustness and the integrity of the Journal.

The papers have been compiled so that they can penetrate the interstices of the social forces, political institutions and eclectic processes that probe the changing nature of the Indian polity. The researchers have utilized various approaches and tools of research design to problematize the fissiparous tendencies plaguing the society since independence, of course keeping in mind the kernels of the qualitative research and the disciplinary osmosis. This has exposed the crude and supercilious relationships between polity and society, democracy and the question of development, state hegemony and policy formulation on the one hand and the lesser subsumed agenda of caste, religion, language and ethnicity to more uncomfortable questions, to which state did not show much preparedness to answer even after seventy-five years of independence. The Journal is an important milestone in terms of our literary contribution to the 'Amrit Mahotsav' that we have been celebrating over a year now to mark our accomplishment in delivering distributive social justice and social uprightness to reach out to the voiceless. However, in this extravaganza, pageant and glittering spectacle, we should not forget to address those on the brim of extinction and near decimation. That is exactly what our papers have done to repeatedly implore the state and polity to recognize the multiple needs of those perishing on the margins. The articles have beseechingly looked towards the state to acknowledge the space to be given to the 'others' and to recognize the role they might have played in the compounded interplay of

socio-economic forces, political upheavals and the grand dynamics of social alignment and political transformations in contemporary India with regard to all the multiple layers we have mentioned in the sub-theme.

The purpose of our Journal, as we have already spelled out is to spark debate on the conceptualization and operationalization of each of these categories on the socio-political plane. It was never our purpose to present an all encompassing and comprehensive account of the Indian polity as a gross structure. We were rather interested in problematizing each of the layers of this social structure in pieces and parcels to bring out its distinction and inter-penetration. The articles on class structure showed the changing character of the political economy in both the rural and the urban India as well as the trends towards urbanization. This was done with a keen eye on the policy designing stratagems of the state including those pointing towards globalization and liberalization, the twin towers of development and growth. The Journal contains a vivid discourse on caste across a wide horizon of issues spanning across the caste origin, the caste movements, the question of the Dalits, the perception about an *Adivasi*, the dynamics of the electoral politics and the ensuing issues of reservation policies. While delving on the question of gender, we intertwined it with overlapping areas of class, caste, religion and status as we tried capturing the lenses of a woman and also the Hijra community.

On the question of caste movement, Angshuman Chakraborty in his paper *The Problem of Identification as OBC: A Sociological Study of the Tili Community in West Bengal* has raised a serious concern regarding the whole process of identification of other backward classes along the dimension of caste in India. Precisely, the question that he was asking is whether, the socio-economic and educational status itself should be a marker of backwardness of a caste or whether paradoxically the obligation of democratic politics often becomes the marker of backwardness of caste in the long run. He has taken the cases of Tilis in Bengal to make his stand. Swati Sengupta Chatterjee in her study on the *Dalit Namasudras in Colonial and Post-Colonial Period: Culture and Politics in Bengal* has discussed the changing status of the Namasudras and the evolution of the Matua sect in Bengal nestled in the crest of intense socio-political tremors. In *Caste and Commensalism: Analyzing Intersections with the Contemporary, Urban 'Foodscapes'* Titasha Sinha very interestingly merges food with caste and brings out its various implications. Sinha's paper seeks to create a 'foodscape' to analyze how in the contemporary, urban scenario food mediates with various social cleavages to tenaciously weave its own interpolations. It becomes entangled with the associated methods related to that of production, consumption, handling, mannerisms and various other cultural associations which are operative simultaneously. In their paper *Assessing the Effectiveness of the Major Welfare Schemes of West Bengal: A Geographical Appraisal*, Biraj Kanti Mondal and others conclude that progressive welfare programmes of the Government of West Bengal have been found to be very necessary and effective, particularly in the state's backward and poorer sections of society.

Santanu Ghosh in his article *The Construction of Criminal Tribes in India: A Colonial Conjecture* has discussed the nature of the criminal tribes in colonial India with special reference to the Bengal presidency. The paper tries to analyse the serious problems faced by some of the simple nomadic tribes like Lodhas, Domes etc. of Bengal after they were identified as addicted criminals. The role played by Rani Shiromoni, Durjan Singh, Jaganath Dhal, Gobardhan Dikpati, Anchal Singh, Ganga Narain and other rebellious zamindars in leading the Chuar movement has been critically analysed in Amrita Sengupta's *The Adivasi Resistance in the Jungle Mahals 1760-1832: The Role of the Jungle Zamindars*. The use of archival source material from West Bengal State Archives by the author is commendable. Further, on the *adivasi* question Puja Mondal and others through their paper *The Contested Medical Pluralism;*

*Environment, State and the Indigenous Healthcare in West Bengal* investigate the conflict between the public and indigenous health care systems among West Bengal tribals. The writers employed 'healthcare' as an analytical framework to comprehend the broader issue of 'contested territories' of the environment, state, and tribal society. Biraj Kanti Mondal and others in *A Study of Inter-District Spatio-Temporal Disparity of Gender, Caste and Tribe and their Nexus in West Bengal* discuss the critical diversity and imbalance in the distribution of gender, caste, and tribes, which jeopardise the growth scenario of socially disadvantaged groups and society as a whole.

Rakhi Mathur's paper *Women and the Right to Live – Inhuman Aspects Of India's Patriarchal Society* shows how the birth of a girl child is not a welcome sight in many families, and even in some cases parents choose not to give birth to daughters and how it goes on to manufacture an eerie imbalance between the male female sex ratio. Subhadeep Mondal feels that like other marginalized people this pandemic had led to the further marginalization of the Hijra community. His study 'Izzat', *Intersectionality and Emerging Geographies; A Case Study of Covid-19 Experiences of the Hijra Community in Suri, Birbhum* delves into the question of 'izzat' (respect) and intersectionality in Hijra community, especially the differential experience in the pandemic. He basically looks into how those identities inter-weave with each other and what are the spatial relations of such intersections. On the gender question, intersectional ties have been forged between the various blocks of the gender continuum to present an incisive picture.

As editors who feel deeply about this issue, Srabanti Choudhuri in *A Multi-layered Village in Malda: Sociological Accounts from the Field* dabbles with the question of Minority and studies the intricacies of a minority dominant village and its various institutions to bring out its relevance in negotiating with the question of Islamic feminism. Ritu Mathur Mitra's paper *Contestations of Gender and Culture: Women's Folk Songs of North India* is an empirical study of the folk songs sung by the women of North India on diverse occasions, a textualization of oral history that intends to throw open the real questions of women's autonomy in a patriarchal society, perceived by their own selves and expressed in the lyrical sub-text of their own songs. . In this birth centenary year of the Bengali historian Amales Tripathi, a special paper on *Amales Tripathi: His Researches in the Quest of Knowledge* has been adroitly penned by Chandan Basu and adeptly translated from Bengali to English by Debarati Banerjee. In this enlightening paper on the intellectual tradition of Bengalis engaged in historical research, the author dwells upon the two recurring themes in Amales Tripathi's writings namely, 'nation-building' and peoples' history.

This issue of the Journal has two book reviews. One is by Nataraj Malakar on Rup Kumar Barman's book *Paribarta Anusandhan: Rashtra Nagarikatwa, Bastuchyuti O Ithihascharcha* (Search for Alternative: State, Citizenship, Displacement and Historiography). The other is by Debajit Goswami on *From Government to Governance A Brief Survey of the Indian Experience* by Kuldeep Mathur.

Editors :

**Dr Ritu Mathur Mitra**  
Associate Professor  
Department of History  
School of Social Sciences  
Netaji Subhas Open University

**Dr Srabanti Choudhuri**  
Assistant Professor of sociology  
School of Social Sciences  
Netaji Subhas Open University