

## **Institutionalising Marginal Actors in South Asia: Processes, Policies, Practices and Pitfalls: Roger Jeffery**

The premise of democratic politics is that all citizens are equal and have an equal right to a say in national politics. This substantive definition of democracy, however, is observed more in the breach than in practice. Some forms of marginalisation result from geographical location, as rural residents may be ignored in policy-making or within urban areas, those living in slums. But marginalisation of some regions within States can become central to identity-making processes, leading (for example) to mobilizations to establish new States or for secession. Cross-cutting these patterns are forms of exclusion that derive from gender, age, disability or sexuality as well as marginalisations derived from membership of some castes or religious minority groups. In a wider South Asian context, people who may regard themselves as members of majority religious groupings can nonetheless be excluded or marginalised. All these elements can play roles in people's exclusion from the good things of life, or capabilities and well-being.

What happens when formerly excluded groups are integrated into socio-political processes? Our main concern is to chart the processes by which people gain access to institutions – whether these are informal social institutions or the more formal political ones – and unpack the consequences of these processes both for the groups in question and for the institutions that they enter. Poor people must be more fully included in newly democratised systems. The intersections of poverty and identity make the democratic politics of 'inclusion' a complex and problematic exercise in the Indian context. In this paper, therefore, we turn our gaze towards the processes and policies through which hitherto excluded groups and actors are granted – or claim – access to socio-political institutions, and raise questions about whether and how marginalised populations are accommodated and critically scrutinise the extent and impact of such institutionalisation.

### **From the Margins to the 'Mainstream': Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu: Hugo Gorringe**

In 1999 the largest Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu, the Liberation Panthers, ended their decade long boycott of elections and contested elections. In the 14 years since they have struggled to establish themselves as political players. During fieldwork in 2012, one of the main concerns of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK - Liberation Panther Party) was to become a 'mainstream' party. Thirumavalavan, the party leader, emphasised that the party tended to be marginalised and side-lined as a 'Dalit' party. He therefore outlined an ambitious attempt to change the constituency and makeup of the party so that it was no longer perceived as a Dalit organisation. Institutionalisation, this reminds us, is not a simple step but an ongoing process. Entering elections has compelled the VCK to change in terms of structure, members, rules, and tactics. Not all of these changes have been welcomed by cadres, nor have they necessarily benefited the party in obvious ways. Drawing on

ethnographic work with party activists and affiliates this paper teases apart the complexities of institutionalisation for Dalit parties in south India.

**Challenging Normalised Exclusion: Humour and Hopeful Rationality in Dalit Politics:  
Suryakant Waghmore**

Institutionalised Dalit exclusion points rather to the impossibilities of justice, tolerance, and civility in India's popular democracy. Various studies have dealt with Dalit resistance in an everyday context to their sustained exclusion. This paper takes forward such exploration through a nuanced exploration of humour and anger in Dalit movements. I suggest that humour and anger in Dalit movements form critical strategies that Dalits put to use to challenge the normality of caste exclusion.

I argue that the public and private performance of humour and anger in Dalit movements contributes to a kind of 'hopeful' rationality in Dalit politics. Such rationality also engages in altering the popular notions of tolerance and touch and stretches the mainstream boundaries of laughter and self-critique, thus making radical contribution to civilising India's popular culture and democracy.