

Summary of Proceedings of Seminar on Religious Minorities and Karnataka Politics: Issues and Challenges for Inclusive Democracy

The Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE) of JAIN UNIVERSITY in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSEEIP), National Law School of India University organized a Seminar on ***Religious Minorities and Karnataka Politics: Issues and Challenges for Inclusive Democracy*** at the JC Road Campus of Jain University on 30 September 2012. The Conference has over a 100 distinguished academicians, political leaders, journalists, social activists, researchers and students participating.

In the First Session, Dr Sandeep Shastri, Pro Vice Chancellor, Jain University and Director of CERSSE, presented a paper on the theme `Religious Minorities and Politics: The Karnataka Perspective`. Drawing extensively from survey data, Dr Shastri made the point that the religious minorities voting as a `block` was a myth and suggested that the socio-economic circumstances and conditions were a more authentic base for explaining vote choice even among the religious minorities. Drawing data from 1952, he highlighted to fact that both in the legislature and in the Council of Ministers in the state, the minorities have been under-represented. Mr Dinesh Amin Mattu, Assistant Editor of Deccan Herald also spoke in the first session and highlighted the fact that the question of representation was very different from the issue of meaningful participation in decision making. He also spoke of the need for a more enlightened leadership emerging from among the minorities. Mr Ravindra Reshme, a senior journalist responded to the two presentations and asserted that the important political leaders of the minority community in the state, went far beyond merely representing minorities and drew admiration, respect and support from across sections in the state. Dr B K Chandrashekar, Congress leader and former Chairman, Karnataka Legislative Council, chaired the session and felt the need for a deep introspection within all political parties on how best to ensure greater representation to minorities.

In the Second Session, Professor Abdul Aziz a well known Economist and Visiting Professor at the National Law School of India University spoke on Karnataka Muslims and Politics. He spoke of the causes and consequences of poor representation of Muslims in the political process and called for an alliance across social groups (Minorities, Dalits and Backward Castes) to ensure greater presentation to these sections.

The third session saw a presentation on Karnataka Christians and Politics by Dr Valerian Rodrigues, Professor of Political Science at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Given the numerical strength of Christians, Dr Rodrigues felt that it would be difficult for Christian candidates to merely win on community support. He underscored the fact that Christian candidates who emerged victorious won on the basis of a broader support base they were able to establish. Mr David Simeon, former Chairman of the Karnataka Legislative Council and leader of the Janata Dal (S) spoke on the involvement of Christians in the political process especially in the Northern Karnataka. Dr Amrose Pinto, Director, St Joseph's Evening College, responded to the two papers and stressed on the fact that the Christian community was actively involved in a range of social and political movements across the state.

The fourth session saw two presentations. The first was by Mr. Arun, a senior advocate who spoke about the Jain community and the political process. He stressed the fact that the Jain community had worked with the majority community and had thus paved the way for harmony between the two communities. The second presentation was by Mr Hanuman Singh, President of the Sikh Dharam Sangh of South India. He highlighted the need for unity among the religious minorities to be able to voice their concerns and problems.

The final session saw a Panel Discussion on the need for an Alliance of Dalits, Minorities and Backward Classes. The panels included Mr.Mavalli Shankar, State leader, Dalit SangarshSamiti (DSS), Ms.BanuMustaq, Advocate and Dr. Banjagere Jayaprakash, Political Analyst . All the three panelists stressed on the need for such an alliance and emphasized the need for each section of society to reach out to the others at the time of need. Alliances, they asserted was more about sustained efforts at the ground level.

Given the importance of the theme, the organizers are planning to bring out the papers presented in the conference as an edited book.

