

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH ON GENDER IN ASIA SERIES

Dalit Women's Education in Modern India

Double discrimination

Shailaja Paik

ROUTLEDGE



Dalit Women's Education in Modern India

Double discrimination

Shailaja Paik

First published 2014
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2014 Shailaja Paik

The right of Shailaja Paik to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Paik, Shailaja.

Dalit women's education in modern India : double discrimination /
Shailaja Paik.

pages cm. – (Routledge research on gender in Asia series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Dalit women—Education—India—Maharashtra. 2. Discrimination in education—India—Maharashtra. 3. Sex discrimination against women—India—Maharashtra. 4. Educational equalization—India—Maharashtra. 5. Maharashtra (India)—Social conditions. I. Title.

LC2328.M34P35 2014

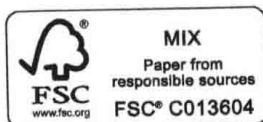
371.822095479—dc23

2013048742

ISBN: 978-0-415-49300-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-77074-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear



Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Shailaja Paik centers her history of western Indian Dalit women in the highly charged political field of education, which was a testing ground for Dalit self-realization in the context of colonial and postcolonial modernity. Drawing on a rich archive of oral history and insisting on gender as a generative force in the shaping of all Dalit experience, she documents the ways that Dalit women made history through their struggle with the state and the community itself. This doubleness was both the condition of their radical history and the limits of its horizon. Readers will feel the contradiction of that double bind even as they come to appreciate the variety of obstacles Dalit women faced as they took up the daily challenges of 'getting on and [getting] out from under'.

Antoinette Burton, *University of Illinois*

Shailaja Paik's study of education among Dalit women in urban Maharashtra is a ground-breaking contribution to historical work on caste and gender in South Asia. Based upon extensive oral interviews as well as exhaustive archival research, Paik's book provides critical analysis of a broad range of important historical concerns, including the limitations of the colonial and post-colonial educational systems, the failure of pre-independence feminists in addressing concerns of low-caste women, the views of B.R. Ambedkar and other Dalit radicals on education and gender, and the ways education transformed and failed to transform the professional and familial lives of Dalit women.

Douglas E. Haynes, *Dartmouth College*

Shailaja Paik examines the double discrimination faced by Dalit women in India when they strive, against many odds, to make the most of whatever educational facilities there are available to them. They are discriminated against both as members of a stigmatised community, and also as women. While the caste-based prejudice comes from outside the community, the gender-based prejudice comes too frequently from within, as male Dalits routinely devalue and curb the potential of female members of their families. This history of such discrimination cannot be studied adequately through written records, as it is largely an unrecorded one – it depends very centrally on the collection of women's narratives through interviews. Dr. Paik has carried out this task with energy and great commitment, revealing a fine empathy with those with whom she engaged. The result is a path-breaking and important piece of research and writing.

David Hardiman, *University of Warwick*

Shailaja Paik's *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India* stands out for putting the everyday experience of ordinary Dalit women in western India at the center of her analysis of Dalit access to education in the twentieth century. Drawing on a rich archive of English and Marathi sources, including oral histories, Paik provides an account of Dalit women's navigation of the hierarchies of gender, caste, class, power, and privilege. The triumphs and tribulations of Dalit women who both seized and challenged the new educational opportunities makes for a compelling narrative attentive to the inequities within upper-caste as well as Dalit communities.

Mrinalini Sinha, *University of Michigan*

Shailaja Paik gives us a very clear look at education, what it means, how Dalits enter into it and how negotiable their attitude about education is. The long-standing Mahar/Mang comparison has been expanded in very interesting ways. Of her many topics two that are most unusual are in-depth studies of middle-class Dalits. Usually the middle class is dismissed as a minor percentage of Untouchables who have managed to climb into the middle class. Shailaja deals with it very seriously.... It is probably one of the very few reports we have. She has given us a multi-faceted study of discrimination in terms of the field of education. The reformers, from B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule down to the present, have all stressed education as the key to progress. Shailaja has much to offer to the field of education and women.

Eleanor Zelliot, *Carleton College*

Shailaja Paik's book deals with an understudied subject, Dalit women's education. It covers pre- and post-1947 developments by relying on rich sources – archival and oral. During the Raj (and sometimes after!) Dalit women suffered from dual discrimination since they were neither welcome in the public schools – though these institutions were supposed to be for all children – nor necessarily sent to them by their parents. But some of them, in Maharashtra, seized the opportunity of their migration to the city to follow Ambedkar's recommendation, 'Educate'. Paik's remarkable exercise in ethno-history meticulously highlights the many faces of segregation based on language and location, as evident from her 'tale of two cities' which shows that to live in a slum of Poona implied more than a mere topographical periphery. Last but not least, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India* argues that education did not always give jobs to women – sometimes because they married too young, sometimes because nobody wanted to hire them: a strong plea for job reservations, one of the major achievements of India.

Christophe Jaffrelot, *King's College, London*

Dalit Women's Education in Modern India

Inspired by egalitarian doctrines, the Dalit communities in India have been fighting for basic human and civic rights since the middle of the nineteenth century. In this book, Shailaja Paik focuses on the struggle of Dalit women in one arena – the realm of formal education – and examines a range of interconnected social, cultural and political questions. What did education mean to women? How did changes in women's education affect their views of themselves and their domestic work, public employment, marriage, sexuality and childbearing and rearing? What does the dissonance between the rhetoric and practice of secular education tell us about the deeper historical entanglement with modernity as experienced by Dalit communities?

Dalit Women's Education in Modern India is a social and cultural history that challenges the triumphant narrative of modern secular education to analyse the constellation of social, economic, political and historical circumstances that both opened and closed opportunities to many Dalits. By focusing on marginalised Dalit women in modern Maharashtra, who have rarely been at the centre of systematic historical enquiry, Paik breathes life into their ideas, expectations, potentials, fears and frustrations. Addressing two major blind spots in the historiography of India and of the women's movement, she historicises Dalit women's experiences and constructs them as historical agents. The book combines archival research with historical fieldwork, and centres on themes including slum life, urban middle classes, social and sexual labour, and family, marriage and children to provide a penetrating portrait of the actions and lives of Dalit women.

Elegantly conceived and convincingly argued, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India* will be invaluable to students of History, Caste Politics, Women and Gender Studies, Education Studies, Urban Studies and Asian Studies.

Shailaja Paik is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati, USA.

Routledge research on gender in Asia series

- 1 Women, Identity and India's Call Centre Industry**
JK Tina Basi
- 2 Feminist Research Methodology**
Making meanings of meaning-making
Maithree Wickramasinghe
- 3 Sex Trafficking in South Asia**
Telling Maya's story
Mary Crawford
- 4 Religion, Gender and Politics in Indonesia**
Disputing the Muslim body
Sonja van Wichelen
- 5 Gender and Family in East Asia**
Edited by Siumi Maria Tam, Wai-ching Angela Wong and Danning Wang
- 6 Dalit Women's Education in Modern India**
Double discrimination
Shailaja Paik
- 7 New Modern Chinese Women and Gender Politics**
Ya-chen Chen

**For my parents
Sarita Deoram Paik and Deoram Fakira Paik
who educated me.**

Acknowledgements

This book is a product of the staunch support, inspiration, consistent and rigorous engagement, love and constant enrichment of significant people in my life. I have accumulated numerous debts over a decade and a half and although these debts cannot be repaid, it is my great privilege to thank them.

This book has been possible because of my engaged interlocutors: Dalit women who welcomed me into their intimately private and public lives in order to discuss their histories, hurdles and hopes. I feel very honoured to have shared the company of such energetic, erudite and inspiring people. All contributed generously their time, affection and insight with incredible faith and trust, and have taught me in turn about the deeper roots and meanings of the Ambedkar movement; about their ideas, lives and actions; and, most importantly, about relationships to be cherished. Women shared their fears, anxieties, tragedies, elations and triumphs with me. I am indebted to all of them.

David Hardiman has been an excellent intellectual mentor from the very outset of this project. Over the years, I have benefited from his constructive criticism and guidance. I am deeply grateful for his unfailing support, incisive comments and questions, and ready feedback. When I decided to excavate the book from the dissertation, I found an insightful and generous mentor in Douglas E. Haynes. His critical comments, encouragement, astute suggestions and vast knowledge of history and other subjects are reflected in this work. Doug discussed the small and big ideas, and read most of the chapters in their different versions, as well as very closely reading the final drafts of some chapters. He readily and energetically engaged with my endless queries and offered insightful comments. He, along with David, also helped strengthen the articulation of ideas in and beyond the book. Doug's passion for intellectual debates and clear and innovative historical writing infused this work. Between Doug and David, I am indeed well schooled. I am deeply grateful.

As the book was nearing completion, I lost a dear friend and mentor, Sharmila Rege. Sharmila introduced me to methodological debates and shared her intellectual treasure. I miss her deeply. Eleanor Zelliot shared some valuable sources and has been a constant support and inspiring mentor over the years. Gail Omvedt has been greatly supportive from a distance. Thanks to everybody for writing innumerable letters for different fellowships.

A timely fellowship with Yale's South Asian Studies Council accelerated the finalising, revision and writing of most of the chapters. Yale also provided me with an intellectually stimulating environment to present and test my revised ideas. I made friends, like Karuna Mantena, who read some chapters, commented on and discussed my work. Christophe Jaffrelot also read some chapters.

The research for the book was funded by grants from the Charles Phelps Taft Research Center and University of Cincinnati's Research Council. I am indebted to audiences and engagements at a number of conferences, symposia and institutions: the Annual Conference on South Asia at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; the Annual Conference of the Association of Asian Studies; the National Women's Studies Association; the Annual Conference of the American Historical Association; Yale University; Columbia University; Amherst College; Bowdoin College; TISS; Dartmouth College; University of Iowa; University of Michigan; George Mason University; and the University of Pennsylvania. Chithrabha Kudlu has been with this project since its inception and has with great enthusiasm shared my field-work stories. We discussed different topics of interest during long conversations over the phone. Thanks, Chith! Shefali Chandra was always there for timely discussions on some issues, and she and Anupama Rao have been supportive in different ways. Anjali Arondekar read an earlier version of Chapter 3 and offered critical comments. I thank friends and colleagues for making efforts to arrange workshops and talks on my research. I thank my colleagues at the University of Cincinnati for their encouragement and support, especially Willard Sunderland, Nikki Taylor and Laura Jenkins. Special thanks to Hilda L. Smith and David Stradling who, though unfamiliar with the context, read some chapters and discussed them with me. Hilda has shared her erudite scholarship and experience, and has patiently engaged with my every query. She has become a wonderful friend over the years. My greatest debts are also to friends, anonymous reviewers and my writing group, who have read all or parts of this project. I found a superb editor in Sarah Grey. Her skills, thoughtful suggestions and help with making the book accessible are truly invaluable. Many thanks, Sarah. At Routledge, thanks to the patience and support of the editorial and publication team.

I want to thank the librarians and staff at Mumbai Marathi Granthsangrahalaya, Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai University and the India Office Library, as well as the private collections of the late Vasant Moon.

Without the unstinting support, love and encouragement of my *aai* and my family – *akkaa*, Rani and Ashok Waghmare (Sir), Maitreyee and Advait, and Kirti and Amit – I couldn't have endured these long years. Aai has been a model of fortitude and has taught me to pursue my interests single-mindedly and passionately and always believed in my endeavours. Thank you, Gargi, for your love, wit and humour, your questions, your journey from reading the titles of the books on the shelves to talking about our lives, and seeing and sharing the process of this wonderful dissertation-to-book project. Thanks for the boundless joy and understanding! And of course I cannot name it all because it is beyond words, but thanks to you, Pravin, for everything in the past, present and future.

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
 Introduction: education for the oppressed	 1
 PART I	
Education	33
1 The right to education	35
2 'Educate, organise and agitate': non-Brahman and Dalit technologies of education	72
3 Education, reform of women and exclusion of Dalit women	109
4 Modern Dalit women as agents	146
 PART II	
The paradox of education	187
5 Education and life in the urban slum	189
6 Modern middle-class Dalits: seeking education and escaping the slum	231
7 Dalit women in employment	265

8	Education, marriage, children and family life	295
	Conclusion	327
	<i>List of interviews</i>	344
	<i>Index</i>	347

Figures

I.1	Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur in Maharashtra, India	1
1.1	Ambedkar and his associates in early twentieth-century Bombay Presidency	54
2.1	The laying of the foundation stone of the P.E. Society's College at Aurangabad. President Rajendra Prasad with Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the P.E. Society	99
4.1	Kumari Shakuntala studied subjects like Sanskrit, Marathi, English and Economics to gain her MA in 1964 from Pune University	153
4.2	Ambedkar at a meeting of women	159
4.3	Dalit women dressed in full saris marching resolutely ahead	166
5.1	Pune city	196
6.1	Dalit women led by Kusumtai Gangurde (centre) demonstrating against the increase in fuel prices	258
6.2	The author with Mayor Rajnitai Tribhuwan in the latter's office at the Pune Municipal Corporation	258
8.1	Organised Buddhist women dressed in white at the Dhammadiksha Suvana Jayanti Bauddha Mahila Sammelan	302

Tables

1.1	Caste make-up of students in Bombay, 1881–82 (by percentage of total student body)	41
1.2	Problems of Untouchable students in primary schools in Nasik district	50
1.3	Caste make-up of students in Bombay, 1923	64
1.4	Prominence of castes in schools by level of education in Bombay, 1923	65
5.1	D.R. Gadgil's (1952) study of Dalit education in the late 1930s	204
5.2	Nationwide enrolment by stages of all categories of students by gender (in percentages)	212
5.3	Nationwide enrolment by stages of SC students by gender (in percentages)	212
7.1	Student enrolment in the Training College of Mumbai, 1924–25	266

Introduction

Education for the oppressed

Without *vidya* [knowledge], intellect was lost; without intellect, virtue was lost; without virtue and morality, dynamism was lost; without dynamism, money was lost; without money Shudras were demoralised: all this misery and disasters were due to *avidya* [the lack of knowledge]!

Mahatma Jotirao Phule (1827–1890), Pioneer of Dalit and women's education
(Phule 1969, 189; Phule 2002, 117)

Ever since the revolutionary Jotirao Phule critically analysed the fundamental importance of knowledge seeking for women and Shudra-Ati-Shudras during the mid-nineteenth century, formal education has occupied a central place in



Figure 1.1 Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur in Maharashtra, India (schematic map by author).

2 Introduction

discussions of Dalit civic rights. From the last two decades of the nineteenth century onward, Dalit *streepurush* (women and men) in Bombay Presidency have actively engaged with philosophical notions and methods rooted in 'modernity' and viewed education as critical to achieving it. Revising and extending Phule's agenda of education and exposing the nexus of caste, gender and knowledge in the twentieth century, the radical leader B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) declared that '*shaalaa haa uttam naagarik tayaar karnyachaa kaarkhaanaa aahe* (schools are workshops for manufacturing the best citizens)' and motivated Dalits to 'educate, organise, and agitate' (Ambedkar 1927). The project of education also galvanised Dalit women to make their historical contribution to the Dalit movement and the programme of Dalit modernity. Phule, a Shudra Mali (gardener caste), and Ambedkar, an Ati-Shudra (Untouchable) Mahar, along with upper-caste, elite nationalists and educators, expended tremendous amounts of energy on the reform of women. Phule and Ambedkar were particularly innovative in deploying the modernist grammar of secular education, equality, human rights, dignity, and inclusive and egalitarian citizenship from within the institutional and discursive constraints of the state apparatus.

Dalits make up about 17 per cent of India's population. Historically, they have suffered from severe social, economic, political and cultural discrimination. Yet, since the mid-nineteenth century, inspired by egalitarian doctrines, Dalits have been fighting for their ordinary human and civic rights to access education, water tanks, temples, restaurants, *dharmashaalaas* (buildings to accommodate travellers) and streets. Many factors contributed to advancing Dalit education and empowerment: missionary schooling, colonial institutions, the limited introduction of liberalism into India, reform efforts by upper-caste leaders, experiences of civic space, migration to cities, public equality, struggles for political rights, and – most importantly – the efforts of Dalit radicals. Within this repertoire of factors, this book focuses on the struggle of Dalit women in one arena: the realm of formal education.

The primary concern of this book is to analyse the contradiction between the promises of education as envisioned by leaders such as Phule and Ambedkar and the form of education provided in practice by the modern Indian state. Studying this contradiction is important because both Phule and Ambedkar focused on the state and sought its intervention to resolve the Dalit question. They also critically analysed how high-caste males' *kaavebaaji* (cunning) subjugated both men of low castes and women of all castes by excluding them from their *maanavi hakka* (human rights), including the right to education. Dalit radicals in the early twentieth century interpreted their exclusion from common schools as a barrier both to individual freedom and advancement and to their collective ability to secure equal rights. Analysing these realities from the vantage point of Dalit women, I seek to understand the ideas, actions and changing values that have revolutionised their lives.

This book explores the nexus between caste, class, gender and state pedagogical practices among Dalit women in the cities of Pune, Mumbai and Nagpur to analyse the social, economic and historical circumstances that hindered as well

as contributed to their education. A discussion of these processes and the changes they brought about is necessarily interdisciplinary in character. On the one hand, I focus on ordinary Dalit women's historical experience and trace a richly textured social and cultural history. On the other hand, I explore the kinds of politics that have developed in response to those experiences. What did education mean to women and why was it so important to them? In the context of education, and in a situation of continuing and existing discrimination, what were the distinct experiences of Dalit women? Did education contribute to Dalit women's social mobility and empowerment? How did changes in women's education affect their views of themselves, their domestic work, marriage, sexuality, and childbearing and rearing? How did women compare their lives with their mothers' and grandmothers'? Did education inhibit or promote Dalit women's involvement in wider politics? In sum, what does the dissonance between the rhetoric and practice of education tell us about the history of the modern as it unfolded in Dalit communities? In order to answer these questions, I pay attention to the social and emotional histories of individuals as well as their social circumstances, which shift and are subject to renegotiation and reconstitution. My story recounts a nuanced understanding of informal learning and formal education, and how both helped to shape Dalit women's lives: a journey of getting on and out from under.

Considering their personal and group preoccupations and needs in specific situations and intellectual contexts, Dalits in Maharashtra have interacted critically with the universal, modern discourse of scientific and social progress through local, vernacular Marathi concepts to suit their own purposes. This book thus centres on the dialectics of the Dalit modern: the possibilities and pitfalls shared by creative Dalit women and men in their historic engagement with the experience of modernity. I am concerned with Dalit women's *historical experience of space and time*, a *modern* experience, a paradoxical unity that has propelled them to tear down caste confinement and rigid roles to transform themselves and find their potential, while at the same time facing the threats of the maelstrom of perpetual struggle: contradictions, ambiguity and anguish. Moreover, the anti-caste politics of Dalit radicals and of some nationalists produced techniques through which Dalits engaged in *governmentalising* the self and community;¹ Dalits' access to the public was intimately tied to their ability to regulate, define, reorder and practise self-cleansing, self-disciplining, self-fashioning and self-development as well as political self-rule. Dalits actively expressed their ideas, emotions, fantasies and desires, and refused to be merely products of the agenda of self-transformation. I am thus deepening Michel Foucault's analysis of governmentalising techniques of transformation and extending them from the self to that of the community. While Foucault does not provide an explicit theory of the subordination of women or the colonised, his theoretical frames help me conceptualise substantive changes that took place in Dalits' social, political and sexual mores and, most importantly, their construction of their selves and community.