

Towards an Understanding of Dalit Theory: The Debates in *The Cracked Mirror*

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Abstract

While the already in place emergent Dalit literature has been posing a challenge to the upper-caste narratives on Dalits, in *The Cracked Mirror*, Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai argue that now Dalits must broaden the premise of Dalit representation by taking it to the next level—theory. Using experience as a political tool, as Dalits have already established a large corpus of literature, Guru emphasizes that Dalits must realize the importance to theorize themselves from the experiential point of view. While caste has been discussed extensively by insiders in literature, politics and cultural activism, it is argued that Dalits have remained averse to theory. This paper is an exploration of how theoretical concepts hold the power to intervene the cognitive domains of both the oppressed as well as the oppressor, and as a result, can impart unity, continuity, and intensity to the Dalit experience, and how dialectics of owned experience and theory can help construct a concrete universal.

Keywords: Dalit experience, caste, top-of-the-twice-borns (TTBs), institutionalized exclusion

The practice of social science in India is based on (as well as garners) a socio-cultural hierarchy which solidifies the already established uneven divide between the Dalits and the top-of-the-twice-borns (TTBs). While caste has been discussed extensively by insiders in literature, politics and cultural activism, it is argued that Dalits have remained averse to theory. Gopal Guru, in this regard, maintains that the non-egalitarian/autocratic nature of the social science practices in India is the reason behind the 'institutionalized exclusion' of Dalits from the theoretical