

**Project Name: Dalit Humiliation and Resistance in Western India****Members: Yashpal Jogdand,****Dr. Arvind Kumar Mishra,****Santosh Suradkar,****Prabodhan Pol,****Harish Wankhede,****Prof. Gopal Guru****Description:**

On September 29, 2006, four members of the Bhotmange family belonging to the Mahar (untouchable) caste were slaughtered in Khairlanji, a small village in Bhandara district of Maharashtra, India ( The Hindu, Nov. 21, 2006). The `provocation' for the bestial killings was that Bhaiyalal Bhotmange's wife, daughter, and two sons were educated and asserted their right to a life of dignity and self respect despite their poverty and low caste status. This was clearly unacceptable to the high caste dominated village. This incident had widespread repercussions all over India. Many dalit men and women raised spontaneous collective protests throughout India. Although Dalit protests have been regularly held in the aftermath of caste atrocities, it was the first time in history that Dalits gave voice to their feelings of injustice on such a scale. Khairlanji atrocity has been much debated but there are no social psychological insights on this incident or any other issues related to caste. Therefore, a social psychological focus is necessary to understand inner workings of caste system and its wider implications leading to humiliation, caste violence and collective protests after it.

Caste system is a unique form of social stratification. Caste system works as a relational system based on principle of purity and pollution where Brahmins occupy the position as most pure and untouchables as most impure. The association with impurity or pollution reduces ex-untouchables or dalits to the image of 'walking carrion' or 'walking carcass' in hierarchical Hindu mind. The repulsive meaning attached due to caste membership stigmatizes dalits and conditions their entry into domestic and public spheres. The oppressive system of caste and inhuman practice of untouchability force Dalits live a life of oppression, exclusion and humiliation.

Dalits, however, are no longer passively accepting their life condition even at the cost of their lives as Khairlanji atrocity clearly shows. They try to resist it in several ways. For example, the term 'Dalit' and consequent rejection of Gandhiji's paternalistic 'Harijan' by ex-untouchables itself is a symbol of self-assertion as well as social, political and cultural identity. The conversion to Buddhism by untouchables in 1956 under leadership of Ambedkar created a modern Buddhist identity in order to restore dignity to 'assertive dalit self' and consequent rejection of 'wretched, degraded, lower caste "Hindu self"'. The humiliation and oppression of dalits and their resistance to it forms an important dimension of conflict and change in Indian society. Present project focuses on the study of Dalit resistance in the context of humiliation and oppression in caste society of western India, particularly Maharashtra.