

## The Dalits at the World Social Forum in Mumbai

By going for the first time outside Brazil and wandering into the "home-country" of caste-based discrimination, the World Social Forum was an ideal platform for the Indian Dalits (the formerly "Untouchables") to make known their plight and their sufferings, but also their determination to take their fate into their own hands. More than 1000 Dalits from mainly India and Nepal raised their voices, beat their drums and performed their traditional dances to talk about the oppression, the humiliation, the discrimination they are facing, but also about their hopes for a dignified life and their capability to change the situation for better through their own efforts.

Casteism and racial discrimination was one of five main themes at the WSF. A public meeting, several seminars and workshops attracted thousands of participants. There the whole range of problems was addressed: the open and unveiled discrimination, which is still there in the rural areas, the atrocities (beating, humiliating, raping, torturing, killing) committed against Dalits day by day, the lack of access to resources like land and capital, lack of education, the coercive assignment of most menial jobs and services like sweeping, rag picking, temple prostitution and even manual scavenging and, over and above, the threat to loose the little security some of the Dalits have by way of having got a reserved job or place for education and study. The globalisation process with its inherent trend to privatisation and market-orientation is going to sweep away the quota reservations, which are yet in force for government jobs and educational institutions giving nightmares to the political alert Dalits.

However, it was a pity that the chance to utilize the WSF as a platform to bring together the different streams and schools of thinking within the Dalit movement has been forfeited. It could have been the first episode of a dream: to have a united and powerful Dalit movement within India, which could do away all the discriminations and humiliations. It might have been so easy - to sit together, clarify the differences of approaches and strategies, thresh out contradicting views, but also discern commonalities and identical interests. Find pockets of common views and arrange first steps for common actions and campaigns and build up confidence amongst each other, which would allow further steps ... Can we hope that this day will come soon, when this first concrete step into "another world" will be taken?

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