Navayana has chosen to embrace literary practices that have been marginalized by mainstream publishing...

A young alternative publishing house, Navayana combines its dedication to an Ambedkarite perspective on Indian society with an infectious enthusiasm for contemporary cultural theory.

Ranjit Hoskoté
curator, India pavilion
Venice Biennale 2011
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Fiction
'Navaria makes a strong effort to create casteless characters, much like Jeanette Winterson’s genderless protagonist in Written on the Body.'
—TEHELKA

In “Scream”—the lead story in Ajay Navaria’s collection—the unnamed protagonist is told at the very beginning, ‘Crime is very seductive. And revenge a trickster.’ The narrator rejects having his identity constrained by the cruel monikers assigned by the caste Hindus of his village or the supposed refuge of the Christian church. He occupies an ‘unclaimed terrain’, as do so many of Navaria’s characters. Journeying from a Dantewada village to the town of Nagpur and from there to Mumbai, the Byronic protagonist is raped, works as a masseur and then as a gigolo even as he pursues his education. The city teaches him the ‘many definitions of labour’, and he is freed—even as he is ultimately destroyed—by its infinite possibilities for self-invention.

Unclaimed Terrain features six innovative stories by Navaria, translated into English with a critical introduction by Laura Brueck. The title comes from “Scream” (first published, 2003)—which made Navaria notorious for its unabashed take on sex and caste. Since then, his stories have continued to challenge and unsettle the literary establishment.

Unclaimed Terrain offers a corrective to the glaring lack of availability of fictional (non-autobiographical) dalit literary writing in English. Ajay Navaria is one of the most exciting contemporary Indian writers working in Hindi.

Ajay Navaria teaches Hindu Ethics at Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi. He is the author of two collections of short stories and a novel.

Laura Brueck, Assistant Professor of Hindi literature at the University of Colorado, is the author of Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature (forthcoming).
Father may be an elephant and mother only a small basket, but...

GOGU SHYAMALA

TRANSLATED BY VARIOUS

Paperback | 200 pages | 5.5 x 8.5 inches | Dec 2012

‘I am not where, what, or who you think I am.’ This profound little book declares, ‘Trace me—if you can—in the stories I tell!’ Set in the madiga quarter of a western Telangana village, and told from within it, the stories spotlight different settings, events, experiences and set up new propositions about how to see, think, and be touched by, life in that world. There is a laugh lurking around every other corner as the narrative picks an adroit step past the grandiose authority of earlier versions of such places and their people—Romantic, Gandhian, administrative—and the idiom in which they spoke. These stories overturn the usual agendas of exit—from the village, from madiga culture, from these little communities—to hold this life up as one of promise for everyone.

Gogu Shyamala’s twelve stories in this collection move at many levels, crossing genres, working their magic on orthodox forms of realism, psychic allegory and political fable. They make a clean break with the tales of oppression and misery that the order of realism decrees as the one true subject of dalit writing.

‘I am tempted to suggest that we think of Shyamala’s stories as prototypes of a compact new genre that might be called, not a short, but a little story. The ‘little’ here would of course recall the intrepid independence of the little magazines that have nourished the Telugu reading public since the 1960s; it would make reference to Walter Benjamin’s famous essay, “A little history of photography”, that cuts deep to track over a quick few pages the photographic element’s degeneration from the enchanted portraiture of its early years into a realist endorsement of middle class life; and it would point to the world of the little, subaltern traditions, as against that of the great traditions.’

— SUSIE THARU, co-editor of the two-volume Women Writing in India and No Alphabet in Sight: New Dalit Writing from South India

Gogu Shyamala is a senior fellow at Anveshi Research Centre for Women, Hyderabad. A short story writer, she has edited Nalla Poddu (Black Dawn), the first anthology of Telugu dalit women’s writing, besides Nallaregadi Sallu and Yellammalu.
Kakka

A novel

VEMULA YELLAIAH

TRANSLATED BY K. PURUSHOTHAM AND GITA RAMASWAMY

240 pages | 5.5 x 8.5 inches | June 2012

Kakka is born the ‘wrong side up’—a breech baby. According to legend, such children are bound to suffer. But Kakka’s story would perhaps have been no different even otherwise. He is born into the ‘untouchable’ madiga caste—doomed to a life of thrashings, name-calling and oppression.

Kakka depicts madiga life in transition through three generations: the grandmother, the mother and Kakka. The events in the novel revolve around deprivation, violence, the possession of land, self-respect and the politics of dalit empowerment.

Yellaiah’s craft is marked by a defiant formlessness. He uses the Telangana–Warangal madiga register not just for the dialogue but for the entire narration. He also makes away with most punctuation to signify the orality and authenticity of the text.

Kakka is a novel that turned Telugu literature on its head—both in terms of substance and style.

Vemula Yellaiah worked as an ‘ancillary labourer’ in a Food Corporation of India warehouse when he wrote Kakka in 2000. Today, he is a prominent writer in Telugu, with two novels, several poems and short stories to his credit. He is currently pursuing a PhD and trying to finish his third novel.

K. Purushotham teaches English at Kakatiya University, Warangal. He is co-editing, with Gita Ramaswamy, an anthology of Telugu dalit writing for Oxford University Press. Gita Ramaswamy works with the Hyderabad Book Trust in publishing alternative, low-cost literature in Telugu. She is the author of India Stinking (2004) and On Their Own (2003), and has co-authored Taking Charge of Our Bodies (2001).
Fear of Lions

AMITA KANEKAR

380 pages | 5.5 x 8.5 inches | June 2012

A rebellion led by a witch. A war the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb almost lost to a rabble of peasants.

Two young Mughal nobles, Shamsher and his sister Zeenat, leave Dilli for the market town of Narnaul. The royal Ajmer highway has only just opened for general traffic after a recently crushed rebellion. As the travellers journey through the shattered landscape, meeting victors as well as voyeurs of the recent events, they discover that this was not the usual struggle that the Mughal Empire—the most glittering empire of its age—frequently spawned and crushed: of some petty warlord fired by the dream of kingship. This rebellion was led by a witch inspired by the mystic Kabir; her militant followers, many of them women and all of them rabble, called themselves Satnami, those whose name was truth. They enjoyed unaccountable early success, even setting up their own administration in Narnaul, and sparking the rumour that they would attack the imperial capital as well.

Set twelve years into the rule of the austere Aurangzeb Alangir—1082 by the Hijri calendar of Shahjahanabad’s magnificent Jami Mosque, 1727 by the Vikram Samvat of the brahmins of Banaras, 1671 according to the firangis—in a time of impossible wealth and unbearable want, of brilliant literary, artistic and architectural extravaganzas amidst ancient traditions of squalor and deprivation, and of caste society on the threshold of capitalism—this is the story of an unlikely rebellion that almost brought imperial Dilli to its knees.

Amita Kanekar recently moved to Goa where she has been adopted by two cats. She teaches architectural history in between writing.
Upali, a monk and an embittered survivor of the war that made Emperor Ashoka overlord of the whole of India, hates the Emperor with all his heart.

Yet it is to him that Ashoka, the self-proclaimed Beloved of the Gods, entrusts the task of recording the Buddha’s life and teachings down for posterity. For the Emperor is set on a new conquest—that of Dhamma...

And so begins a search for the Buddha and a struggle over the past. What really was the Buddha’s message? Ascetic renunciation? Universal salvation? Passive disengagement? Tolerance—even of intolerance? If his message was a critique of violence, how did it come to be championed by the most successfully violent autocrats of ancient India? These are questions that begin to surface among the Buddha’s followers, fearfully and then angrily, to be viciously debated even as Dhamma rises to glorious imperial patronage, a patronage that will sustain it for over a millennium and reach it to half the world’s populace.

Set in 256 BCE, almost three hundred years after the death of the Buddha and four since the terrible battle of Kalinga, this is a story about the Buddha and his disciples, among them an ordinary monk, one of the questioners, and an extraordinary king, who seemed to have all the answers. It is also about how the movement called Dhamma was born, spread, changed lives and got changed itself.

*A Spoke in the Wheel* is an ambitious and erudite work of historical fiction—intricate in its craftsmanship, vital in its ideas and epic in its sweep.
Nonfiction
Meena Kandasamy writes angrily, often eloquently, about the politics of the body and caste in contemporary Indian society. Necessarily, what she sees is different from the images we have constructed for ourselves.
—The Hindu

The Bhagavad Gita refers to the human body as ‘the city of nine gates’—a pair of eyes, ears and nostrils, one mouth, and the organs of excretion and reproduction. While every aspect of caste has been studied and classified, the body and the tyranny it is made to suffer under the regime of caste have not been studied. Such an aporia reflects the contempt for the body the caste system has, even as the system’s regulatory mechanisms are primarily directed against the body. The body becomes the ‘site at which the text most obviously undermines its own rhetorical structure, dismantles, or deconstructs itself’, as Derrida puts it. Meena Kandasamy meditates on the body—its orifices and adornments, its pleasures and its pains, its vulnerability and its strengths.

Meena Kandasamy is a writer, poet, activist and translator. She was a writer-in-residence at the University of Iowa’s International Writing Program 2009. She has performed her work at literature and poetry festivals in Pittsburgh, Durban, Jaipur, Ottawa and Chennai.
While the caste system has been formally abolished under the Indian Constitution, according to official statistics, every eighteen minutes a crime is committed on a dalit. The gouging out of eyes, the hacking off of limbs and being burned alive or stoned to death are routine in the atrocities perpetrated against India’s 170 million dalits. What drives people to commit such inhuman crimes?

*The Persistence of Caste* uses the shocking case of Khairlanji, the brutal murder of four members of a dalit family in 2006, to explode the myth that caste no longer matters. Analyzing context and crime, it seeks to locate this event in the political economy of the development process India has followed after Independence. Teltumbde demonstrates how caste has shown amazing resilience—surviving feudalism, capitalist industrialization and a republican Constitution—to still be alive and well today, despite all denial, under neoliberal globalization.
In the Tiger’s Shadow
The Autobiography of an Ambedkarite

NAMDEO NIMGADE

310 pages | 5.5 x 8.5 inches | Oct 2010

Born into a family of landless bonded labourers in the dustbowl of Sathgaon in western India, Namdeo Nimgade is 14 when he finally manages to attend his village school where, being an ‘untouchable’, he has to stand on the ‘hot verandah and listen to lessons through a window’. Inspired by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, he steadfastly pursues his education. Graduating from Nagpur, Nimgade goes on to complete his PhD in soil science from the University of Wisconsin in 1962—perhaps the first dalit after Ambedkar to earn a doctorate in an American university. In the 1950s, as an associate at the Indian Agriculture Research Institute in Delhi, Nimgade gets to spend time with Dr Ambedkar. Throughout his life, Nimgade remains singularly committed to the Ambedkarite movement.

Nimgade narrates incidents in his life with candour and delightful humour—whether recounting his great-grandfather Ganba’s combat with a tiger in a forest or his ‘forbidden’ love for a nondalit woman. Moving away from the framework of victimhood narratives, Nimgade’s life is an inspiring story of triumph against odds.

Now close to 90, Nimgade lives with his love, his wife Hira, in Nagpur.

‘Our family name Nimgade probably derives from the neem tree, which is known for its healing properties and health benefits. Many people from our untouchable community bear names referring to trees or plants, such as my brother-in-law, Khobragade—which refers to a coconut. There’s similarly Ambagade, referring to mango, Jamgade to guava and Borkar to berry. Quite likely, these arboreal names derive from the peaceful Buddhist period in Indian history, and are cited as further evidence that many of India’s untouchables were previously Buddhist.’
The Last Place for a Dalit Woman
The Life of T.N. Sadalakshmi
GOGU SHYAMALA
230 pages | June 2012

A feisty dalit woman politician reminisces about her life.

T.N. Sadalakshmi (1928–2004) was born into the mehtar community—considered ‘untouchable’ among ‘untouchables’. Against great odds, and with the support of her parents, she was educated, entered politics and rose to the rank of deputy speaker of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and also served as a minister. As a student, listening to dalit icon Dr B.R. Ambedkar’s speech altered her life. Sadalakshmi blazed trails—as endowments minister she appointed dalits as priests to Hindu temples, and allowed women on trusts that managed temples. She was known to be upright, incorruptible and dedicated to the poor.

Despite her association with the ruling parties of her times, she was a pioneer of the precursor of the present Telangana agitation, the 1969 Telangana agitation. She was active in the Madiga Dandora movement that sought justice for dalits among dalits. As a woman in patriarchal politics, as a dalit—and particularly a mehtar—in a society decked on caste and gender hierarchies, Sadalakshmi’s encounters with Jawaharlal Nehru, S. Radhakrishnan, P. V. Narasimha Rao, N.T. Rama Rao and other leaders, evokes a different politics altogether. This subaltern view of political life in India will be an eye-opener for any reader.

This book is based on a series of interviews that Sadalakshmi gave to Gogu Shyamala, which the latter has lovingly woven into an unabashed tribute to a remarkable woman. The text retains her sometimes shockingly direct observations. Shyamala’s editorial comments enhance the impact of Sadalakshmi’s observations on the readers.

Gogu Shyamala is a senior fellow at Anveshi Research Centre for Women, Hyderabad. Hers is a major intervention in canonizing Telugu dalit literature. A short story writer, she edited Nalla Poddu (Black Dawn), the first anthology of Telugu dalit women’s writing, and went on to edit Nallaregadi Sallu and Yellammalu.

‘I introduced the practice of appointing women and dalits on temple committees as I felt that untouchability began in the temples. I also instituted a centre for training women and dalits as priests.’
Graphic / Comics
10-year-old Bhim sits apart. He’s thinking of the bell...

When the bell rings, all the other students go to the tap. By the time they finish, the peon has gone home. And I’m not supposed to touch the tap.

Sir, may I drink some water?

Bhim! Always a nuisance! Can’t you wait until the bell rings?

Well, naturally. You’re a mahar! If you cut your hair more often, you’d feel less thirsty. You look as if there are no barbers in Satara.

But doesn’t he know? Barbers won’t touch us mahars....
Bhimayana
Experiences of Untouchability

DURGABAI VYAM, SUBHASH VYAM
SRIVIDYA NATARAJAN, S. ANAND

Four-colour on art paper | 108 pages | 8 x 11 inches | Jan 2011

What does it mean to be an untouchable in India?

Why do some Indians despise the touch of others? Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), one of India’s foremost revolutionaries, recounts his experiences of growing up untouchable and being routinely discriminated against: in school at the age of 10, in Baroda after his return from Columbia University, and while traveling around India.

Battling odds, Ambedkar drafted the Constitution of India and eventually embraced Buddhism. Experiences similar to Ambedkar’s continue to haunt a majority of India’s 170 million dalits. They are still denied water, shelter and the basic dignities of life.

In this ground-breaking work, featuring a Foreword by John Berger, Pardhan-Gond artists Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam interweave historical events like the Mahad satyagraha with contemporary incidents. Defying conventional grammar, they infuse fresh energy into the graphic idiom through their magical art mounted on an epic scale.

‘An extraordinary book’—JOHN BERGER
‘Unusually beautiful. Unforgettable’—ARUNDHATI ROY
‘A distinctive graphic biography’—JOE SACCO
‘Beautiful, compelling’—TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT
**The Vanished Path**

Visits to Buddhist Sites in India

BHARATH M.

Black and white | 250 pages | 5.8 x 8.3 inches | April 2012

_This comic travelogue seeks answers to the mysterious, near-complete disappearance of Buddhism from India._

Bharath M. travels to some of the historical Buddhist sites in the Gangetic plains trying to understand India’s Buddhist past. As a recently converted Buddhist, Bharath seeks to disentangle Buddhist history from the Hindu history of India.

A central mystery of the book is the fact of the near-complete disappearance of Buddhism from India. Though this disappearance has been explained by historians, Bharath tries to understand it from life as it is obtained in Buddhist sites by talking to people. The narrative is light and anecdotal, not pedagogic or documentary. _The Vanished Path_ constructs little capsule narratives in each chapter describing the area, the people and the artist’s experiences in that area. In the midst of these worldly goings-on, there are digressions into history. We see sequences that are historical, sometimes with the Buddha in it, sometimes Ashoka or another historical personage.

The later portion of the travelogue deals with the revival of Buddhism in India since the late nineteenth century and the mass conversion of dalit people led by B.R. Ambedkar.

Bharath M. is the founder-editor of the comics magazine Comix.Inida. He is inspired by manga, has studied Japanese comics and has made a documentary film about them. He says, ‘I have adopted the basic techniques of Japanese comics as the foundation of my work.’
The Strange Fruit that Abel Meeropol saw, and Billie Holiday sang in 1939...

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body... the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

"If the sudra intentionally listens to the Veda with the intention of committing it to memory, his ears should be filled with molten lead; if he utters the Veda, then his tongue should be cut off; if he has mastered the Veda his body should be cut to pieces."

Verse 4, Ch XII.

...going back to the days of Manu, the brahman lawmaker.

Appu and Vidya bring to life the 1873 Phule text, Gulamgiri/Slavery.

Jotirao Phule wrote Slavery (Gulamgiri)—a scathing and witty attack on brahmanism and the slavery of India’s ‘lower’ castes that it engendered. Unlike Indian nationalists, Phule (1827–1890) saw the British as people who could tame the local elite—the brahmans who wielded power simply on the basis of birth. Inspired by Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man and the ideals of Enlightenment philosophers, Phule mounted a critique of the vedas as idle fantasies of the brahman mind. With the objective of liberating the sudras and atisudras, he founded the Satyashodak Samaj (Society of Truthseekers).

Phule dedicated Slavery ‘to the good people of the United States as a token of admiration for their sublime, disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery.’ Written in the form of a dialogue between Dhondiba and Jotiba—reminiscent of Buddha’s suttas, of Socrates’ dialogues—Slavery traces the history of brahman domination in India, and examines the motives for and objectives of the cruel and inhuman laws framed by the brahmans.

This revolutionary text remains relevant today, and given Phule’s rather graphic imagination lends itself almost naturally to graphic art. Appu and Vidya also weave in the story of Savitri Phule, Jotiba’s wife and partner in his struggles, who started a school for girls in Pune in 1848, despite social opprobrium.

This is perhaps the first time that a historical work of nonfiction has been interpreted as a graphic book in India.

Aparajita Ninan (Appu) worked as a design intern with Navayana in 2009–10 towards a graphic book on Phule’s Slavery. This is her first book. Srividya Natarajan (Vidya) trained as a Bharatanatyam dancer, and has illustrated books for children. She is the author of the novel, No Onions Nor Garlic (2006), a comic satire on caste, and Bhimayana (2011).

‘Now tell me, is there any written evidence that Brahma’s mouth, which gave birth to the brahmans, menstruated every month, and that he had to sit in seclusion for four days?’

—JOTIBA PHULE
I saw nothing, I heard nothing and I certainly didn’t bark at those upper caste guys.

Ruby the bitch barks at some drunk Jat youth driving through Mirchpur’s Dalit colony. Rajinder Pali, son of a Jat zamindar, rightly hurls a brick at her. Yogesh, a young Dalit, has the temerity to object, and they come to blows.

To buy peace, two Dalit elders apologise to the Jat elders. Peace costs more than a mere ‘sorry’, so they are beaten up. The Mirchpur Jats know that the dogs need to be shown who’s boss.

One thing leads to another until, on the morning of 21 April 2010, all because of Ruby—posing candidly for the camera here—18 Dalit homes are torched and two Dalits—17-year old Suman and her 60-year old father Tara Chand—are burnt alive. Ruby, of course, says she didn’t start the fire.

Based on Mirchpur: A Dog Story, by S. Anand, Open, 1 May 2010
How to Torture Dalits

A Handbook

AKILA SESHASAYEE

Killing, raping, maiming, humiliating and brutalizing Dalits is as common in India as spitting on the streets and flinging garbage out of a moving car—after all, Dalits are there to clean up behind others.

This useful handbook tells you how it is all done.

1. Treat them like animals, and beware of their animals too.
2. Beat them for listening to songs on a mobile phone.
3. Tonsure an unlettered Dalit for dialling a landlord’s number by mistake.
4. Hound them to death when they make it to a place like IIT where they do not belong.
5. Tell the world that their women like to be raped by upper-caste men.
6. Make them eat dried human excreta when they ask for their rightful wage.
7. Parade the women naked and rape them in public if they question your diktats.

After all, this is the land that may well have taught Jim Crow a few lessons in segregation; the land where Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf is a perennial bestseller with endless reprints. This is the Hindu culture with which rightwing Norwegian killer Anders Breivik identified.

This handbook is bound to be bought by millions of earnest Indians—in India and abroad. This book also conveys India’s real message to the world—violence and torture.

Akila Seshasayee is the founder of SeshDesign. She has earlier worked with Times of India and Down to Earth. Her typographic covers have been featured by the monthly magazine of ideas, Seminar, for over ten years. Akila is also Navayana’s designer. This is her first book.
Academic
This book is a step toward writing a socially informed history of physics in India in the first half of the twentieth century. Through a series of micro histories of physics, Abha Sur analyzes the confluence of caste, nationalism, and gender in modern science in India, and unpacks the colonial context in which science was organized. She examines the constraints of material reality and ideologies on the production of scientific knowledge, and discusses the effect of the personalities of dominant scientists on the institutions and academies they created. The bulk of the book examines the science and scientific practice of India’s two preeminent physicists in the first half of the twentieth century, C.V. Raman and Meghnad Saha. Raman and Saha were—in terms of their social station, political involvement, and cultural upbringing—diametric opposites. Raman came from an educated Tamil brahmin family steeped in classical art forms, and Saha from an uneducated rural family of modest means and underprivileged caste status in eastern Bengal. Sur also reconstructs a collective history of Raman’s women students—Lalitha Chandrasekhar, Sunanda Bai, and Anna Mani—each a scientist who did not get her due.

*Dispersed Radiance* makes an important contribution to the social history of science. It provides a nuanced and critical understanding of the role and location of science in the construction of Indian modernity and in the continuation of social stratification in colonial and postcolonial contexts.
A Rogue and Peasant Slave
Adivasi Resistance, 1800–2000

SHASHANK KELA

How and why did adivasi societies seek to defend themselves against the state and the rural gentry?

Shashank Kela tells a compelling story—of blindness and rancour on the one hand, and desperate resistance and wrenching change on the other—focusing on one particular adivasi region in the first half of his book. He tells us how the bhils of western Madhya Pradesh were affected by colonialism, the perceptions and notions that shaped colonial policy, and the symbiotic partnership between the colonial state and rural elites. It is a story of a futile yet moving resistance, and the emergence of a new and oppressive social order.

In the second part, Kela examines how the Indian state treats its adivasi citizens, and the myriad ways in which they have responded—through conventional political mobilization, attempts at revolution, and peaceful movements against ‘development’. He looks at how the spheres of culture and politics impinge upon each other, and how the political choices of the present are shaped by the attitudes of the past and the process of cultural change.

A Rogue and Peasant Slave challenges the current academic consensus on the historical relationship of adivasi societies to a caste-based agrarian order. Kela defends the view that they were structurally distinct from the caste order while modifying it to take account of historical research during the last twenty years.

Shashank Kela worked as an activist with a trade union of adivasi peasants in western Madhya Pradesh between 1994 and 2004. He also writes on contemporary political conflicts.

‘Well argued, cogently written — fills a major lacuna in the existing literature on adivasi pasts and futures in mainland India. It is especially notable for its synthetic ability to unify themes from history, contemporary political sociology and ecological concerns without ever losing the central thread of the argument.’

—MAHESH RANGARAJAN, author of Environmental Issues in India: A Reader

A WORk THAT COMPARes wIth E.P.THOMPson’S THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS.
In this magisterial study of the social elan of early Buddhism, Nalin Swaris argues that the radical thrust of the Buddha’s teaching is based on his realisation that ‘the individual’ is a fiction of human craving. The Buddha’s decision to found a community of compassion and sharing was the practical expression of his conviction that individualism is the principal obstacle to human happiness. The Buddha’s Way was not discovered and preached in a social vacuum. Orthodox Hinduism classifies its sacred traditions into *srutis* (sacred truths of the Vedas ‘heard’ by ancient rishis while in a trance) and *smritis* (codes of conduct). In deliberate counterpoint to the brahman tradition, the majority of the Buddha’s discourses begin with the declaration: *Evam me sutam*—‘This have I heard...’.

Swaris argues persuasively that Buddha’s teachings are not esoteric, but grounded in everyday life. The Dhamma is not a revealed truth that humans could not have discovered by themselves. It is like a light brought into a darkened room so that people could see what is already there, once the fog of delusion is dispelled.

In a style that would appeal to both lay readers and scholars, Swaris shows how the Buddha anticipated Marx, Derrida and Foucault by centuries.

Ordained a Catholic priest in 1962, Nalin Swaris gave up priesthood, went to Netherlands in 1969 and obtained a Master’s Degree in Social Sciences in 1973. After a Master’s Degree in Religions from the Catholic University of Nijmegen, he completed his PhD on the “Buddha’s Way” at the State University of Utrecht in 1997. Swaris was also human rights activist. He died in May 2011.
A fresh, annotated translation of the 2nd century Buddhist critique of caste.

_Vajrasuci_, a text attributed to Asvaghosha (c. 1–2 century CE), is a critique of caste as a system of birth-based attribution of identities, ranked in a broad structure of hierarchy with the brahmanas claiming the highest rank by virtue of their ‘pure’ birth. The author critiques such claims using a range of arguments from a standpoint that is clearly drawn from earlier critiques of caste made by the Buddha in the early Buddhist texts in Pali. _Vajrasuci_ on the other hand is in Sanskrit, addresses a brahmana audience, and is familiar with brahmana mythologies and brahmanical textual traditions. As a text it circulated over the centuries in the counter-culture, surfacing at different moments, but particularly so in nineteenth-century Maharashtra where it was picked up by the anticaste movement led by Jotirao Phule, and where it is well known even today. _Vajrasuci_ is marked by the use of commonsense, and a mode of reasoning that shows up the falsity of the brahmanical arguments, often using in its arsenal verses debunking birth-based claims to inherent greatness of the brahmana caste drawn from brahmanical texts themselves.

_Vajrasuci_ has not been given its due in Sanskrit studies, or by scholars of caste. This new translation is led by the Sanskrit scholar Heeraman Tiwari from the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, Meera Viswanathan, doctoral student at JNU, and Uma Chakravarti, Buddhist Studies scholar. It comprises the Sanskrit text, an English translation, a romanised version of the Sanskrit, and extensive notes locating the text in its social, linguistic and philosophical context. This edition also features independent essays by the three scholars who pick up, and speak to, different elements in the text. Heeraman Tiwari addresses the epistemological and philosophical argumentative strategies of _Vajrasuci_ and the deductive logic deployed by the author; Meera Visvananthan historicises the text in terms of language and reading community; and Uma Chakravarti examines the dialogical relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism on caste from the age of the Buddha onwards to the time of _Vajrasuci_.

**WOULD APPEAL TO**
**INDOLOGICAL SCHOLARS;**
**SUITs SANSKRIT/ BUDDHIST STUDIES LIST**
K. Balagopal’s writings, from the early 1980s till he died in 2009, offer us a rare insight into the making of modern India. Civil rights work provided Balagopal the cause and context to engage with history, the public sphere and political change. He wrote through nearly three tumultuous decades: on encounter deaths; struggles of agricultural labourers; the shifting dynamics of class and caste in the 1980s and thereafter in Andhra Pradesh; the venality and tyranny of the Indian state; the centrality one ought to grant patriarchy in considerations of social injustice; and the destructive logic of development that emerged in the India of the 1990s. This volume comprises essays—largely drawn from *Economic and Political Weekly* to which he was a regular contributor—that deal with representations and practices of class power as they exist in tandem with state authority and caste identities.

Inspired by naxalism in the late 1970s and into the 1990s, intellectually indebted to D.D. Kosambi’s writings on Indian history and society, and politically and ethically attentive to the politics of feminist and dalit assertion in the 1990s, Balagopal refused dogma and shrill polemics just as he refused theory that did not heed the mess of history and practice.

Balagopal was too self-effacing to put together his writings into a volume. But it is through his writings that his legacy lives on, giving us a roadmap for future struggles.

‘As a human rights worker active since 1981, and slightly older than Balagopal, I remember him as a magical figure. The writings in this volume help interpret the often chaotic developments in Andhra Pradesh, and provide a model tool for understanding other regional realities of India.’

—BINAYAK SEN
The burakumin, Japan’s largest minority group, have been the focus of an extensive yet strikingly homogeneous body of Japanese language research. The master narrative in much of this work typically links burakumin to premodern occupational groups engaged in a number of socially polluting tasks like tanning and leatherwork. This narrative, when subjected to close scrutiny, tends to raise more questions than it answers, particularly for the historian. Is there really firm historical continuity between premodern outcaste and modern burakumin communities? Does the discrimination faced by these communities actually remain the same? Does the way burakumin frame their own experience significantly affect mainstream understandings of their plight?

*Embodying Difference* is the result of a decade-and-a-half-long search for answers to these questions. Based on an extensive array of original archival material, ethnographical research, and critical historiographical work, it argues that there needs to be a fundamental reconceptualization of the buraku problem for two main reasons. First, the master narrative is built on empirically and conceptually questionable foundations; and second, mainstream accounts tend to overlook the important role burakumin and other interested parties play in the construction and maintenance of the narrative. By continually drawing a straight line between premodern outcaste groups and today’s burakumin, the Japanese government, the general population, scholars, and burakumin activists tend to overlook some of the real changes that have often taken place both in who are identified as members of socially marginalized groups in Japan and how they experience that identification. Clinging to this master narrative also restricts the ways in which burakumin can productively and more inclusively identify in the present to imagine a liberated future for themselves.

Amos’ attempt to rethink the boundaries of buraku history and the category of the outcaste in Japan results in a compelling study that also offers us insights on how to comparatively frame the ‘undeniably similar’ dalit question.

Timothy Amos is Assistant Professor in the Department of Japanese Studies at the National University of Singapore.
The caste system in India wrecks all lives under its shade. Though the system was outlawed at Indian independence, it remains intransigent. Few born in India escape it.

The most neglected and abused people in the still impoverished country are those belonging to castes called ‘untouchable’. Of these, the most abused are women and girls. They are commonly raped and killed with impunity by men of higher castes and sometimes by their own kin. They are treated worse than animals.

Yet, wherever spaces for hope and love reside, there they flourish. This book documents the militant feminism of an Arunthathiyar priestess, encouraging women to leave their husbands and families and live alone; Paraiyar women singers and their invention of dialogic literary forms through song; the movement of hunter-gatherers to scavengers and fortune-tellers to people renouncing their romanticized past for a better and more realistic future; the prize-winning English language poetry of a young woman of untouchable heritage. Through these and other such acts of verbal art Trawick shows that there runs a thread of horror and beauty, of implacable anger combined with determined triumph, in the lives of these untouchable women who rethink the world.

Margaret Trawick is an anthropologist who has researched many aspects of Tamil culture since 1975. Her best-known works are Notes on Love in a Tamil Family (University of California Press, 1990) and Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood and Play in Batticaloa (University of California Press, 2007).
Poetry
What happened between 8 and 18 May 2009 in Eelam? Did no one write diaries? Did no one have cameras? Were there no poets there? Not a single artist? Whatever happened on that last day? What is the poetry that can emerge from a ‘wounded landmass’ where ‘no bird is able to fly’, where people ‘ate death’?

Nobody answered our questions.
To ask one of the dead, at least,
I went to the mortuary.
My corpse lay there,
the ribcage ripped apart
and in place of the heart
there was a grinding stone.

Five frontline Tamil poets—Cheran, Jayapalan, Yesurasa, Latha, Ravikumar—lament the loss of their land, their language and thousands of people. They chronicle

the people who have learnt
to pose for hours
clutching with ease
the barbed wire
without getting pricked.

Translated into English for the first time, these poems introspect on why waking is another dream in Sri Lanka.

Ravikumar is a Tamil critic, translator and poet who has founded several ‘little magazines’. His nonfiction has been published in translation as Venomous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture and Politics (2009). He is also the cofounder of Navayana.
Where the word becomes flesh, where reason is dazzled and magic reigns supreme: in that world delves Rajkumar. Sensuous and ferocious, the poetry of Rajkumar cracks open a world that offers the modern reader stunning glimpses into a magic-drenched, living dalit history. Born into a traditional shaman community, Rajkumar revels in his ability to claim disparate discourses as his poetic subjects. His angry goddesses of unreason and excessive emotion embody unfettered power, independence and freedom—elements excised from the daily life of the dalit.

Anushiya Ramaswamy, through her inspired translations, and in an essay that locates Rajkumar’s insurrections in a global literary context, shows how the poet is not writing for inclusion into a center: he has re-drawn the lines in such a way that the center itself is meaningless. The center has the right of it to fear the Other, the Mohini, the darkness, the Isakki, the mother with her breasts full of the poisonous essence, for

    We who cannot experience
    The Brahman
    Link hands and walk
    With our Jungle Gods.

With formal education up to seventh grade, N.D. Rajkumar has a day job as a temporary labourer with the Mail Service of the Indian Railways in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu. In his words, ‘I am a coolie.’ His poetry publications include Odakku, Rattha Santhana Paavai, Theri and Kal Vilakkugal.

Anushiya Ramaswamy is a faculty with the Department of English at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, US, and has previously translated the fiction of Eelam Tamil writer Sobhasakthi—Gorilla and Traitor.

‘Powerful liminalities, threshold moments of transit and transformation, are at play in the poems of N.D. Rajkumar... These are poems that unsettle and provoke us, carry us into a forest of the imagination dominated by devil mothers and shamans in a trance, the god of the cemetery and vampire magicians: a world that is not the fevered product of hallucination, but is really the kingdom of our own desires and hatreds, our struggles for power and appeals for love.’

—BIBLIO
A Current of Blood

NAMDEO DHASAL

POEMS SELECTED AND TRANSLATED FROM THE MARATHI BY DILIP CHITRE

118 pages | 6.5 in x 8.5 in | 2011

‘I am venereal sore in the private part of language.’ That’s Namdeo Dhasal, the maverick Marathi poet who hardly had any formal education.

Born in 1949 in a former ‘untouchable’ community in Pur-Kanersar village near Pune in Maharashtra, as a teenage taxi driver he lived among pimps, prostitutes, petty criminals, drug peddlers, gangsters and illicit traders in Bombay/Mumbai’s sinister and sordid underworld. In 1972, he founded Dalit Panther, the militant organisation modelled on Black Panther. The same year he published Golpitha that belongs to the tradition in modern urban poetry beginning with Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal. Since then, he has published eight collections of poems from which this representative selection is drawn.

In 2004, India’s national academy of letters, Sahitya Akademi, honoured Dhasal with the only Lifetime Achievement Award it gave during its golden jubilee celebrations.

Dhasal’s long-time friend and bilingual poet Dilip Chitre, acclaimed for his translations of the seventeenth century Marathi poet-saint Tukaram, considers Namdeo Dhasal to be one of the outstanding poets of the twentieth century.

Namdeo Dhasal founded Dalit Panther, the militant organisation modelled on Black Panther, in 1972. The same year he published Golpitha, a poetry collection that became a landmark in Marathi literature. He has since published eight collections of poems. In 2004, Sahitya Akademi, the Indian Academy of Letters, bestowed on Dhasal the only Lifetime Achievement Award it gave during its golden jubilee celebrations. Dhasal lives in Mumbai.

Dilip Chitre (1938–2009) was a bilingual poet, translator, essayist, fiction-writer, playwright, screenplaywright, filmmaker and painter. His film Godam won the Prix Special du Jury in Nantes in 1984. In 1994, he won the Sahitya Akademi Award (for Ekoon Kavita–1) and also the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize (for Says Tuka).
Meena Kandasamy’s full-blooded and highly experimental poems challenge the dominant mode in contemporary Indian poetry in English: status-quoist, de-politicized, neatly sterilized.

Call me names if it comforts you. I no longer care.

The scarlet letter is my monogram. I sew it on everything I wear, I tattoo it into permanence. I strive to be a slut in a world where all sex is sinful. I strive to be a shrew in a society that believes in suffering in silence. I strive to be a sphinx: part-woman, part-lioness, armed with all the lethal riddles.

Come, unriddle me. But be warned: I never falter in a fight. And, far worse, I seduce shamelessly.

—From the Preface

ONE-EYED

the pot sees just another noisy child
the glass sees an eager and clumsy hand
the water sees a parched throat slaking thirst
but the teacher sees a girl breaking the rule
the doctor sees a medical emergency
the school sees a potential embarrassment
the press sees a headline and a photofeature
dhanam sees a world torn in half.
her left eye, lid open but light slapped away,
the price for a taste of that touchable water.

Meena Kandasamy is a writer, poet, activist and translator. She was a writer-in-residence at the University of Iowa’s International Writing Program 2009. She has performed her work at literature and poetry festivals in Pittsburgh, Durban, Jaipur, Ottawa and Chennai.

‘When she tells the self-proclaimed arbiters of morality and decency and religious practice where to get off in “Should You Take Offence...” you want to stand up and cheer.’

—TIMEOUT
Navayana offers excellent editorial, typesetting, design and production services out of India. We have done prepress work and printed editions in India for Zed Books, UK, and for the University of Hawai‘i Press, USA. Drop by at our stand, Hall 5.0 E985, to browse.

Prepress work and production are cheaper in India compared to the first world, but one ought to know how to get quality work done and whom to trust it with. Navayana provides reliable publishing solutions—from editing a manuscript (in English) to shipping finished copies of the book to you.

You could also fix an appointment with our designer Akila Seshasayee (author of How to Torture Dalits, p.23) at the fair. View her typographic covers for Seminar magazine at www.india-seminar.com.

S. Anand, publisher of Navayana, is the recipient of British Council–London Book Fair’s International Young Publisher of the Year award for 2007 and the Ashoka fellowship for social entrepreneurship in 2008. Navayana’s stand at Frankfurt this year owes to Frankfurter Buchmesse’s invitation program.
Where will I go? Who will take me in?

Ah—you’ll stay with friends.

No—not with friends.

An untouchable has no friends among other castes. If I claim a friendship and am rejected, it will be embarrassing and painful on both sides.

Then make sure you stay at a good Hindu hotel.

To stay in a Hindu hotel, I’ll have to pretend to be upper caste—and if I get caught, I’ll get beaten up, maybe killed.