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Dalit Boredom and the Promises of Modern Time: Caste, Pedagogy, Institution

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Abstract

Boredom is generally considered a bourgeois concern, and pairing it with the political category of Dalit appears awkward. This paper retains that awkwardness. It reads Elizabeth S. Goodstein's genealogy of boredom as a modern rhetoric of reflection and extends the inquiry to postcolonial India, where her account stops. The paper does not ask whether Dalits are bored, but how their reflection is authorised and timed under caste. Dalit boredom is developed as an analytical category of a subject exposed to varied temporal realities, rather than as a shared Dalit mood. The modern institutions promise inclusion that will arrive, but that arrival is timed by caste, and any disaffection of Dalit subjects in their inability to deal with a promise of inclusion that is timed to be delayed is seen as a prior incapacity or incompetence to deal with a structure that stands for merit. The paper develops this argument through four connected discussions. It discusses the differentiated histories of labour and leisure in India, from courtly and artisanal time to industrial rhythms and educated timepass. The Guru-Sarukkai debate is reread to assess the debate on experience that is timed, and in which reflection may be seen as an incapacity. It examines caste as a modern formation, ranging from colonial school verandah to contemporary labour markets. And finally, the trials and tribulations of inhabiting the Indian Public University, where residential segregation and unequal assessment form a breeding ground for this feeling of Dalit Boredom.

Keywords

Dalit boredom, Caste and temporality, Indian modernity, Higher education, Anti-caste pedagogy, Waiting, Institutional time

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Introduction

Boredom is generally considered a bourgeois concern. Concatenating the term "boredom" with the political category of "Dalit" appears almost awkward and, at best, an uneasy observation. It seems to restrict a history of violence to a passive reception, as boredom seems to exclude violence by pairing Dalit with an affect usually associated with minor irritations or privileged idle behaviour. The paper is informed by Elizabeth S. Goodstein's (2005) method, as outlined in her text *Experience Without Qualities*, which reads boredom as a modern language of self-reflection (ibid., p. 4). This language is shaped by the temporal control and affective dis-locations of European modernity and industrial capitalism (ibid., pp. 1–7). The paper here asks what happens when boredom is read from below, from Dalit locations within Indian modernity, and more specifically, from the classroom and the curriculum that claim to teach Dalit life.

Hereafter, boredom is not only a mood to be analysed, but it is an enquiry into and a resource for pedagogy. The paper hence provincialises modernity in the Dalit and Indian context, and attempts to look at caste as a modern formation rather than just a feudal residue. Following Dirks (2001), Mosse (2020), and Rao (2009), Dalit modernity appears not as a belated entry into neutral modern time, but as being inside modern institutions and temporalities on structurally unequal terms. The postcolonial democracy of India and its neoliberal reforms highlight this contradiction, where Dalit aspirations and exclusion coexist simultaneously.

Dalit existence, therefore, is marked by a paradoxical presence within the modern apparatus. The Indian public university is taken here as a site to represent this modern apparatus. The paper engages with its promises of progressive politics and its posturing as an avenue for equal opportunity, as advertised by the market, while also examining its caste-marked practices within the guise of constitutional language and the reconfiguration of hegemony in discourses of equality. The university platforms a politics of distribution of unequal time as Dalit students deal with waiting outside admin offices, delayed fellowships, and peripheral housing in low-income neighbourhoods far from university campuses. Therefore, it becomes important to ask, what kind of teaching is possible when the very institutions that house Dalit Studies also choreograph such unequal time?

Dalit boredom, as used here, is an analytical category grounded in temporal experience rather than an attribution of mood. Modern institutions promise inclusion, mobility, or recognition that will take its time to arrive, and that time is controlled by the caste-structured institution itself. Until that promise takes its time to arrive, every shortcoming of a Dalit subject to tolerate the casteist underpinnings of an institution that is merely delaying a future promise is read as her personal incompetence to survive a competitive space that she does not belong to. The disaffection caused in the Dalit subject is read as boredom.

The paper primarily addresses four issues. The first will be to recover boredom historically as a rhetoric of reflective time, reading the English word against the differentiated vocabularies of valued and ranked unfilled time used in India: courtly leisure, artisanal *mauj, adda* and *timepass*. Next, it reads in conjunction with Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai's (2012) debate on experience, placing Goodstein's (2005) genealogy of boredom in relation to it, to argue that authority to interpret unfilled time is distributed as disproportionately as the space to experience it is. It further analyses Dalit boredom in accounts of caste as a modern phenomenon, from the colonial school verandah to the labour market. It will conclude its argument at the Indian university by discussing Committee reports, survey evidence, and disciplinary decrees on the assignment of time, from undisbursed fellowships and hostel accommodation to examinations and suspensions.

From Etymology to Differentiated Time in India

The Modern Vocabulary of Boredom

Boredom, as an English word, is fairly new. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the first use of "boredom" in 1829, in the *Court Journal*, as a noun formed within English from "bore" plus the suffix "-dom", meaning "state or condition" (Oxford English Dictionary [OED], n.d.-e).

The older layers of the word-family complicate this picture. The adjective bored appears in English by 1553 with the meaning "pierced, perforated; cylindrically hollow," used technically of gun barrels; this sense belongs to bore in its Germanic meaning "to drill, pierce" (OED, n.d.-a, n.d.-c). A different verb, bore, "to weary by dullness," is attested only from 1768. From this social sense comes bored as an emotional adjective, first cited in Byron's *Don Juan* in 1823, and then boredom in 1829 (OED, n.d.-b, n.d.-d).

Although the feeling does not come etymologically from drilling, there seems to remain such residue; the bored subject of modernity appears to be one that has been drilled and become hollow, empty because of the effects of routine on one hand and the pressure by society on the other. It is because boredom is so easily expressed in casual idioms that it is often trivialised, considered as a petty nuisance that may be remedied by entertainment. Mashuq Ally (2008) observes that its "reputation as an inconsequential emotion" has meant that its significance in social life is "often … minimised if not ignored", and that an Enlightenment discourse treating boredom as "a univocal psychic disorder of lack" remains influential, even as recent work has recast it as a historical phenomenon and a cultural construct of modernity (ibid., p. 36). From the perspective of Dalit experience in Indian universities, this trivialisation is problematic. The feeling of being "bored" in a classroom that is formally open yet socially closed is not simply a decline of interest. It seems to be closer to the older

"bored" in the sense of hollowed out, where one's presence is drilled through by the routines and exclusions of the place.

However, theorising Dalit boredom as more than a private mood requires more than just an English-word history. The category is centred on a judgement. Its starting point is the fact that the delay produced by the institution is read as incapacitation of the one experiencing it. Judgements are never improvised in that way. They derive from a borrowed body of techniques by which the time of unproductive labour was seen. This collection of techniques is contained in India, though not in the word *boredom*, within leisure, idleness, *adda* and *timepass*. Searching for a literary equivalent would conflate cultural differences with an inadequacy of the concept. On the other hand, culturally apt terminology helps us see that it is not the interval spent that determines the correct utility of time, but the person sitting in it, who has been historically traced by it.

Courtly Leisure and the Calibration of Free Time

In the earliest repertoire of leisure activities, we see glimpses of it in the vocabulary. In Sanskrit, there is no one word for leisure, stresses Seema Bawa (2023); this sense is approximated by *avakāśa* and *akarmaṇ*, states of nonactivity. This sense is expressed differently by the words *bhoga* and *vilāsa*, signifying recreation with pleasure and luxuriance. In popular imagination, bhoga and vilāsa are often conflated with śauq (indulgence); when elevated to rājasi, they signify royal tastes and sports (ibid., p. 7). What this vocabulary records is not an absence of empty time, but the ethical, aesthetic and occupational frameworks within which leisure was interpreted and ranked.

The frameworks of these terms were not evenly distributed conceptually. Bawa (2023) remarks that in the premodern archive: "privileges elite male leisure which gets described, celebrated and projected", while "the producers and providers of the same, the toiling lower classes and women are marginalised or voyeuristically projected" (ibid., p. 2). Leisure, Bawa sums up, is "a calibrated activity and appropriate as per class, caste, gender, position and status" (ibid., p. 16). Smita Sahgal (2023) makes this calibration more lucid by discussing hunting, an elite court sport on the one hand and a livelihood for the forest peoples among whom the textual tradition placed the *niṣādas*, *śabaras,* and *caṇḍālas*.

Artisan Time and the Social Valuation of Leisure

This stratified relationship between work and non-work time is seen in artisan life in Benaras, as shown by Nita Kumar (1988), where artisans have a home-based setup and a greater control over their working conditions. Their time is their own, as payment is per piece (ibid., p.47). Such control did not amount to economic independence. The toymaker Shiv Prasad represents, perhaps, the most restricted freedom of all the craftsmen portrayed by Kumar. He owns his working times, but not his prices. He fears the shopkeepers' control over the toymakers' union: if he asks for more, they

may buy elsewhere or withhold money already owed to him (ibid., p. 46). Without the protection of any institution, he can not argue against them, only excuse their different aptitudes: pricing is "not his job but the shopkeeper's", who "deserves whatever profit he makes as a prize for his special skills" (ibid., p. 46). Freedom is, however, as real as these artisans distinguished themselves from other equally poor due to the command of their own times and, what the author calls, an "ideology of freedom" (ibid., p. 13).

The social meaning of this autonomy depended upon the observer's position. Non-Ansaris, who usually held a position of dominance over Ansari weavers, complained that they were excessively fond of *mauj* and *masti* and would close their workshops to go for a stroll (Kumar, 1988, pp. 55–56). Kumar, however, observed looms operating from seven in the morning until seven at night, and sometimes later. She summarises the divergence: "all weavers report that they work very hard and very long, and all others claim that they don't" (Kumar, 1988, p. 56). Historical classifications also represented Julahas as "poor, illiterate, stupid" (Kumar, 1988, p. 49).

A related contest appears in Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) history of *adda* in colonial and twentieth-century Calcutta. Older dictionaries associated *adda* with "marginalized existence" and gatherings of "'bad' people or people of bad occupations," while other sources connected it with opium and ganja dens (ibid., p. 190). *Majlish*, by contrast, signified gatherings involving wealth and patronage (ibid., p. 190). The distinction concerned social location, space and patronage, not merely two names for the same activity. Chakrabarty reports finding no nineteenth-century use of *adda* that conferred respectability upon it; its association with a modern Bengali reading public made it respectable in the twentieth century (ibid., p. 188). He nevertheless describes modern public *adda* as predominantly male and middle-class, and often forgetful of the working classes (ibid., p. 181).

The opposition between leisured elites and continuously labouring subordinates is complicated in these histories. There was thus an unequal distribution of control over time and of the authority to define its use, which colonial modernity did not create from nothing, Victorian disciplines meshing with pre-existing understandings of work and idleness (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 186–187), and it is this background that offers comparatives with the boredom of contemporary Dalits; what is shared is the mechanism of judgement, not the temporalities themselves.

Industrial Time, Educational Mobility, and Timepass

With Industrial Modernity also came varied temporal disciplines. According to Parry (1999), E. P. Thompson's notion of clock-governed work, "not only romanticises task-oriented peasant agriculture but also effaces the extremely variable nature of industrial production" (ibid., p. 107). At the Bhilai Steel Plant, "a good deal" of apparent shirking resulted from breakdowns, failures of supply and essential maintenance, although Parry adds, "A good deal, but not everything" (ibid., pp. 125–126). Many members of

the overwhelmingly non-Chhattisgarhi management regarded local men as work-shy. Chhattisgarhi women, by contrast, had a "Stakhanovite reputation" but were generally recruited only as temporary contract labour for "the most laborious and menial tasks", a pattern Parry attributes more to gender than ethnicity (ibid., pp. 114–115). Industrial time was therefore differentiated by region, gender and employment status rather than governed by a single discipline.

In Jeffrey's (2010) ethnography of Meerut, timepass is an idiom of being left behind by declining education and shortage of salaried jobs and waiting while they have surplus time away from studying (ibid., p. 466). There was a hierarchy involved in this term. Students distinguished their educated timepass from the *timewaste* of urban "illiterates," while Jats occasionally used uneducated, Chamar and Muslim interchangeably (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 475). In rural Bijnor, many Jat men called temporary clerical employment or small businesses *timepass* rather than "serious" work (Jeffrey et al., 2008, p. 91). Whereas Jats applied the term to particularly "meaningless" study or work, Chamars seemed to use it for "a whole style of life and disposition toward the future"; most Chamar young men lacked the resources necessary to sustain prolonged educated unemployment (Jeffrey et al., 2008, p. 183). Yet such practices could also challenge the expectation that Chamars should remain confined to manual labour and caste-segregated spaces.

Such critiques were not symmetrical. Influenced by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and development narratives, the new Dalit politicians criticised timepass as inconsistent with the responsibilities of educated Dalits; educated Jats read Dalit timepass as a failure to appreciate education's "true value" (Jeffrey et al., 2008, p. 204). Timepass could occasion youthful solidarities "sometimes across caste and class boundaries" (Jeffrey, 2010, p. 465), which, however, were necessarily partial and fragile ones (Jeffrey, 2010, pp. 474–477). The central inequality was not simply who had time to waste, then, but who had the resources and social power to define it as transition, sociability, failure or resistance. Modern boredom both measures and obscures that uneven power to interpret the meaning of empty time.

Goodstein, Guru and Sarukkai, and the Rhetoric of Boredom

Goodstein's Project and Archive

Goodstein (2005) sets out to write a genealogy of boredom as a distinctively modern way of reflecting on subjective malaise, rather than as a timeless psychological state. She takes along the notion that boredom implies both an experience and a discourse and reads it as an "experience without qualities" in which the deficits of the self masquerade as the poverty of the world, and vice versa; boredom exists in that relational enterprise. The point here is not just to make a phenomenological observation. It is to locate boredom in a historically specific configuration of malaise. And Goodstein situates

that crisis of meaning in the Enlightenment, secularisation, industrial capitalism, and the dissolution of traditional frameworks of faith and authority (ibid., pp. 3–4, 18–21). It is the everyday affect in which the "democratization of skepticism" in modernity becomes lived as a crisis of experience itself (ibid., pp. 10–11, 21).

Methodologically, rather than determining boredom as a complete definition, Goodstein (2005) tracks how different discourses, that are literary, philosophical, sociological, and psychoanalytic, have used the word to figure subjective malaise since the late eighteenth century. Because boredom is simultaneously a private feeling and a socially legible idiom, that is, as historically specific as the language in which modern subjects interpret what it means to suffer, desire, and fail to find meaning (ibid., pp. 11–14). The book is structured accordingly: Part I reconstructs the emergence of boredom within Western literature and the human sciences; Part II re-reads Simmel, Heidegger, and Musil in order to show how boredom crystallises the aporetic relation between sociological and philosophical accounts of modern subjectivity (ibid., pp. ix–x, 14–18).

Time, Modernisation, and the Discourse of Boredom

The concept of the language of boredom is rooted in the notion of time. Goodstein (2005) claims that modern boredom is inseparable from modern temporality. Boredom, according to her reading, emerges as Enlightenment gives way to industrial capitalism (ibid., pp. 3–4, 18–20). This modern experience thrives with the notion of "clock time" as its backdrop, as it coordinates work, leisure, and human life itself (ibid., pp. 5–6). The subjects of modernity inhabit the empty units of mechanical time. And a new, secular historicity is imagined where life is a continuous progress towards improvement. In contrast to this narrative of continuous linear improvement, a formation of temporal regimes of clock-time emerges, and the narrative of progress and boredom arises from the disconnect between the two.

Boredom can therefore be read as an everyday phenomenology of disenchantment. It registers the possibility that rational mastery of time, scientific progress, and the organisation of work and leisure may fail to secure meaning. It is both symptom and strategy: it registers discontents associated with modernisation while offering the subject a way to stabilise a relation to a world that no longer seems engaging (Goodstein, 2005, pp. 2–5). In this sense, boredom is not simply a feeling caused by empty time. It is a historically constituted way of interpreting time as empty, through which the material transformations of nineteenth-century Europe, including industrialisation and urbanisation, come to be expressed as subjective malaise (Goodstein, 2005, pp. 3–6, 18–20).

On Class, Gender, Race, Centre, and Periphery

At the level of whose experience can be represented and interpreted, Goodstein (2005) shows that the modern rhetoric of boredom is not evenly distributed. She observes that male boredom has often been valorised while female boredom is devalued, and that evaluations of boredom may also follow class, racial, and national divisions (ibid., pp. 21–22). This does not mean that the canonical bored subject is invariably male. In nineteenth-century French literature, *ennui* was, according to Goodstein, a sign of "spiritual distinction" for an élite (ibid., pp. 172–173, 184–185); yet Flaubert also depicted it in *Madame Bovary* as the condition of a woman in provincial life. They differed in their authoritative reception and interpretation.

Goodstein (2005) develops this distinction through a close reading of Reinhard Kuhn's study of ennui. In her account, Kuhn treats canonical literary ennui as philosophically significant but describes a housewife waiting at a supermarket as experiencing only transient idleness. He assigns the more persistent unhappiness of a suburban woman to psychological and psychiatric attention (ibid., pp. 53–58). Goodstein's objection is that these classifications presume, rather than demonstrate, the absence of an existential problem. They leave insufficiently examined how the restrictions of the bourgeois family may shape the woman's experience of meaninglessness (ibid., pp. 57–58, 61).

Kuhn associates the industrial worker's boredom with the *monotony* of routine labour and assigns it to sociology and human-relations expertise. Goodstein (2005) asks why the movement from meaningless work to unfulfilling leisure could not also raise a question of meaning (ibid., pp. 59–61). Kuhn's category of *anomie* is different: he projects it onto an exoticised Polynesian figure and refers it to anthropology, rather than examining it as a condition of modern Western society (ibid., pp. 61–63). These figures are representations in Kuhn's argument, not testimony from the people he depicts. The Indian material of the previous section shows the same operation without the European archive: Kumar's outsiders, Parry's management and Jeffrey's Jat students each judge another group's unfilled time by a standard from which they exempt themselves.

Goodstein (2005) notes that the valuation of boredom can be mapped onto racial and national positions, but she does not offer a historical account of boredom in colonial settings (ibid., pp. 6–7, 21–22). What her book offers is not a finished work but more of a question: that of the determination by the social position over whose boredom poses the reflective question of meaning, and whose is nothing more than a case to be explained.

On Colonial and Postcolonial Modernities

Goodstein (2005) is explicit, however, about the historical and geographical limits of her genealogy. In a footnote, she states that she "shall not attempt to extend" her claims

about boredom to colonial or postcolonial contexts, even though anecdotal evidence suggests that the structures of experience she analyses appear "at the 'periphery' as well as the 'centre' of the modernisation process" (ibid., pp. 6–7). Modern boredom, she argues, is a function of a "modernized temporality," the shift from traditional to mechanical time as it is integrated into industrialisation and the rationalisation of everyday life (ibid., p. 6). In colonial settings, this shift is inseparable from the "discursive occupation and resignification of subjective experience," as modernisation is always imposed in the language and categories of the colonising power (ibid., pp. 6–7). Where the agent of modernisation "speaks the language of boredom," similar configurations of self-understanding can be expected to arise at the periphery, but Goodstein leaves this as a conjecture rather than a worked-out argument (ibid., p. 6).

Caste has no place in the modernity that Goodstein (2005) describes. Her text is European and metropolitan. This essay borrows the idea of how different authorities time the marginalised subject and brings that politics of governing time from nineteenth-century European literature to the institutions in the postcolonial state. Agrarian crisis, state violence and the uneven delivery of equal opportunity in universities that present themselves as the most progressive of modern apparatuses are what time Dalit existence after independence. Dalit boredom is therefore not a derivative of a European sense of reflection. It is what the modern rhetoric of reflection becomes when the time reflected upon is governed by somebody else, and it carries, for that reason, a pedagogical potential that the European version does not.

Reading Goodstein with Guru and Sarukkai: From a Theory of Boredom to Boredom with Theory

Goodstein (2005) treats boredom as mediating between the subjective and objective, as well as the spiritual and material, consequences of modernisation (ibid., p. 407). She argues that boredom can appear to express a timeless human fate even though its language and temporal assumptions are historically produced (ibid., pp. 4–6, 407–413). Her description of the "democratization of skepticism" speaks only of the spread of categories through which people reflect on experiences of subjective malaise but not of their equal authoritative hold to formulate and spread an interpretation of that experience (ibid., p. 413). The issue of the line being drawn between access to an idiom of reflection and authority to speak in/through it is what follows here by extension.

The debate between Guru (2012) and Sarukkai (2012) in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* returns this question to the conditions under which experience is lived and theorised. Sarukkai argues that the Dalit lived experience is not a condition an outsider can choose to enter and leave. It is marked by "the lack of freedom in an experience" (Sarukkai, 2012, p. 36). Yet he also questions whether the ethical significance of lived experience entails Guru's stronger claim about who may theorise it (Sarukkai, 2012, pp. 36–37). Their positions should therefore not be treated as identical. Guru gives the relation between experience and

social arrangement a spatial form, arguing that "production of experience hinges on the reproduction of spaces" (Guru, 2012, p. 72). Spatial arrangements shape both the experiences people undergo and the conditions in which those experiences can acquire conceptual expression (Guru, 2012, pp. 72–74).

Read together, Goodstein (2005) on the modern rhetoric of reflection, Sarukkai (2012) on unchosen lived experience, and Guru (2012) on socially produced space allow an inference: thinking time is not equally free across all social locations. Furthermore, Guru posits that although the tormentor and the theoretician have different purposes, each can reduce the victim to merely an object of their action (Guru, 2012, p. 72). Taking the relationship and his words into mind allows exploration of the question of whose descriptions of caste-structured times come to be accepted as concepts, and whose narratives come to be accessed only as narratives. Constrained time does not mean absence of thought; caste determines the terms on which thought is made, heard, and authorised.

This is the sense in which a theory of modern boredom meets, and must be reconsidered through, Dalit experiences of time in caste-structured spaces. The speaking of Dalit boredom nevertheless risks anachronism, unless one first clarifies what modernity means in the Indian context and how Dalit modernity coincides neither with, nor simply lags behind, a nationalist narrative of progress.

Modernity, Indian Modernity, and Dalit Modernity

Boredom's Historicity and the Question of Indian Modernity

Goodstein's (2005) attempt is to trace a historicity to the logic of boredom that leads to its articulation. The attempt is not just to trace that historicity but to find the point of intersection between that and the discourse that tries to explain that socio-historical feeling (ibid., pp. 13, 25). As we have established above, for Goodstein, that intersection point lies within the realm of modernity. She argues that the larger umbrella of boredom exemplifies a new mode of reflection centred on the embodied individual who struggles to ascribe meaning and purpose in a world "increasingly bereft of both religious and worldly certainties," and that boredom comes to function as a key term in a rhetoric where malaise is understood as an objective response to external realities rather than an inner flaw (ibid., pp. 402–404). Bringing Goodstein into conversation with Dalit studies thus already means treating Western industrial modernity as one of the forces that shape the temporalities and affective languages available to Dalit subjects, even if caste imposes a very different set of historical conditions than those in her Western archive.

Caste as a Modern Formation

This comparative reading, however, is only defensible if Indian modernity itself is provincialised. Nicholas Dirks's (2001) argument, in his book *Castes of Mind:*

Colonialism and the Making of Modern India, is that "caste (again, as we know it today) is a modern phenomenon," produced through the colonial state's attempt to classify, enumerate, and regulate Indian social life (ibid., p. 5). In his account, the ethnographic state transforms fluid, localised hierarchies into a single, systematised order called "caste," so that caste becomes one of the central social technologies through which colonial modernity rules. Furthermore, David Mosse (2020) extends this argument to the illusory promise of equality and castelessness that surrounds the development claims of the contemporary labour markets (ibid., pp. 1226–1227). He takes the example of elite jobs that conform to the social structure, where upper-end jobs are reserved for the middle class/upper-caste people, and lower-end jobs are categorised for Dalit and Adivasi workers. The skill differentiation and subsequent job allocations happen on the grounds of caste. Upper-caste groups continue to monopolise the job market through their networking caste methods and the categorical caste-based exclusion that follows through in the labour market as prominently as it used to before all of this (ibid., pp. 1251, 1253). Caste is not a residue that modernity has failed to clear away; it is made and remade in and through the economy itself, which means that Indian modernity is saturated with caste from the outset (ibid., p. 1263).

Caste Radicalism and the Dalit Public Sphere

Anupama Rao's (2009) history prevents Dalit modernity from appearing as a passive admission to institutions made by others. Between 1877 and 1929, Dalit publicists used newspapers and petitions to present untouchability as "contingent and wrong", rather than a ritual destiny (ibid., p. 40). Valangkar combined petitions for civic and employment rights with *kirtan* performances opposing the treatment of Dalit communities (ibid., pp. 47–48). Print, bureaucratic claim-making and performance worked alongside one another.

This Dalit public developed in relation to, but cannot be collapsed into, wider non-Brahmin politics. The Satyashodhak Samaj's exclusion of Dalit members in 1895 showed that opposition to Brahmin dominance did not guarantee Dalit equality (Rao, 2009, p. 47). Dalit reformers consequently developed their own forms of self-representation and claims to rights. Their actions were part of making modern political life, not merely demands to enter it after others.

Verandah as an Institutional Form

While sustaining the demanded distance from elite caste families, the colonial schools granted access to Dalit children. According to an 1887 report from Satara district, the Mahar children were kept out of schoolrooms, scribbling on their slates in the sun (Rao, 2009, p. 71). The verandah, however, acted as a larger institutional compromise for Rao, through which the Dalit children could achieve access, while being kept away from their elite caste schoolmates, while having a deteriorated access to sight and

hearing of what was spoken and read out in the schools. More than two decades later, in Tale in 1916, R. B. More attended his first-floor class while sitting on a scaffold constructed by the school authorities. The scaffold and verandah were analogous to each other (Rao, 2009, p. 72), as in the analysis of Rao.

Military pensioners in Dapoli (Mahar, Chambhar) petitioned in 1892 for their children's admission to a municipal school (Rao, 2009, p. 72). When Ambedkar began studying in 1894 as a Dalit child, Dalit students sat in a room of their own, placed their slates on the ground for the teacher to inspect, and were barred from the common water supply (Rao, 2009, p. 72). The inspections that happened in late 1894 showed that Dalit students and their upper-caste classmates sat three to four feet apart. More such allegations of explicit discrimination resurfaced in a 1901 petition (Rao, 2009, p. 73). And amidst these very apparent accounts of injustice, the formal setup of education was touted to be equally accessible for all.

The time consumed by such access was evidenced by families petitioning in Dapoli in 1892. Officials offered to extend the school verandah, provided the petitioners stumped up fifty rupees; the extension was still unapproved in November 1894 (Rao, 2009, pp. 72–73), and still more families were being segregated according to a 1901 petition. Families wanted to be educated with others, while officials continually twisted and repackaged this intention into segregated solutions. The verandah, writes Rao (2009), "preserved the illusion of equal education" even as it restricted a clear sight and sound of proceedings in class for the children (ibid., p. 72). Dalit communities also opened independent schools and hostels to tackle such issues of exclusion (ibid., pp. 72–73).

These petitions serve as evidence of temporal and spatial segregation based on caste; they do not tell us about boredom as a primary symptom of exclusion, but something that goes unnoticed as the subject keeps losing her egalitarian rights over legality and time.

Vernacular Modernity and Dalit Mobility

Caste has not escaped the conscious decision-making of people who inhabit newer locales and are hesitant participants in modernity. Waghmore and Contractor (2015) write about urban matrimonial advertisements that ironically have the phrase "Caste No-Bar" while simultaneously mentioning explicitly, "SC/STs please excuse" (ibid., p. 229). Rather than disappearing from urban life, caste is presented as making "modernity vernacular" (ibid., p. 229). The authors also focus on the pressure to make Dalit-ness invisible for some upwardly mobile people of Dalit origin, as well as the possibility of asserting Dalit selfhood and resistance (ibid., pp. 229–230). Through the accounts of Pankaj and Jha (2024) for the city of Navi Mumbai, Dalits acquire education and mobility and carve dignity and self-expression (ibid., pp. 2545–2546,

2552). Dalit modernity is neither a simple narrative of liberation from the shackles of caste, nor one of discrimination and oppression without expression of agency.

As histories, these are not, in spite of themselves, histories of boredom. They show how caste structures terms within modern institutions, which offer the promise of entry, and how actors contest those terms. When caste-structured delay suspends a promise of inclusion, the resulting disaffection can be treated as incapacity. The higher-education cases that follow examine this sequence through fellowship time, residence, assessment and discipline.

Dalit Boredom and the Indian University

Promise and Administrative "Waiting"

Higher education introduces the above argument into institutions which explicitly promise mobility and equal citizenship. Reservations, fellowships, and anti-discrimination rules are what formally substantiate that promise, but admission alone does not secure the conditions of study that fulfilling it requires. This evidence does not prove that all Dalit students grow bored or even that the students cited below used that word. What it does is show how the delayed arrival of resources, inhibited access to space, and the skewed tutoring and recoding of those obstacles as deficiencies in character on the part of the students can make a promised futurity lie outside a Dalit student's reach. Dalit boredom might be a way of thinking on that arrangement, not a cypher for any exclusion.

Waiting for fellowship/scholarship money is a common thread in these testimonies by Dalit students. One respondent, in Sukumar's (2023) study, talks about waiting eight months for a 5000 rupee MPhil scholarship while she had to borrow money, and struggles for books and photocopies (Sukumar, 2023, pp. 31, 85). Later, while negotiating the paperwork for doctoral funding, an ICSSR clerk told her that "people like you gobble up the chances of other meritorious students" (ibid., p. 86). Her response was that files needed to be cleared on time "so that students like us can survive" (ibid., p. 86).

The University Grants Commission's 2012 equity regulations make clear that institutional time can itself become a medium of discrimination. Among the practices prohibited when based on caste or other protected grounds were differential access to faculty, keeping a student idle in a laboratory, delaying examination results, withholding information about fellowships or stopping fellowships, and segregating students in hostels or messes (University Grants Commission, 2012, reg. 3(2)(b)-(e)). The regulations do not show that each of these practices occurred in every university. What they do show is that the gap between formal entry and usable educational time was already legible to the regulator.

Residence, Information and the Time to Prepare

The 2007 Thorat Committee inquiry at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, examined complaints through interviews, visits and a questionnaire completed by 25 SC/ST students, about half of those at the institution (Thorat et al., 2007, pp. 11, 18, 33). Its figures describe this limited group of respondents, not Indian higher education generally. Because the report combines SC and ST students, its findings cannot be assigned to Dalit students alone.

The committee found that 29 SC/ST students were shifted from Hostels 1 and 2 to 4 and 5, and almost half stated caste harassment to be the cause; 88 per cent of those who answered the questionnaire reported facing social isolation in various ways. 76 per cent of SC/ST students told the committee that restrictions were imposed upon them about joining private messes (Thorat et al., 2007, pp. 34–36). Hostels, therefore, were much more than lodging alone. Exclusion from conversations, sharing books, and notes was also among their experiences (Thorat et al., 2007, p. 36).

A separate finding concerns the circulation of academic information. Students reported that class representatives failed to pass on decisions about teaching and deadlines in time, sometimes leaving SC/ST students to learn of them only after due dates had passed (Thorat et al., 2007, pp. 30–31). The report does not establish that hostel segregation caused this informational delay. Taken together, however, its findings show how being present on campus can coexist with reduced time to prepare, seek advice and meet a deadline. What is lost is not simply social company but a fair opportunity to anticipate and meet the institution's requirements.

Assessment and Merit Explanation

The notion of merit is itself contingent upon very practical factors of proximity to institutional resources that are officially claimed to be available for all. At AIIMS, 84 per cent people amongst the survey of 25 mentioned that practical evaluation and viva happened under unfair circumstances. 76 percent spoke of having been asked their caste by examiners, and 85 percent amongst the complainants mentioned that they were given less time by the examiner as opposed to their upper-caste colleagues (Thorat et al., 2007, pp. 5, 24, 42). A literal case of compromised time allowed to students speaks volumes about the institutional promise of being allowed equal time and opportunity to everyone. And adds an even expository light on aptitude-oriented marking that is translated to a fair merit system that claims to segregate students equally on the neutral system of marking them ahead of one another.

Sukumar's (2023) multi-campus survey finds the same pattern. One research scholar reports that "only two-three faculties asked relevant questions relating to the topic, others asked where am I from and what am I doing in the campus?" (ibid., p. 82). The student, rather than the research, was examined.

An awareness of such risks can explain how such events obtain their social meaning, as in Ajantha Subramanian's (2015) study of the Indian Institutes of Technology. The opposition between "general"/ "merit-based" admission on the one hand and "reserved" admission on the other can convert inherited upper-caste advantage into ostensible castelessness, casting the second in the role of the caste-marked student (Subramanian, 2015, p. 298). Subramanian's case may be concerned with IITs and not with AIIMS. However, she presents one general danger posed by such narratives. It becomes easy in such cases to interpret the student as not being good enough to keep up, rather than someone who might not have received an equal measure of attention or help as his peers. Goodstein's (2005) account explains why the two readings are available at all. Where the bored subject appears to reflect "in an enlightened and unemotional way upon the senselessness of life", she writes, "ennui comes to be regarded as a philosophically or spiritually significant mark of distinction" (ibid., p. 403). No study cited here compares two students who describe themselves as bored, and none is claimed. What Goodstein supplies is the reason that distinction is unlikely to be extended to a caste-marked student: it is granted to a subject already credited with the capacity to reflect.

Disciplinary Time at the University of Hyderabad

The University of Hyderabad had a different temporal arrangement. Rohith Vemula and four other ASA research scholars were barred from residing in hostel rooms and entering the administration building because of an order passed by the administration in December 2015, following a dispute between the Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA) and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). They were also prohibited from meeting anywhere in groups in common places. However, they were allowed to pursue their academic courses, library use (Sukumar, 2023, p. 158), and other academic-related programs. While remaining students who were still enrolled, they found the routine avenues through which enrolment translated into life on campus became inaccessible to them.

The place they found to reside in, a camp, became notorious as the *velivaada* (place of caste exclusion) (Sukumar, 2016, p. 452). The name was a political diagnosis of the situation, not evidence of any passivity. It was the immediate spatial forms of exclusion that, even as they were contested by students, became entrenched with the order and the locking of the room doors (Sukumar, 2023, pp. 158–159). Rohith Vemula hanged himself on 17 January 2016. Boredom is not the point of suicide, nor is boredom the breadth of the political actions staged by the five students. More narrowly, this is how membership in an institution may continue in formal ways, even as it is excluded from its life.

Beyond Curricular Inclusion

These examples suggest why an anti-caste pedagogy cannot be limited to adding a Dalit text to a reading list. Sharmila Rege (2010) argues that women, Dalits and Adivasis may enter sociology as topics while its "cognitive structures" remain largely unaltered (ibid., p. 90). She recalls a Dalit doctoral student's account of how ostensibly affirmative moments (an Ambedkar lesson, an elocution competition and the award of a UGC Junior Research Fellowship) could each reproduce caste by reducing him to a "stigmatised particular" (ibid., p. 89). Educational achievement is real; the institution's way of recognising it can still constrain the student's authority to interpret that achievement.

Phule's "trutiya ratna," or "third eye," is used by Rege (2010) to think about education as a means of understanding and transforming relations between power and knowledge. She interprets Ambedkar's intervention in the debates over university reform: examination-centred teaching is correlated to understaffing and inadequate representation on the governing bodies (ibid., p. 93). She also demonstrates that pedagogy and institutional reform cannot be decoupled. For Rege, the act of pedagogy should incorporate attention to classrooms, to funding (on time or late), to access to faculty and friends (or lack thereof), to conducting examinations, and to who is interpreted as knowing versus resenting an obstacle. One must pay attention not merely to the curriculum. This must also include respecting the analysis by students, as is evident in the naming of *Velivaada*.

Institutional evidence helps set boundaries and limits on the boredom being talked about here. Students will not necessarily complain of boredom if tuition fees are not paid, rooms remain separate, or viva calls come unevenly; none of these, by themselves, are reports of boredom. But they may upset the promise of the future delivered by virtue of being included in the education, making the student's study period contingent on decisions made elsewhere. These cases interrupt the possibility of a common temporality. And what we determine as boredom exists not in punishment but in delay in waiting to not be punished, while the student is told that the future that was promised is already here. And she is supposed to adjust and succumb to the narrative of merit to personalise every wrong that is an institutional injustice. Dalit boredom speaks of that personalisation where a social injustice is forced to be interpreted as an individual shortcoming.

Conclusion: A Category and a Field

Goodstein (2005) starts her analysis of boredom with a disturbed relation between the self and the world, "the deficits of the self masquerading as the poverty of the world" (p. 1). Her insistence that this relation is historically produced raises a further question for this paper: How do caste-structured institutions organise a student's time, and whose

account of the disaffection they produce is authorised? The problem of reflection turns on whose account is acknowledged. For a Dalit student, such reflections may be returned as a failure of aptitude or motivation, of adjustment or adaptation.

Histories of courtly leisure, of artisan autonomy, adda, factory work and timepass do not offer a single Indian equivalent of modern boredom. They report an uneven distribution of resources to control time and of the authority to describe its use. In the university, this assumes the form of an institutional inequality. Admission to a university can overlap with deferral of funds, segregated residence, unequal supply of information and reduced academic attention. A hostel order or examination decision happens at a given time; the conditions created by it remain thereafter. The phrase "Dalit boredom" does not reduce these experiences to one another; it draws attention to the gap between formal inclusion and the time and conditions needed for study.

None of the evidence discussed here establishes that the students themselves described these experiences as boredom. For the student who waited eight months for an awarded scholarship, that period was filled with work, borrowing and efforts to obtain the money due to her (Sukumar, 2023, pp. 85–86). The category does not diagnose how she felt during the wait. It asks why she was expected to continue studying while the conditions needed for study were withheld.

The public university is answerable for this issue as it promises access and mobility. Access also refers to the time during which education can proceed. The rules discussed in the article recognise some delays and disruptions as institutional wrongs; temporal injury is not entirely outside the context of injustice. A complaint might eventually be resolved by the university through a decision or payment, which does not necessarily restore the supervision, preparation or opportunity lost during the delay. The issue of anti-caste pedagogy, thus, constitutes more than curricular inclusion; it also entails addressing the institutional and material conditions that allow students to study, participate, and have their interpretations taken seriously.

What opportunities to study or prepare are lost between the university's promise and its fulfilment? And how does one account for the losses that the payment or decision does not put right? When students explain how that time was for them, will what they say be heard as an analysis of the institution or as evidence that the students could not keep up? If gaining a place at a university does not give students the time to learn and the facilities needed for studying, what would a right to learn demand from the university beyond the right to enter?

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