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LATITUDES OF MARGINALITY IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

Laurence Simon, Joint Editor-in-Chief

ARTICLES

Caste Identities and Structures of Threats: Stigma, Prejudice, and Social Representation in Indian Universities *Gaurav J. Pathania, Sushrut Jadhav, Amit Thorat, David Mosse, Sumeet Jain*

Caste and Religion Matters in Access to Housing, Drinking Water, and Toilets: Empirical Evidence from National Sample Surveys, India *Vinod Kumar Mishra*

A Critical Lens to Understand Gender and Caste Politics of Rural Maharashtra, India *Tanuja Harad*

The Exclusion of Bahujan Schoolchildren: An Anti-Caste Critique of the National Education Policy 2020, India *Yuvraj Singh*

Importance of Caste-Based Headcounts: An Analysis of Caste-Specific Demographics Transition in India *D.P. Singh, Srei Chanda, L.K. Dwivedi, Priyanka Dixit, Somnath Jana*

Politics of Recognition and Caste among Muslims: A Study of Shekhra Biradari of Bihar, India *Tausif Ahmad*

The Human Dignity Argument against Manual Scavenging in India *Asang Wankhede, Alena Kahle*

Sanitising India or Cementing Injustice? Scrutinising the Swachh Bharat Mission in India *Sudhanshu Shekhar*

Hariprasad Tamta: Father of Shilpkar Revolution in India *Sandeep Kumar*

FORUM

Un'casting' Universities: Examining the Intersections of Inclusive Curriculum and Dalit Pedagogies in a Private University in Bangalore, India *Rolla Das*

BOOK REVIEWS

'Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader' by Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore *Preeti*

'Breaking Barriers: The Story of a Dalit Chief Secretary' by K. Madhava Rao *Sanghmitra S. Acharya*

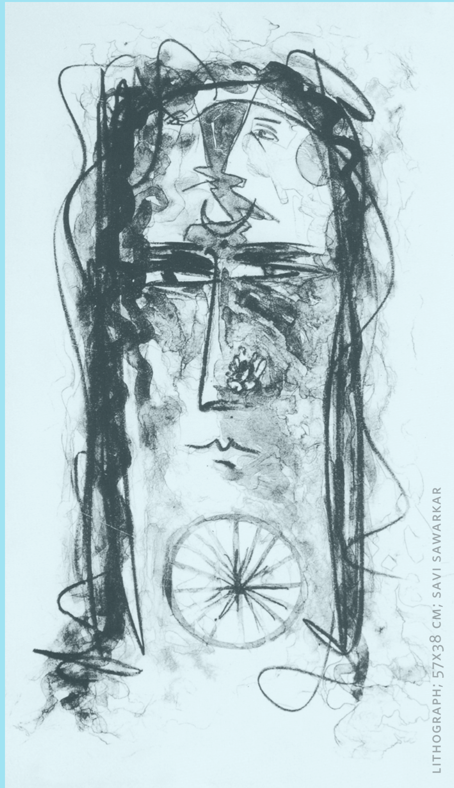

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Laurence Simon, Joint Editor-in-Chief
.... 01-02

ARTICLES

Caste Identities and Structures of Threats: Stigma, Prejudice, and Social Representation in Indian Universities *Gaurav J. Pathania, Sushrut Jadhav, Amit Thorat, David Mosse, Sumeet Jain*
.... 03-23

Caste and Religion Matters in Access to Housing, Drinking Water, and Toilets: Empirical Evidence from National Sample Surveys, India *Vinod Kumar Mishra*
.... 24-45

A Critical Lens to Understand Gender and Caste Politics of Rural Maharashtra, India *Tanuja Harad*
.... 46-53

The Exclusion of Bahujan Schoolchildren: An Anti-Caste Critique of the National Education Policy 2020, India *Yuvraj Singh*
.... 54-74

Importance of Caste-Based Headcounts: An Analysis of Caste-Specific Demographics Transition in India *D.P. Singh, Srei Chanda, L.K. Dwivedi, Priyanka Dixit, Somnath Jana*
.... 75-91

Politics of Recognition and Caste among Muslims: A Study of Shekhra Biradari of Bihar, India *Tausif Ahmad*
.... 92-108

The Human Dignity Argument against Manual Scavenging in India *Asang Wankhede, Alena Kahle*
.... 109-129

Sanitising India or Cementing Injustice? Scrutinising the Swachh Bharat Mission in India *Sudhanshu Shekhar*
.... 130-143

Hariprasad Tamta: Father of Shilpkar Revolution in India *Sandeep Kumar*
.... 144-153

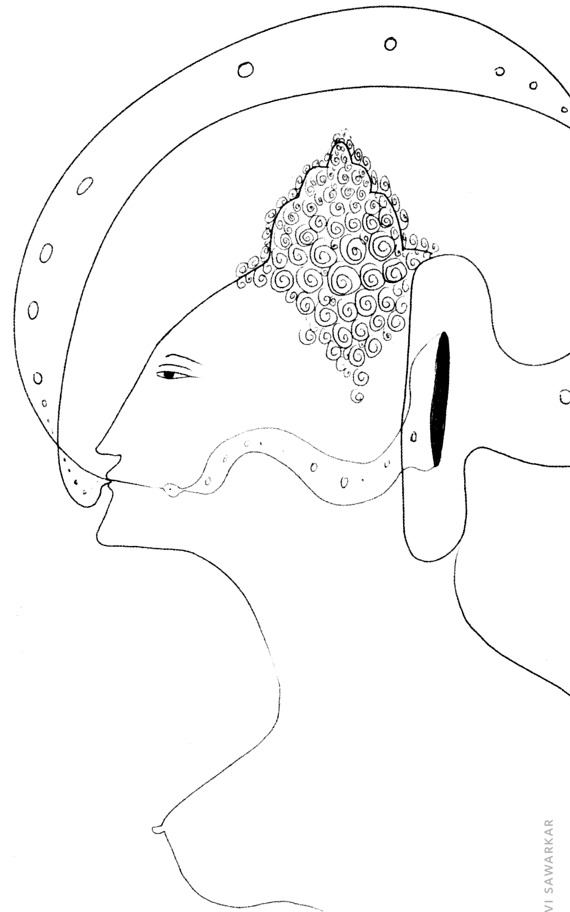
FORUM

Un'casting' Universities: Examining the Intersections of Inclusive Curriculum and Dalit Pedagogies in a Private University in Bangalore, India *Rolla Das*
.... 154-166

BOOK REVIEWS

'Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader' by Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore *Preeti*
.... 167-171

'Breaking Barriers: The Story of a Dalit Chief Secretary' by K. Madhava Rao *Sanghmitra S. Acharya*
.... 172-176



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Latitudes of Marginality in India

Laurence Simon[1]

This issue, *Latitudes of Marginality in India*, presents new research that challenge mainstream doctrines and beliefs that buttress and stiffen attitudes limiting social and economic equity. The term 'latitudinarian' was used in theology to describe churchmen who relied upon reason to verify moral certainty rather than the orthodoxy of tradition. Used more broadly, latitudes allow for ideas from outside, new approaches to research, inclusivity, and forgotten voices.

With this issue, *J-Caste* embarks on our fourth year of heterodox research with readers across countries in Asia, Europe, North America and elsewhere. We maintain the rigor of our peer-review process as well as our original open-access policy which eliminates all financial barriers to publish, subscribe, read, download, or forward articles. We take pride in publishing promising young academics alongside celebrated and established scholars.

The lead article in this issue, ***Caste Identities and Structures of Threats: Stigma, Prejudice, and Social Representation in Indian Universities***, breaks new ground into why universities in India are turning into places of social defeat for Dalit and Other Backward Classes (OBC) students. Based largely on qualitative data gathered by the authors, the article argues that the basis of caste discrimination and humiliation in universities is not the same as it exists in other social institutions. The authors offer insights as to how students evolve strategies for coping and ideas for how higher education can heal "the wounded (caste) psyche." Two other articles in the issue address learning in Indian education. ***The Exclusion of Bahujan Schoolchildren: An Anti-Caste Critique of the National Education Policy 2020, India*** explores the nature of educational inequality with direct reference to the social reproduction of caste. ***Un'casting' Universities: Examining the Intersections of Inclusive Curriculum and Dalit Pedagogies in a Private University in Bangalore, India***, in our Forum section, addresses the disconnect between curriculum and pedagogy which results in the "erasure of the discourse on caste," and a deep and tragic alienation among some.

[1]Joint Editor-in-Chief

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Other articles seek to further understanding through utilizing better data availability and analysis. ***Caste and Religion Matters in Access to Housing, Drinking Water, and Toilets: Empirical Evidence from National Sample Surveys, India*** provides evidence of social identity-based discrimination and discusses the socio-economic determinants of accessing quality dwellings and basic water and sanitation. ***Importance of Caste-Based Headcounts: An Analysis of Caste-Specific Demographics Transition in India*** analyses four rounds of the National Family Health Surveys in the last 25 years and surfaces important trends and deficits when seen through distinct inter and intra-caste (including sub-caste) analysis.

Several articles view caste realities through varied lenses including the camera. ***A Critical Lens to Understand Gender and Caste Politics of Rural Maharashtra, India*** considers the real world impact of '*Sairat*', a Marathi romantic drama film, portraying dominant masculinity and brutal killing due to transgression of caste (in the form of intercaste marriage). ***The Human Dignity Argument against Manual Scavenging in India*** confronts the notion of "safe" sanitation work and argues for the complete abolition of all forms of scavenging. ***Sanitising India or Cementing Injustice? Scrutinising the Swachh Bharat Mission in India*** cites the history of linking sanitation and waste disposal to the most backward castes and argues that policy for a sanitized India must remove the "shackles of caste that have chained few marginal communities to such occupations."

Hariprasad Tamta: Father of Shilpkar Revolution in India seeks to revive and analyse the leadership of Hariprasad Tamta, the "father" of the Shilpkar (Dalit) Revolution, during the British and post-Independence era. ***Politics of Recognition and Caste among Muslims: A Study of Shekhra Biradari of Bihar, India*** advances *J-Caste's* mission to expand caste analysis into other prominent religions of South Asia and beyond. The article's author presents research into the Arzal (Shekhra) caste (bone picking occupation) and argues that their "struggle for social recognition harmed their demand for redistributive justice."

Article

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Caste Identities and Structures of Threats: Stigma, Prejudice, and Social Representation in Indian Universities

Gaurav J. Pathania[1], Sushrut Jadhav[2], Amit Thorat[3], David Mosse[4], Sumeet Jain[5]

Abstract

Caste is a complex ontological construction. Despite several anti-caste movements and constitutional provisions, caste exists in the Indian psyche as part of everyday life. Even in the advent of globalization, caste continues to foster social and economic inequalities and exclusion in newer forms and perpetuates violence. The available research on caste-based stigma and humiliation provides a limited understanding as it deals with Dalits only; and ignores caste-Hindus (upper-caste) agency. Based largely on qualitative data collected at an intense three-day workshop, including two Focus Group Discussions and a year-long ethnography, this article illustrates the micro processes of everyday life experiences of caste-based stigma and humiliation among university students, academic staff and administrative staff. It explores subtle and overt caste discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes existing in the spatial morphologies of Indian higher education, its perpetuation on campuses and its impact on students' psyche. It highlights the dearth of scholarship in this area of caste identity and stigma; and proposes nuanced questions for future research to understand why universities in India are turning into places of social defeat for Dalit and OBC students. The article argues the basis of caste discrimination and humiliation in universities is not the same as it exists in other social institutions. Instead of asserting conclusions on this matter we set out justifiable lines of inquiry. There are two issues that this

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article examines: first, how students in Indian higher education evolve strategies for coping with threatened identities. Second, what structural repair in higher education is required to heal the wounded (caste) psyche?

Keywords

Dalit, caste, stigma, mental health, wellbeing, passing, higher education

Understanding Changing Higher Education Landscape

> *Between January 1, 1995 and December 31, 2019, India lost more than 1,70,000 students to suicide, according to the National Crime Record Bureau.*[1]

Higher education in India is known as a key driver of economic growth as well as a pathway for achieving social equality. Scholars believe these existing inequalities in education not only emanate from social and economic, but also, they are further accentuated by the higher education system itself. Universities claim to be spaces of 'casteless modernity', but recent studies argued that this space of 'casteless modernity' is implicitly upper-caste (Deshpande, 2013; Pathania & Tierney 2018; Singh, 2013; Subramanian, 2015, 2019; Vithayathil; Thomas 2020). There are two observations this article discusses and conceptualizes: (a) higher education (despite its expansion and diversification) is dominated by upper-castes, (b) for privileged groups (students and staff) 'caste-less merit' has become an (implicit) idiom of caste privilege, based on their special capacity to deny/invisiblize caste as a source of advantage.

Despite the least implementation of reservation policy in education,[2] one cannot ignore the complexities among non-Dalit (unreserved) castes. Due to reservation, Dalits suffer double discrimination, or as Deshpande (2015) calls it, face a "double-stigma"[3] effect. The non-Dalit caste becomes culturally, socially, and politically dominant in order to maintain their upward social and cultural mobility in Indian society (Paul, 2007). In admissions into courses such as engineering or medicine in view of the reservation scheme, a Dalit applicant's grade is viewed as a mediocre entry grade, and considered not acceptable, as it could undermine the aspirations of high-achieving non-Dalit students, and lower the standards of the profession (Panini, 1996; Naito, 1997).

Understanding Caste in the Indian higher education landscape

The traditional landscape of higher education in India has changed significantly at the start of the twenty-first century, due to the rampant growth of private institutions.

[1]One Every Hour: 10,335, last year saw most student suicides in 25 years, *Times of India,* September 7, 2020

[2]Not even 3 per cent of IIT faculty are Dalits, Tribals, *Justice News,* January 1, 2019. https://www.justicenews.co.in/not-even-3-per-cent-of-iit-faculty-are-dalits-tribals/

[3]Dalits are stigmatized both for their caste identity and as recipients of the state provision in the form of quota/ reservation policy.

Despite expansion, it has not changed the fact that the spaces of higher education are dominated by upper-castes and "lacks diversity" (Kumar, 2016; Rathod, 2023; Sabharwal & Malish, 2017). However, the most recent study of an elite campus by Pathania & Tierney (2018, p. 10) observes that the 'hallways of elite institutions do not transcend existing prejudices and stereotypes.' Despite all the development, such issues remained unresolved. Studies also highlight discrimination and everyday 'problems' of academic and non-academic life of Dalit students (Malish & Ilavarasan, 2016; Narwana & Gill, 2020; Ovichegan, 2013; Pathania & Tierney, 2018; Sukumar, 2022; Verma & Kapur, 2010). For such privileged groups (students and staff) 'caste-less merit' has become an (implicit) idiom of caste privilege, based on their special capacity to deny/invisibilize caste as a source of advantage. The issue of drop-outs in higher education needs to be addressed. Between 2016 and 2019, around 2,400 students have dropped out of IITs, half of which are SCs and STs. On these issues, the New Education Policy 2020 is completely silent (Pathania, 2020).

Identity Threats in Higher Education

Caste is a unique form of discrimination because of its concealable nature. The look or appearance are illusory in the case of caste. In everyday interaction, there is a presence of "intrusive archeology of caste" (Jogdand, 2013). A lower-caste individual constantly faces the threat to his identity. For example being asked about a surname to find out about one's caste. This often occurs in the case of lower castes as their surnames reveal or hide their caste. Bayetti et al. (2017, p. 35) in their studies on the construction of professional identities of psychiatrists, highlights that there are the "other" identities operationalized during the professional training, and what may be the "emotional cost of doing so"? The authors suggest further qualitative ethnographic research to unpack these challenging and vital questions. A threat to identity occurs when the processes of identity, assimilation-accommodation and evaluation are, for some reason, unable to comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem, which habitually guide their operation (Breakwell, 1986, p. 47). The discussion on caste identities in higher education is centered on "quota" versus "non-quota" Or "reserved" versus "general".

(a) Language as "Structure of Threat"
(b) Classroom as a "Structure of Threat"
(c) (sur)Naming as "Structure of Threat" in casteist societies

The existing dominant social representation poses a threat by stigmatizing the 'reserved' category. It dos this on a number of fronts: historical roots (Kelvin, 1984), economic and social. But more importantly it is the grip of social representation upon the minds of the lower caste students who face continuing negative stereotypes. The social representation which slowly but surely erodes self-esteem, and threatens identity, could account for much of the depression, insecurity and anxiety among quota students (Sukumar, 2013).

The evolution of identity entails continual and a dialectical relationship between personal and social identity (Breakwell, 1983, p. 12). The structure of identity should not be confused with its content (Breakwell, 1986, p. 18). According to Breakwell, the actual contents of an identity are not static and it shifts according to the social context within which the identity is situated. As Tajfel (1981) pointed out, individual values cannot be independent of social stereotypes. This is partially how threat arises, when the individual learns that a new social position carries a negative social value. The distinctive contribution of this article is to look at the context of universities, and to make the point that discrimination in universities is not the same as it exists in other social institutions. This becomes important, as universities are seen by the marginalized as spaces and means of escaping their lived places and contexts. It argues for the distinctive conditions on campuses and the implication of discrimination here. How do Dalit and OBC students face the obstruction and discrimination in their pathways to higher education and what strategy do they opt to cope up? Discrimination is considered as one of the most damaging factors when it comes to stress or distress that leads to social isolation and social exclusion.

Theoretically speaking, social representation is essentially a construction of reality. It reflects dominant systems of belief and values in presenting and accepting interpretation of objects, persons or events (Breakwell, 1986, p. 55). Identity process theory suggests that if the identity principles are obstructed, the process will be unable to function satisfactorily, which will result in threats to identity (also see Jaspal, 2011, p. 33). This article elaborates Breakwell's idea of social representation and tries to understand the caste-based discrimination by understanding the impact of stigma attached with caste-based reservations as well as caste-based stigma and how it leads to an emotional rupture.

The social representation has two roles: when it comes to reservation: First, to attach a definite form to reserved /category students by locating within a social category with distinctive characteristics; second, it acts as a template prescribing how reserved/Dalit student actions should be explained and interpreted. The social representation of the reserved therefore, effectively erect a stereotype of them which depicts their psychological and social qualities. It also explains how quota people should be evaluated.

The way the reservations system works, and is perceived, assigns SC/STs (i.e. all Dalits/Tribal regardless of ability) to the category of the 'non-meritorious', those who are 'the caste-infected'; the implicit assumption being that 'merit' is an upper-caste characteristic,[4] or merit belongs to the upper-castes (purveyed in a claim that merit is casteless, which of course it is not)—perhaps is found more in science than arts/humanities disciplines? This means (in this view) either that Dalits do not belong in the university (as a category they are ascribed the status of a subordinate laboring class); or if they do reach the university, they should occupy the non-meritorious 'reserved'

[4]Caste-lessness has come to mean "merit" and "anti-reservation", largely by a section of dominant castes and elites in contemporary India who specifically call for caste-blind enumerations (Deshpande, 2013, p. 38).

category. SC/STs who enter the university under the open or non-reserved categories or sets are doubly 'out of place' and singled for sanction. Moreover, there are issues and challenges of being 'first generation learners' and hailing from rural households, receiving their school education in their regional language (Kamat et. al., 2018, p. 15) while having to interact with city-based English-medium educated students in higher education. Thus, student interactions and relations across identity groups of caste, rural-urban, nationality, religion, language, and gender are an important metric of campus climate (ibid).

Social policy on caste focuses on the disadvantages of particular groups, treating caste as a static or residual problem addressed through remedial provisions, safeguards and complaint-handling, rather as a dynamic relational problem that might be subject to the state's general duty to address inequality and discrimination in economy and society (Thorat & Attewell, 2007; Thorat & Newman, 2010). In her report on campus climate in India, Kamat et. al. (2018, p. 13) highlighted three major categories: 1) first generation, 2) rural and 3) language. First generation learners are relatively poorer than the second generation learners and generally they are below or near the poverty line. The process of navigating through spaces of higher education generates various struggles and strategies to deal with existing caste stigma, stereotypes and distress. Stigma promotes and reinforces social isolation (Farina et al., 1992; Link et al., 1997; Mehta et. al., 2015), and universities have become the sites of embodiment and reification of stigma (especially caste-related).

Constitutionally, SC, ST and OBC students have seats reserved (15 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively) both in institutions of higher education as well as in public sector employment. Colloquially they are called (reserved) category students or quota students. 'Category Students', recount their experiences of prejudice from other students, teachers as well as administrative staff. Kumar (2016) highlights how, at the prestigious Delhi University, Dalit girls are humiliated by the question, "*Quote se aayi ho ya kothe se aayi ho*" (Have you come through reservation or have you come from a brothel? Here the word quota rhymes with the Hindi word for brothel *'Kotha'*). Similarly, Guru points out how words such as *sarkari damad* (son-in-law of the government) and other phrases are used to humiliate reserved category people. Just as the group is stigmatized as a permanent carrier of dirt, waste and disease, the whole segregated space they inhabit or are relegated to sometimes symbolizes the same and becomes a threat to the "clean" and "normals" (as Goffman refers to the non-stigmatised). Therefore, even spaces can evoke a sense of nausea or anxiety (Sibley, 1995). Such spaces, therefore, can become "stigma symbols" in a Goffmanian sense that is a sign which is "effective in drawing attention to a debasing identity discrepancy" (Goffman, 1986, p. 45).

An anti-caste scholar N. Sukumar (2008, p. 17) writes about his students' experience of hostel life at Hyderabad Central University: 'Comments like Bakasura and Kumbhakarna (negative characters from Hindu mythology) are commonly made by the non-Dalit students and mess workers. Abusive comments like "pigs",

"government's sons-in-law", "bastards", "beggars"', etc., and comments which question paternity are quite common…'. Similarly, humiliation is faced by reserved category teachers who report experiences in classrooms, staff rooms, in dealing with staff in residential quarters and hostel canteen halls. They expressed that they experienced many forms of subtle and overt behaviors, remarks, etc., from non-category students, faculty and administrative staff. N. Sukumar (2008) states: "Every Dalit or reserved category student in a 'meritorious' higher educational institution dies a little every day". Although other students from poor or rural families also face problems, the daily experience of social exclusion adds a huge and uniquely negative dimension to the lives of quota students.

The fact that a large number of Dalit and Adivasi students have committed suicide[5] (Karthikeyan, 2011; Patel et al., 2012) clearly indicates the widespread prevalence of caste discrimination in the Indian education system, which perceives them as 'non-meritorious' and not fit to belong there. In 2008, Senthil Kumar, a Dalit student at the University of Hyderabad, committed suicide. Professor N. Sukumar who prepared a report on this suicide highlighted 'murky realities of caste discrimination in our universities' (Senthil kumar Solidarity Committee 2008, p. 10). The National Commission for for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) in their draft prepared to contribute to the Rohit Act recommends the government 'to provide arrangements for appropriate psychological, emotional and physical support in the form of counseling, security and other assistance to the victim if s/he so desires or needs' (NCDHR draft 2016, p. 17). In 2006, a Dalit student committed suicide due to caste humiliation by hostel-mates in India's top medical school. In response, the government of India formed the Professor Thorat Committee to investigate the matter.[6] The humiliation of reserved category students continues even in the coaching industry for higher education (Henry & Ferry, 2017, p. 3; Subramanian, 2015)—as revealed by the multiple mechanisms the institution employs to eliminate and sanction students from the marginalized groups, particularly SC and ST students, thus contributing to the differential value of the academic titles it delivers.

Non-Dalit individuals, privileged in their caste identity, are likely to remain disinterested towards the Dalit community (Ovichegan, 2014, p. 375). Along with highly visible caste and associated symbolic violence against SC students, teachers' perception that SC and ST students are 'unteachable' (Anveshi Report 2002) had a negative impact on their educational experience (Malish & Ilavarasan, 2016). Thus, from policy to institutional landscape, the university serves as a crucial site of display of public perceptions, stigma, stereotypes and prejudices.

[5] https://www.thelancet.com/action/showFullTextImages?pii=S0140-6736%2812%2960606-0

[6] "Committee to Inquire into the Matter of Allegation of Differential Treatments of SC/ST Students in All India Institute of Medical Sciences", New Delhi. One of the striking findings of the committee was that about 76 per cent of the respondents reported that the examiner during the viva had asked the caste background; about 84 per cent mentioned that their grades were affected because of their caste background.

Method

The study was funded through an international partnership and network mobility grant from the British Academy to bring together scholars from the UK and India working in the area of caste. This research is based on qualitative ethnographic research methods that included field observations, focused group discussions, and field logs. The study was carried out between September 2016 and August 2017. Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organized in Delhi at a university among students and teachers from four major universities in Delhi in September 2016. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling method to include representation across gender, age groups and social categories. A mixed sample in terms of seniority, age and gender was chosen to maintain heterogeneity and to avoid power differences. An attempt was made to select students and faculty members from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. The aim of the FGDs was to understand the lived experiences of students and teachers who experienced caste-related distress. FGDs were audio recorded and then transcribed. A thematic analysis was conducted by authors, grounded in different disciplines including psychiatry, medical anthropology, social work, sociology and economics. An email list and a website were created to maintain the network among scholars. The material shared through these networks is also used in the article. Pseudonyms are used in this article to ensure the confidentiality of respondents.

Table 1.1: Representation of social categories

Faculty FGD (19)						Student FGD (18)					
M	F	SC	ST	OBC	Gen.	M	F	SC	ST	OBC	Gen.
14	5`	6	4	2	7	10	8	8	3	1	6

Focus group interviews were conducted from a phenomenological approach to understand students and teachers' personal and educational experiences and processes, in order to understand caste-based stigma and prejudice. Phenomenology is grounded in the focus of the participants' experiential world, that is, how they view and make meaning of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2003; Sokolowski, 2000; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). It relies on lived experiences to understand how meaning is created through perception and contributes to a deeper understanding of these lived experiences by exposing traditional assumptions (Sokolowski, 2000). This approach served as a valuable tool to elicit student perceptions of school power and influence in their lives.

Findings and analysis

Names, Categorization and Pre-higher Education Experiences of Discrimination and Distress

School is a crucial site where childhood takes shape. Many popular Dalit autobiographies such as Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2008) and Sheoraj Singh Bechain's *My Childhood on my Shoulders* (2018) present the lived experience of humiliation

and discrimination faced by Dalit children in the schools. In our FGDs, while sharing about their caste-related humiliation, every respondent started with their childhood experiences of discrimination. Their narratives reveal a world in which Dalit life remains an endless struggle. Even after achieving academic credentials, Dalits feel compelled to keep proving to themselves and to the upper castes that they are indeed capable and talented.

In a rigid and strict structure of Indian society, there are various mechanisms of identification. In Indian society, its identification is generally through surnames as it denotes one's caste. A participant (A) who was named after Dalit icon Dr. B.R. Ambedkar discusses the stigma associated with his name. He went to pre-school in a city, and his family changed his name just to avoid any trouble with the name Ambedkar. He shares his story:

> My name was Alok for two years when I was in kindergarten, but when I had to write an entrance examination, my official name "Ambedkar" had to be brought back on a certificate. This was an embarrassment for my uncle with whom I was staying in the city. But in the village you are made aware of your identity very soon because your locality is different from others[7] but when you are moved to a different location, you are called by your caste name or whatever. My introduction to caste or being from a lower caste was from my childhood itself.[8]

Another participant, Gautam, whose primary schooling was in a village, shares a contrasting experience:

> I think in villages an individual does not feel discriminated against because since childhood he lives in his area/mohalla,[9] which is separated from others. Everyone knows each other, and every caste resides differently in their specific location. Everything is segregated, and you grow up with this and therefore you don't feel it. But in cities, everyone mixes with others and there is a curiosity to know about others.

Gautam mentions that caste-related distress does not emerge in a day or two, or in a year but it takes its shape through various incidents in childhood. As our surname roughly indicates our caste, it has a deep impact on a student's psyche. Gautam shares his schooling experience:

> Any new teacher coming to class was more interested in wanting to know who [caste-wise] this person was and what his caste was. I tell my name to them and they would say, "*Aage kya*?" (What comes after your first name?). Over

[7]Dalits or the ex-untouchables have always lived in segregated hamlets, little away from the main village area.

[8]From a Focus Group Discussion with university students on September 15, 2016 at JNU, New Delhi.

[9]Hamlet.

> a period of time, I developed this habit of staying silent. Somehow from 6th to 10th [grade], I did not speak anything in class. I did not make any friends. I was alien to my own class. They [teachers] slapped my face but I promised myself that I wouldn't say anything. Whenever new teachers came, my heart started beating so fast, thinking that he would ask me about my name. And when they did, they would ask in a very derogatory manner: *Aaage peeche kuch hai ki nahi?* (Is there anything after your first name?). To know my caste, they will always be starting from the top [of the varna system]: *Brahim ho? Rajput ho?.. Arre, kaun ho bhai? [Are you Brahmin, Rajput? …* Who the hell are you?]. I never answered this question. In those six years I remained silent.[10]

> There are official mechanisms which re-establish these themes as social stereotypes that are reproduced in the education system. A university professor who himself faced discrimination since his childhood as a child laborer, studied through distance education and managed to become a schoolteacher and later a college teacher. He is also a theater artist and managed to 'act out of his caste[11] due to his personality and indistinct surname which is used by both upper and lower castes. With a smile on his face, he explains with lots of conjectures, guesses and all that (stammers) ultimately, society wants to understand you under the category of caste. It might take years. For example, in my case it took them 20-30 years, and they have not been able to figure it out (the entire group burst with laughter). It is very enigmatic.[12]

The participant whose teachers harassed him over his name continues his story and the impact on his behavior:

> During my school days, for five years, I could not speak (due to fear) and starter stammering. My father was taking me to different places and it was not going away. But when I left the school, I was the only one from my batch who opted for government school because there I felt safe and developed leadership qualities. When I went to college, can you believe that I became the best speaker from college to state level declamation contests?[13]

The vignettes above illuminate how 'silence' is a coping mechanism along with hiding one's stigmatized identity but it is also the manifestation of subtle forms of discrimination existing in our education system. This silence represents those who are and/or feel 'unwelcome' and 'unwanted' in school or university (also see Nambissan, 2009). Toni Morrison (1995), in her essay, *Site of Memory* describes a character: "The language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances. Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful". According to

[10]from FGD with college and University teachers on September 14, 2016 at JNU, New Delhi.
[11]Comments by moderator of the FGD.
[12]From FGD with college and University teachers on September 14, 2016 at JNU, New Delhi.
[13]Ibid.

Verma (2016), silence is a behavior that is "preceded by several stages of language, cognition, and emotional states involving underlying belief systems hidden to the speaker of silence" (106). He further states that 'pedagogy is often reduced to a method to manage hierarchies' (108). In short, silence is the reflection of existing social hierarchies.

During fieldwork, it was found that a large number of Dalit and OBC students could not complete their studies and de-registered from the university as they were not helped by their supervisors. Such departures from a reputed institution occur with an element of shame. This shame leads to the situation of alienation. In general, teachers' reactions to such situations are: 'I don't understand why they (Dalit students) do not speak up. Even when they come to my office to discuss, they generally remain silent. There might be several reasons behind this, but I don't ask about their personal life'.

This is an issue of 'stereotype threat' as Dalit students are constantly worried about how they are judged—that their achievements are perceived as lesser—which impacts self-confidence and then performance by comparison to those not living under the negative stereotype. Thus, it is important to recognize the emotional aspect of silence (Sue, 2015, p. 126). Therefore, disclosure of their caste identities makes them even more vulnerable to various kinds of prejudice and discrimination. Such behavior, according to Maurya (2018, p. 24) "attributing Dalit students' academic achievements to quota, and using implicit humiliating comments [by the upper castes] based on negative caste stereotypes."[14]

Language, Etiquette, and Silence

Language is an important medium of social interaction. Bernard Cohn's (1985) famous phrase "command of language and the language of command" reveals an important component of cultural capital, namely, the ease and familiarity with the dominant language, both in a narrowly linguistic sense. A large section of students, especially lower caste students who come from rural backgrounds find it difficult to adjust to a comparatively cosmopolitan campus environment as language becomes a basic hindrance to their social interactions. Though some campuses have formed 'Linguistic Empowerment Cells' to provide basic training in English grammar they have not yielded any significant results. FGD data shows that language is used as a negative stereotype associated with lower castes. A professor, belonging to the Scheduled Tribe at India's top university shares her experience when she was teaching at a college in Tamil Nadu:

> "…one very senior professor said to me in Hindi, "Jab tum muh kholti ho to pata nahi chalta ki tum aise background se ho"- [when you open your mouth, I can't make out that you come from such a background]. I asked what do you mean by that, Sir? He said, "Because you speak such good English".

[14]21 year-old Student Kills Self at Osmania University, Protest Erupts, *The Times of India,* December 3, 2017.

Similarly another respondent, a Dalit scholar who is also an activist shares his experience with his upper caste friends after revealing to them his 'chamar' caste identity:

> "I used to get a reply like, "Why are you kidding? You don't look like them." That's when I understood that these [upper caste] people judge us on the basis of our dress, our physique, our way of talking and our education, and so on.[15]

Commenting on the attitude of upper caste classmates, Dev, a Dalit student from the department of Journalism at Jamia Milia Islamia University states that, "It is very common for them to comment on their appearance and clothes: "Yaar bhangi ban ke aa gaya/chamaar ban ke aa gaya?" (Your dress makes you look like chamar or bhangi? referring to the lower castes of cobblers or street sweepers). Professor Sukumar (2008, p. 15) explains how 'dress codes, language skills and general "étiquette" influence the relationship between different groups. Gestures, body language…more than anything it's body language (to exclude)'. Further, an upper caste teacher at a college highlights his interaction with his students:

> I observed it is only the upper caste students who speak and ask questions, (pause) because lower caste people are made voiceless in classrooms. I feel the distress of Dalit and tribal students in my class, which disturbs me. Therefore, by initiating a positive debate on affirmative action, I try to settle down my distress.[16]

choose 'silence' and 'submissiveness', or 'hiding' as options. This is another form of stigma management. "Stigma management is an offshoot of something basic in society, the stereotyping or "profiling" of our normative expectations regarding conduct and character; stereotyping is classically reserved for customers, orientals, and motorist, that is, persons who fall into very broad categories and who may be passing strangers to us" (Goffman, 1986, p. 51). Stigma is imbued with certain notions of power**.** Goffman conceptualizes the spoiled identity by claiming that stigma reflects societal norms and expectations.

Institutional Mechanisms

The classroom is an important space where students experience a teacher's authority as a knowledge giver. Shifrer (2013, p. 476) in his study on high school students suggests that teachers may have more power than parents to use stigmatized labels on students. In India, due to the age-old caste hierarchy, the classroom serves as a hierarchical space of discrimination, as a majority of the teachers in the education system are upper caste. Our FGDs with teachers highlighted a trend in undergraduate colleges (of Delhi University) regarding the appointment of teachers and allotment of classes to teachers

[15]From a Focus Group Discussion with college and University teachers on September 14, 2016 at JNU, New Delhi.

[16]Ibid.

and students. In every college, students in a particular field, say sociology, are divided into various sections of classes and these sections are formed on the basis of a merit list. This does not make for a socially integrated classroom. A senior faculty highlights the general process: "In the first list of merit you don't find SC/ST/OBCs students. In A section we will find the upper caste [students], B section we will find more of the OBC students and in section C, you can find more SC/ST [students]."[17]

In the past few years at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), OBC and SC students performed very well in the written portion of the MPhil admissions exam but did not eventually gain admission. Through a Right to Information Act file, it was learned that in the viva-voce portion of the exam, lower caste students were given 1 or 2 and sometimes 0 points. This reveals institutional biases in the selection process. Instead of making socially inclusive rooms, institutional 'entrapment' forces them to remain in their 'section' and their 'quota'. Moreover the purpose of conducting interviews is also suspect. While all those who clear the entrance examination are at par with each other and have adequately displayed their subject knowledge, the question then arises, what is the purpose of or objective of conducting a viva? Is it then some kind of identification process? Students from marginalized groups are usually first or second-generation learners. Many of them are facing senior faculty members in universities for the first time. An interview setting can be extremely intimidating. The interviewee is sitting alone on one side facing at times 7 to 10 faculty members. In such situations more than memory, subject knowledge, future research plans, etc., a candidate's cultural capital, confidence, language skills get tested. While students from economically and socially well-to-do backgrounds would understandably be expected to do much better than the first or second-generation learners from poor and socially backward groups. They are inexperienced, under greater stress to perform as a lot rides on such interviews for them and they have fewer options as opposed to the well-off students, who have many more opportunities to study and/or work, relying on their social-network to cash on (Deshpande & Newman, 2007). At the same time, the interviewers are able to discern the regional origins, class, social background (broadly) and are free to make judgments based on their own personal stereotypes or even biases or prejudices. The 'subjective' evaluation is indeed, subject to all the above-mentioned qualifications of both aspiring students and the interviewing faculty members.

Conversation about Caste, Untouchability Stigma

A recent telephonic survey called the Social Attitudes Research for India (SARI)[18] conducted by researchers at r.i.c.e[19] and J.N.U, asked respondents about their beliefs

[17]From a Focus Group Discussion with college and university teachers on September 14, 2016 at JNU, New Delhi.

[18]SARI (Social Attitudes Research for India) uses a sampling frame based on mobile phone subscriptions, random digit dialing, within household sample selection, and statistical weights to build representative samples of adults between 18-65 years old. A small research team carries out the interviews.

[19]Research Institute for Compassionate Economics (https://riceinstitute.org)

on untouchability, reservations and inter group marriage amongst others. The first round of the survey, asked male and female respondents, *"Kya aapke parivar me kuch sadasya chuachhoot ko mante hain?* (Do some members of your family practice untouchability?") in Delhi and rural and urban Uttar Pradesh. In rural U.P around 62 per cent and in urban U.P 52 per cent of the women reported that at least one person in their family practiced untouchability (from Coffey et al., 2018). This percentage was around 40 per cent for women and 28 per cent for male respondents in Delhi. Similarly, another study found that across India in 2011, among 30 per cent of households, at least one member practices untouchability (Thorat & Joshi, 2015). What this shows is that ideas of and practices around caste, untouchability, purity and pollution are still pervasive. It's part of childhood socialization, leaving lasting influences on young children, which even the schooling system fails to address and finally are carried onto the higher education level, where these issues and ideas are not addressed in any institutional manner.

Besides the classroom, the science lab is another crucial site of discrimination and hierarchy. Neha shares her conversation with a hostel mate who is doing research in natural sciences at one of India's top universities. She says that by the third year of her Doctorate degree, only two or three Dalit scholars continued their studies. She states, "In the laboratory, during lab work, many upper caste scholars dilute the chemicals of Dalit students and spoil their results often."[20] Such a caste-based evaluation of one's scientific experiments begins from the first day of their academic careers, when their guide asks about their caste. There are several cases where due to such bullying, lower caste scholars often leave the elite institutions and move to lesser-known institutes where they can concentrate on their results.

Lack of institutional mechanisms of the notion of privacy in India gives authority to academic staff/faculty to publicly shame students by identifying them by their caste. For example, the list of names of admitted students and obtained marks is generally on public display. Similarly, in most of the universities during registration of new students, separate counters are set up for SC/ST/OBC and unreserved 'general' category students. This is a classic example of institutional caste-based discrimination that blatantly violates SC/ST student's basic dignity and right to privacy. An anti-caste author, Yashica Dutt writes: "All these universities seem to be following the same playbook on how to exclude Dalits" (Dutt, 2019, p. 76).

Individual Agency and Suicide

During the fieldwork of this study, a research scholar and an activist, Muthukrishnan Rajini Krish of JNU[21] ended his life by hanging himself. His suicide led to debates across campuses. Student bodies blamed the university for his death calling it

[20]Shared by a FGD participant on an online network on May 17, 2016 at 12:17 pm.

[21]On April 13, 2017, a Dalit M.Phil student of India's most politically vibrant campus Jawaharlal Nehru University hanged himself

an 'institutional murder'.[22] Amidst such arguments, missing was the debate on his complex struggle, of how Krish dealt with his Dalit identity. His Facebook posts reveal that it was his dream to study in JNU and he appeared four times for the entrance and in these four years he revised his research proposal 25 times. His profile picture was one of him standing next to the statue of Nehru[23] on campus. His name was Muthukrishna but he was known as 'Rajini' Krish because he was a big fan of Rajini Kant, a popular film star from Tamil Nadu. Many of his Facebook posts reveal him mimicking Rajini Kant's dialogue and style. He was popular among friends for cracking jokes and always smiling. 'It is hard to believe that the most lively and jolly person amongst us committed suicide' his friend exclaimed.[24] His Facebook posts also reveal a kind of isolation that despite having lots of friends, he chose Facebook to express himself, and he lived in complete isolation. In 2016, University of Hyderabad student, Rohith Vemula (whose suicide led to nation-wide protests), wrote in a letter[25] to the university administration that university authorities should "make preparations for the facility of euthanasia for students like me" (Dhillon, 2017).

Suicide is the consequence of multiple factors such as psychiatric disorders and interpersonal distress (Boahen-Boaten et. al., 2017, p. 376; Mythri & Abenezer, 2016; WHO 2016). Durkheim (1951) argues that suicide is not simply a personal choice an individual makes in response to stress but also a phenomenon which reflects social constraints or turbulences in institutions or structures (e.g. employing organizations, educational institutions, and social providers) meant to buffer the individual against stress. On the contrary, our ethnographic observations reveal that many student-activists including Dalit activists as well as teacher-activists find suicide to be a cowardly act. They proudly refer to Dr. Ambedkar, Birsa, Phule, Periyar and Marx who 'fought the fight' for the downtrodden. A Dalit professor angrily comments:

I don't even want to talk about suicide. Such [people who commit suicide] are very selfish individuals. Their crisis or problems or discrimination are not anywhere close to what Ambedkar faced. Yet Ambedkar never gave up. He fought and struggled for the entire society.

Most activists across parties perceive life in binaries: cowardly and brave; bourgeois and proletariat; exploiter and exploited; upper and lower caste. In these binaries, from the socio-cultural to the ideological level, there is little or no importance given to individual agency. University campuses and student activism is the reflection of these ideological binaries (Pathania, 2018). Existing ideologies also represent similar tendencies. In his social integration theory, Durkheim (1951) suggests that suicide risk is heightened when there is a breakdown of social ties between the individual and the

[22]BAPSA (Birsa Ambedkar Phule Student Association) poster: "Against Institutional Murder of Muthukrishnan" March 15, 2017.

[23]Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India.

[24]From an interview of his friend Satish on May 1, 2017.

[25]Letter dated December 18, 2015 that was made public. [accessed on March 8, 2016. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/give-euthanasia-facilities-rohith-wrote-to-v-c/]

social group. In this context, universities, in terms of their education and activism, fail to integrate those who struggle with their stigmatized caste identity.

Mosse (2018, p. 433) calls the idea of caste "as an imprisonment of the mind", which is experienced by Dalits as devastating, hurtful, even traumatic humiliation. Such "dignity humiliation"—the rejected claim to equality (Lindner, 2010), is a source of distress, turning the universities to which they gain access, into places of defeat for ambitious Dalit students or faculty (Deshpande & Zacharias, 2013; Guru, 2009; Jadhav et al., 2016). The bearing that this has on the tragic deaths by suicide of talented students in elite institutions needs careful inquiry, but it has without question disrupted the public narrative of casteless modernity. SC/ST students and faculty enter a system that, in this way, overtly offers the promise of equality and recognition, while at the same time covertly removing that possibility through structurally-driven practices of discrimination and exclusion. To be humiliated in a dignified space (of higher education) means to "suffer an actual threat to or fall in one's self respect" (Statman, 2010). Gopal Guru says that '[i]t could be argued that humiliation is a modern phenomenon which occurs within the conditions that make it possible for the servile to acquire both assertion and autonomy so necessary for self-respect." (Guru, 2009, p. 10). The expectation of equal treatment in universities creates particular conditions for a form of humiliation that is psychologically dangerous in a certain way that leads to alienation, exclusion and distress among students. More exclusion causes more negative emotions. When the salience of self is high and the network of others, within a network that is extensive, emotional reactions will be strong. Verification of identity will thus generate more intense positive emotions, where failure to have an identity will produce strong negative identity. Negative emotions in self, such as embarrassment, shame, and guilt, lower self-esteem (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 119) and "labeling the other impure and subhuman is psychological ethnocide".[26] In other words, universities are becoming "socially toxic" spaces for lower caste students.

The reports of WHO have highlighted that India has one of the highest suicide rates in the world ranking, "particularly the developed and more educated South India. They have also pointed out that age specific suicide rates is from 15–24 years. Mosse (2012) in his studies on South Indian society concludes that caste has turned inward and now resides as a feeling inside the mind and heart. It functions in both the minds of the victim and of the tormentor, the lower and the upper caste. It takes the form of horrific violence such as rape, lynching, murder or arson perpetrated by the more powerful against the powerless, especially Dalits (Jadhav et al., 2016). It also serves as a mediator between poverty, caste and social suffering (Mosse & Jadhav, 2014). All of this has a deeper impact on the human mind. In brief, 'heart-mind' is about matters of worry, concern and suffering which are common and socially acceptable, but 'to discuss "brain-mind" problems invokes heavy social stigma' (Kleinman, 2012, p. 94).

[26] https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/india-news-calling-the-other-impure-subhuman-is-psychological-ethnocide/304575 (accessed: April 2, 2022)

When a mental health condition is seen as a matter of the loss of control of the heart-mind by the 'brain-mind', this means loss of status and respect (*izzat*) which are part of an individual's cultural identity'. As a matter of fact, psychological research on caste has not paid enough attention to the fact that disadvantaged groups like Dalits might not internalize their devaluation willingly but develop strategies to overcome negative evaluation and protect their esteem (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999). This is a systemic oppression that keeps Dalits away from intellectual resources.

Conclusion and Future Research Questions

The article attempts to highlight that humiliation (and fear of humiliation) is an emotional engine that intensifies along with expanding aspirations, assertions of autonomy (social or economic) and has serious mental health effects. Discriminating on the basis of caste amidst the expectation of equal treatment "can be experienced by Dalits as devastating, hurtful, even traumatic; and it is this kind of distress that our data points to, including the part it might play in the tragic deaths by suicide of talented students in elite institutions.

As much as we admit to the persistence of caste discrimination and stigmatization as a problem plaguing higher education campuses, there is also a constant denial or attributing of depression, distress and suicides to incident-specific situations with total disregard for links with the larger social milieu of exclusion. Undoubtedly, there are incident-specific reasons, but it cannot be a coincidence that for every 25 cases of suicide, 23 are Dalits (Nayar, 2017). The trend suggests a structural relationship between caste identity and suicide. It requires an examination of the different forms and experiences of discrimination to understand what triggers suicide. It needs to be emphasized that for policy makers, caste-based discrimination and depression has been unchartered territory of higher education. Also, in the Indian higher education system, "a genuine dialogue between health and social science is still missing" (Jadhav, 2012). Intergroup contact can reduce intergroup bias by fostering more fluid, continuous, and inclusive social identities, but higher education in India does not show positive signs of bridging this gap The way in which the South Asian social system of caste produces social suffering, the consequences of which include poor psychological well-being. The neglect of caste in public health research in general and mental health in particular, strongly impacts wellbeing. There is lack of data on subjective wellbeing (Fontaine & Yamada, 2014, p. 407); the available research centers on caste and the humiliation are more centered on the "plights of Dalits" (Jadhav, 2012).

The above-mentioned data underscores how the overall higher education landscape and environment is severely affected with caste prejudice. It highlights how upper caste agency is also affected by caste stigma. With changing times and social mobility, the binaries of upper and lower castes are not as obvious as they may appear. Especially with the changes brought about by policies of affirmative action, there is dilution in the traditional caste structure. Satish Deshpande observes that '[u]pper caste

identity is such that it can be completely overwritten by modern professional identities of choice, whereas lower caste identity is so indelibly engraved that it overwrites all other identities' (Deshpande, 2013, p. 32). Therefore, future research needs to be looked at in this light: a) How are universities becoming places of social defeat? b) Are our educational institutions able to transform Dalits into academic resources? c) Do Indian universities have any mechanisms to deal with caste-related distress that leads to suicide? d) How different institutional habitus produce different impacts on Dalit students?[27] Therefore, we suggest that more studies should be conducted in state-run institutions to understand students' distress.

These are the special conditions that give rise to discriminatory practice against Dalits (SC/ST) staff and students which will be illustrated by our data. As in Tilly's (1998) theory of ''durable inequality", caste involves processes of both ''categorical exclusion" and ''opportunity hoarding". Moreover, the effects of caste are such as to operate quite differently (sometimes inversely) on upper and lower castes (Mosse, 2018, p. 430). The nature of the experience of this discrimination, humiliation and their psychological or mental health effects requires another specific theoretical framing: Jadhav, Mosse & Dostaler (2016) draw distinction on Evelin Lindner's (2010) distinction between 'honor humiliation' and 'dignity humiliation' arguing that universities illustrate a shift from the 'honor-humiliation' associated with the subjugation of Dalits within caste orders of graded status and entitlements and which involves ritual humbling and 'knowing your place in a social order'; to 'dignity humiliation' which involves violation of claims to acknowledged rights to equal treatment, membership, opportunity, recognition etc. In a similar vein, Dalits involve "the making salient of caste and all its social judgments" in places where caste is not meant to be salient (Mosse, 2018, p. 433); this is a modern form of power over Dalits.

There is an urgent need to "reinvent" mental theory and it should be informed by local suffering, caste included (Jadhav, 2012). It is a matter of dialogue with one's own personal and collective memory (ibid.). It is also a matter of dialogue between disciplines. Social sciences is considered a very complex image of being very abstract and sacrosanct, needs to be revised and social sciences insights needs to be incorporated in the 'clinic'.[28] Although clinicians have devised "effective methods for healing traumatized people, they have done little to expand our understanding of how individual (caste-based) traumas[29] are socially constructed and also afflict collectives and influence ongoing and protracted conflict dynamics" (Rinker & Lawler, 2018, p. 151). When we think of linking social science with "clinic"; we are thinking of linking social suffering with the collective historical trauma of caste. In this regard, universities can serve as healing sites for both upper and lower castes.

[27]The Proposal for India's First University Only for Dalit Students to Come up in Hyderabad by 2018. [*Hindustan Times,* Hyderabad. July 6, 2017.]

[28]in an interview (see Jha 2020).

[29]Although trauma is primarily understood as an individual human experience, it often generalizes to symptoms in collective social settings (Rinker & Lawler, 2018, p. 151).

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Caste and Religion Matters in Access to Housing, Drinking Water, and Toilets: Empirical Evidence from National Sample Surveys, India

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Abstract

This article aims to provide a systematic analysis of inter-group inequality in access to good quality housing and basic amenities. It also attempts to discuss the socio-economic determinants of accessing housing and basic amenities. The article provides evidence of social identity-based discrimination by implying econometric analysis of decomposition methods. The findings of the article demonstrate that social group identities such as caste and religion play a significant role in determining the sufficiency, continuity and quality of housing and basic amenities. Inter-group inequality in accessing these essential services is significantly high in both rural and urban areas. The results of logistic regression model and decomposition method used in the article shows that social identity-based discrimination reduces the sufficiency and quality of housing and basic services availed by marginalized social groups such as scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and religious minorities. It can be argued from the analysis that right to adequate housing in terms of good quality dwelling and access to drinking water and sanitation is adversely affected by social exclusion and discrimination experienced by marginalized social groups.

Keywords

Inequality, discrimination, exclusion, adequate housing, inclusive policies

Introduction

Provision of basic amenities available to the households define the standard of living of the households and greatly determines the quality of life and wellbeing. Thus, right

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to adequate housing, one of the fundamental human needs does not comprise mere housing but also decent minimum housing which meets households concerns (Young & Lee, 2014; Myers, 2016). Adequate housing has a significant effect on the socio-economic well-being of the household (Aizawa et al., 2020; Kenna, 2008). Access to sufficient drinking water and sanitation is a basic human need. However, as per the UN World Cities Report 2022, more than one and half billion people are living in inadequate housing conditions and lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. In Asia, approximately 57 per cent of urban households lack proper access to toilets (Asian Development Bank, 2016). Goal 6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) recognised basic human rights to water and sanitation and aims to ensure availability and sustainability of water and sanitation. Similarly, Article 11 and 12 of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) provides obligation at the international level with respect to sanitation while recognizing the right to an adequate standard of living. Human rights to water and sanitation emphasizes that irrespective of social-economic background, access to adequate services should be equal (Cullet, 2019). Poor quality housing and basic amenities to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes remain a critical issue of concern. Poor and vulnerable social groups often lack access to good quality housing and basic amenities due to low and irregular income and therefore lack of affordability.

Although, economic factors such as income, poverty and inequality determines access to basic amenities and good housing, social stratification of caste and religion also affect access to public goods like water and sanitation. Thus, caste and religion based social stratification affect access to good quality housing and better civic amenities (Balasubramanum et al., 2013). Due to social exclusion and discrimination, marginalised social groups are wholly or partially denied access to civic amenities which often has adverse consequences on the households well-being, particularly health (Borooah et al., 2015; Thorat & Newman, 2007). Caste-based discrimination causes inaccessibility or limited accessibility to good quality and basic amenities. Social identity-based discrimination and structural inter-group inequality causes higher poverty among marginalised social groups. Empirical studies suggest that the quality and nature of basic amenities available to the people depend upon the social composition of the locality. Substantial inequality in distribution of good housing and basic amenities persists in rural as well urban areas (Bansode & Swaminathan, 2021).

As indicated by various empirical studies conducted on housing market discrimination (Thorat et al., 2015; Vithayathil et al., 2016; Mishra, 2020), marginalised households have limited access to basic amenities and are at the receiving end of unfriendly behaviour from a majority of social groups living in their locality. These vulnerable social groups not only experience discrimination in accessing housing—both rental and owned—but are also forced to vacate their houses and suffer other unpleasant consequences and compromises in the form of higher prices for similar units in comparison to dominant social groups, long commuting distance for work, access to poor basic amenities and other social and psychological consequences. Thus, denial of housing due to social identity-based discrimination imposes a social as well

as an economic cost to the disadvantaged groups (Thorat et al., 2015; Mishra, 2020). Inadequate access to water and sanitation to the socially excluded groups causes adverse consequences on health and social well-being. Vulnerable social groups, particularly migrants living in informal settlements like slums, face difficulties in accessing water and sanitation at an affordable cost. Despite public policies on housing, water and sanitation, inter-group inequality in access to housing and basic amenities continue to persist. The gradual withdrawal of the government as a supplier of housing to the poor and marginalised had diverse implications on socially excluded communities. Poor design, limited coverage and poor implementation of public policies on housing and basic amenities have further increased the inter-group inequalities. Residential segregation also has a significant impact on the disparities in the quality of housing and basic amenities (Krivo & Kaufman, 2004).

Access to adequate housing is an important determinant of household well-being and it encompasses the quality of the dwelling unit, basic amenities such as water, sanitation and bathing facilities. Lack of access to adequate safe drinking water and sanitation facilities not only has an adverse impact on the health of the households but also compromises dignity and quality of life (Murthy, 2012). Accessing safe sanitation not only prevents disease but is also essential for privacy and self-dignity. Lack of adequate sanitation and bathroom amenities increases vulnerability for women and gender-based violence (Mishra, 2021). Lack of access to safe and private sanitation makes women unsafe and they are often victims of violent sexual assaults while accessing public sanitation facilities (Sharma et al., 2015; Rauch, & Helgegren, 2014; Ellis & Feris, 2014; Collender, 2011). Households without access to water and sanitation for the exclusive use of the household, leads to dependancy on public sources of water and on-site sanitation. Social equity in accessing water and sanitation is essential to reduce inter-group inequality in access to these civic amenities (Alankar, 2013). However, discrimination is often practiced by the state agencies, which are the main supplier of water and sanitation in urban areas. There are biases in favour of a higher income locality. Not only is the duration and quantity of water supply less but the quality is also very poor in low income locality in comparison to high income locality. In most urban centres, intra and inter-locality difference in supply of drinking water is high. Thus, inequities in distribution of water to the marginalised social groups and economically poor locality are not accidental but institutionalized (Alankar, 2013).

The article analyses the inter-group disparity in access to good quality housing and basic amenities. The determinants and discrimination in access to basic amenities for marginalised social groups have been analysed through regression and decomposition analysis. The article is structured into four major sections. Section 1 details the inter-social group inequality in access to good quality housing and basic amenities. The results of logistic regression models have been discussed in section 2 which explains the determinants affecting access to housing basic amenities. Analysis of social discrimination in accessing good quality housing, water and sanitation has been done through decomposition method in section 3. The last section of the article summarises major findings of the data analysis and offers recommendations to the policy makers.

The analysis of the article is based on unit level data from National Sample Survey, 76th round on Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Conditions. The statistical methodology of the article is explained in the next section.

Methodology

Logistic Regression Model

In this article, the determinant of access to basic amenities has been analysed using logistic regression model. Let $Y = 1$ if household have access to basic amenities and $Y = 0$ if the household does not have access to basic amenities. X_i represents explanatory variables, such as rural-urban, gender, household size, household head's education, monthly per capita consumption expenditure for the ith individual and income.

$$Yi = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X_i + U_i \quad (1)$$

In this model, it can be assumed that every household has two alternatives – access to basic amenities or not. Let us assume that U_{i1} and U_{i0} are the utilities a household 'i' attaches with access to amenities or not.

If the household has access to basic amenities, then $U_{i1} > U_{i0}$

Otherwise, $Ui1 < Ui0$

Similarly, if a rational household maximizes its utility, in that case:

Probability $[Y_i = 1]$ = Probability $[U_{i1} > U_{i0}]$

Probability $[Y_i = 0]$ = Probability $[U_{i1} < U_{i0}]$

In such a situation, the probability for the household can be written as (McFadden, 1974): Probability $[Y_i = 1]$ =

This is a reduced form of the binomial logit model, where xi represents the vector of independent variables for the ith individual and the stochastic term ũ follows a logistic distribution.

Decomposition Method

In this article, the discrimination based on social identity in accessing basic amenities has been measured through decomposition method. In this method, the gap in the outcome variable for two social groups is decomposed to measure how much proportion of the gap is due to the social group identity. For adequate housing, the probability of accessing basic amenities has been calculated for the two social groups. The gap in the probability is disaggregated into two components. The first component explains the proportion of gap due to endowment/economic factors. Thus, this part of the gap will be removed if both social groups have similar endowment. However, the second component, the remaining gap will not be covered even if there is improvement in endowment or economic variable. The second component is termed as unexplained gap which is due to discrimination based on social identity. Thus, the decomposition analysis helps to measure the role of discrimination in explaining the inter-group inequality (Khan, 2022).

The Fairlee method (1999) helps to explain the decomposition method. The differences in the coefficients of the two groups in the regression equation can be used as a measure of discrimination. The gap in the outcome variable can be attributed to the discrimination or endowment gap. In this model the coefficients of the privileged groups obtained from the regression analysis are assigned to the marginalized social groups to estimate the predicted probability of accessing basic amenities among them. If there is no discrimination, this predicted probability should be the same as their actual probability of accessing better quality basic amenities. The gap between this estimated probability and actual probability of accessing good quality basic amenities among the marginalized social group is a measure of discrimination. However, the gap between this predicted probability and the actual probability among privileged groups is a measure of the gap in the outcome variable attributed to the difference in the endowment. In this article, the decomposition method is used to estimate the difference in the probability of accessing good quality basic amenities between privileged and marginalised social groups (Hindu High Castes/Scheduled Castes, Hindu High Castes/ Muslims, Hindu High Castes/Other Backward Classes). The household size, gender, location, household head's education, monthly per capita expenditure and income are used as explanatory variables in the model for the decomposition analysis.

To calculate the decomposition of gap in the outcome variable between two groups (say A for privileged group and B for marginalized social group), define $\overline{Y}^j$ (where j = A or B) the average probability of the binary outcome for group *j* and *F* as the cumulative distribution function from the logistic distribution. Following Fairlie (1999), the decomposition for a non-linear equation, $Y = F(X\hat{\beta})$, can be written as:

$$\overline{Y}^A - \overline{Y}^B = \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N^A} \frac{F(X_i^A \hat{\beta}^A)}{N^A} - \sum_{i=1}^{N^B} \frac{F(X_i^B \hat{\beta}^A)}{N^B}\right] + \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N^B} \frac{F(X_i^B \hat{\beta}^A)}{N^B} - \sum_{i=1}^{N^B} \frac{F(X_i^B \hat{\beta}^B)}{N^B}\right],$$

Where N^j is the sample size for social group *j*. $\hat{\beta}^B$ and β^A are the coefficients for marginalized and privileged groups respectively, X_i^B and $\overline{X}^A$ are the endowments for marginalized and privileged groups, respectively. The first term in brackets represents the part of the gap attributed to differences in distributions of *X*, and the second term represents the part due to differences in the identity-based processes determining levels of *Y*. The second term also captures the portion of the gap due to group differences in immeasurable or unobserved endowments (Khan, 2022).

An equally valid expression for the decomposition is:

$$\overline{Y}^A - \overline{Y}^B = \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N^A} \frac{F(X_i^A \beta^B)}{N^A} - \sum_{i=1}^{N^B} \frac{F(X_i^B \beta^B)}{N^B}\right] + \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N^A} \frac{F(X_i^A \beta^A)}{N^A} - \sum_{i=1}^{N^A} \frac{F(X_i^A \beta^B)}{N^A}\right],$$

In this case, the marginalized social groups' coefficient estimates, $\hat{\beta}^B$ are used as weights for the first term in the decomposition, and the privileged groups' distributions of the independent variables, $\overline{X}^A$ are used as weights for the second term.

Unequal Access to Quality Housing

Quality of housing is an essential component of adequate housing and determines the household well-being. The national sample survey data provides information on quality of housing into three categories—good, satisfactory and bad. Analysis of inter-group inequality in terms of quality of housing suggests that Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) households have lower access to good quality housing in comparison to dominant social groups. This trend is witnessed both in rural and urban areas.

Table 1: Quality of housing by social groups: 2018

Social Groups	Rural			Urban		
	Good	Satisfactory	Bad	Good	Satisfactory	Bad
ST	26.2	52.1	21.7	49.3	36.8	13.9
SC	27.2	53.4	19.4	44.6	43.0	12.4
HOBC	36.9	50.1	13.1	59.4	34.9	5.8
HHC	44.4	46.1	9.5	67.3	28.5	4.2
Muslims	33.6	52.2	14.3	47.9	43.1	9.0
Rest	55.4	37.0	7.5	68.7	28.2	3.1
Total	34.7	50.4	14.9	58.2	35.0	6.9

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Table 1 also shows that proportion of households living in bad quality housing is highest among scheduled caste households. Analysis based on Table 1 also indicates rural-urban disparity, as the proportion of good quality housing is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This trend is witnessed for all social groups.

Unequal Access to Drinking Water

Availability of adequate and continuous supply of water at affordable prices is essential for household well-being (Aizawa et al., 2020). Since Independence, varied plans and programmes have been initiated in India to provide safe drinking water to rural as well as urban households. *Har Ghar Jal (access to water for all the households)* is one of the recent initiatives by the government to provide drinking water to all households in India. Physical accessibility of water in terms of exclusive use for the households is crucial. The availability of drinking water in the premise of the house and for the exclusive use for the households is considered most convenient and suitable. NSSO provides information regarding the nature of availability of water sources such as: for exclusive use of households, for common use in the housing units, access to water source in the neighborhood, restricted use for public, unrestricted use for public, restricted community and unrestricted private source.

In this section, inter-group inequality in access to water source has been analysed with respect to three types: exclusive use for household, common use in the building

and unrestricted public source. The data given in Table 2 indicates that exclusive use for households, unrestricted public and common use in the housing unit are the main sources of water for households. Table 2 shows that the inter-social group inequality in accessing exclusive water source is quite high. At aggregate level, while high castes have highest proportion (61 per cent) of households having access to source of water for exclusive use of households, the corresponding figure for scheduled tribe and scheduled caste households is 28 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. Further, the data analysis from Table 2 also indicates that unrestricted public source of water is higher for marginalized households particularly those residing in rural areas. The proportion of households depending upon common water source in the housing structure is higher in urban areas for all social groups. In comparison to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, inter-group inequality is lower for Muslim households.

Table 2: Principal source of water by social groups

Social Groups	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Exclusive	Common use	Unrestricted Public	Exclusive	Common use	Unrestricted Public	Exclusive	Common use	Unrestricted Public
ST	25.4	6.9	54.7	43.9	19.8	17.7	28.3	8.9	49.1
SC	44.1	9.2	35.4	46.9	18.1	16.9	44.8	11.4	30.9
HOBC	51.9	8.5	27.7	53.5	18.5	9.3	52.4	11.6	22.0
HHC	56.7	9.1	22.0	66.3	13.4	7.4	61.7	11.3	14.4
Muslim	55.0	14.2	20.3	57.6	16.8	11.4	56.0	15.2	16.9
Rest	74.6	7.1	10.9	69.8	11.2	6.3	72.3	9.1	8.6
Total	48.6	9.2	30.5	57.5	16.3	10.3	51.7	11.6	23.6

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

For urban households in India, the pattern of access to water source is different from rural areas. The data in Table 2 shows that the proportion of households accessing water source exclusive to the households is higher in urban areas than rural areas for all social groups and the proportion of unrestricted public source is lower for urban households. However, inter-social group inequality still persists in urban areas as the highest (nearly two-thirds) proportion of households from high caste has access to water sources for the exclusive use of households. In urban areas, more than half of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households do not have access to water sources for exclusive use of households. More than half of the proportion of Muslim and OBC households has provision of water sources in their housing units. Access to water source for common use in the dwelling units in urban areas is highest for scheduled tribes, scheduled caste and OBC households.

Unequal Access to Drinking Water by Tenure Status of Housing Unit

Tenure status of housing unit also affects the provision of basic amenities. Security of tenure and provision of essential services are inter-linked. Security of tenure enables

the resident to invest their income in upgrading the quality of basic amenities in the dwelling unit. In this section the difference in the availability of water source in the owned and rented housing unit has been analysed. Based on the data given in Table 3, it can be argued that the households living in owned housing unit have higher access to exclusive source of drinking water than rental housing.

Table 3: Source of drinking water by tenure status

Social Group	Owned			Rental		
	Exclusive	**Common use**	**Unrestricted Public**	**Exclusive**	**Common use**	**Unrestricted Public**
ST	58.5	5.0	22.29	31.0	33.2	8.0
SC	57.8	8.2	19.65	30.8	34.0	10.7
HOBC	68.6	8.0	10.55	32.5	32.2	7.2
HHC	77.6	6.4	7.62	45.6	25.8	6.5
Muslim	67.0	11.0	11.42	37.5	29.0	10.5
Rest	80.6	4.3	5.91	41.3	30.2	5.5
Total	70.1	7.7	11.13	37.1	30.1	7.8

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

However, inter-group inequality still persists in owned housing unit. While the highest, 77.6 per cent high caste households, have access to water source for exclusive use of households, this is significantly lower for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe (58 per cent). Approximately two-thirds of OBC and Muslim households have access to drinking water for exclusive use of households. Thus, we can argue that despite owning a housing unit in urban areas more than 40 per cent scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households do not have provision of water for exclusive use of households and depend on other sources. The availability of water sources for the households living in the rented accommodation in urban areas shows a significant pattern as more than half of the households among all social groups do not have access to exclusive water sources. However, among social groups high caste households have highest, 45 per cent access to exclusive water source. Among the households living in rented accommodation, access to common source of water in the housing unit is significant among all social groups and highest, where 34 per cent scheduled caste households reported to depend on this.

Unequal Access to Sufficient Drinking Water throughout the Year

Access to sufficient drinking water throughout the year is very significant for the household well-being and essential component of right to adequate housing. The inter-group inequality in accessing sufficient drinking water throughout the year has been analyzed for rural, urban, slum and non-slum.

Table 4: Access to sufficient drinking water throughout the year

Social group	Access to sufficient drinking water throughout the year				
	Rural	**Urban**	**Slum**	**Non-slum**	**Total**
ST	81.1	85.0	72.5	87.0	81.7
SC	88.2	89.3	84.9	89.9	88.4
HOBC	87.6	91.6	86.6	91.9	88.8
HHC	86.9	92.9	89.6	93.1	90.0
Muslim	93.4	88.3	78.2	89.3	91.4
Rest	90.8	91.7	81.9	92.1	91.3
Total	87.6	90.9	84.0	91.5	88.7

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Table 4 indicates that access to safe drinking water throughout year is lowest for scheduled tribe households. In urban areas, 15 per cent scheduled tribe and 10 per cent scheduled caste households do not have access to sufficient water sources throughout the year. Further, if we analyse the availability of sufficient water for different social groups living in slums, the findings indicate that among all social groups, the high caste have better access to drinking water throughout the year. It can be argued that in comparison to other social groups, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe face highest deprivation in getting access to sufficient water throughout the year. Interestingly, urban households have better access to drinking water than rural households.

Unequal Access to Quality Toilet Facilities

Accessing safe and private toilet facilities are essential for a secure and healthy life of household members particularly women, elderly and adolescents (Pearson & Mcphedran, 2008). Access to sanitation for exclusive use of households also saves time and energy which brings economic and other benefits in terms of utilizing the saved time in economic and other essential activities. In this section, inter-group inequality in access to toilet has been analysed.

Availability of Toilet for Exclusive Use of Households

Access to toilet can be analyzed in terms of its availability for the exclusive use of households, for common use of households in the building, public/ community latrine without payment. Among these categories, availability of toilet for exclusive use for households is considered the most suitable for privacy, dignity and well-being of the households. The data given in Table 5 clearly indicates that nearly 77 per cent urban households have access to toilet for exclusive use of households which is higher than rural households. However, nearly 50 per cent households living in slums do not have access to toilet for exclusive use of households and have to depend upon common or public toilets.

Table 5: Access to toilet for exclusive use of households

Sector	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Public/community toilet without payment	Other
Rural	63.2	7.3	0.24	28.71
Urban	77.6	15.6	1.5	3.8
Slum	50.9	15.6	12.0	10.6
Non-slum	79.6	15.6	0.69	3.23

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Analysis of inter-group inequality in access to toilet shows a significant trend. The data given in Table 6 suggests that at aggregate level, proportion of households having toilet facilities is highest for high caste households. Nearly 80 per cent high caste households have access to exclusive toilet in their houses. While only 57 per cent scheduled caste and scheduled tribe and nearly 67-68 per cent OBC and Muslim households have access to toilet for exclusive use of households. Using common toilet in the dwelling unit or sharing with other households in the building is highest among Muslim households.

Table 6: Inter-group inequality in access to toilet for exclusive use of households: 2018

Social Group	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Other	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Other	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Other
ST	56.0	6.4	36.7	67.6	17.4	11.6	57.8	8.1	32.8
SC	54.4	7.4	37.3	66.2	19.9	8.9	57.3	10.5	30.4
HOBC	63.4	5.0	31.1	76.9	17.1	4.0	67.6	8.7	22.6
HHC	76.8	7.8	14.7	84.0	12.2	0.77	80.5	10.1	7.4
Muslim	64.1	15.3	19.3	76.1	16.6	3.5	68.7	15.8	13.1
Rest	85.4	4.9	9.3	87.4	9.7	1.4	86.4	7.3	5.4
Total	63.2	7.3	28.7	77.6	15.6	3.8	68.1	10.1	20.2

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Inter-group inequality in accessing the toilet for rural households shows a similar pattern. Although, access to toilet for exclusive use of households is lower for marginalized social groups, it is highest for high caste households. In comparison high castes have nearly 75 per cent households with access to toilet for the exclusive use of households, the corresponding figure for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe is nearly 54 per cent. However, in rural areas, the dependence of households for other sources is higher for all social groups. For urban households, the availability of toilet for exclusive use of households is higher than the rural households. Inter-group inequality in access to toilet is significantly high in urban areas as well. In urban areas, highest 84 per cent high caste households have access to exclusive toilet while nearly one-third of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households do not have access toilet for exclusive use of households. Similarly, 76 per cent urban Muslim households have access to

latrine facilities for exclusive use of households. Using common toilet in the building is quite high for the marginalized social groups such as scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and Muslims in urban areas. Use of public or community toilet is quite low for all social groups in urban areas. Thus, based on the discussion in this section, we can conclude that inter-social group inequality is significantly high in both rural and urban areas, which intends to suggest that social group identity plays a very significant role in determining the quality of essential services accessed.

Unequal Access to Bathroom

Availability of bathroom in the housing unit is considered essential for maintaining privacy to the household members and improving quality of life. Access to bathroom is an important component for right to adequate housing. The availability of bathroom can be studied in various categories: bathroom for exclusive use of households, common use of households in the building, public/community with and without payment, others and no bathroom facilities. Access to bathroom has been analysed for rural, urban, slum and non-slum. In the next section, inter-social group inequality in access to bathroom has been also analysed. The data in Table 7 illustrates significant rural-urban and slum-non-slum disparity. The analysis suggests that while nearly half of the proportion of rural households does not have access to exclusive bathroom, the corresponding figure for urban areas is 75 per cent. In rural areas, more than 43 per cent households do not have specific bathroom facilities but depend upon other sources such as make-shift structures for bathing. In slum areas as well, nearly one-fourth of the households do not have well-defined bathrooms and depend upon other types such as temporary arrangement, etc.

Table 7: Access to bathroom

Sector	Access to Bathroom					
	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Public/ community use without payment	Public/ community Use with payment	Others	No bathroom
Rural	50.3	6.1	0.07	0	43.4	0.25
Urban	75.0	15.9	0.15	0.01	8.8	0.16
Slum	59.3	13.2	1.26	0.04	25.9	0.25
Non-slum	76.2	16.1	0.05	0.01	7.5	0.15

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Analysis of inter-group inequality for bathroom shows that like other basic amenities, marginalized social group households have lower access to bathroom for exclusive use of households than high caste households. This trend can be observed for aggregate, rural and urban level. However, in comparison to rural households, urban households have better access to bathroom. Thus, inter-social group disparity is noticed in urban areas as well. The data given in the table clearly shows that 82 per cent of high caste households in urban areas have bathroom for exclusive use of households which is

highest among all social groups whereas more than 40 per cent scheduled tribes and more than 35 per cent scheduled caste do not have bathroom for exclusive use of households.

Table 8: Access to bathroom for exclusive use of households

Social Groups	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Others	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Others	Exclusive use of Household	Common use of Household in the building	Other
ST	35.5	5.9	58.3	59.7	20.4	19.2	39.2	8.1	52.4
SC	41.7	5.8	52.2	63.4	19.9	15.9	47.0	9.2	43.3
HOBC	53.6	5.0	41.1	74.0	17.9	7.9	60.0	9.1	30.7
HHC	65.4	6.7	27.7	82.4	12.4	4.9	74.2	9.7	15.8
Muslim	45.2	9.3	45.2	72.2	15.8	11.7	55.7	11.8	32.2
Rest	81.0	5.8	12.7	87.8	9.8	2.3	84.3	7.8	7.7
Total	50.3	6.1	43.4	75.0	15.9	8.8	58.7	9.4	31.5

Source: NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Quite a significant proportion of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households in urban areas depend upon sharing the common bathroom in their dwelling. In comparison to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe, Muslim households have better access to bathroom. In rural areas, except high caste households, other social groups have very poor access to bathroom. More than half of the proportion of rural scheduled caste households does not have access to bathroom. Thus, based on the analysis of this section, it can be argued that similar to other amenities, inter-group inequality persists in access to bathroom as well. The analysis manifests that in comparison to urban areas, inter-group inequality is higher in rural areas.

Factors Affecting Access to Basic Amenities in India: Logistic Regression Analysis

Multiple socio-economic factors determine essential amenities accessed by the households. In this section, the socio-economic determinants of access to three basic amenities, viz., drinking water, toilet and bathroom has been analysed through logistic regression model. As per the model, the determinants which impact the quality and quantity of basic services availed by the households are: geographical location of the dwelling unit, i.e. rural, urban, gender of the head of the households, household size, income and educational background of the head of the households. Besides, social identity such as caste, ethnicity and religious background play a significant role in access to basic amenities to the households.

Factoring Affecting Access to Safe Drinking Water: Results of Logistic Regression

In this section, socio-economic determinants of access to safe drinking water have been analysed through logistic regression model. The analysis of the logit model given in Table 9 shows that the odds of accessing water for exclusive use of households is 5 per cent lower for urban households than rural household.

The logit analysis also shows that if the education level of the head of the household is more than higher secondary, the probability of getting access to water source exclusively for the households would be 26 per cent higher. The logistic regression model also shows that the size of the households determines the odds of access to exclusive water source for the households. Muslim households have 8 per cent higher probability of getting access to exclusive water source. In comparison to high caste households, scheduled tribe households have 70 per cent lower probability of getting access to exclusive water sources. The gap is quite significant which indicates the pathetic condition of access to water resources for the tribal households in India. The logistic regression model also indicates that scheduled caste households have 34 per cent lower probability of accessing exclusive water source for the households. Similarly, OBC households also have 14 per cent lower probability of getting access to exclusive water source than high caste households. Income of the households has significant impact on the probability of accessing exclusive use of water source for the households. The logistic regression results are significant as shown in the model. Based on the analysis of logit model, it can be concluded that apart from the education and economic factors, social identity of the households play critical role in determining access to quality services.

Table 9: Result of the logistic regression: Access to exclusive water source

Access to Exclusive Source of water	Odd ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Urban (Ref: Rural)	0.95	0.0002	-237.4	0	0.95	0.95
Female (Ref: Male)	1.02	0.0002	140.1	0	1.02	1.03
Education	1.26	0.01	33.6	0	1.24	1.28
Household Size	1.36	0.0003	1513.8	0	1.36	1.36
Muslims (Ref: Hindu)	1.08	0.00	277.72	0.00	1.07	1.08
Other Religious Minorities (Ref: Hindu)	1.38	0.00	821.03	0.00	1.38	1.39
ST (Ref: HC)	0.30	0.00011	3311.1	0	0.30	0.30
SC (Ref: HC)	0.66	0.00018	1533.0	0	0.66	0.66
OBC (Ref: HC)	0.86	0.00019	-669.4	0	0.86	0.86
Income	1.96	0.00043	3034.0	0	1.96	1.96
_cons	0.00	0.00	3233.4	0	0.0033	0.0033
Prob > chi2	0.00					
Pseudo R2	0.0682					

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Logistic Regression Results for Access to Toilet

The results of logistic regression for access to toilet for exclusive use of households show that in comparison to rural households, urban households have 7 per cent higher odds of accessing exclusive toilet for the households. Similarly, female-headed households have 7 per cent higher odds of getting access to exclusive toilet. The education level of head of the households have a significant role in determining the quality of basic amenities. The head of households having education more than higher secondary have 68 per cent higher odds of getting access to toilet for exclusive use of the households than those households who have lower education level. Size of the households also determines the quality of toilet accessed by the households. The result of the logistic regression shows that in comparison to Hindu households, Muslims households have only 3 per cent lower odds of access to toilet for exclusive use of households. Among social groups, scheduled caste household have very low probability of getting access to toilet for exclusive use of households. In comparison to high caste households, scheduled caste households have 49 per cent lower probability of having toilet for exclusive use of household. Similarly, in comparison to high caste, scheduled tribe households have 38 per cent lower probability of accessing exclusive toilet for the households. The OBC households also have 29 per cent lower odds of accessing toilet for exclusive use of households.

Table 10: Result of the logistic regression: Access of household to exclusive toilet

Access to exclusive toilet	Odd ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Urban (Ref: Rural)	1.07	0.0003	244.3	0	1.066	1.067
Female (Ref: Male)	1.07	0.0002	369.7	0	1.07	1.08
Education	1.68	0.0004	2152.0	0	1.68	1.68
Household Size	1.17	0.00	3386.9	0	1.17	1.17
Muslims (Ref: Hindu)	0.97	0.0003	-87.1	0	0.97	0.98
ORM (Ref: Hindu)	1.68	0.0008	1048.2	0	1.67	1.68
ST (Ref: HC)	0.62	0.00024	1262.1	0	0.62	0.62
SC (Ref: HC)	0.51	0.00016	2173.1	0	0.51	0.51
OBC (Ref: HC)	0.71	0.00019	1294.8	0	0.71	0.71
Income	3.79	0.001	5058.7	0	3.790	3.794
_cons	0.00	0.00	4746.47	0	0.00	0.00
Prob > chi2	0					
Pseudo R2	0.107					

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

The logistic regression model shows that income of the households has greater impact on the probability of accessing exclusive toilet for the household. The logistic regression results are significant as shown in the model. The analysis of the logit

model clearly shows that the social identity of the households greatly determines the access to toilet amenities despite targeted universal coverage of the public policy on sanitation.

Logistic Regression Results for Access to Bathroom

Logistic regression model for access to bathroom for exclusive use of households shown in Table 11 indicates that in comparison to rural households, urban households have 24 per cent higher probability of accessing bathroom for exclusive use of households. Education also has significant impact on the probability of accessing bathroom for the households. A larger household size also increases the odds of accessing bathroom as shown in Table 11. Similar to other basic amenities, access to bathroom for exclusive use of households is also determined by the social and religious identity. The logit model shows that in comparison to Hindu households, Muslim households have 19 per cent lower probability of accessing exclusive bathroom for the household. Apart from religious identity, the socio-ethnic identity of the households also plays a significant role in determining the access to bathroom. In comparison to high caste households, the probability of accessing bathroom is 49 per cent lower for scheduled tribe households while it is nearly 41 per cent lower for scheduled caste households. Similarly, OBC households have 15 per cent lower probability of accessing bathroom for exclusive use of households. As shown in the model, income of the households has stronger effect on the odds of accessing the exclusive bathroom facility in the housing unit. The logistic regression results are significant as shown in the model.

Table 11: Result of the logistic regression: Access of household to exclusive bathroom

Access to Exclusive Bathroom	Odd ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Urban (Ref: Rural)	1.24	0.00032	829.5	0	1.238	1.239
Female (Ref: Male)	1.09	0.0002	455.8	0	1.092	1.093
Education	1.73	0.0004	2378.8	0	1.73	1.73
Household Size	1.22	0.00	4195.4	0	1.21	1.22
Muslims (Ref: Hindu)	0.81	0.0002	-755.7	0	0.81	0.81
Other Religious Minorities (Ref: Hindu)	1.70	0.0008	1117.6	0	1.70	1.70
ST (Ref: HC)	0.51	0.00020	1746.2	0	0.51	0.51
SC (Ref: HC)	0.59	0.00018	1731.4	0	0.59	0.59
OBC (Ref: HC)	0.85	0.00021	-652.5	0	0.85	0.85
income	7.72	0.0022	7297.8	0	7.72	7.72
_cons	0.00	0.00	7235.9	0	0.00	0.00
Prob > chi2	0					
Pseudo R2	0.1876					

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Discrimination in Access to Basic Amenities: Decomposition Analysis

In this section, the discrimination in access to basic amenities such as water, sanitation and bathroom has been analysed by implying decomposition econometrics techniques. The decomposition analysis has been done for access to three basic amenities exclusive to the household: water, toilet and bathroom. As discussed in methodology section of this article, the decomposition method disaggregates the factors explaining the inter-group gap between different social groups. Apart from endowment factors such as income, geographical location, education, etc., social identity-based discrimination also determines the access to essential services to the households.

Discrimination in Access to Drinking Water: Decomposition into Endowment and Caste Discrimination

The decomposition results given in Table 12 explain the gap between scheduled caste and high caste as far as access to exclusive source of water for the household is concerned. The results show that 49 per cent gap in access to water source is explained by endowment factors while remaining 51 per cent is not explained by endowment factors. This means that the 51 per cent difference in access to exclusive source of water for scheduled caste in comparison to high caste is due to caste identity-based discrimination for scheduled caste households.

Table 12: Decomposition result for exclusive water: SC vs HC

Total Number of observation	1,69,080
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, SC	79008
Probability of access to water source for exclusive use of household, HC	0.654544
Probability of access to water source for exclusive use of household, SC	0.487127
Difference	0.167417
Total explained	0.081718
Percentage explained	48.8
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	51.2

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

The decomposition results shown in Table 13 explain the gap between OBC household and high caste households. The analysis shows that the endowment factors explain nearly 62 per cent gap between OBC and high caste households as far as access to water source for exclusive use of households is concerned. The remaining gap of 38 per cent is not explained by the endowment factors. Thus, 38 per cent gap in accessing water source for the OBC and high caste is due to caste identity.

The decomposition results for the availability of water source for exclusive use of household between Muslim and high caste household is given in Table 14. The

result shows that the endowment factors explains nearly 88.4 per cent gap between Muslim and high caste households while remaining 11.6 per cent is not explained by the endowment factors. Thus, nearly 11.6 per cent gap between Muslim and high caste household is due to Muslim identity.

Table 13: Decomposition result for exclusive water: OBC vs HC

Total Number of observation	2,41,086
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, OBC	151014
Probability of access to water source for exclusive use of household, HC	0.654544
Probability of access to water source for exclusive use of household OBC	0.567094
Difference	0.08745
Total explained	0.054286
Percentage explained	62.1
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	37.9

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Table 14: Decomposition result for exclusive water: Muslims vs HC

Total Number of observation	1,57,528
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, Muslims	67456
Probability of access to water source for exclusive use of household, HC	0.654544
Probability of access to water source for exclusive use of household: Muslims	0.612137
Difference	0.042406
Total explained	0.037506
Percentage explained	88.4
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	11.6

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Thus, based on the decomposition results, it can be concluded that scheduled caste households have to face caste-based discrimination which reduces their access to water sources for exclusive use of households.

Discrimination in Access to Toilets: Decomposition into Endowment and Caste Discrimination

In this section, discrimination in access to toilet for exclusive use of households has been analysed. The decomposition results shown in Table 15 explain the difference in accessing toilet between scheduled caste and high caste household. The decomposition result shows the impact of discrimination in denying exclusive toilet for scheduled caste households. The result given in Table 15 shows that less than 24 per cent difference is explained by endowment factors while remaining 76 per cent is not explained by

endowment factors. The analysis based on the decomposition result clearly shows that more than three-fourth differences between scheduled caste and high caste household is due to discrimination experienced by the scheduled caste household due to their social identity.

Table 15: Decomposition result for exclusive toilet: SC vs HC

Total Number of observation	1,69,080
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, SC	79008
Probability of access to toilet for exclusive use of household, HC	0.832347
Probability of access to toilet for exclusive use of household, SC	0.594382
Difference	0.237964
Total explained	0.093949
Percentage explained	23.8
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	76.2

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

The decomposition results shown in Table 16 explain the difference between Muslims and high caste households to endowment factors and non-endowment factors. The result clearly indicates that nearly 49 per cent difference is explained by endowment factors while more than 51 per cent difference is not explained by the endowment factors. This may be attributed to discrimination experienced by Muslim households in comparison to high caste households. Thus, more than half of the difference between Muslim households and high cast households is due to discrimination faced by Muslim in accessing toilet for the exclusive use of household.

Table 16: Decomposition result for exclusive toilet: Muslims vs HC

Total Number of observation	1,57,528
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, Muslims	67456
Probability of access to toilet for exclusive use of household, HC	0.832347
Probability of access to toilet for exclusive use of household, Muslims	0.722025
Difference	0.110322
Total explained	0.053623
Percentage explained	48.6
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	51.4

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Based on the decomposition analysis of this section, it can be argued that social identity-based discrimination experienced by scheduled caste and Muslim households adversely affects access to sanitation.

Discrimination in Access to Bathrooms: Decomposition into Endowment and Caste Discrimination

In this section, discrimination in accessing bathroom for exclusive use of households for marginalised social groups have been analysed through decomposition analysis. The results given in Table 17 explains the gap in accessing bathroom for exclusive use of households for scheduled caste households in comparison to high caste households. The decomposition results shows that nearly 54 per cent gap between these two social groups is explained by the endowment factors while remaining 46 per cent is not explained. Thus, 46 per cent difference between scheduled caste and high caste in accessing bathroom is due to the discrimination faced by scheduled caste for their caste-based identity.

Table 17: Decomposition result for exclusive bathroom: SC vs HC

Total Number of observation	1,69,080
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, SC	79008
Probability of access to bathroom for exclusive use of household, HC	0.768447
Probability of access to bathroom for exclusive use of household, SC	0.487997
Difference	0.28045
Total explained	0.152568
Percentage explained	54.4
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	45.6

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

The decomposition results for difference in accessing bathroom for OBC and high caste households given in Table 18 shows that the endowment factors explain the 63 per cent difference between these two social groups while remaining 37 per cent is not explained by the endowment factors. Thus, 37 per cent difference may be attributed to caste-based identity for OBC households in comparison to high caste households.

Table 18: Decomposition result for exclusive bathroom: OBC vs HC

Total Number of observation	2,41,086
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, OBC	151014
Probability of access to bathroom for exclusive use of household, HC	0.768447
Probability of access to bathroom for exclusive use of household, OBC	0.606639
Difference	0.161808
Total explained	0.101943
Percentage explained	63.0
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	37.0

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

Similarly, Table 19 explains the difference in access to bathroom for Muslims and high caste households. The decomposition results shown in the table indicate that endowment factors explain nearly 48 per cent difference between Muslims and high caste households. Thus, nearly 52 per cent difference is not explained by endowment factors.

Table 19: Decomposition result for exclusive bathroom: Muslims vs HC

Total Number of observation	1,57,528
Number of observation, HC	90072
Number of observation, Muslims	67456
Probability of access to bathroom for exclusive use of household, HC	0.768447
Probability of access to bathroom for exclusive use of household, Muslims	0.590784
Difference	0.177663
Total explained	0.085615
Percentage explained	48.2
Percentage not explained (discrimination)	51.8

Source: Author's calculation from NSSO, 76th Round, 2018

This may be attributed to the discrimination faced by Muslim households in accessing the bathroom for the exclusive use of household. Thus, more than half of the difference between Muslim and high caste household is due to discriminatory practices against Muslim household in comparison to high caste households.

Discussions and Conclusion

The article examines the provision of adequate housing for marginalised social groups in India. The essential components of adequate housing such as access to good quality dwelling unit and access to basic amenities such as drinking water, sanitation and bathroom for exclusive use of households have been systematically analysed. Apart from analysis of inter-group inequality in access to the above components of adequate housing, socio-economic determinants affecting their access have also been analysed. Based on the analysis, it can be argued that inter-group inequalities in access to good quality dwelling units and other basic amenities is alarmingly high in both rural and urban areas. Location of the dwelling units such as slum and non-slum also significantly affect access to good housing and basic amenities. Among all social groups, inter-group disparity is high for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households followed by Muslim. This trend is observed in both rural as well urban areas. Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households not only have lower access to safe drinking water, they also do not get sufficient drinking water throughout the year. Similarly, inter-group inequality in access to toilet and bathroom amenities is higher for marginalised social groups in comparison to high caste. It emerges from the analysis that apart from income and educational attainment of the households, caste, ethnicity and religious identity also determines the quality of housing and basic amenities accessed by the

households. The results of logistic regression model suggest that the probability of accessing good quality basic amenities such as water, sanitation and bathroom are lower for marginalised social groups in comparison to dominant social groups. The article also analyse the discrimination experienced by marginalised social groups while accessing basic amenities for exclusive use of households. The results of decomposition analysis disaggregate the role of endowment factors and discrimination in determining quality of basic services accessed by marginalised social groups. The decomposition analysis intends to suggest that apart from endowment factors which plays significant role in determining access to better and adequate housing for all social groups, discrimination and exclusion based on social group identity adversely affect marginalised social groups. Scheduled caste and Muslim households have lower access to good quality dwelling and basic amenities due to caste and religious identity based exclusion and discrimination. These vulnerable groups are often denied equal access to housing and basic amenities due to prejudices and biasness against their social identity. Based on the data analysis in this article, it can be argued that apart from the general public policies, it is imperative to formulate group specific public policies for housing and basic amenities. The public housing programmes should be formulated and implemented in such a manner which promotes inclusiveness in these programmes and reduces inter-group inequality. The right to adequate housing which is essential for dignified life and well-being should be guaranteed to all social groups. The right to access to clean water and hygienic living conditions must be regarded as basic rights to all human being irrespective of social and economic backgrounds.

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A Critical Lens to Understand Gender and Caste Politics of Rural Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

'Sairat', is a highly acclaimed movie and is the highest grossing Marathi film till date. It was one of the biggest hits of the Marathi films industry and screened for many months in theaters after the release. *'Sairat'*, a Marathi romantic drama film portrays the construction of hegemonic masculinity and its relation to the controlling of women's sexuality. The movie centers around controlling women's sexuality, portraying dominant masculinity and brutal killing due to transgression of caste (in the form of inter-caste marriage) in rural Maharashtra.
In July 2016, an upper caste girl was raped and murdered by lower castes at Kopardi village soon after the release of the movie. The rape and murder of the girl led to protests all over Maharashtra. The protesters and leaders of the upper caste community alleged that the rape and murder of a girl was provoked by the movie, *'Sairat'*. This article takes the protests as a provocation to take a closer look at *Sairat's* gender and caste politics.
This article explores the way hegemonic masculine identity has been manifested through control over women's sexuality and their mobility, and violence against women. The hegemonic masculinity has been constructed based on unequal gender and power relations between men and women, dominant and lower caste men.

Keywords

Film, gender, caste, sexuality, femininity, masculinity

Introduction

In July 2016, after the rape and murder of a young upper caste girl in Kopardi village, Maharashtra, political leaders from various parties asked for the critically acclaimed

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Marathi movie '*Sairat*' to be banned. '*Sairat*', directed by Nagraj Manjule, depicts the love story between Archie (leading female character), who hails from a dominant caste family, and Parshya (leading male character), a boy from a Denotified Tribe. The movie was one of the biggest hits of the Marathi film industry and was screened in theaters for many months after its release. Following the case of the sexual assault of the young girl in Kopardi, individuals from a high caste community started protesting against '*Sairat*', claiming that the movie was responsible for encouraging Dalits to desire and marry upper caste girls (Deshpande, 2016). According to the protesters, the movie was also harmful because it showed dominant castes in bad light (Joshi, 2016). The article tries to delve into, how *Sairat's* representation of the upper caste community led to protests against the film. What do the protests themselves reveal about the upper caste community?

This article takes the protests as a provocation for a closer look at *Sairat's* gender and caste politics. Most critiques of the movie have focused on the inter-caste relationship at the heart of the film. However, scant attention has been paid to how the movie depicts hegemonic masculinity and femininity in the context of the caste society of rural Maharashtra. This article examines how *Sairat* portrays the violence of hegemonic masculinity, depicting how it significantly rests on the regulation of women belonging to the community. The article argues that the movie highlights how the construction of the dominant caste identity rests on unequal gender roles and power relations, manifesting as control over the sexuality and mobility of women. In addition to its depiction of an inter-caste love story, the film's depiction of gender roles also contributed to the backlash it faced from the dominant caste community.

Research Methodology

The article is based on a review and analysis of the portrayal of dominant masculinity in a Marathi movie, '*Sairat*'. Relevant literatures were searched through by using the keywords, *Caste, Gender, Sexuality, Femininity, Movie, Masculinity* in electronic bibliographic databases such as *Jstor*, and *EPW*, Newspapers, magazines, and other web portals were also reviewed to prepare the article.

Literature Review

'*Sairat*' is situated in a longer tradition of Indian movies that use the heterosexual love story as a backdrop to discuss other social issues. According to Virdi (2003, p. 181), "These kinds of films assert the individual's rights against feudal structures associated with vested familial interest: the authority of the father, the state, and the unwritten rules of endogamy with caste, class and community". What makes '*Sairat*' distinct from other films of the genre was the way in which it highlighted caste. '*Sairat*' brought the focus back on caste issues at a time when caste is increasingly being constructed as irrelevant within discourses of law and by the upper caste Hindu society.

Dr Ambedkar (1918) rightly points out in his book *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, that endogamy is central to the caste. The mechanism of caste is nothing but the mechanism of endogamy (Ambedkar, 1918). By keeping an inter-caste heterosexual love story at the center of the film, *Sairat* highlights how the regulation of women's sexuality is the key to maintaining caste endogamy. Through its portrayal of the leading character Archana (Archie), the movie offers a nuanced understanding of the intersection of caste and gender identities, by depicting how women might use their caste location to exercise agency, express sexual freedom, and to resist socially constructed femininity. However, the movie suggests that any exercise of such agency and freedom is ultimately limited in the context of a caste patriarchal society where the violence of dominant caste masculinity reigns supreme.

'*Sairat*' and its Portrayal of Dominant Castes

Archie is the daughter of a sugar baron and local leader and is depicted as a bold and confident girl. Archie also belongs to one of the high castes. In the context of rural Maharashtra, upper castes occupy a dominant position, holding control over land, politics, educational institutions, sugar factories and other cooperative sectors. In the movie, Archie's father attempts to construct his family as a modern and progressive one, claiming that upper caste families like theirs don't restrict their daughters from enjoying various kinds of freedom. In the movie, Archie draws power from her dominant caste status and as the daughter of a politician and a landowner, to enjoy freedoms such as riding bikes and tractors, roaming in the village, and going to the well for swimming. She is shown as having access to many things without any restrictions. Archie is also seen riding a heavy bike, Royal Enfield and tractor, heavy vehicles associated with masculine strength and power. She is also seen to be teasing and bullying the local boys. Her boldness rests primarily on her dominant caste identity, and presumably offers a different ideal of femininity from the ones commonly seen in Indian movies. Archie's subversive femininity can also be seen in her relationship with Parshya. Unlike usual depictions of heterosexual romance, Archie falls in love with Parshya not because of his aggressive masculinity but because he is handsome, intelligent, and gentle.

However, the movie compels the viewer to question such an understanding of dominant caste femininity as progressive and liberated. Even as Archie is seen as occupying different spaces, she was under the surveillance of men from her families as her brother was continuously checking her movements. The control becomes most violent at the moment Archie expresses romantic and sexual desire. She falls in love with Parshya in the movie, who hails from the Pardhi community, a Denotified Tribe. Once her family learns about her relationship, Archie comes to be prominently marked as carrying the honour of the family. As a way of ensuring caste endogamy, her marriage is decided within her own caste against her wishes. It is not just her marriage that restricts her autonomy; Archie is also denied the other freedoms which she used to have access to earlier. '*Sairat*' thus demonstrates how the safeguarding of

caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion (Chakravarty, 1993).

A close reading of this movie demonstrates the exceptionality of Archie's bold and confident femininity. Her friend, Swapnali, probably from the same caste of Archie, but not with the political and economic clout that Archie's family has, remains passive in the movie. Even Archie's mother remains passive, in keeping with her role as the ideal high caste housewife. She is not seen anywhere with her husband in public spaces or at political meetings. Swapnali and Archie's mother can be considered as more representative of hegemonic caste women of rural Maharashtra. Through the characters of Swapnali and Archie's mother, '*Sairat'* challenges dominant castes claim to progressive gender relations, showing how the caste identity is dependent on controlling its women's sexuality, maintenance of patriarchal structures and power relations often mediated through land ownership (Gawali, 2017).

Through '*Sairat'*, we see how the power and privileges of dominant caste communities rest on an aggressive masculinity that seeks to control both women of all castes and men of oppressed castes. The violence of hegemonic masculinity is reiterated at various points in the film. Both Archie's father and brother, Prince, are shown to be angry, aggressive, and entitled hegemonic men. Archie's father and brother enjoy a high degree of impunity in their village not only because of their wealth but because of their dominant caste position, highlighted through the connections that they have with the police and those in the government bureaucracy. Their wealth and clout make them the rulers in the village. After knowing about Archie and Parshya's love affair, Archie's brother thrashes the lower caste boys and drives their families away. Within the context shown in '*Sairat'*, hegemonic upper caste masculinity exists in such a way that even if the threat to life is not overtly visible against the "lower" caste groups, a small indication of the threat becomes enough to drive a lower caste family away from their own village.

The movie also shows how the power of the dominant caste communities is perpetuated by passing on these norms of aggressive masculinity from one generation to the other. Prince does not think twice before slapping his teacher who hails from an oppressed caste (marginalized) community. His act of violence is normalised and justified by his father and his community. Instead of condemning the son's violent behaviour, Archie's father encourages it. He explains to the teacher how he should obey rather than punishing his son, and he does not stop there but also has the teacher transferred to another place. In doing so, Archie's father ensures that the generation imbibes the norms of aggressive upper caste masculinity, carrying forward the caste and patriarchal legacy of the high caste community.

'Sairat' offers a critical perspective on the norms of femininity and masculinity within the dominant caste communities present in rural Maharashtra. However, as Connell (2005) argues, there is not one masculinity, but many different masculinities, each associated with different positions of power. Masculinity emerges at the intersection of caste, religion, class, sexuality, gender, and other identities. '*Sairat'* highlights how norms of masculinity and femininity are shaped by the caste relations

of particular contexts. We see this in the changing relationship between Parshya and Archie. Archie's dominant caste status is well-known to those in her village and thus, she is able to tease Parshya while the two of them live in the village. As discussed earlier, such a relationship between Parshya and Archie can be seen as subverting hegemonic norms of femininity and masculinity. However, once Parshya and Archie elope to Hyderabad, there is an instance of Parshya slapping Archie. Such an act would be unthinkable in the village where Archie's dominant caste family exerts pervasive power. However, on first moving to Hyderabad, both Parshya and Archie retain a sense of anonymity. The temporary sense of anonymity allows their caste status to be irrelevant, which enables Parshya to subvert the norms of masculinity and femininity associated with their caste, and thus slaps Archie. This subversion is only temporary; the violence of dominant caste masculinity is restored when Archie's brother murders both Archie and Parshya for their transgression of endogamy. Thus, the movie demonstrates the pervasive violence of dominant caste masculinity.

Protests against '*Sairat*' by the Dominant Castes

'*Sairat*' was released in April 2016, and it became the biggest hit in the Marathi film industry. For many months, the movie was screened in theaters. Few months after the movie's release, in July 2016 in the village of Kopardi, the police accused Dalit men of the gangrape of an upper caste girl. Within a short time, the incident was taken up by the media and it was broadcast across Maharashtra. Soon, people started protesting against the incident across Maharashtra (Sinha, 2017). While the sexual assault of the upper caste girl was seen as the immediate trigger behind the protests, the protests soon became an instrument for the upper castes to reclaim their caste dignity and pride. A key feature of the protests was the anger of dominant castes against the director of '*Sairat*', Nagraj Manjule. According to the protesters, '*Sairat*' was responsible for encouraging Dalits to desire and marry upper caste girls. They claimed that incidents of lower caste men harassing upper caste women had increased after the release of the movie.

Another significant feature of the protests was the claim by protesters that the movie's depiction of the dominant caste community was inaccurate (Tare, 2016). Interestingly, the very nature of the protests raises questions about the gender relations within the community. It needs to be noted that as part of the protests against the incident at Kopardi, upper castes organised more than fifty marches. However, every single one of these marches was a silent march. Given that dominant caste men have in the past organized loud and violent protests, what explains the choice of silent protests in this instance? It is worth noting that what differentiated the protests against the Kopardi incident from previous protests was the presence of upper caste women at the forefront of the protests. The Kopardi protest was among the first time that dominant caste women were out in public protests (Aasbe, 2019). The presence of the women at the forefront of the protests might be read as an instance of women claiming

leadership roles. However, the choice of the silent protest as a tactic complicates this understanding.

To take the presence of dominant caste women as protesters in the public sphere as an indication of their empowerment also ignores the terms that defined their presence. As discussed, the protests against the Kopardi incident were among the first instances that dominant caste women had occupied the public sphere as protesters. These women have rarely protested issues of gender-based and sexual violence that exists in their communities. Women who were part of the protests against the Kopardi incident too did not raise concern about patriarchy that exists within their own communities. Instead, their protests were aimed at protecting the diminishing caste privileges of their brothers and fathers. In doing so, they prioritized the pride and honor of their community over the issues of gender-based and sexual violence that they experience on an everyday basis. Thus, any understanding of how dominant caste women were pushed into leadership roles during the protests against the Kopardi incident must take into account how these women were active participants in protecting their community's masculine interests.

The protesters' reading of '*Sairat*' and their protest against the movie also reveal the gender relations that are characteristic to the upper caste community. Dominant caste men claimed that the movie portrays the Dominant caste community in the wrong way.[1] The question this provokes is whether the opposition of the upper caste men was against the aggressive and violent dominant masculinity depicted in the movie or against the sexual agency displayed by Archie, a higher caste woman. Hence, it can be argued that the dominant caste protests against '*Sairat*' must be understood in terms of their opposition to the character of Archie since she is shown as an upper caste woman who asserts her sexual rights. Not only does Archie challenge the rules of caste endogamy by going against her family and choosing Parshya as her partner, but she expresses her sexuality in a way that transgresses the norms of appropriate femininity and sexuality expected from upper caste women. The norms of caste and patriarchy within dominant castes dictate that women's sexuality should always be seen as a private matter and any discussion of sexuality by women, if at all, be expressed within the closed walls of the house. Upper caste women talking about sexuality in public would be seen as challenging the dominance of the men of their community. In *Sairat*, Archie flirts with Parshya in public spaces and in doing so, she asserts her sexual rights in the public domain. Archie not only asserts her sexuality but she does so openly and outside the wall of her house. Her choices challenge the norms of sexuality and femininity considered appropriate for upper caste women, and hence, she faces extreme violence within the movie as a way of restoring the honour of the hegemonic caste community.

Conversely, the presence of upper caste women as protesters in the public sphere in the Kopardi incident was accepted and glorified by the community. It needs to be noted that the women protesters were silent on the matter of their rights as women.

[1]Refer https://www.loksatta.com/manoranjan-news/sairat-movie-insulting-maratha-community-in-maharashtra-says-nitesh-rane-1243852/

No woman protested against the violence meted out to Archie by dominant caste men in the movie or argued that women like Archie should have agency and freedom. The acceptance of the women protesters within the dominant caste community reveals that the community provides space for women to appear in the public sphere. In doing so, they perhaps seek to highlight the progressiveness of the dominant caste community, much like Archie's father's initial claims in '*Sairat'*. However, the protests reveal that dominant caste women's political participation is allowed only when women are complicit in maintaining caste patriarchy and caste hegemony. Any public assertion of sexual rights would pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Hence, we see the relative absence of protests led by women against the forms of gender-based-and-sexual violence that they face from men within their community.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the movie '*Sairat'* and the responses to '*Sairat'* reveal the norms of masculinity and femininity within the dominant caste community. While the caste community makes claims to progressiveness based on the limited space offered to women in the public domain, it is evident that the presence of women in public is contingent on upholding caste pride and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. As '*Sairat'* reveals, the source of power and privilege of the dominant caste community rests on an aggressive and violent masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity assumes responsibility for controlling the sexuality of women and punishing transgressions of caste privileges and caste endogamy. It is in this context that the protests against the sexual violence at Kopardi must be understood as upholding the hegemony of the upper caste community, rather than as protesting gender-based and sexual violence.

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The Exclusion of Bahujan Schoolchildren: An Anti-Caste Critique of the National Education Policy 2020, India

Yuvraj Singh[1]

Abstract

This article explores the link between education policy and the social reproduction of caste, with a special focus on the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). It traces the shape of exclusion that Bahujan schoolchildren experience in the Indian school system by attempting to analyse, and build a coherent understanding of, caste-based exclusion in the sphere of school education. The article is organised in two parts, both of which use the NEP 2020 as an anchor to study the nature of educational inequality. The first part maps the outer contours of educational inequality, engaging with the issue of unequal access to schooling. The inner contours of educational inequality, that is, the internal processes of schooling that engender exclusion, are examined subsequently. At the kernel of this study is the complex relationship between education and power. In essence, the present article delineates the myriad ways through which the NEP 2020 contributes to the processes of social reproduction, particularly the mechanisms through which it conduces to the hegemony of historically privileged caste groups in the society.

Keywords

Education, caste, NEP 2020, exclusion, Bahujan, educational inequality, caste and education, Ambedkar, Phule, schooling, school education, social reproduction

Introduction

In 1882, Jotirao Phule addressed the Hunter Commission (formally, the Indian Education Commission), airing the concern that the (British) government's education policies served the wellbeing of 'Brahmins and the higher classes only' and left 'the masses wallowing in ignorance and poverty' (Deshpande, 2002, p. 103). This article,

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focusing on the National Education Policy 2020 (henceforth NEP 2020),[1] argues that the situation today, after more than 140 years of Phule's submission, remains all but unchanged.

The 'masses' that Phule referred to were the Shudras and Ati-Shudras—the working, labour castes and ex-untouchables. Social scientist Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (2019) uses the term 'Dalitbahujan' to represent the masses—the 'people and castes who form the exploited and suppressed majority.' For the purpose of this article, however, I'm using the term 'Bahujan' in lieu of 'Dalitbahujan' to denote the masses. More specifically, I'm using Bahujan as an umbrella term representing the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) cutting across religion, ethnicities and geographies, as well as Denotified Tribes (DNTs), Nomadic Tribes (NTs) and Seminomadic Tribes (SNTs).[2]

While a growing body of scholarship has accentuated higher education institutions as sites of exclusion for marginalised castes (see: Subramanian, 2019; Sukumar, 2023), there has been relatively less emphasis on school education. The focus of this article, therefore, is on examining the ways in which schools in India become spaces of social and educational exclusion for students belonging to historically marginalised castes. In and through this examination, the article also seeks to delineate the relationship between the NEP 2020 and the persistence of caste.

Why does school education in India continue to be plagued by caste-based inequality? This article, situated at the intersection of scholarship on sociology of education and anticaste theory, and drawing from a range of secondary data such as autobiographical narratives of Bahujan authors, quantitative data from multiple surveys, and findings from independent and institutional studies, aims to illuminate the continued exclusion of Bahujan children in the Indian school system.

The theoretical underpinning of this article is derived from an Ambedkarite framework, to which the philosophy and scholarship of B.R. Ambedkar are foundational. Further, the ideas of Antonio Gramsci on education, which strongly resonate with Ambedkar's views (Paik, 2014), form the theoretical bedrock of this article. Importantly, the ideas of Jotirao Phule on education also inform this article. Linking Phule, Ambedkar, and Gramsci is particularly relevant here because of their shared interest in the 'interlinkage between political hegemony and pedagogic practices' (Ibid., p. 77). Further, I use the Gramscian concept of hegemony within the broader Ambedkarite framework, as Ambedkar and Gramsci are both 'subversive,' and 'Ambedkar and his own caste background do not sabotage Gramscian categories.' (Guru, 2013, p. 90). I also bring theoretical insights from critical educational

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[1]For all references to the NEP 2020, see Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India, https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

[2]The limitation of this article is that it doesn't address the graded inequality within Bahujans. I don't recognise Bahujan as a monolithic category in itself, as SCs and STs continue to face discrimination and violence at the hands of the dominant OBCs.

theorists, particularly Henry A. Giroux and Michael W. Apple, which are valuable in understanding the interconnections between education, hegemony, and resistance.

This article is structured in two parts. The first part examines the exteriority of educational inequality by exploring the surface of what constitutes educational exclusion. In other words, what impedes Bahujan children from getting an education in the first place? In this part, I present a panoramic view of exclusion by looking at the taxonomies of schools and uncovering what I call the '**Chaturvarna School System**.' I use the term Chaturvarna School System to signify the existing school system wherein children from marginalised castes are accommodated in the bottom tiers of schooling. In the second part, the article shifts gear and studies the interiority of educational inequality, that is, the exclusion exercised through curricula, pedagogies, classroom processes and the quotidian life of the school. Drawing theoretical insights from Ambedkar, I conceptualise the '**Pedagogies of Brahminism**,' which refers to the pedagogies that suppress Bahujan students.

An important dimension of this article is to examine the role of the state in the reproductive functions of education. The state in this article is not regarded as a fixed object or a thing. Rather, it is seen as a constantly evolving entity that is always in the process of formation, shaping and being shaped by multiple forces (Apple, 2003; Gramsci, 1971). It is helpful, amidst this constant movement, to use education policy as an anchor for understanding the role of state intervention in reproductive functions of education. The NEP 2020, therefore, emerges as an important apparatus in this article to see the relationship between the state and schooling. In both parts of the article, I critically decode the restructuring of the education landscape stipulated by the NEP 2020 to argue that it consolidates the existing systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable children. The article concludes by highlighting the urgent need of examining caste-based exclusions in schooling in order to devise effective anticaste interventions that can challenge upper-caste dominance. Through this work I hope to articulate the complex dynamic between education and power, add my voice to the Phule-Ambedkarite cause of de-brahminising education, and strive towards the aim of abolishing caste-based exclusion in schools.

The Exteriority of Educational Inequality

Schools in India are part of a complex, hierarchical and multi-layered school system. The structural hierarchy of the Indian school system has been accentuated by several scholars. In a broad classification, Mehendale & Mukopadhyay (2019) recognise six types of schools in India: (i) government-funded and government-managed 'open to all' schools, run by local authorities and funded by state government; (ii) government-funded and government-managed 'specified schools,' run by central state government for a certain target population; (iii) government-funded and privately-managed schools such as grant-in-aid schools, bridge schools, special schools; (iv) privately-funded and privately-managed 'secular' schools—a diverse set of schools, ranging from elite high-fee-paying schools to low-fee-paying schools; (v) privately-funded

and privately-managed 'minority' schools—religious and linguistic minority schools; (vi) privately-funded and privately-managed school for 'specified' groups—schools for children with disabilities, schools run by non-governmental organisations for disadvantaged children, etc.

Social anthropologist A.R. Vasavi identifies as many as nine layers of schools:

> [T]here are in reality nine types of schools which vary by the cost of schooling, medium of instruction, type of board exams, and management structure. These include (i) Ashramshalas (for Adivasi/tribal regions); (ii) state-run government schools (including municipal, corporation and panchayat schools); (iii) state-aided but privately managed schools; (iv) centrally aided special schools such as the Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and "Military Schools"; (v) low-fee paying, state-syllabus private schools; (vi) expensive private schools including the "Public School" chains; (vii) religious schools (Pathshalas and Madrassas run by religious institutions and trusts); (viii) alternative schools run by independent or non-profit organisations; and (ix) international schools (Vasavi, 2019, p. 2).

However, this official classification does not illuminate the ways that schools are class-and-caste stratified. Therefore, a much broader classification, but a more useful one for the purpose of this article, is done by Velaskar (1990) and Nawani (2018), in which they categorise schools into four echelons: (i) elite, unaided private schools, often having affiliation with international curriculum, populated by children coming from the affluent families; (ii) government central schools and the good quality private aided/unaided schools; (iii) private aided/unaided schools of average quality; (iv) regional government/local body schools and the low budget private schools, which cater to the poorer sections of the society.

In this classification, the resemblance between the school system and the *varna* system becomes discernible (Nawani, 2018). Just like thousands of castes and sub-castes fall into four varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra), the schools in India can be seen to be falling into the aforementioned four echelons. In other words, schools in India can be seen as a part of a four-tiered school system, akin to the *chaturvarna* structure. These schools differ from each other on several parameters. In the upper echelons, schools are generally better equipped with resources to foster students' learning. In effect, the quality of education one has access to is contingent on their milieu, that is, while the schoolchildren coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds receive poor quality education, their counterparts from privileged backgrounds get the best.

It is of important here to think about the intersection of class and caste, for caste 'has historically shaped the very basis of Indian society and continues to have crucial economic implications even today' (Omvedt, 1982, p. 14). In an analysis of 'caste composition of classes,' Madan observes that caste 'clearly continues to have an impact upon who is the most wealthy and powerful in this country,' and 'seems to have

a substantial impact even upon who is at the bottom of the class structure' (2020, p. 42). That only 22.3 per cent of the country's 'high caste Hindus' own 41 per cent of the country's total wealth (Tagade et al., 2018) substantiates it. In this light, it would not be an overstatement to say that Bahujan children, by and large, populate the schools falling in the lower echelons, thereby receiving poor quality education.

This is what I refer to as the 'Chaturvarna School System'—a school system in which the students from marginalised castes are accommodated in the lower echelons of schools. Dalits,[3] as avarna castes, are outside the chaturvarna structure, which means that Dalit children are, predominantly, either accommodated at the bottom of the chaturvarna school system or kept out of it altogether. This is corroborated by a survey conducted by Social & Rural Research Institute in 2014, which illuminates that nearly one-third (32.42 per cent) of the 6 million out-of-school children in India are Dalits (see Table 1). The chaturvarna school system, in and of itself, promotes children well-endowed with caste capital, 'favouring the most favoured and disfavouring the most disfavoured' (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 36). The upshot of this is that those students who are already at the margins are segregated even before they enter the school-gate. It is not surprising, then, that SC, ST and OBC children have the highest out-of-school percentage.

Table 1: Social group wise out-of-school-children in the age group 6-13

Social Group	Total No. of Children (Age 6-13)	Out Of School Children	Percentage
SC	60772699	1966027	3.24
ST	23991282	1007562	4.2
OBC	71899270	2206001	3.07
Others	47424023	884639	1.87
All	204087274	6064229	2.97

Source: National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India, Social and Rural Research Institute (2014)

Another aspect of the chaturvarna school system is that it reflects not only in the children that are out of the school system but also those who are pushed out of it. An analysis of U-DISE 2016-17 data done by RTE forum[4] reveals that the dropout rates of SC, ST and OBC children are much higher compared to the 'general' category children in the primary and upper primary levels (see Figure 1). It is also important to note that Muslim students also have significantly high dropout rates of 7 per cent in the primary level and 10.11 per cent in the upper primary level. Azam (2020) has pointed

[3]The term 'Dalit' in this article has been used in line with its usage in the popular discourse, to refer to former 'untouchable' caste groups, which the Indian Constitution recognises as 'Scheduled Castes.'

[4]Right to Education Forum. (2018). Status of Implementation of The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (2017-18). Retrieved last on May 5, 2023, https://www.careindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Status%20report18.pdf

out that educational exclusion of Muslim students cannot be solely attributed to rising communalism, as caste also plays a critical role in it.

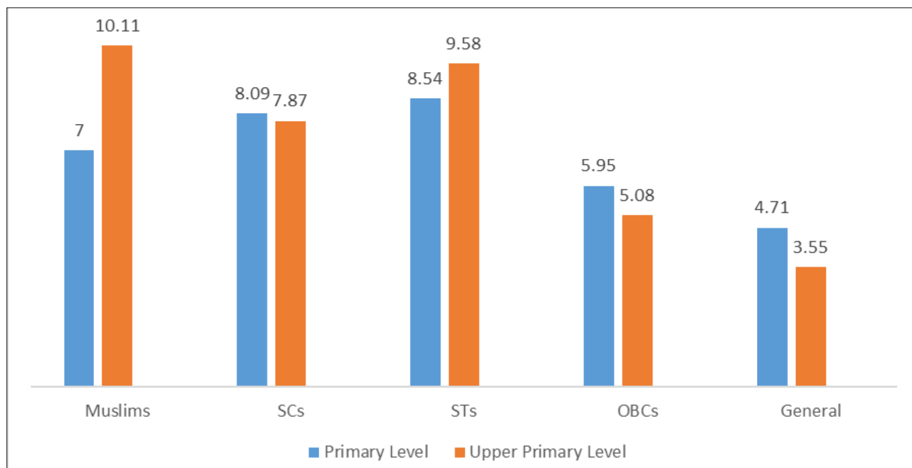

Figure 1: Average Annual Dropout Rate 2016-17

Source: Status of Implementation of The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act, 2009, Right to Education Forum (2018)

In the sections to follow, I will expound on how the NEP 2020 mandates the chaturvarna school system, as well as some other aspects of the policy that render the access to schooling unequal.

Disregarding the Common School System

One of the proposed solutions to the problem of unequal access is the Common School System (henceforth CSS). First conceptualised by American educator Horace Mann in 1830s, common schools were supposed to be tax-funded public schools, attended by all children in the neighbourhood regardless of their social backgrounds (Maniar, 2019). In India, it was under the Education Commission 1964–1966 (also: Kothari Commission) that the idea of establishing a CSS was formally proposed for the first time. The commission, taking note of the differentiation in the education system, observed that there is a 'segregation in education itself – the minority of private, fee-charging, better schools meeting the needs of the upper classes and the vast bulk of free, publicly maintained, but poor schools being utilized by the rest' (NCERT, 1970, p. 14). To address this problem, the commission envisaged common schools 'which will be open to all children, irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic conditions or social status' (Ibid., p. 15), with the aim of bringing 'the different social classes and groups together and thus promote the emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society' (Ibid., p. 14). As opposed to a uniform school system, the commission envisaged CSS as a system where every school is 'intimately involved with its local community' and 'regarded as an individuality and given adequate freedom' (Ibid., p. 463).

Subsequent to the Kothari Commission, both National Policy on Education 1968 and National Policy on Education 1986 upheld the idea of CSS. However, owing to various reasons, its implementation remained a failure. Now, coming after a gap of 34 years, the NEP 2020 has entirely abandoned the idea of CSS, exacerbating the differential arrangement of schooling. That schools are instrumental in structuring human societies is a long-standing idea in the field of sociology of education. They mould children, weave the fabric of future and shape the collective ethos of communities. A segregated school system, therefore, reproduces segregation in the society at large. It was for this precise reason that both Ambedkar and Gramsci, albeit in different social contexts, emphasised the significance of common schools for all students as a means of challenging social hierarchy (Paik, 2014). By eschewing the idea of CSS, then, the NEP 2020 sanctions the reproduction caste-based segregation, and caste, in the society.

Neoliberal Shifts against Constitutional Vision of Education

Jotirao Phule was a proponent of free public education. In the memorial addressed to the Hunter Commission, he mentioned that 'the entire educational machinery' must be handled by the government and that both 'higher and primary education require all the fostering care and attention which Government can bestow on it' (Deshpande, 2002, p. 110). Dr. Ambedkar, much like Phule, was in favour of state-funded education. Knowing that most children from historically disadvantaged castes wouldn't have the means to study if education was not incentivised by the state, he resisted the commercialisation of education: '[t]he Education Department is not a department which can be treated on the basis of quid pro quo. Education ought to be cheapened in all possible ways and to the greatest possible extent' (Ambedkar, 2019b, pp. 40–41). During the framing of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar played an instrumental role in the inclusion of Article 45, which directed the Indian state to provide free and compulsory education to all children until the age of 14 years.

Over the decades, however, India has seen the commercialisation of education that Ambedkar was wary of. It was the National Policy on Education 1986 that heralded a shift in favour of privatisation, reducing the role of state in the provision of public education. A more drastic change in the school-education landscape happened in 1991, when the economic reforms in conformity with International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank ushered in the neoliberal restructuring of education. The state was obliged to begin structural adjustment programs (SAPs), reduce the expenditure on education, allowing the market a greater degree of freedom to intervene in the sector. Subsequently, World Bank-sponsored projects—beginning with District Primary Education Program (DPEP) in 1994 and followed by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2000 —dismantled the public education system. These reforms led to the state's abdication of its constitutional responsibility of providing free education of equitable quality to all children, mushrooming of low-cost private schools across the country and further layering of the school system. Consequently, marginalised caste schoolchildren, largely dependent on state-funded schools, were excluded from

education. This neoliberal shift in education is mirrored in other sectors, such as housing and healthcare, where market-based approaches have heightened and capitalised upon Brahminical legacies to further exclude Bahujans from essential services.

From 2005 onwards, the Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) began highlighting the poor literacy and numeracy skills of students, particularly in government schools, consolidating the dichotomy between public and private school performances and 'further supporting the political economy of privatisation' (Raina, 2020a, p. 3). Following this, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–2012) proposed the engagement of the Indian state with the corporate sector for the delivery of social services, highlighting Public Private Partnership (henceforth PPP) as an important strategy for the development of education (Tilak, 2016). In 2009, enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act was met with contestations on several grounds, such as excluding children between the ages of 0-6 and 14-18 years from its ambit, weakening the civil society movement for a CSS and legitimising the existing multi-layered school system (see Sadgopal, 2010; Teltumbde, 2012). Since 2016, five major policy documents have come out, forming the base work of NEP 2020 (Raina, 2020b), namely (i) the Subramanian committee's report, NPE 2016; (ii) its companion text, Draft NEP 2016; (iii) NITI Aayog's 'Three Year Action Agenda,' 2017; (iv) the Kasturirangan Committee's report, Draft NEP 2019 and; (v) NITI Aayog's 'The Success of Schools: School Education Quality Index,' 2019. All these antecedents of the NEP 2020, Raina asserts, advocated the amplification of neoliberalisation of school education. In 2020, World Bank's 5718 crore project—Strengthening Teaching- Learning And Results for States (STARS) got the union government's approval. It is currently being implemented in six states across India under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme. The project, unsurprisingly, envisions a greater role of non-state private entities in the education sector.

It is in this context that the NEP 2020 has come out, bulldozing the ground to make way for private entities. Veiling the word 'private' under the guise of expressions 'public-spirited private' and 'philanthropic private,' the policy advocates the privatisation of school education. The first expression—'public-spirited private'—is baffling. It appears as though the policy is imagining a private enterprise that places public interests before its own—a highly unlikely scenario. The second expression—'philanthropic private'—has connotations of philanthrocapitalism. Thorup (2013) explains that one of the key tenets underpinning philanthrocapitalism is that there is no conflict between the market and the common good. He notes that philanthrocapitalism as a phenomenon expresses the idea that capitalism is the solution (read: not cause) to the existing problems and propounds that the market should be extended to the hitherto state-run services. This aligns with a neoliberal vision of education, that is, market should administer the provisioning of education (Tooley, 2000). It appears, then, that the policy's mandate that 'the private/philanthropic school sector must also be encouraged and enabled to play a significant and beneficial role' (NEP 2020, 8.4) and its call 'for the rejuvenation, active promotion, and support for private philanthropic activity in the education sector' (NEP 2020, 26.6) are in line with the

ethos of philantrocapitalism. In a similar vein, the policy uses 'Public Philanthropic Partnerships' as a euphemism for PPP. This is to avoid the flak that PPP has received for being an incompatible partnership between the weak state and the powerful private sector, which 'often end(s) in favour of privatisation of education' (Tilak, 2016, p. 8). This policy-led, unprecedented espousal of privatisation of school education is antithetical to the Indian Constitution, which envisioned education as a public good as opposed to a private commodity.

Online Education and Unequal Access

The Covid-19 pandemic-induced proliferation of digital education has cast light on the massive existing digital divide between the haves and have-nots in India. Access to online education is a significant problem, especially for students from marginalised sections residing in rural parts of the country with limited or no access to internet. Several studies have shown that the access to digital infrastructure is inversely proportional to the socio-economic disadvantage. An analysis of NSSO data reveals that only 4 per cent of SC and ST students and 7 per cent OBC students have access to computer with internet (Reddy et al., 2020). The massive disparity in resources—electricity, internet, smartphones, computers, study-space, etc.—means that the virtual classrooms alienate Bahujan students from education. This has been substantiated by a survey-based report (Scholarz, 2021), which showed that SC and ST children were the most affected during the course of school closure owing to the pandemic. According to the report, only 4 per cent of rural SC/ST children were studying online regularly, as opposed to 15 per cent among other rural children. Notwithstanding, the NEP 2020 lays a great emphasis on the promotion of online education. Although it mentions that the digital divide must be addressed, it 'appears to place the onus of ensuring digital access on the household rather than the state' (Taneja, 2021).

The Interiority of Educational Inequality

So far, I've focused on exclusions that children face before entering the school. Here I want to shift the attention to the deeply violent spaces inside the school. Giroux (2016) refers to the 'pedagogies of repression' as pedagogies that obscure the role that education plays in distorting history, silencing the voices of the marginalised and thwarting the relationship between learning and social change. It is crucial to recalibrate our understanding of pedagogy as a repressive tool in the Indian context, where caste is omnipresent. Drawing on Giroux's insights, and Ambedkar's understanding of Brahminism, I use the term 'Pedagogies of Brahminism' (POB) to interpret the repressive functions of pedagogy in relation to the marginalised majority (Bahujans) in India. Ambedkar contended that Brahminism is a socio-political ideology that negates the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity.[5] In this regard, caste is 'nothing but Brahminism incarnate' (Ambedkar, 2019a, p. 77). In a society where caste is the

[5]Presidential address by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar at the G.I.P Railways Depressed Caste Workers' Conference, Nashik, 1938.

primary determinant of life and death, POB relates to the pedagogies that reinforce systems of domination, generate conditions of social reproduction of caste and caste-based inequalities and, ultimately, supress Bahujan students. Accounts in Dalit literature have explicitly illuminated the overt discrimination (punitive measures, corporal punishment, verbal abuse, humiliation and segregation, etc.) that Dalit children are subject to in schools (see: Ambedkar, 2019c; Kamble 2018; Pawar, 2013; Pawar 2015; Valmiki, 2003). Several independent and institutional studies have also repeatedly highlighted the overt forms of discrimination against Bahujan children (see: Balagopalan and Subramanian, 2005; Centre for Equity Studies, 2014; Nambissan, 2009). This overt discrimination is the most visible part of the POB, forming up its surface. Here, I would attempt to cast light on the hidden, subterranean parts of the POB.

Phule reimagined education as a *Trutiya Ratna* (third eye or third jewel), which enables the oppressed to understand their oppression, critically engage with the world and strive for liberation. Phule's vision of education as an instrument of emancipation finds resonance throughout the twentieth century in the works of Ambedkar, Gramsci and Freire (Paik, 2014). Ambedkar, for instance, identified education as a liberating force that could stimulate the transformation within and empower the marginalised to fight against the pro-caste Brahmin orthodoxy. The sequence of words in his famous slogan 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' is indicative of the transformative character of education. For Gramsci, too, education was vital for subaltern groups to develop self-consciousness about their active role within the society.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was strongly influenced by Gramsci (Mayo, 2015; Paik, 2014). Despite having some contrasting views, Gramsci and Freire share important connections, as they 'both regarded education as political' (Mayo, 2015, p. 128), and maintained that it provides the oppressed the conditions for self-reflection, and overcoming their oppression. Freire's work has been influential in shaping critical pedagogy, which stresses upon the impossibility of a supposed 'neutrality' of education (Apple, 2012; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994). The notion that education is ideologically neutral not only allows the power to become invisible, thereby safeguarding the existing power dynamic, but also treats the viewpoint of the dominant as the unstated and undisputed normative centre. Critical pedagogy puts forth the idea that education doesn't exist in a vacuum, isolated from politics and power, that 'it is intimately connected to multiple relations of exploitation, domination, and subordination—and very importantly to struggles to deconstruct and reconstruct these relations' (Apple, 2013, p. 23). I want to use the inextricability of education and power as an entry point onto the terrain of the politics of knowledge. The examination of the politics of knowledge is a crucial way of understanding the relationship between education and power (Apple, 2003), for it offers us important questions—such as: 'Whose knowledge is of most worth?' (Ibid., p. 7)—that are closely connected with the exercise of hegemony by dominant groups.

Gramsci proposed a dialectical formulation of hegemony as a dynamic confluence of coercion and consent. He referred to hegemony as the ability of dominant groups

to establish the 'common sense' of society by gaining the consent of the weaker sections (Gramsci, 1971). To put it differently, hegemony, in Gramsci's terms, means the diffusion throughout society of an entire consciousness that supports the interests of dominant classes, which, in a caste society, is Brahminical consciousness. The production of hegemony is not a natural occurrence; it requires deliberate efforts in specific sites such as the family, workplace, and the school (Apple, 2012, p. 16). Gramsci's succinct insight that '[e]very relation of "hegemony" is necessarily an educational relationship,' (1971, p. 350) suggests that education, in its broadest sense, is central to the functioning of hegemony. In the following sections, I will unpack the role of internal mechanisms of schooling in reproducing upper-caste hegemony in cultural and economic spheres. Here, too, I will look at the NEP 2020 to show how it reinforces the POB, and perpetuates the processes of cultural and economic reproduction.

Cultural Reproduction

The perspective that schools function as important social sites for the perpetuation of ideological hegemony of the powerful groups by validating and reproducing their culture and forms of knowledge emerges strongly from the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1986) refers to 'embodied cultural capital' as those snowballed effects of family and class history that become an innate part of the person. In the Indian setting, caste becomes a significant contributor to the embodied cultural capital. Drawing from experience, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd elaborates on how schools play a particularly crucial role in transmitting the Brahminical culture: '[i]f our culture was Dalitbahujan, the culture of the school was Hindu' (Shepherd, 2019, p. 14) and '[d]alitbahujan life figured nowhere in the curriculum. We had been excluded from history. In fact, it appeared that our history was no history at all' (Shepherd, 2019, p. 54). He further notes that the language and morality of the school-textbooks have no connection with the lived reality of the marginalised majority.

There is a dearth of studies in India that have analysed the school curriculum with respect to caste. Pioneer work done in this direction was done by Kumar (1983), wherein he drew a similar conclusion, describing the school curriculum as 'a means of subtle control' (p. 1571), which serves to assist SC and ST children in internalising the symbols of 'backwardness.' More recently, in an analysis of Odia school textbooks, Nayak and Surendran (2021) identified seven types of caste bias, with 'invisibility' bias being the most prominent. They infer that 'textbooks strengthen and reinforce the already existing caste-based prejudices' and normalise the 'upper-caste way of life as not only dominant but also desirable' (p. 329).

The covert ways in which the POB operate is also reflected in the quotidian life of the school: the practice of Brahminical rituals during morning assembly (for example: *Saraswati Vandana*), or the denial of eggs in mid-day-meal, which is rooted in casteism (Karpagam & Joshi, 2022) and so on. Schools validate certain forms of knowledge, ways of speaking and conducting oneself, values, dispositions, mannerisms and customs that are inherent in someone born and brought up in an upper-

caste household. The POB alienate Bahujan children from their cultures, invalidate the knowledge forms of their communities, and actively encourage a sense of inferiority in their psyche.

Economic Reproduction

In the 1970s, the idea that schools in a capitalist society function to reproduce the class structure came to be widely accepted (see: Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977). Althusser (1970) contested that schools serve as important sites in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. According to him, schools, as 'ideological state apparatuses,' not only performed the reproduction of the skills and rules of labour power but also the reproduction of the relations of production. Bowles (1971) termed it 'unequal education'—an education system that serves to reproduce the social division of labour. In the Indian context, Ambedkar's insightful observation that caste system is not merely a 'division of labour' but also a 'division of labourers' (2019a, p. 47) tells us that a school system entrenched in the practice of caste would reproduce caste-ordained division of labour. The POB would instil in students the temperament that reproduces the class divide between dominant and marginalised castes. Moreover, schools in the upper echelons serve as avenues that lead to the best colleges and thereon to elite occupations (Velaskar, 1990). Students stuck at the bottom of the chaturvarna school system are not able to experience education as something that can lead them to well-paying jobs. Both exteriority and interiority of educational inequality (factors such as: unequal access, poor quality of public education, POB) coalesce to legitimise the restriction of Bahujan students to the lower rungs of economic ladder. In the next section, I further explore the ways in which the NEP 2020 sanctions cultural and economic reproduction.

NEP 2020 and Bahujan Exclusion

At its onset, the NEP 2020 states that '[t]he rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this Policy' (p. 4). This is a particularly anti-Bahujan credo, considering the fact that in the ancient India, Shudras and Ati-Shudras were forbidden from the pursuit of education. The injunctions of the ancient Hindu code Manusmriti (or The Laws of Manu) denied education and agency to women too, which brings us to the intersection of caste and patriarchy. In a Brahminical society, structures of caste and gender are intensely interlinked—those who are at the intersections of marginalised caste identities as well as marginalised gender identities face discrimination on both these accounts. A recent study conducted in four South Indian states showed that Dalit transgender persons are subject to most amount of violence in the schools (Centre for Law and Policy Research, 2019). Looking from the lens of intersectionality, therefore, the aforementioned credo of the policy appears particularly rooted in Brahminical patriarchy, therefore particularly discriminatory against Bahujan women, against, in fact, all identities at the intersection of marginalised castes and genders.

Absences

To understand how the NEP 2020, as a guiding document that determines the school curriculum, contributes to the processes of cultural reproduction, it is useful to study what is absent in the policy. To begin with, the word 'caste' does not find any space in the NEP 2020, apart from inevitable references to term 'Scheduled Castes.' Another troubling absence is of the word 'reservations' and/or 'affirmative action.' These absences reveal the deliberate attempt to present the education ecosystem in India as casteless, notwithstanding the fact that caste is a damaging condition and caste-based discrimination in schools and universities is an everyday reality for Bahujan students. To understand why caste as a damaging condition does not figure as a problem in the policy, Edelman's insights are imperative. He explains that the 'problems come into discourse and therefore into existence as a reinforcement of ideologies, not simply because they are there' (1988, p. 12). Such absences occur, in part, because powerful groups resist the 'consideration of practices from which those groups benefit' (Edelman, 1988, p. 13). These absences, or deliberate erasures, suggest that the policy devaluates the experiences of Bahujan students, thereby approving of the existing caste-based inequalities. In effect, it not only hinders any resistance to the caste system that may arise but also justifies its acceptance.

Another aspect is the absence of Bahujan lives and history in the school curriculum, which has been an unvarying characteristic of education in India (Nayak & Surendran, 2019; Shepherd, 2019; Valmiki, 2003; Xaxa, 2011). The NEP 2020 worsens this exclusion by erasing the contribution of Bahujan scholars:

> The Indian education system produced great scholars such as Charaka, Susruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Bhaskaracharya, Brahmagupta, Chanakya, Chakrapani Datta, Madhava, Panini, Patanjali, Nagarjuna, Gautama, Pingala, Sankardev, Maitreyi, Gargi and Thiruvalluvar, among numerous others, who made seminal contributions to world knowledge in diverse fields such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medical science and surgery, civil engineering, architecture, shipbuilding and navigation, yoga, fine arts, chess, and more (NEP 2020, p. 4).

All the aforementioned scholars are a part of the Brahminical tradition/knowledge structure. The contributions of anticaste reformers such as Savitribai and Jotirao Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy (to name a few) are ignored by the policy document (Sadgopal, 2020). Needless to say, these absences in the policy manifest in the school curriculum: most schools in India do not teach anticaste thinkers. Further, the epistemic contributions of tribal communities to agriculture, forestry, and natural resource management also remain unrecognised (Ibid). Menon (2020) points out that Gautama (Buddha) is mentioned as a scholar produced by the Indian education system, not as the pioneer of a religious movement that challenged the hierarchical, caste-ridden Hinduism.

Hidden Curriculum and the Reinforcement of Caste Laws

Another prominent absence in the policy is of hidden curriculum. The concept of hidden curriculum is not new. It refers to, 'the norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers' statements of ends or goals' (Apple, 2019, pp. 86-87). Hidden curriculum propounds a network of tacit rules that establishes what is legitimate and what is illegitimate. Children learn more from various social encounters in the classrooms than from the everyday formal teaching, and so more than official/formal curriculum it is the hidden curriculum that determines what students learn in schools (Giroux, 1978).

More often than not, the hidden curriculum operates in ways that reify the dominant culture. In the context of capitalist societies, for example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) propose that the norms, values and skills that get transmitted through hidden curriculum characterise the relations of class interaction under capitalism. The Indian society, on the other hand, is marked by the ubiquity of caste: 'turn in any direction you like, Caste is the monster that crosses your path' (Ambedkar, 2019a, p. 47). The social dynamics of the daily classroom interactions, then, is also underpinned by caste-laws. Consequently, hidden curriculum in the Indian classrooms plays a key part in reproduction of social relationships that are based on caste-laws, and, in turn, upholding the institution of caste.

The hidden curriculum is a function of the personal position of the teacher (Singh, 2021). Because the dominant culture in India is informed by the notions of Brahminism, teachers become the primary actors in reinforcing the Brahminical ideology in the classrooms through the hidden curriculum. Given this context, it is imperative that the teachers be sensitised on the subject of caste and asked to introspect their individual caste locations. At present, however, no anticaste teacher training program exists in India, and the NEP 2020 fails in acknowledging the presence of hidden curriculum, let alone proposing a caste sensitisation program for teachers.

The Legitimisation of Caste-Based Vocation

To understand how the NEP 2020 contributes to the processes of economic reproduction, it is worthwhile to revisit the recent amendments in the child labour laws. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 (CLPRA Act) stipulates that a child is allowed to work if they are helping their family or family enterprise after school hours or during vacations. The Act defines *family* as the child's 'mother, father, brother, sister and father's sister and brother and mother's sister and brother,' and *family enterprise* as 'any work, profession, manufacture or business which is performed by the members of the family with the engagement of other persons' (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016). These definitions open up a slew of possibilities of child labour to flourish, allowing the child to work in settings that any of their family members own, or where any of their family members are employed (Ganotra, 2016). Given that children coming from socio-economically disadvantaged families (often trapped in

intergenerational debt bondage) work with the consent of family members, allowing children to work in 'family enterprise' is tantamount to legalising child labour.

It is also heavily linked with caste system and the perpetuation of caste system, for it forces upon oppressed caste children their traditional (read: caste-based) family occupations. Bahujan children, accounting for the largest section of child labourers in India, are the most affected by it, goaded into exploitative labour. The Act also allows adolescents (those between 15-18 years of age) to work in non-hazardous activities, and substantially reduces the occupations coming under the ambit of hazardous occupations (Ganorta, 2016; Mander, 2016). In consequence, it opens up a plethora of settings for adolescents to work, endangering their lives.

These amendments in child labour laws are compounded by the espousal of vocational education by the NEP 2020. Asserting that there is 'no hard separation' between academic and vocational education, the policy stipulates that the vocational training of students would begin from grade 6 onwards (NEP 2020, 4.26). This legitimisation of caste-based vocation would push Bahujan children into the spiral of labour, forcing traditional family occupations upon them, tethering them at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Additionally, the policy states that:

> Schools/school complexes will be encouraged to hire local eminent persons or experts as 'master instructors' in various subjects, such as in traditional local arts, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture, or any other subject where local expertise exists, to benefit students and help preserve and promote local knowledge and professions (NEP 2020, 5.6).

Across India, the parents of a large portion of Bahujan children are agricultural and/or daily wage labourers, employed in the farms of village landowners or the manufacturing units in the locality. The CLPRA Act, coupled with this clause, creates a loophole that allows children to work as 'vocational trainees' with their elder family members as labourers. Through these stipulations, the policy opens up the avenues for the perpetuation of caste-ordained occupations, mandating the renewal of the caste-based hegemony in the society.

That these reforms are Brahminical is underscored by the fact that they resonate with the position of Bal Gangadhar Tilak—'the most celebrated icon of Brahmin nationalism' (Dwivedi et al., 2021)—on the issue. Tilak was firm that the curriculum of peasants' children should be separate from the curriculum of other children, that traditional occupations should be an essential part of the peasants' children's curriculum (Rao, 2008). The nexus of caste and patriarchy also becomes evident in Tilak's stance, for he opposed the establishment of girls' schools too, arguing that education will make women immoral (Ibid). Acutely aware of the caste-patriarchy nexus, Jotirao Phule, along with his wife Savitribai Phule, started the pioneering movement for the education of not only Shudras and Ati-Shudras, but also of girls/women.

Language Policy: Mandating Bahujan Subordination

The shifts in language policy in NEP 2020 contribute to reproduction in both cultural and economic domains. The NEP 2020 highlights the importance of promoting classical languages. However, it gives a privileged position to Sanskrit over other classical languages, mandating that the language will be offered 'at all levels of school and higher education' (NEP 2020, 4.17). It overlooks the fact that Sanskrit education has Brahminical roots—historically marginalised castes were denied it, forcing them into agrarian production and menial work.

The endorsement of Sanskrit is compounded by the promotion of regional languages over English: 'Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language' (NEP 2020, 4.11). The implementation of this policy-clause could lead to a situation where a large section of Bahujan children will be unable to access English education.

While this is being framed as a decolonisation effort (*Hindustan Times*, 2022), it is crucial to recognise that in the Indian context, true decolonialisation must also involve de-brahminisation. Historically, English education has overwhelmingly been available only to Brahminical classes in India. This is rooted not just in cultural systems, but structural and political-economic systems: as hoarders of landed wealth, Brahmins were able to channel agrarian accumulation into elite urban education and white-collar education, which has simply reproduced the privilege of English language skills. It has helped them to accumulate immense cultural, social and economic capital. The post-independence government policies, too, thwarted the entry of English education into Bahujan communities:

> After 1947 in spite of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's insistence to recognize English as national language and must be taught in Government schools the Nehru Government relegated English teaching to private school education and the regional languages were adopted as teaching languages in the Government schools. This policy denied equal rights in the education system and language played a key role in that denial of ruling class language to the poor and lower castes (Shepherd, 2019).

In India today, English language holds the promise of upward socio-economic mobility. It is a crucial factor in obtaining a well-paying job in a competitive, globalised economy. Despite the absence of any scriptural injunctions against learning English, the Brahminical classes maintain a monopoly over its use (Anand, 1999, p. 2053). This perpetuates social hierarchy, with Bahujans remaining at the bottom stratum of the socio-economic structure, and subjected to continued subordination. For this reason, Shepherd (2011) has advocated for a two-language policy, which involves teaching the syllabus in both English and a regional language.

Unsurprisingly, Tilak was against the English education for the peasants' children. He believed that it would embolden them to break the boundaries set by caste, breaking, consequently, the caste system itself (Rao, 2008). The NEP 2020-ordained denial of English to the masses, then, is not only a violation of the Indian Constitution that gives all children the equality of opportunity, but also a way of maintaining intact a caste-based social order.

Conclusion

Using the NEP 2020 as an anchor, this article has delved into the ways in which schooling contributes to upper-caste hegemony. But hegemony is never in statis: 'hegemonic power is constantly having to be built and rebuilt; it is contested and negotiated' (Apple, 2003, p. 6). The sense of flux and conflicts associated with hegemony suggests that there is always space for counterhegemonic projects. Phule and Ambedkar recognised education as a tool to create counterhegemonic solidarities against Brahminism. Any counterhegemonic project today must take into account the evolving nature of educational exclusion. To this end, this article has sought to map the inner and outer contours of caste-based educational exclusion in schools. One possible approach to address the unequal access to schooling, as presented in the article, is to promote a 'common school system' that can counter the existing 'chaturvarna school system.' Similarly, inside classrooms, anticaste pedagogies oriented towards cultivating critical consciousness in students could constitute a challenge to the POB. Rege (2010) suggests that 'Phule-Ambedkarite-Feminist' (PAF) pedagogies, as opposed to the POB, 'may be seen historically as constituting one school of critical pedagogy' (p. 92).

In the context of higher education, we are now witnessing the emergence of Bahujan scholars who are beginning to assert themselves, and envisioning equitable futures for educational systems and practices. The resistance in school education, however, still remains sporadic and limited. Situated as we are now amidst the double assault of right-wing Hindu nationalism as well as neoliberalism on education, it is of paramount importance to analyse the nature of exclusion that Bahujan schoolchildren are experiencing in order to reinvigorate the resistance to the Brahminical-neoliberal forces. Towards the end, then, I would like to call for more elaborate interrogations of how existing modes of schooling contribute to the persistence of caste. Such interrogations offer the possibility to expand our understanding of the forms, textures and shapes of caste-based educational exclusions, which is crucial in devising policies, structures, mechanisms and pedagogies grounded in anticaste epistemology and geared towards an inclusive praxis. To reiterate, the utopia of just and egalitarian schooling will continue to elude us until there is a rigorous reflection on the subtle and far-reaching ways in which education services the structures of power.

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Importance of Caste-Based Headcounts: An Analysis of Caste-Specific Demographics Transition in India

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Abstract

Caste has always been a subject of socio-political segregation in India. Inequality across caste is prominent for varying health and development outcomes, which is a subject less researched till date. Four rounds of National Family Health Surveys (1–4) conducted in the last 25 years are analysed to portray the fertility and mortality differentials across castes/ tribes. The article signifies, that distinct inter and intra-caste differences in association with the region of residence are present that must be taken into consideration while understanding the health outcomes. Despite a decline in the fertility and child mortality rates in India, caste-wise differentials suggests that the decline is associated with the socio-economic position and transition experienced by these groups. Though schemes and benefits are targeted towards backwards castes, however, sub-castes under each caste are far from realization of those benefits at equal pace. Realization of the developmental processes among castes is a matter of proper enumeration and intricate research that rationalize the distributive and affirmative policies of India.

Keywords

Caste, socio-economic inequality, Total Fertility Rate, child mortality, NFHS, India

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Introduction

The ongoing debate on enumeration of population on the basis of caste to measure development has become pertinent in the political paradigm of India. In the demand of socio-economic and caste census, several political bodies are asking the government to start conducting a caste-specific census. A prominent paradigm observes that the development of social communities is devised on the basis of caste reservation in India. Caste is a fundamental construct to measure the social stratification in India (Deshpande, 2001). This has been a source of understanding of the persisting structural inequality in social and economic dimensions (Borooah et al., 2014). The fertility and mortality outcome of the population across castes are understudied in demography. The importance of the caste system is well recognized particularly in the context of India, and previous literature dated to over 2500 years hold evidence for the existence of caste as social hierarchy (Macdonell, 1914). The evolution of the caste system demarcates the social strata, occupational contributions and material possession in terms of individual and social capital (Borooah et al., 2014; Deshpande, 2001). Eventually, social classification further gets associated with the ideology of class, which remains closely connected with sociological or related research. In that context, the research is focused upon a broad classification of caste category such as forward or unreserved, scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribe (ST) and other backward castes (OBC). The knowledge regarding these caste categories is limited as scant sources provide information across specific castes and sub-castes underlying it. Since castes and, also necessary to mention, religions are related with socio-economic status (Kumari & Mohanty, 2020), hence demographic and health outcomes vary to a great extent in that regard. To date, major demographers or social scientists are forced to consider caste as an aggregated group in large datasets despite several classifications constructed within the caste groups mainly due to data inadequacy. Moreover, the literature available to study the demography of caste in India is severely scattered and concentrated on a few regions of India (Corrie, 1995; Pallikadavath & Wilson, 2005; Ramesh, 2008).

The formal demography of caste can be a matter of general interest to social scientists. Caste has been included in vested political interests till date. In the development paradigm, a detailed study on caste has hardly been seen. In developed nations, inequalities observed among social groups has been widely documented (Cai & Morgan, 2019; Yang & Morgan, 2003). As we are devoid of such scope yet, the limited understanding of the reserved caste categories as a minority group can be largely interrogated, henceforth. To fulfill that, one has to argue about subcastes and their social-economic position in relation to who receives a programmatic benefit in the country. However, the understanding in demographic outcomes in an Indian context remains largely unfulfilled with the current database as the last full enumeration of the population with the indicator of caste was done in 1931 by the Registrar General of India (RGI, 1931). Castes are categorized primarily into Brahmin, Kayastha, Vaisya,

Shudras and untouchables. The first three castes are designated as forward caste categories (Borooah et al., 2014). Other than the forward castes, several other castes such as SC, ST and several subcastes of OBC are considered in the reserved caste categories by the Indian constitution. There are several divisions under each caste depicting the stratification associated with the occupation they are engaged in. Yet, no national data source is available to enumerate different sections of population on the basis of their sub-castes at present. The Census of India recognizes that the proportion of population for SC and ST has increased between 1961-2011. The proportional share of reserved castes such as OBC has increased between 1999-2009 across religious categories (Bharti, 2018). Constructs of caste have intruded into religion. A large section of the Muslim population is considered in the Other Backward Class (OBC) categories. Moreover, several religious groups are largely represented by particular castes. For instance, Buddhist or Neo-Buddhists in India are represented by the SC population (Kulkarni, 1994). The concept of lower or backward castes is associated with the untouchability leading to social exclusion and marginalization which results in poor development. As societal change is interwoven into the socio-economic structure of the population, therefore, the pace of demographic transitions is influenced by the complex dynamics of it. Demographic processes like change in fertility, mortality or migration are used to comprehend such changes in the population. The disadvantageous position of the caste groups with regard to their social and economic context highlights the demand to understand the inequalities persisting in society through segregated categories of castes or sub-castes.

A necessary pre-requisite to measure health inequality is to measure the fertility and mortality outcome of the population. Selection bias in mortality towards low socio-economic groups has been documented in several literatures, which prompt us to associate with the wealth and standard of living among the subgroups (Beydoun et al., 2016; Subramanian et al., 2006). The concept of social segregation is deeply interwoven with the occupational constructs of the population which determine the adult or child mortality of any given population (Fujishiro et al., 2017). Standard occupation and earning lead to better access to education and in turn health facilities. This helps to decipher a change in fertility or mortality outcomes. Through programmatic concepts, it can be argued that despite providing reservations and relaxation in several social welfare schemes, many sub-castes are yet to get considered in the process. An inability to reap the benefit of it might hinder development at a socio-economic front rather than the demographic front. In fact, the existence of intra-caste differentials among minority castes in association with socio-economic factors is potent enough to influence the access to a social safety net (Goli, Maurya, & Sharma, 2015; Manjula & Rajasekhar, 2015; Mishra, Veerapandian, & Choudhary, 2021; Pankaj, 2019). Therefore, a huge disparity within the social sub-groups cannot be solely explained by the education or occupation interventions alone. A typical disparity in healthcare access has always been observed among the minor social groups in India. This is evoked by

the possible difference in health behavior and practice, which can certainly influence the measure of health of any population such as fertility and mortality. Studies also argued that the concept of caste remains much more stringent in rural setups, and in urban areas development percolates more easily across castes due to sanskritization and westernization (Bharathi, Malghan, & Rahman, 2019; Shah, 2007). The way in which population across different castes reaps the benefit of development from the community and society can change the behavior and practice among the population extensively. Measurement of fertility and mortality among children for a considerable span of time would reflect the progression of the castes in India. Fertility choice is maneuvered through social and economic values associated with the individuals, and mortality is influenced by the unique combination of the socio-cultural and economic agents at different stages of child growth. Targeted intervention to improve the mortality and fertility behavior in India could essentially be modified in the social groups if a barrier is not present or policies are designed effectively. Since population growth rate influences the social and political dynamics in terms of reservations for the backward castes, it becomes essential to estimate and explore the level of fertility and child mortality across castes. The results will be important to understand the tempo of change in demographic transitions in India in terms of practices adhered to by social groups.

Data

To measure the different caste-wise fertility and child mortality of the population we have utilized four rounds of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data of India. The Demographic and Health Survey, which is known as National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is a central to itemize the demographic and specific health parameters mainly focused upon the reproductive and sexual health of the population since 1992-93 (NFHS-1). Though it could give a broad overview of castes across states of India, however, the benefit of such information has been remarkable as it allows one to analyse the differentials in various demographic and social-economic behavior. In India, the caste distribution shown by the Socio-Economic Caste Census (2011) is 19.7 per cent SC, 8.5 per cent ST, 41.1 per cent OBC and 30.8 per cent Others / General category. It was a privilege for us, social scientists, to explore the major dimensions of demography across the caste categories consistently with all four rounds of NFHS data. Since the survey interrogates specific sub-castes under each broader caste, we have meticulously identified each type of sub-caste from those four rounds of NFHS in this study. NFHS-1 (1992-93), NFHS-2 (1998-99), NFHS-3 (2005-06) and NFHS-4 (2015-16) have been conducted among 89,777 ever married women of 13-49 years in 24 states and NCT Delhi, 90,000 ever married women of 15-49 years in 26 states, 124,385 women aged 15-49 and 74,369 men aged 15-54 in 29 states, 699,686 women of age 15-49 and 112,122 men of age 15-54 in 29 states and 7 union territories, viz.

(International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), 1995; International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) & ICF, 2017; International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) & ORC Macro, 2000, 2008). As it attempts to capture information over four consecutive rounds in last two decades and more, the detailed representation of the survey across different caste categories would unfold detailed trends and patterns of population across castes in India. The sampling followed is a multistage sampling with probability proportion based on population size. The missing value indicates the system missing/ skipped, caste not reported indicates that during the survey if a respondent replied 'don't know' on the question of caste, and others are those who are not categorized for a classified caste in the study.

We have tried to segregate the castes and sub-castes after a thorough and rigorous literature review and perusing a large number of online and offline sources. The distribution of those sub-castes across different rounds of surveys has been documented and then the study has tried to capture the measure of fertility and mortality in India. Castes are divided with respect to actual information on caste categories, language spoken, religion followed, ethnicity, occupational status, etc., which makes it complex caste categories considering the exclusive social and economic construct of that particular group. In the fertility measure, Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and in mortality measure, Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), and Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) has been used. The overall estimation for fertility and mortality is also calculated at the national level. For the study, we have utilized STATA 15.1 software.

Method

Methodology for Estimating Fertility Rates

Fertility rate was calculated in two steps. First, using a STATA code to transform the birth history data in a table of birth. Second, we are using Poisson regression to compute the fertility rates from birth history data (Schoumaker, 2012). More specifically,

Let, X_i be the random variable that denotes the number of birth (x_i be the realization of X_i) is assumed to follow a Poisson distribution with mean μ_i

$$P(x_i=x_i|\mu_i) = \frac{\exp(\mu i) * \mu i \hat{} xi}{xi!} \quad (1)$$

the mean μ_i = (fertility rate (λ_i)*exposure (t_i)), further,

$$\log(\mu_i) = \log(\lambda_i) + \log(t_i) \quad (2)$$

$\log(\lambda_i)$ is linear combination of independent variables , thus ,

$$\log(\lambda_i)=\alpha+f_1(age)+f_2(covariates) \quad (3)$$

now for five years age group we makes dummy variables, in the form .

$$\log(\mu_i)=\log(t_i)+(\alpha+\textstyle\sum_{w=20-24}^{45-49} \beta wiAwi)$$

α is the constant term; Aw_i are dummy variables for the six age groups from 20–24 to 45–49; and we have the first age group (15–19) is the reference category.

So, fertility rate (λ_i) = exp ($\alpha+\sum_{w=20-24}^{45-49}$ βwiAwi)

Predicting fertility rates for a specific age group (e.g. 20–24 years) is straightforward. The dummy variable A is equal to 1 for the specific age group and 0 for the other age groups; the rate is then equal to the exponential of the sum of the constant and the coefficient of the corresponding age group (20-24).

λ_{20-24}=[$\alpha+\beta_{20-24}$]

So TFR = 5*{exp(α)+(exp ($\alpha+\sum_{w=20-24}^{45-49}$ βw)}

Methodology to Compute Child Mortality Rates

We calculate child mortality rate using the STATA package SYNCMRATES, which calculate child mortality rates using DHS data by simple direct method (Masset, 2016). The child mortality rate is calculated as the quotient of the numerator divided by the denominator for each type where, numerators is defined as the number of deaths to live-born children during a specified age range and specified time period. NMR is measured by considering deaths at ages 0 to 30 days, including deaths reported at age zero months. Similarly, IMR is measured at ages 0 to 11 months, and the U5MR is measured at ages 0 to 4 years, including deaths reported at ages 0 to 59 months. The denominator considered is the number of surviving children at the beginning of a specified age range during the specified period of time.

Results

Pattern of Fertility among Castes/Sub-Castes at National and Selected State Level

Table 1 depicts the distribution of study samples interviewed across different caste categories in four rounds of NFHS represented at the household level. In NFHS, the total number of subcastes identified is 32. In NFHS-1, the percentage share of prominent upper or forward caste found to be Brahmin (7.3 per cent), Upper Caste (2.36 per cent), Kayastha (1.3 per cent), and Rajput (4.7 per cent). Beside upper castes, other castes are marked are Jat-Gurjar (3.1 per cent), Yadav (1.9 per cent), Kurmi (3.86 per cent), Service Caste, i.e. Kumhar (3.17 per cent), SC (4.92 per cent), ST (3.25 per cent), Musahar (0.14 per cent), Walmiki (0.46 per cent). Religious minorities such as Muslims share 5.3 per cent of the sample. In NFHS-2, the proportional share of the forward castes in the sample is found to be lesser to the proportional share of the forward caste found in NFHS-1. More than 40 per cent of the sample shows a missing data about the particular castes they belong to. The extra castes named in this round are OBC open (0.07 per cent), Ansari Julaha (0.41 per cent), and language (0.5 per cent). Religious representation of the caste shows Muslims are 3.37 per cent and Christian 0.7 per cent. Around 4.3 per cent did not report their caste and 42.6 per cent claimed missing, explaining no knowledge of their castes. In the NFHS-3 and NFHS-4, the

upper caste represents similar share in the sample except Kayastha, which is found to be 1.12 per cent in NFHS-3 and 0.4 per cent in NFHS-4. However, Naidu-Nadar/ Kapu Nair caste, which is a prominent upper caste in Karnataka and some southern states show a higher share in NFHS-4 (5 per cent) when compared to other rounds of NFHS. The backward castes like Yadav, Kurmi, Kumhar, SC, ST, Khan Pathan, and Ansari Julaha indicate a substantial share in the total sample of NFHS-4. It was also found that Yadav, service caste, i.e. Kumhar, SC, ST, Ansari Julaha and Khan Pathan show an increase in the sample share from the NFHS-3 to 4. The share of respondents who didn't report their caste is 5 per cent in NFHS-3 and NFHS-4. Despite a high missing response in the previous rounds, in NFHS-4 it dips to 32.7 per cent.

Table 1: Distribution of the caste categories among households selected in across National Family Health Survey of India-1, 2, 3, 4

	NFHS1		**NFHS2**		**NFHS3**		**NFHS4**	
Caste Group	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
Brahmin	6,454	7.29	5,643	6.19	5,882	5.39	26490	4.4
Upper caste	2,092	2.36	980	1.07	894	0.82	2545	0.4
Kaystha	1,180	1.33	1,025	1.12	1,224	1.12	2332	0.4
Rajput	4,173	4.71	4,142	4.54	3,404	3.12	17571	2.9
Naidu Nadar Kapu Nair	1,034	1.17	1,764	1.93	1,856	1.7	30258	5
Bania	2,319	2.62	2,024	2.22	3,408	3.13	18271	3
Maratha	41	0.05	1,393	1.53	1,595	1.46	10597	1.8
Jat-gurjar	2,783	3.14	2,512	2.75	2,139	1.96	9940	1.7
Yadav	1,681	1.9	2,660	2.92	2,908	2.67	25559	4.2
Kurmi	3,415	3.86	1,679	1.84	2,136	1.96	16014	2.7
Service caste -KUMHAR+	2,805	3.17	3,398	3.73	3,527	3.23	33244	5.5
Vishkarma	1,042	1.18	1,658	1.82	2,161	1.98	10505	1.7
Muslim	4,699	5.31	3,074	3.37	3,128	2.87	20669	3.4
Khatik Dusadh	953	1.08	1,496	1.64	1,657	1.52	12799	2.1
SC	4,357	4.92	4,361	4.78	5,490	5.03	51761	8.6
ST	2,874	3.25	2,441	2.68	3,703	3.4	31706	5.3
Fisherman	524	0.59	589	0.65	469	0.43	3314	0.6
Lodhi-others	159	0.18	306	0.34	749	0.69	4986	0.8
Mixed caste-Bengali, Bhagat	2,369	2.68	4,093	4.49	755	0.69	6341	1.1
Musahar	121	0.14	97	0.11	101	0.09	1241	0.2
Walmiki	406	0.46	570	0.63	685	0.63	3266	0.5
OBC open			62	0.07	83	0.08	997	0.2
Sindhi	157	0.18	184	0.20	105	0.1	693	0.1
Khan Pathan	518	0.58	813	0.89	1,340	1.23	9483	1.6
Buddhist Boudha	687	0.78	147	0.16	168	0.15	1523	0.3
Ansari Julaha			374	0.41	1,211	1.11	8938	1.5
Sikh	1,447	1.63	596	0.65	664	0.61	6158	1
Jain	365	0.41	289	0.32	404	0.37	1198	0.2
Christian	2,780	3.14	621	0.68	809	0.74	4214	0.7
Language			457	0.50	518	0.48	1590	0.3
Caste not reported	5,627	6.35	3,920	4.30	5,514	5.06	30396	5.1
Missing	31,497	35.57	37,828	41.48	50,354	46.18	196910	32.7
Total	88559		91196		109041		601509	

N.B. Not classified group is many castes name with small number which could not be specified to the above major groups.

Figure 1 shows the TFR of study sample across selected sub-caste/ caste groups in India.[1] The figure has included Brahmin and upper castes from forward caste, Maratha, Jat-Gurjar, and Yadav from backward castes, Kumhar, Walmiki, and Vishkarma from the service castes, and Muslim, mixed castes—Bengali and Bhagat and Buddhist Boudha from the remaining sections of the castes. Mixed castes are those social subgroups involved in multiple and/or a wide range of occupations for instance-agricultural activities, service sectors, or any other occupational types. Despite belonging to the same social subgroup, they represent a diverse economic status. Results also indicate that Maratha had TFR more than five (5) during NFHS-1 and other selected castes clustered between TFR 3-4. Over the course of the survey, the change in the TFR of the castes has shown a variation and in NFHS-4 though the fertility showed a convergent pattern, yet the range of TFR that is represented by these castes have shown a wide variation.

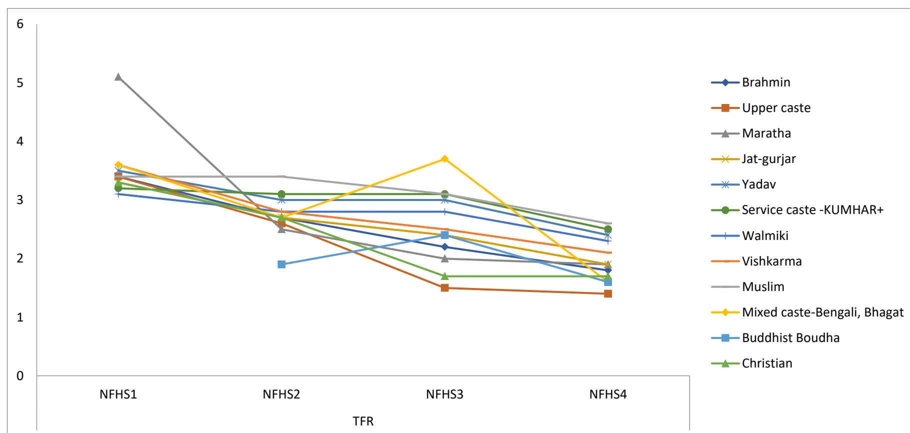

Figure 1: Estimates of fertility (Total Fertility Rate) across castes in 4 rounds of NFHS (1-4) in India

Pattern of Child Mortality among Castes/ Sub-castes at National and Selected State Level

Figure 2 represents the estimation in neonatal mortality across selected castes in 4 rounds of NFHS. A clear decline in the NMR has been observed across rounds of NFHS. In NFHS-4, the neonatal mortality shows a convergence. The highest NMR is represented by the mixed caste Bengali and Bhagat in NFHS-1 (70) in NFHS-1 and it declined to NMR 20 in NFHS-4 representing a sharp decline after NFHS-3. The upper caste has a relatively lower NMR than previous mixed caste, however, the pattern of decline in NMR has been observed to be similar to those. The decline in NMR for the Christian, Maratha along with upper caste in NFHS-4 was found to be remarkable in perspective to the NMR found in the previous rounds for these castes. Among the

[1]The National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16) collects data at the district level that has aimed around 1000 HHs. As a result, the large sample size has been considered for the survey than its previous rounds, which gave state level estimations.

Yadav caste, the decline was not found to be very significant. Walmiki does not show any noticeable improvement in the NMR across all the rounds of NFHS.

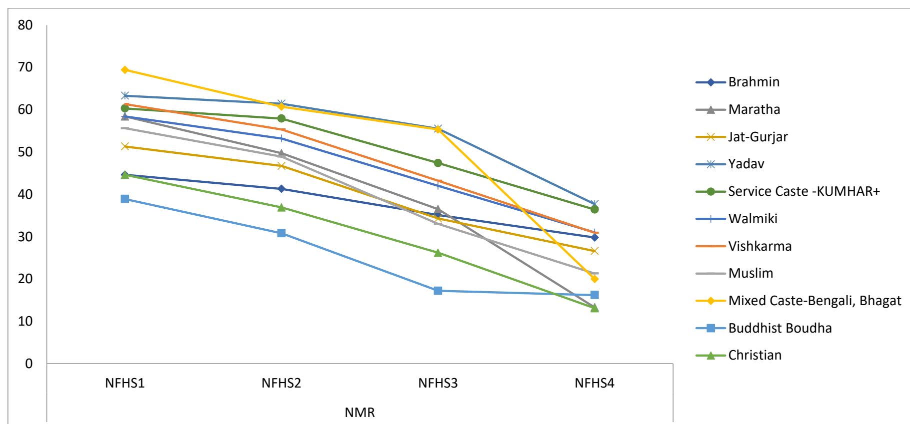

Figure 2: Estimates of Neo-natal Mortality Rates across selected castes in 4 rounds of NFHS (1-4) in India

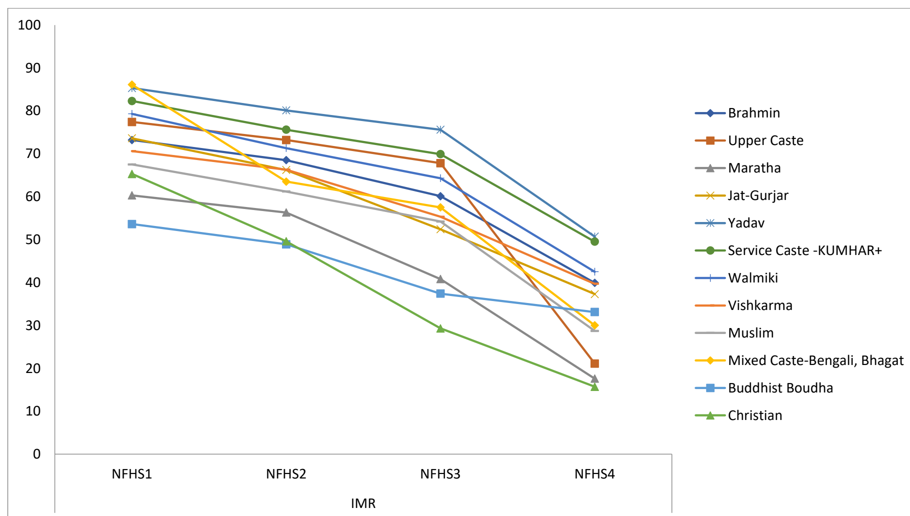

Figure 3: Estimates of Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) across selected castes in 4 rounds of NFHS (1-4) in India

Figure 3 represents the estimated infant mortality rates of the selected caste across four rounds of NFHS in India. The pattern of decline in infant mortality has been found to be distinct and no noticeable convergence has been observed here across the rounds of NFHS. During NFHS-1 to 3, the IMR has shown a sustained decline, while in NFHS-4 these castes show a sharp decline in IMR. Other than upper caste, Christian and Maratha, which show a sharp decline in IMR during NFHS-3 to NFHS-4, no other caste is noticed with a significant change in IMR. Figure 4 represents the

estimates of under 5 mortality rates across castes in four rounds of NFHS in India. The level of decline in U5MR from NFHS-1 to 4 shows a divergence in the mortality pattern. Castes such as Walmiki and Maratha who were positioned relatively lower in the U5MR in NFHS-1 are declined to the lowest. Jat-Gurjar, Mixed castes, namely, Bengali Bhagat and Muslim have found to achieve a similar level of U5MR in NFHS-4 though they were at different levels of mortality in NFHS-2 & 3.

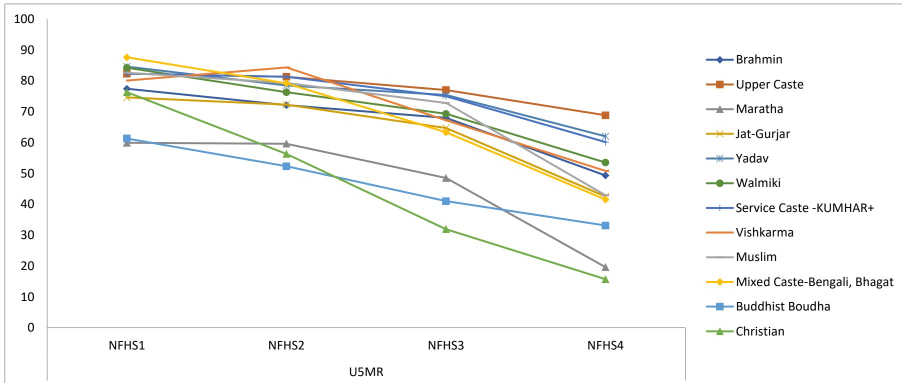

Figure 4: Estimates of Under 5 Mortality Rates (U5MR) across selected castes in 4 rounds of NFHS (1-4) in India

Discussion

This study is the first ever attempt to envisage the demographic outcomes of population segregated by castes in India. At this juncture when many castes claim reservations, adherence for distributive and affirmative actions, this research would provide a classic example of the fertility and mortality trends of the population belonging to the particular caste over around 25 years. Our study finds a long-term transition in fertility and child mortality across different caste categories in India. First, forward castes have displayed a significant and large decline in fertility along with the religious subgroups or castes such as Sikh, Jain, Christian, and Sindhi. The TFR of these castes have reached way below the replacement level of fertility, which suggests a greater focus required to maintain the population size in the long-term. Second, decline in child mortality in terms of NMR, IMR, and U5MR have shown a decline and convergence for the selected castes. However, there is no uniform decline observed in child mortality among forward castes and religious castes. Muslim and other Islamic castes have shown better child mortality outcomes, although the fertility outcome of those did not show a decline relative to the backward caste categories in the study period. Last, there remains an intra-caste inequality while looking at the fertility and mortality rates across four rounds of NFHS found in the study.

The differentials in demographic outcomes among reserved/ backward and unreserved caste are often measured in terms of development indicators such as education, employment, minimum wages, health care access, etc. Forward castes have

an upper hand in possessing material resources, better opportunities to modify life chances and achieve improved economic wellbeing. A desire towards children has been on the decline among the upward castes in India. In contrast, the reserved and deprived castes, which are often considered to be minority, are unable to decline the fertility to maintain their kinship as a motive to conserve their socio-economic status(Chamie, 1977). This study shows a similar pattern in such contexts illustrating a higher TFR among the reserved/ backward castes at a national level. This pattern can be well explained by the fertility model given by Bongaarts in 1978. Primarily, the proportion of population getting married or age at marriage can be a vital factor to explain the fertility pattern. The increase in the age at marriage mainly due to educational improvement and higher opportunities for the employment of women has supported the decline in fertility among forward castes. The study has depicted that SCs and STs are observed to have a lower median age at marriage, mainly due to cultural norms and lower educational attainment (Saxena & Mohanty, 2013). Moreover, improvement in child marriage among the backward castes in the Empowered Action Group states of India such as UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, etc., has been found to be lower than that of forward castes and OBC measured through the NFHS-3 (2005-06) data. Development to the backward castes has been supported by other literature that suggests the SC group of Musahar has seen an increase in child population by 1.5 per cent in 2001-11. Increase in fertility in this caste community could be explained by the lower development, untouchability, and marginalization practiced in the society (Singh, 2016).

Marriage and social mobility can explain the fertility behavior of the population sub-groups. Inter-caste marriage among the forward castes results in similar fertility behavior in the population. There remains a concept of sub-sub-caste within a prominent caste. Marriage within such sub-castes might not help to escalate better health behavior and hence, demographic outcomes. Studies also provide evidence that among illiterate or low educated individuals, homogamy has been found to be higher in rural areas, whereas, it is contrasting for those residing in urban areas in India (Borkotoky & Gupta, 2016). In a particular state, the fertility decline is also explained by the proportion of Schedule Castes, Muslim and urban population out of the total population (Das & Mohanty, 2012). The presence of cultural norms, taboos, beliefs among the backward classes such as ST women would increase the likelihood of conception at a younger age (Singh et al., 2020). Women empowerment has been a crucial tool in the fertility transitions in India (Panandiker & Umashankar, 1994). Mehrotra (2006) argued that upper castes don’t generally follow endogamy. Caste mobility in that situation becomes a possibility. Considering the religious caste such as Muslim, several scholars mention that this religious caste is known to maintain horizontal equality as per the textual norms of Islam, however, in South Asia it adopted vertical hierarchy (Akbar, 2017). It changes along with the change in associated geography and neighbouring communities. Ansari Jualaha is a caste which is basically positioned lower among Muslims. But in Bihar, they are placed at the middle position in the caste hierarchy of Muslims (Akbar, 2017). The social position of the caste and diversity across region could improvise the demographic behavior significantly.

The geographical location of the castes in turn decides the decline in TFR in a great extent. The heterogeneity of any particular caste in larger caste categories should also be considered, when we measure the changes. For instance, Jat Gujjar are categorized to be OBC and ST in the few designated states of India. The analysis shows a decline in the fertility rate among Jat Gujjar, however, the overall child mortality is found to be high. On an obvious note, ST population residing in the rural areas would have a lesser chance to access basic resources and improve rigid cultural norms. The sample distribution of the Jat-Gujjar community in our study has shown the proportional distribution for urban sample as varying between 12-19 per cent. Therefore, a section of this caste community faces several deprivations and remains far away from developmental benefits. However, the transfer of certain behavior from urban to rural community of any particular castes has been claimed to be rapid (Shah, 2007). As a result, imbibing practices such as family planning, childcare, immunization, etc., should be more easily transferred among the population. Since the concept of caste is rural (Shah, 2007), hence, the structural composition of the castes in the villages of any state can decipher the social and demographic attitude of the population.

Further, evidence from NFHS-4 data shows that a relatively higher proportion of under 20 years aged SC/ST women are giving birth to their first child (40 per cent) than non-SC/ST mothers of under 20 years (35 per cent) (Bora, Raushan, & Lutz, 2019). Hence, there remains a higher likelihood for under five deaths among reserved caste categories. Difference in the time of child mortality among Dalits and Adivasis explains the deficiency in the accessible services in several parts of India (Ram, Singh, & Yadav, 2016). Child mortality differentials are already noted to be true for the Hindus and Muslims at a national level. Bhat & Zavier (2005) argued about the presence of major concentration or clustering of Muslims in a formation of ghetto and mostly in the urban areas. Access to health facilities is most crucial to control child mortality than the fertility of population. Living in urban areas offers a higher chance to acquire knowledge, access and development. While backward castes such as ST, fisherman, Musahar, etc., have shown to be residing mostly in the rural areas or urban fringes representing lower developmental outcomes. Linguistic castes show mixed caste categories and hence, demographic outcomes are conclusive enough to be discussed. However, decline in child mortality outcome among Bengalis and Bhagats can be explained on the basis of educational achievement, better access to public health facilities and by observing fertility transitions for a lengthy period of time (Dyson & Moore, 1983).

Caste inequality varies across states in India. The northern states are known for a higher intra-caste inequality, leading to greater chaos in population (George, 2015). Intra-caste inequality can result in differentials in the fertility and mortality transitions in the last 25 years. Our study finds that several castes such as Yadav, Kurmi, etc., secure a higher socio-economic position and achieve the benefit far more prominently than any other in the OBC categories. Therefore, it can be deduced from this study

that lower position subgroups within a caste still experience a low development due to a persistent gap in the availability and accessibility of the schemes, programmes and policies. Receiving support from the government is compromised as we observe power hegemony within a caste. Often, castes, which are the most downtrodden, suffer the most in terms of primary healthcare services in rural areas. Our study shows that castes such as Vishkarma, Khatik Dusadh, Musahar, etc., placed in lower strata of caste hierarchy show a higher rate for child mortality. The mortality outcome of OBC open and other OBCs have been found to be lower from the few upper castes. It is due to OBCs placed at a higher position than SCs or STs, and thus reap the benefit from developmental programmes. That signifies a greater monopoly in terms of social inclusion and access to basic resources by the OBCs (George, 2015).

This article could capture the indicators by segregating the caste with the utmost effort. The categorization of the caste in a particular reserved category in a particular state is subject to the particular socio-economic status of the respective state. Our study could not capture the change in the population share of caste groups in the representative sampling as NFHS do not consider the sub-castes in the sampling frame. We were also limited to identifying those particular socio-economic status in reference to selected states while performing the analysis. It opens a scope for further detailed analysis in this particular issue. Data set identifying the castes or communities in particular along with the other socio-economic determinants, health outcomes and wellbeing measure could capture the inequality in the population more comprehensively. Numerous individuals could not have reported the castes or sub-castes perhaps due to lack of awareness or low education or socio-political reasons. As a result, a large proportion of the sample has been placed into missing and not reported categories. To be able to capture this information would enrich our study in a great extent.

Conclusion

Caste has been a measure of social inequality which has been envisaged by the demographic outcome in our study. The decline in fertility and child mortality is associated with the underlying deep-rooted socio-economic inequality that persists heavily in our society. The forward castes are more likely to reap the benefits of development earlier than the backward castes. However, a decline in fertility would impose negative socio-economic consequences. Moreover, few selected sub-castes within a major caste show skewed patterns of development as they cornered themselves with bargaining power and privilege to control the position, resources and benefits. Thus, equity must be evoked through state machinery such as programmes and policies to improve the benefits of the backward castes in India as well as to balance the unequal decline in the birth and death rates among the forward castes. Counting and identifying the caste would be comprehensive to design target-based programmes and policies.

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Annexure

Table 2: Estimates of fertility (Total Fertility Rate) across castes in 4 rounds of NFHS (1-4) for India

India	**TFR**			
Caste	**NFHS1**	**NFHS2**	**NFHS3**	**NFHS4**
Kaystha	3.6	2.7	1.7	1.6
Rajput	3.4	2.9	2.6	2
Naidu Nadar Kapu Nair	3.2	2.4	1.6	1.7
Bania	3.5	2.8	2.9	2.2
Kurmi	3.5	2.7	2.4	1.9
Khatik Dusadh	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.1
SC	3.4	2.9	3.3	2.3
ST	3.5	2.9	2.9	2.3
Fisherman	3.7	2.7	3.2	2.2
Lodhi-others	3.1	3.4	3.2	2.7
Musahar	3.4	3.5	5.9	4.8
OBC open		2.5	2.4	1.5
Sindhi	3.1	2.8	1.6	1.7
Khan Pathan	3.4	3.8	3.4	2.5
Ansari Julaha	3.5	2.8	3.1	2.7
Sikh	3.3	2.7	2.2	1.6
Jain	3.1	2.7	1.5	1.3
Language		2.9	1.8	1.7
Caste not reported	3.4	3.2	2.8	2
Missing	3.4	2.8	2.5	2.1

Table 3: Estimates of Neonatal Mortality Rates (NMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) across castes in 4 rounds of NFHS (1-4) for India

India	**NMR**				**IMR**				**U5MR**			
Caste group final	**NFHS1**	**NFHS2**	**NFHS3**	**NFHS 4**	**NFHS1**	**NFHS2**	**NFHS3**	**NFHS 4**	**NFHS1**	**NFHS2**	**NFHS3**	**NFHS 4**
Kaystha	66.3	60.1	45.3	26.3	61.3	74.8	55.7	34.1	69.2	67.9	63.1	48.4
Rajput	68.7	61.2	44.8	30	75.2	71.3	63.9	42.3	81.2	78.5	76.1	51.2
Naidu Nadar Kapu Nair	63.2	60.3	47.7	18.1	69.7	63.5	57.5	24.7	76.9	73.6	68.2	36
Bania	59.6	54.6	45.8	28	77.2	72.1	65.1	39	85.6	84.2	79.6	49.4
Kurmi	59.7	56.3	42.8	23.7	72.3	67.3	59.9	31.5	77.5	76.3	69.5	39.3
Khatik Dusadh	58.9	51.3	46.3	49.7	77.5	73.2	68.6	66.2	89.6	85.6	81.7	77.4
SC	65.2	58.4	55	35.2	79.6	74.1	68.2	48.9	85.4	91.3	84.2	58.1
ST	63.2	56.9	48.7	31.2	76.3	72.3	69.7	42.3	81.2	84.2	76.2	66.6
Fisherman	60.2	53.1	46.2	30.7	70.5	66.3	60.9	39.2	90	85.6	81.5	43.7
Lodhi-Others	55.3	51.9	45.2	44.6	82.1	78.1	73.5	62.1	95.6	90.5	85.7	79.1
Musahar	60.3	56.2	47.7	45.1	80.5	79.3	63.6	57.8	102.5	95.6	89.4	81.2
OBC Open	49.7	40.1	27.2	18.6	74.1	66.5	56.2	26.1	75.4	70.1	56.2	29.6
Sindhi	63.5	31.2	22.8	16	55.3	39.7	22.8	16	62.3	50.2	22.8	16
Khan Pathan	59.4	49.3	45	29.9	79.6	73.2	67.7	49.5	89.8	86.3	82.4	54.6
Ansari Julaha	55.2	47.5	36.1	31.9	78.9	70.5	65.7	44.4	89.4	84.1	67.4	55.6
Sikh	52.3	44.6	32.2	25.5	52.3	47.6	38.4	36.1	83.2	69.8	43.9	38.7
Jain	42.6	37.6	26.9	11.7	48.7	39.6	25.4	16.1	53.2	40.1	15.6	16.1
Language	50.2	44.6	36	34	60.1	55.6	42	47.8	78.2	63.2	43.3	61.6
Caste Not Reported	55.6	50.4	44	21.4	67.6	67.2	59.6	31.8	91.3	86.6	79.9	38.2
Missing	59.8	52.3	42.7	27.7	66.5	61.3	53.7	38.8	96.3	89.1	83.6	48.9

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Politics of Recognition and Caste among Muslims: A Study of Shekhra Biradari of Bihar, India

Tausif Ahmad[1]

Abstract

The caste system among Muslim society has long been an ignorant point of debate in academia. But in recent times it emerged as a thoughtful discourse. The sociological study finds that Muslim society of India is divided into three major social groups, Ashraf, Ajlaf, and Arzal. Most Muslims of India belong to the latter two groups. The present study is an attempt to give an insight into an Arzal caste known as Shekhra. Shekhra has an occupational history of bone picking. The article will discuss how the struggle for social recognition harmed their demand for redistributive justice (reservation). They have been included in the Central OBC and in EBC in Bihar. However, later, reservation has been denied because of their self misrecognition as Sheikh Biradari. The study is an attempt to explore the reasons behind it and suggests the possible way to find a solution.

Keywords

Muslim, caste, Ashraf, Ajlaf, Shekhra, Sheikh, recognition, reservation

Introduction

The concept of social justice in independent India has long been limited mainly to the landless and underprivileged people within non-Muslim society. The social hierarchy and division within Muslim society were not considered urgent and serious themes of study. For instance, social categories such as Pasmanda and Dalit Muslim have not been accepted as part of social and academic discourse in India. Albeit, in Hindu society, categories like Dalits and OBCs have been studied rigorously, and a large volume of literature has been produced so far. Due to the politicisation of lower caste followed by intellectual discourse, the problems and concerns related to the OBCs and Dalits were considered a serious category for social and public policy. As a result, the

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subaltern groups mentioned earlier have benefited in comparison to the Dalit Muslim and Pasmanda Muslim.

In Indian Muslim society, besides the fact that nowhere in their sacred texts (the Qur'an and Hadith) does the implication of social stratification exist, they have been practicing the caste system over the years, which they usually call "Biradari" (Ahmad, 1978, p. 256). On the one hand, they amplify the notion of *Masawat* (equality) in the religious realm, but on the other hand, in the societal realm, there are castes that matter the most. According to Imtiaz Ahmad, they are not like the Hindu caste system. They occupy a middle ground between Islam's egalitarian principle and the very structure of Indian Muslim society. Imtiaz Ahmad dubbed them "caste-like features." (Ibid.)

Muslim society in India is divided into three distinct caste groups.[1] The first is *Ashraf* (noble), which comprises foreign-origin Muslims from Arab countries, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, and others, including the native converts from upper-caste Hindus like *Brahmans*, *Rajputs, Kayasthas,* and others (Ansari, 1960). The *Ashraf* category has four castes, namely *Syed, Sheikh, Mughal, and Pathan*. The *Syed* and *Sheikh* tend to relate themselves to the Arabs, whereas the rest of the two caste groups, *Mughal* and *Pathan,* consider themselves of Central Asian and Afghan origin (Ahmad, 1967). These *Ashraf* groups *are* usually, but not necessarily, landowners, religious leaders, and political leaders as well. The second category is notably known as *Ajlaf* (lowly), which comprises clean occupational castes. This category includes various castes such as *Ansari, Rayeen, Mansoori, Saifi, Qureshi, and* others. The third and lowest one is the *Arzal* (excluded), *which* is somehow the equivalent of Hindu Dalits.[2] In this category, castes like, *Halalkhor, Nat, Pamaria, Hajjam, Dhobi,* and other unclean occupational castes are included.

Although earlier, some studies had been done on lower-caste Muslims in the context of Bihar. There has been scarce anthropological studies done on individual Muslim castes. And as far as *Shekhra* Biradari is concerned, no socio-political and anthropological study has been conducted. This article is willing to fill those academic gaps. Alongside, the article also aims to engage with the politics of recognition critically. The central question here is about the struggle for recognition and redistribution of the *Shekhra* Biradari of Bihar. For a long time, the *Shekhra* caste, which used to do menial jobs, was despised, and misrecognised by the society.

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[1]It is important to note here that the three-caste group first recognised in the 1901 census in Muslim society. However, it recogmises Arzals quoting that, 'those Muslims with which no other Mohammadens wants to associate them'. Meanwhile, the same happened in later censuses till the 1931 census. Because after this there was no caste census done. Later, after Independence, the first backward commission Kaka Kalelkar Commission followed the census of 1901 and accepted the first two caste groups among Muslims Ashraf and Ajlaf. However, in 1990 after the implementation of the Mandal Commission, the three caste groups among Muslims got legitimised.

[2]See the detailed study on different castes in, Ansari, Gaus. *Muslim Castes in Uttar Pradesh.* Lucknow: Ethnographic and Fol Culture Society Uttar Pradesh, 1960. Anwar, Ali. *Msawat Ki Jung: Pasemanjar Bihar Ke Pasmanda Musalmaan.* (in Hindi) New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan, 2001. And, Ansari, Ashfaq H. (ed.) 2007, Basic Problems of OBCs and Dalit Muslims, Serial Publishers: Delhi.

Because of the demeaning treatment they received from society, they changed their social identity from *Shekhra* to *Sheikh*, because *Shekhra* is a demeaning identity that does not receive proper respect, since lack of due respect inflicts harm and self-hatred (Taylor, 1991, 1994). Social recognition is the essential element of one's idea of self for due recognition, which, according to Taylor, is "a vital human need" (Ibid., p. 25). The lack of social recognition compelled *Shekhras* to change their identity and call themselves "*Sheikh*." The latter question intersects with the former because of the dilemma on their self-identity of becoming someone else; they are confronted with the challenge of redistribution (reservation). The politics of redistribution claimed by Nancy Fraser is about claims that lower castes make to get their share of economic opportunities through policies such as reservation in public institutions (Singh, 2020). *Shekhra,* being a bone collector, was not only demeaned by society but also kept resourceless, uneducated, and unemployed. According to Nancy Fraser, the politics of recognition and redistribution is a claim of social justice (Fraser, 2003). She believes that combining recognition and redistribution completes the concept of social justice. According to Fraser, without redistribution, there would be no recognition, and without redistribution, recognition would not do any good.[3] The same line of argument is fit for the *Shekhra* Biradari. This article primarily deals with the origin of *Shekhra* Biradari, their social position and their struggle for recognition and redistribution. Furthermore, this article shows that how contradictory have become these two aspects of recognition and redistribution for the *Shekhra* Biradari?

The article is part of my ongoing doctoral research work. The issue of *Shekhra* Biradari came before me during the fieldwork for my theses in Vishshariya village of Bhargama Block of Araria district, which was conducted between September 2019 and February 2020. The whole debate, discussion, and argument are based on the personal interviews conducted with some of the most important people in *Shekhra* Biradari and the documents, letters, and notes provided by them.

The Shekhra Biradari: Brief Discussion on Origins of the Community

Irrespective of ample studies concerning the Muslim caste system, anthropological studies on different Muslim castes still face the challenges of minimal resources. The *Shekhra* community is one such community with a dubious past and no written documents. However, they try to find their linkage in different documents and records. *Shekhra* (also written as *Shaikhda* or *Shaikhra* and also known as Gujarati *Sheikh*) is a Muslim community in Gujarat, also found in the districts of Ahmadabad and Baroda, that is known for its devotees of the Sufi preacher Bala Shah.[4] According

[3]Nancy Fraser proposes in her book "Redistribution or recognition? A political-Philosophical Exchange" a "perspective dualist" analysis that casts the two categories as co-fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice. For details see the 'Introduction'.

[4]Gazzeteer of Bombay Presidency, Vol. IX, Part. II, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1899. pp. 69–70

to Azeemuddin, the *Shekhra* of Seemanchal migrated from Gujarat,[5] but they do not believe in any relation between the *Shekhra* of Seemanchal and the Gujarati *Sheikh* or *Shekhra*. There are probably two reasons for this. The Gujarati *Sheikh* or *Shaikhda* never practiced bone picking, and the *Shekhra* of Seemanchal do not believe in the Bala Shah, in whom the Gujarati *Shaikhda* has faith.

While searching the words *Shekhra/Shekhda/Shaikhda/Shaikhra* on the internet, nothing is found about this caste. In an online Rekhta dictionary, the word *Shekhra* (written as *Shaikhda*) means "scornfully, son of a *Sheikh.*"[6] The *Shekhda/Shekhra* Muslims of Bihar must not know this meaning. However, the *Shekhra* Biradari of Bihar has its own narrative about the community, which entails distinct historical roots about their origin because of its less well-recorded history. Within *Shekhra* Biradari, most people do not recognise themselves as *"Shekhra,"* but as "*Sheikh*".

Well, *Shekhra* Biradari was involved in a menial job equivalent to the Hindu *'Chamar*' caste in the beginning.[7] This was the reason for their attempt of changing their identity from *Shekhra* to *Sheikh*. According to a sociological study, no caste claims that it arose from a shameful social practice, which is why castes attempt to elevate their social status through a process of social mobility instead (Sinha, 2010). In other words, *Shekhra* Biradari is an "ancestorless" community (castes which have lower status or whose heredity is not prestigious)[8] which is why it can be found that there is/was no interest to get to know their history, except among those who fight for their reservation. The latter is now attempting to trace the historical origin of their caste.

Albeit lack of records there has been some mention in different sources. For example, *"Punjab Castes"* (1916) followed the 1881 census mentioned *Shekhra* as a 'contemptuous diminutive of *Sheikh*' (Ibbetson, 1916, p. 210). Jabir Hussain in *"Bihar ki Pasmanda Muslim Abadiyan"* (in Urdu) also mentioned *Shekhra* as Pasmanda Biradari (Hussain, 1994, p. 11). *Sheikh* Wahajuddin wrote in his book, *Kulhaiya Sheikh Siddiqui ki Origin* (in Urdu) that in 1760-70, four dynasties came to the west from Bengal. A third of them settled in Dehti village[9] and called themselves *Shekhra*.[10]

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[5]The *Shekhra* Biradari is written in different ways everywhere. While *Shekhra* writes himself as Shekhda (in Hindi), in Gujarat it is written as Shaikhda or Shaikhra. Since, here the article is about the *Shekhra* community of Seemanchal of Bihar, I have used the word which is used by the Bihar Backward Classes Commission and National Backward Classes Commission, the word is written as '*Shekhra*'.

[6]https://rekhtadictionary.com/meaning-of-shaikhdaa

[7]Interview with Razi Ahmad secretary of *Shekhra*VikasParishad, and deputy chief of JD(U) of Araria in his residence on January 21, 2020.

[8]See details in, Gillette, J.Ancestorless Man: The Anthropological Dilemma. *The Scientific Monthly,* 1943 *57*(6), 533-545. Retrieved on March 8, 2021. from http://www.jstor.org/stable/18232. Also Kranath, Dilip.'Caste among Muslims', in Ansari, Ashfaq, H. (ed.) *Basic Problems of OBC & Dalit Muslims*, New Delhi: Serial Publications. 2007. Pp.66-87

[9]Dehti is a village in Araria districts, known for the population of *Shekhra*Biradari

[10]Wahajuddin, *Sheikh* Muhammad. *Kulah Haya Sheikh Siddiqui Ki Origin.* Patna: The Print Line, 2005.

Qamar Shadan in his book *Tareekh E Purnea* (in Urdu) also makes mention about *Shekhra* Biradari.[11] Except for these, there are no detailed written records about this Biradari.

Azeemuddin, an ex-minister and MLA in the Bihar government (1990-1995) and the founder and chief of '*Shekhra Vikas Parishad*' (*Shekhra* development council)[12] addressed *Shekhra* people in 2011 in the town hall in Araria district and delivered his presidential speech. In this speech, he elaborated on the origin of the Biradari. Here is a translation (by the author) of the written version of his speech.[13] According to him,

> The history of *Shekhra* caste in Araria district dates to the era of Aurangzeb when Saif Khan was made a faujdar of Purnea at the request of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan of Bengal. The army that came with him included the soldiers of Gujarat and the *Shekhra* caste of Gujarat also came in the area of Purnea whose original profession was to collect bones and work as a beggar. Going into the depths of history, the roots of *Shekhra* caste go through Gujarat and Punjab and North-Western border province.

In the book of H.A. Rose in *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of Punjab* and *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Punjab Vol. II* indicate that the profession of 'Chuhra,'[14] the Hindu slum caste of Punjab, was to choose bones and act as a beggar and many of them converted to Islam. The *Shekhra* community has its origins in this Chuhra caste, a branch of which is still found in Ahmedabad and Baroda in Gujarat. *Shekhra* caste is specifically mentioned in Satish C. Mishra's, *Muslim Communities in Gujarat*. It is possible that some *Shekhra* families, along with soldiers from Gujarat, reached Purnea during Saif Khan's time. After defeating Bir Shah of Birnagar,[15] when Saif Khan started to rule the area of Purnea, he also populated the *Shekhra* caste here."

Shekhra Vikas Parishad's proposal notes state that, "the *Shekhra* caste is socially, economically, educationally, and politically backward, depressed, exploited, and marginalised due to working menial jobs, resulting in this *Arzal* caste being kept separate from society's mainstream. On account of the ancestral profession of collecting the bones of dead animals, they have been considered an abomination."

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[11]Shadan, Qamar. *Taareekh E Purnea* (In Urdu) Qamar Nizami Ma'roof Ganj, Gaya, Patna: City Print Bihar, 1991.

[12]*Shekhra* Vikas Parishad (*Shekhra* Development Council) founded by ex-Minister of Bihar Azeemuddin in 1993 for the movement in support of the reservation of the *Shekhra* Biradari. The organization continues to work and fight the new challenges that have emerged after this but could not find solutions.

[13]His speech is available in pamphlet form in Hindi, translated by the author.

[14]Report on the Census of Punjab taken on February 17 1881, Para 295 part IV, p.154. There is a mention of Chuhra caste, but no mention of bone collecting but scavenging. However, there was also Muslim Chuhra caste.

[15]The problem is with the *Shekhra* community of Araria district, but mostly the people of Bhargama block suffer more of this. Since this study is based on Bhargama block, the discussion of Birnagar is also needed because Birnagar is a village in Bhargama Block.

Besides this, there is another oral narrative of the history of this caste. According to the narration,[16] they were initially and originally 'bone collectors'. The word *Shekhra* originated from the word "*Seeker*" which means 'bone' thus, the collector of bones called '*Seekra*', which eventually turns into the *Shekhra*.[17] The word transformation from '*Seekra*' to *'Shekhra*' is also an influence of '*Sheikh*'.[18] The work of bone collecting is considered a demeaning job as per the conventions of society. Hence, they were kept out of mainstream society and forced to live on the outskirts of their villages. They have continuously migrated from one place to another, but eventually settled in Araria District. Most of them gradually left their traditional occupation as the demand for bones declined over time, and they shifted to other occupations. Many sociological writings have corroboted this shift of occupation by lower castes over time. Archana Sinha wrote about the traditional occupational caste, elucidating that "during British colonial rule, the rigidity of the Indian caste system was withering. Different castes were being inculcated in every field of work, but not in the organised sectors" (Sinha, 2010). However, after they leave their conventional job of picking up bones and choose another kind of occupation, it cannot get them into better socio-economic conditions, despite the fact that their educational, economic, and political conditions have worsened. However, as they transitioned from their traditional occupation of bone collecting to mainstream society, they began to refer to themselves as "*Sheikh*s" rather *Shekhra* in order to elevate their social status.

The 'Sheikh' and the Process of "Sheikhisation" Among Various Muslim Castes

The sociological fact is that communities have no permanent identities, and these identities are constantly changing. Caste and communities in India have no biological basis but have been given assumed identities and hierarchies based on social and political grounds. With the passage of time, the identities of various castes, tribes, and communities changed. Castes and communities that have acquired economic and political power have been able to enhance their status in the hierarchy of the caste system over time (Joshi, 2015, p. 4). The phenomenon of *Shekhra* Biradari identifying as *"Sheikh"* did not alter their sociological realities but their nomenclature. However, *Shekhra* is not a unique case in this respect. In Hindu society, there has been a practice of raising oneself or at least appearing tall, whereby the adaptation of the name, surname, lifestyle, and dialect of the upper castes has been termed 'Sanskritisation' (Srinivas, 2003). Similarly, in Muslim society, a group or individual's socio-economic upward mobility has been termed as 'Ashrafisation' (Vreede-de-Steurs, 1969, p. 56;

[16]Interview with Mr. Ashfaque in his residence in the village Vishhariya on November 27, 2019. Ashfaque himself is from *Shekhra* Biradari and a teacher in Vishhariya high school, in the Bhargama block of Araria district and is working for the reservation for *Shekhra*.

[17]For the work of bone collecting, they still called by other Biradari by various derogatory words like 'Haddi chunwa' (bone pickers), and 'Haddi Chussa' (bone suckers).

[18]In the words of Razi Ahmad, secretary of *Shekhra* Vikas Parishad, and deputy chief of JD (U) in Araria. Personal Interview done on January 21, 2020 at his residence in Araria.

Ghosh, 2018, p. 181). The definition of Ashrafisation is the process of social mobility by which people in lower positions imitate the upper caste people's lifestyles, customs, manners, etc., so that they are placed in the upper caste category (Momin, 1978, p. 141). Ghaus Ansari calls them pseudo-*Ashraf*. He writes,

> It has been a common practice on the part of the lower caste individuals to claim *Ashraf* descent along with a rise in socio-economic status. There are numerous instances in almost all towns of Uttar Pradesh where low caste persons, who have attained a higher economic status, felt it degrading to remain members of their caste. They almost always look upward on the social scale. Whenever they have felt that their caste status is below their social status, they attempt to add some of the *Ashraf* titles to their names, and then they claim *Ashraf* descent (Ansari, 1960 p. 38).

Ashrafisation includes certain aspects like *parda* practice (the Islamic veil system), emphasis on *Dini Talim* (religious education), use of good Urdu language, not letting women out for work, etc. (Momin, 1978; Hasan, 1994). Ashrafisation is more about the social system than the class system, reflecting a higher economic status, which often leads to a change of either the family or Biradari name (Ghosh, 2018, p. 182). But here with *Shekhra* Biradari, the case is different from Ashrafisation.The *Shekhra* Biradari, who had amassed wealth, education, and jobs at the time, attempted to elevate their social standing within the Muslim community by naming and claiming to be *Sheikh.* This process of struggling for social recognition I call "*Sheikh*isation."[19]

Why have I called it *Sheikh*isation? There are various reasons for this. Sheikhisation is a less intense process than Ashrafisation. Ashrafisation is meant to be a cultural or value aspect that Sheikhisation is not. Sheikhisation is beyond Ashrafisation in a sense that it does not necessarily acquire the value or cultural traits of *Ashraf* Muslims, but it claims to be one of them, e.g. *Sheikh*. In this process, the most common phenomenon is related to the only caste, e.g. *Sheikh*.

Furthermore, here is a question as to why most of the lower caste Muslims want to be called "*Sheikh*." *Sheikh* is the upper caste category (*Ashraf*), and there are about 28 sub-castes or categories among the *Sheikh*s.[20] So it is easier to claim one caste to be a *Sheikh* than other castes, i.e., *Syed, Mughal,* and *Pathan*. This whole process is nothing but the struggle for social recognition, because many sociological studies have revealed that the lower castes do not get the respect they want for their status of being lower caste. When they do not get their due identity two things happen on this matter, either they hide their real identity or they change it as happened in the case of *Shekhra*. As written earlier, *Shekhras* were bone collectors, which was a menial job. People identify them as untouchables. They were outcasted and lived outside the

[19]See Ahmad, T. "The Paint of Muslim Society: Population, Politics, and Reservation", *Islam and Muslim Societies: A Social Science Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2021

[20]People's Group of India: Discovering every tribe, Nation, Language and People. https://peoplegroupsindia.com/profiles/shaikh/

village. However, by the time they changed or left their jobs, they saw the need to change their identities as well.

However, this is not the only case. The various types of literature show how lower caste people attempted to claim the title of *Sheikh* at the time. Now the first question needs to be addressed: who is the *Sheikh*? Imtiaz Ahmad writes about this caste,

> The word *'Sheikh'* literally means the 'chief' (*Sardar*) or *Agua* in Arabic. It is used respectfully for a clan, family, or head of a family. But in India, the word has gained a relatively special meaning and is indicative of a status group. In the entire subcontinent, it is used for individuals who claim to be descendants of the Arab *Quraish* clan of Prophet Muhammad or a close companion or friend (*sahaba*) of the Prophet. Such persons are generally considered noble from birth in India and like *Syed*, *Moguls*, and *Pathan*. Like the *Syeds, Mughals*, and *Pathans*, the *Sheikhs* also have a very high status in the idealised system of social staging of Muslims (Ahmad, 1978 p. 179).

In fact, "*Sheikh*" comes just after the *Syed* in the hierarchy. It is also noteworthy that the *Sheikh* is not a caste in itself; it is divided into many different sub-groups (Ibid., p. 181). Those who are trying to identify themselves as *"Sheikhs"* are probably unaware of this. In the below section, I will discuss some examples of Sheikhisation among low-caste Muslims cited by different scholars and authors.

Buchanan accounts of 1809–10 stated that the "low fellows" among the Muslims "tend to assume the title *Sheikh,* implying highly coveted Arab origin" (Buchanan, 1928). According to Satish C. Mishra, the term *"Sheikh"* can cover a community of no definite origin; more precisely, since an individual can call himself a *Sheikh* and this epithet can be claimed by any person of uncertain caste, a group of persons who have no definite associations can be covered (Misra, 1985, p. 115). Imtiaz Ahmad writes about the lower castes' claims to be *Sheikh*s.

> The total number of persons claiming affiliation with the *Sheikh* caste was 1300000 in 1931, and this number was 150 per cent more than those claiming the same in 1901. If we remember that no one came from Arabia between 1901 and 1931, then this remarkable growth was not possible in any way other than the slow and gradual inclusion of the members of other castes in the *Sheikh* category. The available evidence also seems to indicate that the *Sheikh* category has always been a little too open and variable. Dynamic groups seeking a new status identity have often used the *Sheikh* category to improve their status. For example, it is easier to convince a *Sheikh* than *Syed's* claim because the *Sheikh's* status can be easily claimed. It is essential for dynamic groups claiming a superior status to add their lineage to an Arab historical figure (Ahmad, 1978, p. 184).

Ali Anwar writes, "In the 1891 Gaya Census Report, there are only a few descendants of the early Muslims who settled in India." Further information is found in the report

that *Mullick* (oil pressure, also known as *Teli*), who claims to be a separate sect, is completely classified as a *Sheikh* (Anwar, 2001, p. 98).[21] He further writes that,

> Weavers are prominent among the Muslims of the lower line. Most of them demand the wrongful right be included in the *Sheikh* caste. In the same book, he further writes,"in 1911, the census officer of Bihar, referring to the flood of records in this regard, wrote that the weight of the applications seeking to be graded among the upper castes in the weight of their castes was increased. This aggressive entry was seen not only among Hindus but also among Muslims. In the same report, it was said that between 1901 and 1911, Muslim Rajput suddenly started calling themselves *Pathan*, '*Khan*' replaced 'Singh'. On the other hand, all the lower caste Muslims, weavers, washermen, barbers, oil pressures, etc. started aspiring for the status of the *Sheikh* themselves. But the Muslims of the elite did not recognise him. Similarly, the lower-class Muslims also did not give them the recognition of high rating (Ibid, p. 99).[22]

Ayyub Rayeenin his book *Bharat Ke Dalit Musalman* (in Hindi) describes that,

> People of different castes in different places were also affected by an inferiority complex. Many small-caste people were not able to shy away from calling themselves, *Sheikh*s and *Khans*. This shows that as the majority community, the caste classification within the Muslim community is not only irresponsible, but the upper-class Muslims also have respect in the society, due to which some small caste people are affected, instead of their original caste, *Ashraf* Muslims do not shy away from revealing caste, whereas, due to this behaviour, they do not get a reservation for backward, backward classes. He further adds that backward and extremely backward castes socially identify themselves as one of the *Ashraf* castes. But when it comes to the government jobs and other welfare schemes, they secretly get a certificate of their original castes (Rayeen, 2013 p. II-III).[23]

According to him, this is nothing but an inferiority complex that these lower castes have. Mohammad Sajjad writes in *Muslim Politics in Bihar: Changing Contours* that, "Henry Miers Elliot also confirmed this observation, saying that most of them claiming to be *Sheikhs* were non-Aryans (non-Persians, non-Arabs, and non-Turks, that is, were local converts)" (Sajjad, 2014, p. 292). This is true: "the category of *Sheikh* is perhaps the fussiest and most fluid among the Indian Muslims; much lower caste Muslims have entered this category" (Alam, 2009). There are various studies that show similar trends among lower Muslim castes. But the question is why they commit such acts. The next segment is about the same question.

[21]Translated by Author

[22]Translated by Author

[23]Translated by Author

The Dichotomy of Social Recognition and Redistributive Justice

The first backward Commission The *Kaka Kalelkar Commission of 1955* and the *BP Mandal Commission of 1980* placed *Shekhra* in the category of 'Other Backward Classes' because of their socio-economic condition.[24] For the first time, they have given the reservation benefit in 1962 in Bihar, where they have listed it in BC-I.[25] After the implementation of Mandal Commission in 1990, *Shekhra* Biradari got listed in 1993 as Bekhra instead of *Shekhra*.[26] It got corrected to *Shekhra* in 1997.[27] Despite their inclusion in the purview of OBC reservation, they were also involved in the struggle for recognition at a social front. In this case, recognition and redistributive justice have become conflicting. Since upper castes do not fall under any reserved category, those seeking social status must leave the reservation. For social recognition, they claimed to be identifying themselves as *Sheikh*. The discussion about why the *Shekhra* Biradari refused to identify as *Shekhra* can be found here.

The problem with the reservation which will be discussed in the segment below in *Shekhra* Biradari arose when the reservation for backward classes in the Panchayat election was arranged in Bihar. This is also mentioned in the press note dated February 13, 2014, issued by the *Shekhra Development Council.*

According to Mr. Razi Ahmed,[28] there were two candidates from Mirzapur Kothi (a village in Forbesganj, Araria) on the seats reserved for women from backward classes. One was the wife of Mr. Ahad, and the other was the wife of K.N. Vishwas. While Mr. Ahad belonged to the *Shekhra* Biradari, K.N. Vishwas belonged to the *Mandal* caste (both included in the OBC). The election is won by Ahad's wife, prompting K.N. Biswas to write to the Bihar Backward Classes Commission, complaining that in Araria, the people fighting and winning elections with *Shekhra* caste certificates are actually a *Sheikh* Caste. "Therefore, it is requested to the Commission that, because of the subject's sensitivity, the caste certificate should be given only to real *Shekhra*s after local investigation and the mention of the caste in the Cadistriel Survey, C.A. Khatian, before issuing *Shekhra* caste certificates." (Letter dated February 17, 2007). This leads to huge confusion within the authority; hence the authority stopped issuing certificates, saying that they would first investigate it. However, this was not a single case.[29] There were multiple cases like this that went before the authority. There have been other instances of people running for office under the name *Shekhra* Biradari, only

[24]Presidential speech of Azeemuddin on February 6, 2011, at *Shekhra* conference held by *Shekhra* Vikas Parishad in Town hall Araria.

[25]In 1962 and 1964 by the welfare department (retrieved from the letter of K.N. Vishwas dated 08-04-2016 and late MP of Araria (2014-2018) Taslimuddin, dated 28-02-2016.

[26]Central List of OBCs: State: Bihar, Entry list-76. http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User_Panel/GazetteResolution.aspx?Value=mPICjsL1aLt5iq8E5sHcb9aZw5ZegRBykGFG48OgIp4fJY-6woN7b1j2zCe3l0aO

[27]http://www.ncbc.nic.in/Writereaddata/963522188546048l701.pdf

[28]Interview done on 21st January, 2020 in his residence.

[29]The recent similar case of Vishhariya village of Bhargama Block is Khushboo Ara vs State of Bihar, 31 August 2021 in the High Court of Judicature at Patna, civil writ jusrisdiction

to discover after a complaint that he was not *Shekhra*.[30] But after a while, it involved politics, and the matter stretched both sides. Since then *Shekhra*s have suffered from not having the OBC certificate. Many of the people I met told me that they lagged behind in the socio-economic realm because they could not get the certificate.

The problem does not lie only on the outside of the community—there is also an issue within the community (Biradari). The whole *Shekhra* Biradari is divided into two different dimensions. The first dimension comes from those people who have some landholding or a job or business. They are those who are less concerned with politics, government jobs or benefits of reservations, etc. They strongly claim that they are *"Sheikh"* by caste and not *Shekhra*, ignoring their lineage. When asked about the proof of being an upper-caste *Sheikh,* they claimed they have a *Khatiyaan* (land-owning document) from 1954. According to that document, their ancestors had the prefix "*Sheikh*" with their names. They even demonstrated that the prefix "*Sheikh*" was commonly used with every name of their forefathers. When I investigated about other Biradaris, it came to light that, irrespective of caste differences, every caste has used the prefix "*Sheikh*" with their names. Still, be it *Ansari/Momin, Kunjra/Rayeen, Jat Muslims, Kulhaiya, Duniya/Mansoori,* or other castes of Araria district, they all have the same prefix. However, the point to be noted is that using the *"Sheikh"* prefix does not defy castes but is used as a courtesy title such as "Sir," "Mr.," or "Shri."[31] However, they all have been added to the OBC list. Nonetheless, castes are denoted as *"Musalmaan"* in that land-owning document for all Muslim Biradari. However, there is no evidence of such a caste in Bihar. And this is a cross-caste phenomenon. Just because in their documents, their ancestor's name has the prefix of *"Sheikh,"* they claim to recognise them as *Sheikh*, while this claim is false. When asked about the OBC reservation, they rejected it because they needed to accept their backwardness and their true identity (*Shekhra*). On the other hand, they have to abandon the claim of *Sheikh*. They do not want to belittle themselves at the expense of their social standing. Here is the main struggle: social recognition. Hence, they reject any kind of reservation. The story of *Shekhra* is similar to that of the "*Kurmi*" caste, who believe they are upper caste and have been degraded by OBC reservation (Satyendra, 2018, p. 46).[32]

However, because of the ground reality, a group of people from the same caste have been demanding reservation. *Shekhras* were inducted in central OBC in 1996 (Entry list 76),[33] but after a few years when the government discovered that these people carrying *Shekhra* Biradari certificates were not genuine *Shekhra* but of *Sheikh* caste, they stopped issuing certificates. The fight begins from there with those who are educated, non-land owners, and job *Seeker*s. They are those who want a reservation

case no. 2408 of 2021. Here is the link of full details to the case, https://indiankanoon.org/doc/45036882/

[30]Similar case is related to the other Panchayat of the district. See, Dainik Jagran, '*Shekhra*nahin Sayyad Jaatikehain Mukhiya Ejaz, 24 November 2012. Retrieved on 22 march 2021 from https://www.jagran.com/bihar/araria-9878630.html.

[31]https://peoplegroupsindia.com/profiles/shaikh/.

[32]Translated by Author

[33]http://scbc.bih.nic.in/ObcList.html.

in educational fields and jobs. They want to be recognised as a backward caste so that they can get a reservation. *Shekhra* Biradari, which was earlier used to get the OBC certificate, has been stopped from getting it because it is believed and claimed by some of them that they are not *Shekhra* because they do not do the jobs that *Shekhra* Biradari is supposed to do.

Meanwhile, a new dimension in this issue emerged from the political front. All such cases came up when those who already had the backward class certificate got the benefit of reservation in local elections. Seats were reserved for backward castes and women in each category in the 2006 Panchayat election. These factors motivate them to fight for the OBC reservation. Exogamous marriages are uncommon among one-another. The majority of inter-caste and Biradari marriages occurred as a result of eligibility for panchayat elections. A person accepts this marriage as pure political intercourse. Three such cases came up, which show that this community is divided among itself for political gain. A family wins the election of the village head with his old caste certificate; those who are denied this benefit filed a case based on the fact that the candidate is not backward but is a *Sheikh.* On this basis, his candidacy should be canceled. According to Ashfaque, three such cases have been reported so far.[34] A group that has previously obtained a certificate, is doing a good job, and wants its children to benefit from it is constantly trying to ensure that the Biradari is recognised and benefits as *Shekhra.* On the other hand, some have not been able to take advantage of reservations, and they also believe that this reservation is not going to benefit much; they constantly oppose the identity of their neighborhood and village. *Shekhra*, as a bone-picking caste, will reduce their dignity and self-respect in society. The entire community, or, say, *Shekhra* society, is divided in this dual identity battle. According to Ashfaque and Aslam Beg, it is true that a good chunk of the population, not all, are the descendants of *Shekhra* Biradari. Those who built good houses amplify their economic status and spontaneously claim to be *Sheikh* by the time they had earned it. Because of their strong claim, the rest of the people are suffering from their exclusion from the reservation benefit. Whenever there is a matter of identifying oneself, most of them claim to be *Sheikh*, which creates conflict between them. One accuses another of impersonating a *Sheikh,* while another accuses the first of lowering his status for the sake of reservation benefits.

The Problem

The issue of *Shekhra* Biradari not receiving an OBC certificate arose after K.N. Vishwas filed a complaint with the Bihar State Backward Classes Commission in 2007, alleging that the people of Bhargama block who receive an OBC certificate for *Shekhra* Biradari are *Sheikh*. However, until 2006, many people from Vishhariya village and Bhargama blocks had an OBC certificate. But after the allegation of them being *Sheikh* and making fake certificate in the name of *Shekhra*, they stopped getting OBC certificate. After this, the *Shekhra* Biradari began fighting for what they had

[34]Interviw done on November 27, 2019.

lost. For example, the same person, K.N. Vishwas, whose letter created the confusion, wrote a letter again on April 8, 2016 to the State Commission for Backward Classes of Bihar to issue certificates to the *Shekhra* Biradari. In this letter, he has given a detailed description of the backwardness of the community and demanded to issue OBC certificates to them. This time he did so, because he was a legislative assembly candidate from the *Rashtrya Janta Dal* (RJD) and was fighting from the Forbesganj Constituency, where a large chunk of the *Shekhra* community resides. But still, the problem remains unsolved.

As far as fighting for the rights are concerned, there are two organisation that are fully determined to get justice, *Shekhra Vikas Parishad* (the *Shekhra* Development Council) and the *National Shekhra United Front*. According to Aslam Beg, a member of the *National Shekhra United Front* and a founder of the *Apna Adhikar Party* (AAP), local politics is driven by caste consciousness, which is also responsible for their plight. The leaders, who are not from their caste, have been involved in stopping to get a certificate.

According to Aslam Beg,[35] to get back their rights they also went to the Home Secretary of Bihar, Amir Subhani, to solve the problem, and he too gave directions to the lower authorities. But because of the local politics and the lack of will of the concerned authorities, they do not issue certificates. "As a result, our new generation of students who are studying and require reservation benefits is being harmed. There is no leadership from the community in the Parliament or in the legislative assembly to raise our concerns. Their struggle goes unheard due to a lack of political leadership." Razi Ahmad shared an authority letter that the concerned authority gets from the department of personnel in Bihar. The letter here is the last and latest. The letter mentions the issuance of a certificate to District Magistrate on July 24, 2018.

According to the instructions, by letter dated *Shekhra* Development Council, District Araria, letter- SVP/04/2018, dated – 09.07.2018 attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by the members of *Shekhra* caste in obtaining caste certificate. Including this, it is requested to take appropriate action. (Photocopy)

It is worth mentioning that in the circular number (9) of the Departmental Circular No. dated, the following records are considered appropriate for proof of caste certificate of the father/ancestor of the applicant/applicant:

(9.1) Revenue records (e.g. Khatiyans, Donations, Land related documents, Land related records allotted to the landless, etc.).

(9.2) In case of non-availability of the records mentioned in the Condica, the inspection report can also be made the basis for caste certificate, as and when the situation arises.

Therefore, in the provision of departmental letter number-673, dated-08.03.2011 condica-(09) laid down in the Departmental Circular Number guide, the *Shekhra* caste

[35]Interview done on 27 November, 2019 in his residence in Vishhariya Village of Bhargama Block, Araria district.

is not mentioned in the revenue record (i.e., Muslim / Muslim inscribed in place of caste). Caste certificate can be issued:

i. In the name of the applicant/applicant's father, grandfather, caste certificate of *Shekhra* caste has been issued in the past, and then the caste certificate can be issued on that basis.

ii. After an investigation by the Panchayat Secretary, Revenue Staff, and Zonal Inspector, it will be mentioned in the report that the applicant/applicant belongs to the *Shekhra* caste. It is recommended to issue a caste certificate.

In the light of the above, the applicant/applicant should be directed to issue the *Shekhra* caste certificate to the subordinate officers so that the candidates of the *Shekhra* caste as per the status quo to get the certificate.'[36]

However, this was not the only letter issued by the higher authority, but there were several others. When I talked to the concerned authority, they said that they given explicit instructions to the lower authority (the Circle Officer of a Block) to issue certificates to the *Shekhra* Biradari. However, even authorities are confused about the Biradari because the difference between *Sheikh* and *Shekhra* is blurred. Neither *Shekhra* nor their neighbor from another Biradari accepts them as such but *"Sheikh."* Ashfaque points out that, "The other backward Muslims do not want us to get the same benefit as they are getting. Hence, the authority concluded that there is no such community, and the scenario remains the same." Mr. Ashfaque and Aslam Beg both agree that there is a communication gap between them and authority. According to them, they have pleaded with the authority to once again conduct a survey in their community so that they can get a real picture of the Biradari, but the authority refuses to do so. They claim that the problem is getting worse by the day as other block residents become aware of it. According to them, "Since only this reservation is widely available to *Shekhras* (and other backward Muslims), we do not have another place to go and we must fight for this." The main trouble is happening to the Circle Officer of Bhargama Block. Nonetheless, the fact is that they are eligible to get Dalit reservation for their background, but the community which was getting the benefit of OBC reservation are not able to avail of it when they need it widely.

Conclusion

To conclude, we have reached a point where we can see the dichotomy of caste or caste groups between social status (recognition) and redistributive justice (reservation). On the one hand, there is a race to prove oneself as an upper status group, whereas on the other hand, there are many groups that are fighting for the reservation. The government needs to keep a meticulous eye on this. It is their responsibility to truly identify one group.

The government should not only listen to those who are justifying themselves as *Sheikh* but also listen to those voices that are demanding social justice. This is not

[36]For original document which was issues in Hindi, please visit https://state.bihar.gov.in/gad/Content.html?links&page=Old%20Circulars%20and%20Notifications

the only cause; several castes earlier identified themselves as *Sheikh*, but now are demanding the OBC reservation. *Shekhras* number almost five million in Bihar and are spread across more than 145 villages,[37] most of them are socially, economically, and politically weak, and under-represented. Most are uneducated, and the educated ones are unemployed. They are largely labor migrants who have no choice but to migrate because they cannot find work where they were born. The National Commission for Backward Classes has said that to prove backwardness, a lack of adequate representation in education and services could be considered. One such community is the *Shekhra* Biradari, which has significant educational and economic backwardness. Their political representation is limited to local bodies. There is enormous labor migration among the community, and all are unskilled labourers. Whatever survey was conducted about the *Shekhra* Biradari, it was done without a proper attitude and without caution. The *Shekhra* people even claim that the surveyors did not inquire about all the members of society.

Moreover, the people they went to were the same people who do not hold back from calling themselves *Sheikh.* They also maintain that the other communities under other backward classes (OBCs) also do not want this Biradari to take advantage of reservation. Subsequently, these people give the impression that they are not *Shekhra* but *Sheikh*. The government and officials have paid little attention to the *Shekhra* Biradari movement and demands. They are not so numerous politically that their voice can reach the government.

Caste-based occupations did, in fact, end with the passage of time and the development of the economic system, particularly among Muslims. In such a case, the *Shekhra* Biradari's work was completed with the passage of time. But their social, economic, and political situations did not change much with time. The government and the people in power will have to take care of finding the right solution so that they do not fall prey to any kind of legal exploitation. The fact is that even today, they are living their lives only after doing petty jobs. Most of the people work as daily wage labourers, rickshaw poolers, agricultural labourers and so forth. The fact of SC reservation is that people in the scheduled caste category are rarely engaged in their caste work, but they constantly receive the benefit of reservation. Reservations must be made in light of today's socioeconomic and political circumstances.

As far as the *Sheikh* is concerned, it is proven that a large section of the people who are socially, economically, and politically backward have called themselves *Sheikh.* That is why Ejaz Ali (founder of the All India Backward Muslim Morcha and pioneer of the Dalit Muslim movement) labeled them *"New Sheikh*" and advocated for their inclusion in the OBC category (Anwar, 2001, p. 46). *Shekhra Biradari,* after all this confusion and negligence, said that they would continue their fight until they got their rights back. They even say that for now, our political agenda is for this reservation only; whoever will give us a reservation, our vote will go to them.

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[37]Presidential speech of Azeemuddin, an Ex-Minister of Bihar Government (1990-1995).

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The Human Dignity Argument against Manual Scavenging in India

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Abstract

In this article, we argue that manual scavenging and the 2013 Act which prohibits it are unconstitutional as they violate human dignity, the prohibition against untouchability, and the right to life enshrined in the Constitution of India. We bring out contradictions and limitations in the Supreme Court's jurisprudence on manual scavenging and show that it misses out on deploying its own strong anti-untouchability and human dignity-based jurisprudence in the judicial treatment of manual scavenging. This progressive jurisprudence outlaws all forms of social exclusion and does not allow for any exceptions to the right to human dignity. We then propose a framework which outlines the unconstitutionality of the very practice of manual scavenging through an in-depth and conjoint analysis of the Indian constitutional jurisprudence on prohibition untouchability, right to human dignity and right to life. A conjoint reading of the three principles brings out the real potential of the Indian Constitution in safeguarding the rights of manual scavengers, a feat which must begin with a complete abolition of all forms of scavenging work without exception. Arguing against the acceptability of allegedly "safe" sanitation work, we propose an alternative framework to understand and critique manual scavenging, without which a complete eradication of manual scavenging is impossible.

Keywords

Manual scavenging, caste discrimination, untouchability, Dalits, sanitation work, human dignity

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Introduction

If one paid heed only to the statements of the Indian government, the conclusion reached would be that manual scavenging—the manual cleaning of human faeces in the sanitation chain—is long eradicated. In fact, government actors, including the Social Justice Minister, claim that there have been no deaths through manual scavenging (Varma, 2021), and sanitised discourse around "sanitation workers" deems the problem sorted and ready for the archives. Despite decades of activism, it is blatantly clear that manual scavenging remains invisible and misunderstood. Manual scavenging, which is performed by workers according to a recent large-scale survey 97.25 per cent come from the Dalit community (Mahatme, 2021), the formerly "untouchables", continues rampantly across urban and rural India, everywhere from household latrines to governmental sewer lines and waste treatment plants.

With non-governmental organisations, as well as the majority of scholars, asserting that the way forward is to enforce the existing law on manual scavenging, we beg to differ. In particular, we criticise the judiciary, which has long been hailed as the sole state actor to take manual scavenging seriously, and ask to what extent the Supreme Court of India (SCI)'s approach to eradicating manual scavenging is sufficient in doing so.

In this article, we present manual scavenging as a violation of human dignity, and hence of the right to life, and dissect the different facets of the practice that lead to infringements of dignity. We show that the SCI has not treated manual scavenging at par with other violations of dignity. The SCI has not made connections between its strong constitutional jurisprudence on untouchability and the right to life, and manual scavenging, resulting in compromising and apologetic conclusions on manual scavenging. We finally propose an approach the SCI could take in order to incorporate a proper understanding of manual scavenging more in line with its own precedents and the constitutional interpretation. Rather than making sanitation work "safer", we argue for a recognition of the unconstitutionality of the existing law on manual scavenging, as it does not address the violations of dignity that confront sanitation workers daily—not just those without safety equipment. Unless a complete prohibition is put in place, the eradication of manual scavenging will remain a distant reality.

Structure of Article

We first revisit existing criticisms of the government's approach on manual scavenging to establish that there is a clear consensus that the executive, and to some extent the legislative, approach manual scavenging without properly incorporating an understanding of caste and non-technical considerations. We then highlight that the *Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013* has been commended for incorporating a recognition of the wider social context within which manual scavenging occurs, but that it nonetheless does not go far enough as it uncritically considers sanitation work with safety equipment completely acceptable. Building on existing criticism of the 2013 Act, we then proceed to ask whether the

Supreme Court of India (SCI), which has otherwise been hailed for being proactive and a defender of social justice, has criticised the Act.

After laying out our methodology and aims, we take a step back, and clarify key terms in the debate that are often conflated. We then identify what is problematic about manual scavenging and establish that given the backdrop of caste, the very act of engaging with human faeces becomes a violation of dignity. Having established that manual scavenging is at its core a human dignity problem, we then turn to the SCI's jurisprudence on human dignity to show that there is a strong legal case to be made that all engagement with faecal matter must be prohibited, regardless of safety equipment. However, we show that the SCI has only strongly affirmed the right to dignity in its jurisprudence on the right to life and the prohibition of untouchability—but not in its jurisprudence on manual scavenging, even in the much-commended cases *Delhi Jal Board vs. National Campaign for Dignity and Rights of Sewerage and Allied Workers and Others* (2011), and S*afai Karmachari Andolan vs. Union of India* (2014). In each, dignity is invoked either not at all, or merely symbolically, in its manual scavenging judgements. In light of this evident discord, we propose a line of legal reasoning that would adequately link the existing SCI understanding of dignity with manual scavenging, and argue that this would result in declaring the parts of the 2013 Act unconstitutional that permit engaging with faecal matter.

Criticism of the Executive and Legislative Interventions

The executive and legislative of the Indian Government have been amply criticised in scholarly literature for their approach to manual scavenging. Such criticism includes that it focuses on constructing sanitary latrines instead of taking a systems-approach and addressing issues in the entire sanitation system, or that it focuses on rural at the expense of urban India (Ingole, 2016). Notably, these criticisms appear to now be slowly addressed—leaving only the third, and most vocal, scholarly criticism of its approach: That its laws and policies focus on technical solutions to eradicating manual scavenging while leave unaddressed the role of caste in causing and perpetuating manual scavenging (Bhowmick & Purakayastha, 2016; Coffey & Spears, 2017; Doron & Raja, 2015; Gupta, 2016; Katiyar, 2014; Permutt, 2011; Ravichandran, 2011). These authors have also highlighted that the eradication of manual scavenging has featured only as an afterthought or formality in the government's wider sanitation efforts. The *Swachh Bharat Mission*, for instance, professes to aim at eradicating manual scavenging and constructing sanitary toilets, although efforts have consistently focused on the latter. In fact, some scholars have highlighted that not just is the current approach insufficient to eradicate manual scavenging, but it also actively contributes to its worsening. Ghosh (2019) highlights that Swachh Bharat "implicitly rel[ies] on this form of labour, without concern for the lives, safety and working conditions of such workers" (p. 192). Authors have argued that this hyperfocus on sanitary toilets stems from a "*deification of defecation* without addressing the real issue of the *politics of dirt* [emphasis original]" (Bhowmick & Purakayastha, 2016, p. 164), and linked

this to ritual pollution within the Brahmanical belief system. It is through this lens that authors have argued that the executive's approach is simply not concerned with eradicating manual scavenging, as constructing sanitary toilets is an exercise in distancing ritually polluting material from non-Dalits.

This criticism of the government's approach in schemes and policies also extends to its legislative approach. The *Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013* is the culmination of a near decade-long legal struggle to hold state governments accountable for their failure to take steps towards ending manual scavenging. Indeed, especially practitioners have commended that the Act sees manual scavenging as a social justice rather than sanitation issue, that "it recognizes a constitutional obligation to correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by manual scavenging communities by providing alternate livelihoods and other assistance" (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 5), and that it "explicitly adopts an understanding that manual scavenging is [...] against the spirit and essence of the Constitution of India" (Koonan, 2021, p. 157). Regardless of praise for the social awareness embedded in the Act, there is a small amount of literature that critically points out the shortcomings of the legislative provisions in achieving its objective of eradication. After all, the Act explicitly states that "a person engaged or employed to clean excreta with the help of such devices and using such protective gear, as the Central Government may notify on this behalf, shall not be deemed to be a 'manual scavenger'." Authors have highlighted that this amounts to only a "conditional prohibition", and provides a partial justification for the exploitation of Dalits (Koonan, 2021; Wankhede, 2021; Wilson & Singh, 2017). As Wankhede (2021) has shown, the 2013 Act has the following limitations: First, according to the definition of manual scavenger in Section 2(1)(g), a person fails to qualify as a manual scavenger after being provided with protective equipment. Therefore, a person continues to be engaged in dehumanising work but is altogether excluded from corresponding rehabilitation benefits. Second, this "conditional prohibition" revitalises an approach of a 1976 legislation—of prohibitions with conditions, which was abandoned in 1993, and therefore constitutes regression. Third, this conditional prohibition perpetuates social exclusion, entrenches historical discrimination based on caste hierarchy and excludes manual scavengers through a change in their legal status.

Critiquing the Judicial Discourse?

Despite ample existing criticism of the executive and legislative, the fact that the SCI deemed the enactment of the 2013 Act sufficient to end the ongoing *mandamus* on the public interest litigation before it appears to be largely overlooked in existing literature. In fact, the only criticism of the SCI relates to its engagement with the previous Act on manual scavenging of 1993, where Permutt argues, for instance, that the Court "has passively relied on the States to implement policies to eliminate manual scavenging, without any accompanying active enforcement action" (Permutt, 2011, p. 283). Other criticism of the judiciary is even older, and not specific to the SCI; Mandal (2008), for instance, shows that judicial actors in the 1960s explicitly justified manual scavenging

on grounds of alleged inalienable "customary rights" of manual scavengers to clean the toilets of a particular household.

That the SCI would let a law with loopholes suffice as the grand culmination of a public interest litigation is a puzzle. Despite putting in place "progressive safeguards" through interim orders, the SCI's final judgement in the landmark *Safai Karamchari Andolan* case is disappointing as it fails to acknowledge the limitations of the 2013 Act, thereby perpetuating—rather than addressing—manual scavenging (Wankhede, 2021).

Since the SCI has in other cases established itself as a "guardian of human rights", or even "fearless activist" directly tackling divisive issues head-on (Permutt, 2011, p. 281), we build on Wankhede's (2021) previous article to scrutinise in detail why the SCI should have questioned the conditional prohibition.

Methodology

In this article, we are broadly concerned to what extent the Supreme Court's existing approach to eradicating manual scavenging is sufficient in doing so. Coming to a grounded and nuanced answer to this question requires tackling several underlying questions, such as understanding what the Court's approach is, and what "eradicating" manual scavenging even requires. It is therefore as much an empirical as it is a normative project.

Importantly, legal research and research on the coherence and adequateness of a given piece of jurisprudence in relation to another is never a neutral or objective act (Munger & Seron, 1984). Law does not exist in isolation, and neither do the people making conclusions about law. In our case, our article is rooted in a deep concern about manual scavenging, and a desire to inform social activists, judges and others who want to take active steps to counter it. In fact, when we first discussed writing this article, it was in order to inform future public interest litigation. All research that such as ours stems from a concern with social justice is inevitably normative.

To build up our normative argument, we employed methods associated with the integrative literature review, a "form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesises representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). On the basis of an integrative literature review on manual scavenging, we then came to a preliminary hypothesis on what judicial approach would be needed to adequately tackle manual scavenging, arguing that it must strongly rely on human dignity. It is not our claim that this human dignity argument will completely eradicate manual scavenging, but only that it is a vital starting point to seriously consider the project of eradication.

Importantly, our research goes beyond mere doctrinal examination of judicial interpretation, a method that we largely follow in critically evaluating the judgements of the SCI. Instead, we both critique the legal basis itself and discern empirically whether the approach of the SCI is consistent with its approach in other cases. Combining both doctrinal legal methodology and critical insights, we investigate

"to what extent" the SCI's approach is sufficient in eradicating manual scavenging, therefore asserting in a positivist manner that courts hold power, while also rejecting the idea that courts have the sole correct interpretation of the law. As our research stems from a concern with social justice, we are acutely aware that the legal system offers ways to both legitimise oppressive social relations or challenge them. Our partially doctrinal analysis is therefore rooted in a lens that actively seeks out ways in which judicial discourse legitimises or perpetuates harm. This rather liberal understanding of "doctrinal" research resonates with the tradition of Critical Legal Studies, in that we "document and [...] map the incoherent and illogical underpinnings of liberal legalism which reveal the myriad ways in which law legitimates inherently unequal social relations." (Munger & Seron, 1984, p. 257). While we could have presented our findings with reference to sociological theory, we chose to refer to other jurisprudence. This is because our research is practically oriented, and we found it important to root our argument in the language and frame of reference of the legal system and the SCI itself (Vranken, 2010).

Manual Scavenging as a Human Dignity Violation

The "Manual" in Manual Scavenging

Our research question asks to what extent the Supreme Court of India's approach to eradicating manual scavenging is sufficient in doing so. Before proceeding to answer what its approach has been, we find it necessary to carefully examine what precisely is meant with manual scavenging, and what would be needed to "eradicate"—rather than just "improve" or "counter" it. In this context, we also want to take the opportunity to clarify terms that are often conflated, and expound our understanding and use of each.

By "sanitation workers", we refer to those who are otherwise referred to as "safai karamchari", who are "all sorts of workers engaged in cleaning jobs, including those who handle dry and wet waste, and those who sweep" (Dubey, 2018, p. 50). The reason we use the English term sanitation work is simply to be able to comfortably address an international audience. The term *safai karamchari* itself was introduced into the legislative context by activists who wanted to make a clear distinction between the identity of a manual scavenger, and the *occupation* of working with waste (Human Rights Watch, 2014). According to the legal definition, manual scavengers are those sanitation workers who, through the lack of adequate protective equipment, engage directly with faecal matter. As the remainder of our article shows, this definition is flawed in its emancipatory potential. Suffice it to mention here, even the existence of safety equipment does not mean that a sanitation worker will not be in direct touch with faecal matter at all; too big or too small equipment, or unforeseen circumstances for which insufficient tools have been given, can quickly result in a situation where a clear distinction between "sanitation worker" and "manual scavenger" becomes muddled. Additionally, sweepers also frequently have to manually clean human waste in areas where people openly defecate, making the distinction between sanitation work

and manual scavenging fluid (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Walters, 2019). Therefore, as the legal definition of manual scavenging simply is not accurate, we for practical purposes consider "manual scavengers" to be not just those sanitation workers who engage with human faecal matter *without* protective equipment, but to strictly be any person who engages with faecal matter and liquid waste. This includes tasks all along the sanitation chain in urban and rural India, such as cleaning open defecation spots, latrine, drain, and sewer cleaning, and septic tank desludging.

Manual scavengers are united by the fact that those employed are disproportionately Dalits, "untouchables" outside the Hindu caste system. Overall, according to a 2021 survey of 43,797 manual scavengers by the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, 97.25 per cent were Dalits, compared to their share of population of 16 per cent (Mahatme, 2021). This figure excludes workers who are not Hindu, as they are not recorded as Dalits in the census. The true number of Dalits is expected to be even higher, as entire Hindu communities have in the past converted to another religion to escape the "untouchable" label (Thorat, 2021). As they failed to do so, with caste discrimination being carried into their new religion, there are also Dalit manual scavengers from other religions and scheduled tribes (Lee, 2015).

The Problem with Manual Scavenging

Having established that the boundaries between "manual scavenging" and "sanitation work" that government discourse has attempted to establish are flawed and of little use, we consider it necessary to scrutinise whether it is appropriate to say that sanitation work becomes unproblematic in the presence of safety equipment. As we show, the need to eradicate manual scavenging comes not just from the fact that those engaged in manual scavenging die prematurely and are stuck in a cycle of poverty. While these are indeed important issues that must be tackled, manual scavenging more fundamentally involves a complete denial of equal rights. Here, we take a step back and ask what exactly "the problem" with manual scavenging is, as this is a basis for establishing what then must be done in order to fully "eradicate" manual scavenging. As we emphasise, caste sanctions and caste discrimination lie at the core of the problem.

In official government discourse on manual scavenging, policymakers and legislators recognise problems associated with the practice of manual scavenging, but limit this to the discussion of a lack of fair working conditions, severe health problems, and premature death. The underlying problem associated with manual scavenging, from which the other problems arguably stem, has less of a spot in the limelight. Manual scavengers, in addition to the direct and visible violence such as death, are subjected to immense structural and cultural violence rooted in caste and untouchability (Shahid, 2015). "Untouchability" as an institution, as Shah et al. (2006) have aptly described, "refers not just to the avoidance or prohibition of physical contact [with an untouchable] but to a much broader set of social sanctions" (p. 21). Shah et al. (2006) narrate how untouchability is contemporarily exercised through "forced inclusion in a subordinated role", in which individuals are forced to perform "publicly visible acts of (self-) humiliation and subordination [...] such as [...] standing

with a bowed head, not wearing clean or 'bright' clothes" (p. 21). Being forced to perform unpaid or underpaid work, or being denied property, are more examples of modern manifestations of untouchability (Singh et al., 2019). Notably, it is not the case that untouchability is practised only in rural India; instead, caste-based discrimination continues in urban India, although often taking on new forms (Singh et al., 2019). Former manual scavengers in particular are consistently considered as incapable of property ownership and entrepreneurship, including by the very government officials who make decisions about whether to provide them loans (Joshi & Ferron, 2007). Especially children suffer extremely under the social sanctions imposed against their scavenging parents (Walters, 2019). Importantly, these acts are *de facto* instances of forced subordination, and lead to the denial of financial support, housing, and other necessary bases for living an adequate life.

As discussed earlier, as many as 97.25 per cent of manual scavengers surveyed by the government of India were Dalits, in addition to an unknown proportion of those from other religions who converted from Hinduism to escape their Dalit caste identity. Notably, Dalits themselves have a system of graded inequality, as specific sub-castes among Dalits are assigned sanitation work, and ostracised by Dalits of a higher caste standing. This is relevant, as we show later, as it matters little for the proper eradication of manual scavenging as a concept whether a manual scavenger receives safety equipment or not, and whether their immediate experience of engaging with faecal matter ceases to be directly injurious to their health and life. As Walters (2019, p. 53) writes: "Faeces is a polluted object, the job of removing and disposing of faeces is a polluted occupation, and the individual and sub-caste prescribed to do such work are polluted individuals and groups." By the very fact that they work with ritually and physically polluting objects—excrements—they are ostracised and subjected to inferior living conditions (Walters, 2019).

Neither governmental schemes nor the 2013 Act incorporate an accurate understanding that even sanitation work *with* equipment is deemed ritually polluting and thus leads to severe social ostracism. It is therefore not sufficient to make the immediate experience of engaging with faecal matter less or non-hazardous to humans. Rather, the problem at hand is that mere engagement with faecal matter leads to social exclusion, stigmatisation, being treated as an untouchable and systemic violence (the problem with manual scavenging). In other words, it must be recognised that the problem is with the very job of a person working in sanitation. That there is any dignified version of manual scavenging is a complete myth, which in turn perpetuates social exclusion and systemic violence faced by Dalits involved in the practice.

Manual Scavenging, Untouchability, Right to Life and Human Dignity: The Judicial Discourse of the Supreme Court of India

In the previous sections, we have highlighted that manual scavenging is harmful not just because it is harmful to health, but because merely engaging with faecal matter is considered ritually polluting, and thereby leads to severe social exclusion, stereotyping

and stigmatisation of the individuals. The problem with manual scavenging, we have shown, is ultimately the one of human dignity. Existing literature has already highlighted that the predominant governmental approach to manual scavenging does not incorporate an adequate understanding of this. Less scrutinised, however, is the approach of the Indian judiciary. As introduced earlier, we seek to investigate to what extent the approach to eradicating manual scavenging of the Supreme Court of India (SCI) is sufficient in doing so, to which the discussion now turns.

This section provides an account of the deployment of human dignity as a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution by the SCI in its judicial discourse. As we understand it, the SCI has discussed the principle of human dignity broadly in three ways: *manual scavenging and human dignity; untouchability and human dignity; right to life and human dignity*. This section deals with the first two of these categories, to show that human dignity is merely discussed ornamentally in manual scavenging jurisprudence. The next section will analyse the third category and show that the SCI has a wide-spanning and emancipatory understanding of human dignity elsewhere that it could adopt in its manual scavenging jurisprudence. By discussing these categories separately, we work towards a critical assessment of the way human dignity as a principle and fundamental right is reflected in the judicial discourse on manual scavenging, untouchability, and generally. This will help identify shortcomings in the legal argumentation of the SCI and help construct our main argument that the SCI does not adopt an approach that can eradicate manual scavenging.

In contrast with a recent paper (Gupta, 2022), we categorically leave out an analysis of principle of human dignity in international human rights law instruments and jurisprudence of the UN Human Rights Committee, as we firmly believe that such an exercise of borrowing from Western debates ignores the vital resource that existing Indian jurisprudence emanating from a conjoint reading of the principles of the Indian Constitution provide to anchor any critique or normative analysis.

Manual Scavenging and Human Dignity

To date, only two cases by the SCI have concerned relevant questions of law pertaining to manual scavenging: The Public Interest Litigation in S*afai Karmachari Andolan (SKA) vs. Union of India*, filed in 2003, and the case filed against the *Delhi Jal Board* (DJB) in 2011. In both the *SKA* and the *DJB* case, the issue at hand was the non-implementation of laws prohibiting manual scavenging and compensation for sewer deaths. In both, the SCI invoked human dignity sporadically, and even then merely emblematically. Beyond the cases of *SKA* and *DJB,* the judicial discourse of the SCI in *Indian Young Lawyers Association* and *State of Maharashtra vs Union of India* (2018) is notable. These cases discuss the human dignity principle and manual scavenging, while addressing, respectively, the larger questions of untouchability and social exclusion faced by women, and discrimination faced by Dalits. When we outline the limitations of the first two judgements, we draw largely on the latter, as they provide

a helpful framework to understand the overlap of human dignity, manual scavenging, untouchability and right to life in Indian fundamental rights jurisprudence.

As a perceived landmark judgement in anti-caste jurisprudence in India, *SKA* provides for a range of measures to try and completely eradicate the practice of manual scavenging, and outlines the responsibility of the central government and state governments towards eradication and rehabilitation. As the case was treated as a continuing mandamus for several years, the judgement motivated the government to bring about the 2013 Manual Scavenging Act to replace the previous 1993 Act. Therefore, while the case had originally been a petition seeking enforcement for the 1993 Act, the SCI deemed the 1993 Act insufficient. As we show below, however, the 2013 Act is grossly inadequate, too, as it is founded in the SCI's judicial discourse which fails to recognise that any engagement with human faeces is a violation of human dignity.

SKA does not discuss how manual scavenging violates the principle of dignity. The discussion is only limited to how the practice of manual scavenging is "squarely rooted in the concept of the caste-system and untouchability". That it does not discuss how manual scavenging violates dignity does not mean it does not mention the concept at all. The SCI refers to international conventions and covenants prohibiting the practice of manual scavenging, and cites Articles 1 and 23(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which invoke dignity language. However, where the court mentions dignity, it does so tangentially and as a linguistic tool. In paragraph 23.2, for instance, it claims that governments must "provid[e] support for *dignified* livelihood to safai karamchari women in accordance with their choice of livelihood schemes [emphasis added]." This apparent complete absence of a human dignity approach in critically assessing the 1993 Act and introducing the new 2013 Act in the case that is a landmark in the manual scavenging jurisprudence leaves a critical legal void.

The predecessor to the *SKA*, the SCI in *DJB* (2011) also only symbolically evokes human dignity language. *DJB* was a civil appeal emanating from the order of the Delhi High Court directing the Delhi Jal Board to award compensation to the families of deceased sewer workers. The significance of the judgement, at the outset, is that it promisingly describes the inherent nature of the sewer work and its relation to the human dignity of sewer workers.

However, the SCI notes that sewer workers are forced to carry out the work of manually cleaning sewers because of persisting poverty and due to a lack of alternative livelihood options. The court puts forward the case that the compelling power that forces people to work in sewers in "most unfavourable conditions and regularly face the threat of being deprived of their life" is *poverty*–which stands in stark contrast to the conclusions we made earlier about caste (Para 3 and 20).

On the nature of sewage work undertaken by sewer workers, the SCI recognises it as "inherently hazardous and dangerous to life." Importantly, the emphasis of the SCI in outlining the hazardous and life-threatening nature of work points to the larger limitations of the judicial discourse in *SKA*, which excludes sewer work and

only considers dry latrines. Furthermore, the SCI in DJB argues that the inherently hazardous nature of the work means it has an explicit obligation to do justice:

> In this scenario, the Courts are not only entitled but are under constitutional obligation to take cognizance of the issues relating to the lives of the people who are forced to undertake jobs which are hazardous and dangerous to life. (Para 32)

This recognition of its constitutional obligation is central to our critique of the SCI's own failure to adequately instrumentalise human dignity as a fundamental right to address the perpetuation of manual scavenging in general.

The SCI in *DJB* only superficially outlines the relevance of human dignity. It rules that it is the constitutional duty of all the major constituents of the state, the legislative, executive and judiciary, to "protect the rights of every citizen and every individual and ensure that everyone is able to live *with dignity* [emphasis added]." In paragraph 27, it also reiterates that the definition of the right to life in Indian jurisprudence is expansive and "means the right to live with dignity, free from exploitation."[1]

Overall, while the SCI in *DJB* and *SKA* cites relevant jurisprudence, including acknowledging human dignity as an inherent right, it in neither case incorporates this understanding holistically. Instead, mentions of human dignity appear to be symbolic, as they do not meaningfully inform the Court's conclusions to the questions of the case. In the following, we now turn to the invoking of human dignity in the SCI's jurisprudence on untouchability, to assess the judicial approach.

Untouchability, Human Dignity and Right to Life

The interrelation between the offence of untouchability, the aim of the complete prohibition of the practice of untouchability and the inherent human dignity principle involved in the constitutional prohibition can be found in the two landmark judgements of *Indian Young Lawyers Association and Ors. vs. The State of Kerala and Ors.* (2019) and *Union of India vs. State of Maharashtra and Ors.* (2020). These cases are relevant not just as comparison in similar subject matters, but also because the SCI frequently refers to manual scavenging as an example of a violation of human dignity and right to life.

Indian Young Lawyers Association, or colloquially known as the 'Sabrimala case', concerned the constitutionality of the complete exclusion of women between ages 10 to 50 from entry into the Lord Ayyappa temple in Sabrimala. Though the case specifically concerned the social exclusion of women, Justice Chandrachud in his separate concurring opinion discussed the content and scope of the constitutional

[1] Cites in Para 27 the following cases: *Chairman, Railway Board v. Chandrima Das* (2000) 2 SCC 465; *Common Cause, A Registered Society v. Union of India* (1999) 6 SCC 667; especially *Kharak Singh v State of U.P.* and *State of Maharashtra v. Chandrabhan Tale.*); *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v Union of India*; *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*; and *Board of Trustees of the Port of Bombay v. Dilipkumar Raghavendranath Nadkarni*.

prohibition of untouchability under Article 17 of the Constitution, and emphasised that human dignity is within the constitutional scope of the untouchability prohibition.

Rooted in the trinity of dignity, equality and liberty, the fundamental rights that form the foundation of the constitutional makeup categorically reject all forms of social exclusion, and imagine social reordering based on a constitutional order that promotes justice, equality, dignity and liberty of all individuals. In the SCI's opinion:

> Human dignity postulates an equality between persons. The equality of all human beings entails being free from the restrictive and dehumanizing effect of stereotypes and being equally entitled to the protection of law. Our Constitution has willed that dignity, liberty and equality serve as a guiding light for individuals, the state and this Court…In a constitutional order of priorities, these are values on which the edifice of the Constitution stands. They infuse our constitutional order with a vision for the future-of a just, equal and dignified society. Intrinsic to these values is the anti-exclusion principle. Exclusion is destructive of dignity. (Para 300)

This linkage between the anti-exclusion principle and dignity is foundational to the court's analysis of Article 17 on untouchability, as it recognises graded inequality and the theory of 'purity and pollution' on which the practice of untouchability is based. The SCI then cites two underlying moral justifications for the prohibition of untouchability as an enforceable fundamental right:

> First, "untouchability" is violative of the basic rights of socially backward individuals and their dignity. Second, the framers believed that the abolition of "untouchability" is a constitutional imperative to establish an equal social order. (Para 323)

Under this backdrop, the prohibition of untouchability is meant to oppose all forms of exclusion and give constitutional backing to the vision of a more equal society. The central aim of the prohibition of untouchability is emphatically rooted in the dignity of those persons who were historically subjugated due to their identities in caste hierarchy:

> By abolishing "untouchability", Article 17 protects them from a repetition of history in a free nation. The background of Article 17 thus *lies in protecting the dignity of those who have been victims of discrimination, prejudice and social exclusion…* Article 17 must be construed from the perspective of its position as a powerful guarantee to preserve human dignity and against the stigmatization and exclusion of individuals and groups on the basis of social hierarchism… The Constitution has designedly left untouchability undefined. *Any form of stigmatization which leads to social exclusion is violative of human dignity and would constitute a form of "untouchability".* The Drafting Committee did not restrict the scope of Article 17. The prohibition of "untouchability", as

> part of the process of *protecting dignity and preventing stigmatization and exclusion*, is the broader notion, which this Court seeks to adopt, as underlying the framework of these articles. (Para 341–342) [emphasis added]

Additionally:

> The (untouchability prohibition) guarantee against social exclusion based on notions of "purity and pollution" *is an acknowledgment of the inalienable dignity of every individual. Dignity as a facet of Article 21* is firmly entrenched after the decision of nine Judges in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* ("Puttaswamy") (2017) 10 SCC 1. (Para 355) [emphasis added]

In the *Indian Young Lawyers Association* judgement, social exclusion linked to untouchability is therefore consistently recognised as a violation of human dignity. Thus, according to the SCI:

> Individual dignity cannot be based on the notions of purity and pollution. "Untouchability" against lower castes was based on these notions, and violated their dignity. It is for this reason that Article 17 abolishes "untouchability", which arises out of caste hierarchies. Article 17 strikes at the foundation of the notions about "purity and pollution". (Para 343)

We will build upon this understanding to critically evaluate the problem with the judicial discourse on manual scavenging further below.

The SCI critically observes that despite the constitution guaranteeing every human being the inalienable right to dignity, Dalits continue to face indignity and social oppression. The SCI here also refers to manual scavenging, and recognises that "a section of Dalits has been forced to continue with the indignity of manual scavenging". In fact, the SCI even cites Gidla, Coffey and Spears' finding that manual scavengers face dual-discrimination, not only from the upper-castes but also from within Dalit communities, wherefore the manual scavenger caste is the most marginalised sub-caste among Dalits. The SCI expressly writes that:

> Manual scavengers have been the worst victims of the system of "purity and pollution". Article 17 was a promise to lower castes that they will be free from social oppression. Yet for the marginalized communities, little has changed… The Dalits and other oppressed sections of society have been waiting long years to see the quest for dignity fulfilled. Security from oppression and an opportunity to lead a dignified life is an issue of existence for Dalits and the other marginalized. (Para 346)

This, the court—in a case not explicitly about manual scavenging—expressly recognises that manual scavengers are the worst victims of untouchability, dual stigma, humiliation, social exclusion and discrimination, which violates their fundamental

right to human dignity. This stands in stark contrast to the discussion in *SKA* and *DJB*, which are explicitly about manual scavenging but do not make such a connection.

The above analysis of the judicial discourse also supports the first major argument of this article, which we have laid out further above: Manual scavenging is rooted in social exclusion based on the notions of purity and pollution, and violates the much acknowledged inalienable guarantee of dignity.

Before analysing the next judgement, *Union of India*, it is important to point out that SCI jurisprudence on the guarantee against social exclusion is not limited to untouchability prohibition only. In what is a categorical recognition of other types of social exclusion apart from untouchability, the court has directly recognised "the guarantee against social exclusion would emanate from other provisions of Part III, including Articles 15(2) and 21." (Para 357) The SCI thus reads of different fundamental rights conjointly, and highlights how different practices can fundamentally violate the constitutional scheme founded on dignity, justice, equality and liberty.

The striking feature of *Union of India*, a case where the constitutionality of *The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act,* 1989 was in review before a constitutional bench, is the vast range of questions that the court poses in its analysis of untouchability and manual scavenging. Acknowledging the "ignominy and abuse" that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, to which Dalits belong, have been suffering for centuries, the SCI commented:

> They cannot enjoy equal civil rights. *So far, we have not been able to provide the modern methods of scavenging to Harijans due to lack of resources and proper planning and apathy*. Whether he can shake hand with a person of higher class on equal footing? Whether we have been able to reach that level of psyche and human dignity and able to remove discrimination based upon caste?...*We see sewer workers dying in due to poisonous gases in chambers* [*sic*]. *They are like death traps. We have not been able to provide the masks and oxygen cylinders for entering in sewer chambers, we cannot leave them to die like this and avoid tortious liability concerned with officials/machinery, and they are still discriminated within the society in the matter of enjoying their civil rights and cannot live with human dignity*. (Para 45 and 49) [emphasis added]

The SCI further links this absence of human dignity to not just the prohibition of untouchability, but the right to life:

> Under Article 21, the right to life includes the right to live with dignity. Basic human dignity implies that all the persons are treated as equal human in all respects and not treated as an untouchable, downtrodden, and object for exploitation. It also implies that they are not meant to be born for serving the elite class based upon the caste. (Para 46)

The judicial discourse in *Union of India* expressly recognises the importance of the human dignity principle in the lives of manual scavengers, and categorically concludes that manual scavengers cannot live with dignity in violation of their constitutional rights.

Human Dignity in Indian Constitutional Law

Drawing on the above analysis, this section maps the Indian human dignity debate under Article 21 of the Constitution. The above analysis has shown that the concept of human dignity in Indian fundamental rights jurisprudence has been expansively interpreted and has been oriented at understanding human suffering. It is beyond the scope of the section to map all the cases which interpret human dignity; this section will focus on landmark judgements that explain human dignity as generally understood in fundamental rights discourse.

The interpretation of the right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution to include the right to live with human dignity was first conceptualised as an enforceable right in *Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi* (1981). In the judgement, the SCI held that "every act which offends against or impairs human dignity would constitute deprivation pro tanto of this right to live." Though the SCI at the time reduced human dignity to the provision of "bare necessities of life", subsequent jurisprudence has built upon this interpretation and imbued the right with real expansive content.

The content and the meaning of the right to life with human dignity has been recently analysed and summarised in the landmark judgement of the five-judge constitutional bench in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018). In discussing consensual sexual conduct between two homosexual adults, human dignity assumes a central position. The SCI unanimously holds that human dignity is integral to the right to life guaranteed under the Indian Constitution. In paragraph 127, the SCI holds that dignity is an "inseparable facet of human personality" and that dignity is at the pedestal of "a sacrosanct human right and sans dignity, human life loses its substantial meaning."

The SCI further engages with case law of the apex courts from various jurisdictions across the world, as well as international human rights law, and summarises that there is a unanimous global agreement that constitutional courts are obligated to "protect the dignity of every individual, for without the right to dignity, every other right would be rendered meaningless." (Para 268.6)

Summary

To summarise, we have made three key findings: First, case law on the right to life in Indian fundamental rights discourse explains that human dignity is a fundamental and inalienable human and constitutional right. Second, SCI jurisprudence on untouchability has indeed recognised that manual scavenging is an inherent violation of human dignity through the social exclusion and stigmatisation it is linked to. However, third, there is a complete absence of human dignity analysis in case law

explicitly on manual scavenging itself. Neither the landmark judgement of *SKA* nor of *DJB* critically evaluate human dignity as a legally protected good. The three strands of jurisprudence—untouchability, right to life, manual scavenging—provoke many important questions pertaining to the existing understanding of manual scavenging by the legislature and judiciary. Our discussion now turns to a critical analysis thereof.

SCI's Failure to Take Its Constitutional Obligations Seriously

This section provides a further in-depth critique of the absence and narrow conception of human dignity from manual scavenging jurisprudence. It shows that this narrow conception of human dignity in *SKA* and *DJB* constitutes a failure of the judiciary to take seriously its constitutional obligations to take cognisance of the plight of the manual scavengers and of the problems with the conditional legal prohibition.

The complete absence of critical engagement with the concept of human dignity is complemented by a differential interpretation and differential application of dignity language for manual scavengers from the generally understood meaning. As existing untouchability jurisprudence has shown, the SCI expressly recognises that manual scavengers face the worst manifestations of social exclusion and untouchability violating their inherent dignity, a fundamental constitutional right. However, this conclusion neither finds mention in jurisprudence that is explicitly on manual scavenging, nor has this jurisprudential understanding been deployed to challenge the constitutionality of manual scavenging. We therefore contend that the SCI's approach to eradicating manual scavenging does not give manual scavenging the treatment it is due—of unconstitutionality.

Having established that the judicial discourse of the Supreme Court lacks an incorporation of its conclusions and argumentations made elsewhere, and therefore treats manual scavenging differentially when it truly matters, we can now turn to answering our research question: To what extent is this approach sufficient in eradicating manual scavenging? As we show, the problem with the approach is not simply that it has loopholes and is inconsistent with wider SCI jurisprudence. Rather, we argue, the central issue is that this leads to a refusal of the judicial and legislative regimes to take cognisance of the harmful effects of the legal prohibition and safeguards on manual scavenging, which *de facto* is permissible in law. As seen from the preceding analysis, the SCI in its interpretation of human dignity has reiterated its constitutional obligations to take cognisance and address social exclusion and violations of human dignity. After all, the 2013 Act that followed *SKA* only conditionally prohibits manual scavenging (Wankhede, 2021): It allows human engagement with faecal matter if provided with safety equipment. As we established earlier, this does *not* end the harms of manual scavenging, as the mere engagement with faecal matter leads to serious social exclusion.[2] The legal prohibition and safeguards therefore render

[2]This understanding is embedded in the social and cultural connotations that stigmatize Dalits for their engagement with faecal matter. However, we intentionally leave the empirical question of

the plight of manual scavengers invisible by not taking constitutionally mandated cognisance of the social exclusion of Dalits that manual scavenging causes. As the preceding analysis points at a complete absence of the human dignity understanding in manual scavenging jurisprudence, the direct assent given to the 2013 Act by the SCI in *SKA* informs the debacle of the judicial discourse in not only failing to critically evaluate the legislative reforms, but also in considering the legislative interventions to be a panacea for eradicating the practice. Commenting on the 2013 Act, the SCI in *SKA* held:

> For over a decade, this Court issued various directions and sought for compliance from all the States and Union Territories. Due to effective intervention and directions of this Court, the Government of India brought an Act called *"The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013" for abolition of this evil and for the welfare of manual scavengers.* The Act got the assent of the President on 18.09.2013. The enactment of the aforesaid Act, *in no way, neither dilutes the constitutional mandate of Article 17 nor does it condone the inaction on the part of Union and State Governments under the 1993 Act. What the 2013 Act does in addition is to expressly acknowledge Article 17 and Article 21 rights of the persons engaged in sewage cleaning and cleaning tanks as well persons cleaning human excreta on railway tracks.* [emphasis added]

The SCI here explicitly claims two things: First, that the 2013 Act was brought in force for the "abolition" of manual scavenging and the "welfare" of the manual scavengers. Second, that the 2013 Act does not dilute the constitutional mandate of Article 17, which prohibits untouchability, and acknowledges the right against untouchability and social exclusion and right to life with human dignity. This finding of the SCI remains unchallenged and unreviewed in judicial discourse and academic writings on manual scavenging in India.

We find ourselves in complete disagreement with the SCI's approach that empathises with the legislative reforms by way of the 2013 Act. We submit that in doing so, the SCI adopts a narrow view of the guarantees against social exclusion and right to life with human dignity as understood in the Indian constitutional jurisprudence. Had the SCI better appreciated the central premise of human dignity and anti-exclusionary principle in the Indian constitutional framework, it would not have arrived at the finding that 2013 Act furthers the guarantees under Articles 17 and 21.

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whether nurses, care workers, end of life careers, hospital orderlies etc, face similar forms of stigmatization and social exclusion undertaking the work, as it demands a comparative study of how other societies in absence of caste-based discrimination and untouchability treat their essential workers who dispose of faces disposal of faeces. We are grateful to Prof. Barbara Harris-White, University of Oxford for pointing this out and for her indepth review of this article.

A New Argument for the Unconstitutionality of Manual Scavenging

The SCI's approach and corresponding judicial discourse is a major contributor towards perpetuating manual scavenging. This is the case even though the SCI has, on the issues of untouchability and the right to life, provided a solid basis for argumentation that could contribute more to the eradication of manual scavenging. Given our outline of manual scavenging above as a violation of human dignity, existing human dignity jurisprudence would in our view help adequately in problematising the very act of manual scavenging, with or without the protective equipment, and the conditional prohibition under the 2013 Act. Our critique provides a clear path ahead to argue for the unconstitutionality of both the very practice of manual scavenging and the 2013 Act, which we assert the SCI must take in order to advance towards its eradication.

The foundation of the argument for the unconstitutionality of manual scavenging as we envision it is to challenge the permissibility of manual scavenging *in any form*. In short, there are four reasons why we argue this, based on the integrative literature and case law review from above:

1. There is no dignified way to do manual scavenging. Protective equipment does not ensure the dignified treatment of manual scavengers. Adding a medium in between interactions with faeces does not do away with social exclusion due to the persistence of purity and pollution.
2. The physical safety and health of so-called sanitation workers therefore does not comprehensively provide human dignity.
3. The fundamental right discourse on untouchability, human dignity and the right to life prohibits any form of social exclusion. By extension, any practices that further untouchability and other forms of social exclusion are also unconstitutional.
4. The constitutional discourse on the right to life puts an obligation on constitutional courts to protect the human dignity of all individuals. The courts must facilitate measures that enable an individual to have a substantive realisation of the right to dignity.
5. Since constitutional courts are obligated to undertake judicial review of practices and legislation which derogate from the fundamental rights in Chapter III of the Indian Constitution, we submit that the apparent unconstitutionality of manual scavenging should not go unnoticed.

This analysis also allows us to conclude that the 2013 Act cannot survive the constitutional test. This is due to the violence in the legislative approach which makes the plight of manual scavengers invisible through a change in the identity of "manual scavengers" to "sanitation workers", which neglects the caste-related discrimination and social exclusion that these communities continue to face, despite the change in the terminology and provision of protective equipment.

The legislative imagination of how to eradicate manual scavenging falls blatantly short of a holistic understanding. As discussed in depth earlier, it holds that providing safety gear definitionally converts a manual scavenger into a sanitation worker (Wankhede, 2021). The 2013 Act therefore gives legal legitimacy to the practice of manual scavenging by turning its formal character from "manual scavenging" to "sanitation work", a binary we have established is misguided. This "new regime" articulates sanitation work as devoid of caste discrimination, stigma, humiliation, exclusion and discrimination, despite the fact that engagement with faecal matter itself is considered ritually polluting, and that almost all "sanitation workers" are Dalits.

The conditional prohibition therefore allows manual scavenging to continue despite the goal of completely eradicating the practice. To allow the idea of purity and pollution to continue under the garb of sanitation work and invisibilising manual scavengers is a violation of the constitutional right against untouchability and the right to life with human dignity, and does not stand the constitutional test manifested in the expansive and anti-exclusionary right to life.

We contend that there are therefore at least three things the SCI must do to in order for its approach to logically build on its own precedent:

1. It must take cognisance of the fact that its own jurisprudence on manual scavenging blatantly sidelines human dignity.
2. It must understand any engagement with faecal matter as unconstitutional.
3. It must rule that the 2013 Act, or at least the conditional prohibition of manual scavenging it contains, perpetuates manual scavenging and is unconstitutional.

A judgement of the Supreme Court that would adequately reflect the realities of manual scavenging, therefore, may be one that imposes a moratorium on all human engagement with faeces. Given that constitutional rights trump any other considerations, ensuring the constitutional right to dignity would entail prohibiting all sanitation work in which people need to interact with faecal matter, and mechanising the entire process.

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Sanitising India or Cementing Injustice? Scrutinising the Swachh Bharat Mission in India

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Abstract

Occupational competence and division of labour in India have historically been linked to social institutions of caste, class and gender. Labour related to sanitation and waste disposal has perpetually been assigned to the most backward caste groups. The reality of the caste system and the revulsion of upper caste groups from any physical contact with dirt and human waste, or with people dealing with waste and sewage, has had many implications for the state of sanitation and cleanliness in India. The national policy on sanitation and its flagship program the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), seems to ignore this caste reality and the conditions of people involved in waste and sanitation-related activities. SBM focuses on infrastructure building for ownership and access of toilets and not on dealing with sludge and sewage, conditions of sanitary workers and their rehabilitation. The technology used in the toilets being constructed, their sustainability, safety and retrofitting needs also requires critical assessment. Any policy for a sanitised India or Swachh Bharat will only be successful if it considers the notion of caste, of ritual pollution associated with human waste and dirt in India and removes the shackles of caste that have chained few marginal communities to such occupations, thereby making the enterprise of sanitation and cleaning in India truly egalitarian and democratic, in the sense of opportunities and participation.

Keywords

Caste, occupation, sanitation, waste and sewage, Swachh Bharat Mission, scavengers

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Labour, Sanitation and Waste in India

All of us, especially those born in small towns and cities of India, might have witnessed a sight wherein a group of people, working in tandem, take out dark, dense and putrid sludge from a manhole, a chamber or uncovered drains, to clear up the sewer line and allow the septage to flow through. I witnessed this same act on the twenty-first of May last year (2022), in the resettlement colonies of Karawl Nagar in North East Delhi. Half a dozen, half-naked men, with bare torsos, were trying to unclog a drain connected to a chamber, with the help of long and sleek bamboo sticks. One of them entered the chamber connected to the drain, with another watching over him, to ascertain where and how much sludge is stuck in the drain line connected to the chamber. Soon enough he took out a mass of thick black sludge, congealed together with plastics and refuse, with his bare hands, asking his compatriot to pass him a shovel, to clear all that is still stuck in the drain.

The sight of a fellow human trying to grasp semi-solid faecal sludge with his uncovered hands would have been nauseating for most of us, leaving behind a sombre experience. There may be several inquisitions which surround us, in the wake of such an experience, like, why do these people agree to do such work? Why didn't they have any instruments or modern equipment for doing this? Why do they still have to enter a manhole? And maybe, who are these people? This article is an attempt to engage with some of these catechisms, in particular, and India's waste and sanitation landscape in general.

The destiny of labouring classes in India has historically been linked to social institutions of caste, gender and ethnicity (Harriss-White & Gooptu 2001, Thorat & Newman, 2010). In mediaeval times, proscriptions over occupational choices were enforced by the ideals of the *Varnashrama dharma*, elaborated in the *Rigveda*'s dharma shastras. The Varna system divided society into four varnas and a group of outcastes. The four varnas are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudras, for those who cannot be assigned any of the four varnas, allegedly for their grievous sins of a past life, become the outcastes, the untouchables, or the Dalits. The varnas, as suggested, also dictated the type of labour and occupational engagement of each of the five social classes, where all labour relating to waste, sanitation and such activities which were considered ritually polluting, like dealing with carcass of dead cattle, cremation and burial rites, etc., were enforced on the lowest sub-castes (*Jati*) among the outcaste Dalits. In the *Narada samhita*, we find that of the fifteen duties of slaves, one was the disposal of human excreta. Similarly, in *Vajasaneyi samhita* from the *Yajurveda*, chandalas were termed as slaves, engaged in the disposal of human waste. However, excavations at Harappan civilisation (3000–1500 BCE) sites Lothal and Dholavira[1] in Gujarat have shown that people had waterborne toilets in each house, which were

[1]The site of Dholavira is not mentioned in the source text, although, it has been added because recent exploration has found that it too had similarly developed sanitary systems as Lothal, during the Harappan Civilisation. For more information on this see; UNESCO. (2021) Dholavira: A Harappan City. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1645/

linked by drains covered by burnt clay bricks, much before the Vedic texts were written. The drainage system was very developed and had manholes and chambers to facilitate operations and maintenance. As the Indus Valley civilisation declined, the science of sanitary engineering also suffered a setback (Ramaswamy, 2005).

The consolidation of caste-varna consciousness accelerated during British rule. As Aloysius explains (1999) that caste was not omnipresent as a social formation and was only peculiar to certain areas in early India, the river valleys in particular. It was only through what he terms 'collusive colonialism' that a compact between religion and nation emerged, leading to the re-historicisation and legitimation of a caste-varna system or the Brahminical social order. This collusion between the dominant castes and the foreign elites leads to the rise of state power among the dominant castes and establishes the essentialist and quasi-sacred nature of caste across India. In the words of Srinivas, as quoted by Aloysius (1999, p. 163), 'The establishment of Pax Britannica has set the caste free from the territorial limitation inherent in the pre-British political system'. The essentialization of caste, during imperialism, was aided by the dominant castes who tried to compensate for the setbacks to sanitary sciences while also ensuring the ritual avoidance of dirt and filth (especially human excreta) as stated in their Vedic texts. It meant that the practice of manual scavenging, i.e. handling human excrements with bare hands gained enormously and became widespread during the British rule, as they legitimised and systematised it, while urbanising, setting up army cantonments and municipalities (Prashad, 2000; Ramaswamy, 2005). Hence, occupational choices, especially in regions where caste consciousness was strong and hegemonic, got governed by an intricate system, which dictated who was adroit for a particular occupation, based on the position of the caste/sub-caste, in which he was born, within the hierarchical scheme of the caste system. If born outside the four varnas, as an outcaste, one had to profess such a job which was considered ritually polluting.

As Prashad notes (2000, p. 30), 'The colonial officials did not invent caste nor did they invent the relations between the landlords and the wage workers, but they certainly intervened in clear and specific ways to set certain customs above others as the legal norm.' Among such interventions was their setting up of municipal corporations and creation of a system of sanitation for their urban centres, this system was built upon the labour of landless farm labouring Dalits, who were forced to migrate from rural centres to urban areas, mainly because of the British agrarian policy and taxation policy, which privileged the landholding peasant castes and its needs, as they were important for their trade and production (Prashad, 2000; Ramaswamy, 2005). In the endeavour to ensure sanitary living conditions in urbanising centres for the army and administrative personnel, the imperialists were aided greatly by the nationalists, agitating for freedom. The nationalists were largely convinced by the language of modernity, with the need for civic consciousness and public health. As Chakrabarty (1992, p. 544) puts it, 'they both seek to make the bazaar, the street, the mela-the arenas for collective action in pre-British India - benign, regulated places, clean and healthy, incapable of producing either disease or disorder.' Nonetheless, the nationalists' concern for

public health and sanitation did not translate into a concern for those who were being burdened with cleaning and sanitary activities, namely the lowest sub-castes among Dalits. Even Gandhi, who symbolised the moralistic leadership of the struggle against imperialism, did not directly challenge the notion of ritual pollution associated with sanitation, contrarily he vouched for the appropriateness of *Varnasaharma*, as the foundational ethos of Hindu society, which gained currency among the mainstream political discourse of the Nationalist movement. 'Rather than remove the prejudice against sanitation and urge others to join the sanitary corps, the Gandhian solution, for the most part, entailed a valorisation of Dalits as sweepers, not now to be seen as the lowest occupation, but indeed as the highest' (Prashad, 2000, pp. 112–113). Having lost their traditional occupations, and struggling to survive in urban centres, the landless Dalits were coerced into taking up jobs as scavengers and sweepers. They provided the colonial rulers with a cheap and accessible source of labour to maintain a largely primitive and manually run system of disposing of waste and maintaining sanitation.

In this way, the colonial interventions aided by (caste Hindu) nationalists ensured that the labour of the Dalits gets institutionalised as labour meant for sanitary work, in the newly developed towns and cities. Like in and around Delhi, the *Bhangis*, the *Mehtars,* the *Chuharas* and the *Valmikis*, all Dalits sub-caste groups who used to be farm labourers, were inducted as sanitary workers, responsible for cleaning human and other wastes from the urban municipalities and even today they continue to constitute an overwhelming majority of sanitation workforce in the region (Prashad, 2000). This entrapment of Dalit labour as that meant for most defiling activities, in the urbanising cities, was contradictory to the belief of most thinkers, including Ambedkar, who 'thought that along with other modernising processes, urbanisation would offer the untouchables a much-needed opportunity to walk out from the constraining dark hole (in Ambedkar's view, the village system based on caste was a dark hole)' (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012, p. 90). This, as Ambekar also realised, was quite distant from reality. As sanitary systems and their constituent labourers got institutionalised, the casteist subconscious of most Hindus, middle and upper castes and Dalits also got strengthened. The Dalits instead of showing revulsion towards what they do, internalised it as their destiny, rationalising scavenging in the name of security and fixed income and began to exercise hereditary claims over toilets and latrines which they cleaned generationally (Singh, 2014). In the minds of the caste Hindus in urban areas, the ritual pollution associated with dirt and waste in turn polluted those dealing with it. This led to such implications wherein all that is dirty got personified into and as a class or community of Individuals and to be ritually pure is to maintain distance from both dirt/waste and such class or community of Individuals. Guru (and Sarukkai, 2012, p. 91) pointing in a similar direction elaborates that, 'in their (caste Hindus) perception, untouchables were mobile dirt and dirt was mobile untouchability.… The untouchable's image as 'walking dirt' was chained to his or her physical association and the experience of being 'a walking dirt', was sustained through the static nature of space.' This static nature of space around which dirt and those associated with it

are imagined has dire consequences for what qualifies as *'matter out of place'* in the Indian social environment.

The Hindu caste order's obsession with purity and pollution principles, ironically, never led to a concrete science of sanitation and waste disposal, and this again points to the expendability of the untouchable's bodies in the perception of caste Hindus (Geetha, 2009). The task of sanitising contemporary India, therefore, would have to take into consideration the institutionalised nature of ritual pollution associated with dirt, human waste and the labour of Dalits. Many previous interventions to sanitise the country have not achieved desired results or gained pan-nation popular support. Most of them happened to be caste agnostic in essence which can be attributed as a limitation and a reason for the continued uncleanliness of India or an *Aswachh Bharat*. A brief mention of a few prominent sanitation programmes, implemented in independent India, their framework, overall aim and quantum of success achieved, would help in contextualising the previous claim.

Sanitation and public health first find mention in government documents in 1954, as a part of the Indian government's first Five Year Plan. However, no concrete interventions were set in motion to improve sanitation as succeeding governments prioritise the growth of core industries, food security, and other developmental concerns. As a result, the 1981 national census delivered a rude awakening, that the rural sanitation coverage across the country was merely one per cent (Kumar, 2022). Hence, the administrators of the country, for the first time, realised the need for a dedicated policy for the development of sanitation facilities and in 1986, the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) was launched. The CRSP focused not just on building sanitation facilities, thereby providing dignity and privacy to women, but also on the relationship between proper sanitation and health, which impacts the quality of life of the rural population (DDWS, 2007). For all its investment and infrastructure development, the coverage of proper sanitation facilities increased marginally under the CRSP programme (Hueso & Bell, 2013). With the failure of CRSP, to tackle the incessant lethargy of growth in sanitation coverage, the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) was introduced in 1999. The TSC reformulated the existing policy (CRSP) to make it more 'community led' and 'demand driven' by stressing on human resource and capacity development, information, education and behavioural change communication to increase awareness and generate demand for sanitary facilities, with the ultimate aim to provide 'sanitation for all' by 2012 (DDWS, 2007). However, TSC, like CRSP, remained unsuccessful, as it demonstrated a declining rate of net growth in overall sanitation coverage wherein population growth outstripped latrine construction and the number of rural households without latrines increased by 8.3 million. The reported progress under the programme was also exaggerated when compared with the data from the national census of 2011 (Hueso & Bell, 2013). Acknowledging that TSC has not lived up to its objectives, the government renamed and relaunched it as the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) in 2013. The NBA was again renamed and relaunched in 2014, as the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). 'This history alerts us that name changes are not synonymous to changes in policy content' (Kedia, 2022, p. 2).

Susan Chaplin (1999) highlighted three factors that have prevented a successful sanitation movement from being replicated in India, in the way it happened in the UK, Europe and all of the West, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they include; the political and administrative inability of local governments in India, suggesting weaknesses in the local municipalities, which apart from being a colonial remnant, are institutionally marginalised, lack capacity and finance to maintain infrastructure for proper sanitation and are immersed with political interference. Second, there is an absence of a 'threat from below' as the trade union politics in India, apart from being on a downturn, has largely remained limited to the formal sectors of employment. The unions have failed to acknowledge the nature of employment in the Indian unorganised sector. The workers in the unorganised sector, like most of those in the sanitation and waste economy, have historically been migrants, who came to expanding urban centres as they lacked the means to produce. The inexhaustible mass of unskilled labour which came to urban centres meant that the supply of manpower was always above demand leading to the commodification of labour and dissolution of powers to collectivise and bargain among the workers in unorganised economies, as among the Dalits who provided the sanitation services. Third, as modern medicine, science and technology developed, the middle classes (mostly caste Hindus and *Ashraf* Muslims) were able to insulate themselves from epidemic diseases, foul odours and unkempt spaces, by monopolising whatever services the state/municipalities provided and isolating themselves in gated communities.

This leads us to a scenario wherein any endeavour to clean India has not been reinforced by the pressures of a popular movement led by unions/collectives or by the sensitivities and civic consciousness of a burgeoning middle class. India remains unclean and, in the waste, and sanitation landscape, caste still remains the cornerstone for dividing labour, as proficiency for the occupations relating to sanitation and waste is still perceived as an ascribed virtue of individuals, which depends upon the sub-caste (*Jati*) they belonged to. This is the reality upon which one finds that another effort to clean India has been unveiled by the present Indian dispensation, by renaming NBA and sufficiently increasing the fund allocated for sanitation, i.e., the *Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)*.

The Swachh Bharat Mission: Claims and Context

The SBM Phase I was unveiled on October 2, 2014 by the Prime minister, with the target of making India clean, or at least free from open defecation, in the next five years. There are two sub missions under the SBM: SBM - Rural and SBM - Urban. The SBM - Rural intends to make Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF), sanitised and clean. It also wants to improve the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through solid and liquid waste management activities (DDWS, 2017). The immediate objective of SBM in rural areas is to make sanitary latrines accessible for private households thereby improving sanitation coverage, and subsequently, it seeks to develop community-based solid and liquid waste management systems. Along similar

lines, the SBM - Urban targets to achieve a hundred per cent ODF status, a hundred per cent scientific waste management, and change in the behaviour of the masses through 'Jan Andolan' (MoHUA, 2021). This course of action is quite unusual from a public policy perspective, in the following two senses, first, if one considers proper sanitation as a public good, requiring public investment, then any government policy should try to maximise the value of the public investment by funding public sanitation infrastructure (sewage lines, public toilets, solid and liquid waste management, treatment plants, etc.), at the same time incentivising people to invest in their own private sanitation facility. However, the SBM's approach is to subsidise the one-time construction of private sanitation facilities that mainly provide private benefits to those who have the ability to build and maintain them. Second, by just focusing on providing subsidies for private infrastructure, the policy subtly shifts the burden of managing solid and liquid waste and developing, operating and maintaining public infrastructure for it, on the public (Kedia, 2022). This implies that conventional social relations, regarding sanitation and waste management, will get consolidated, as access to toilets increases and so does the public demand for maintaining toilets and disposing of sanitary waste.

The SDG India Index and Dashboard prepared by NITI Aayog, the apex policy think tank of the government, shows that all the districts under the SBM - Rural have 100 per cent sanitation coverage and India is now verified to be ODF (NITI Aayog, 2020) This claim of India being ODF was first made by the Government of India on October 2, 2019, at the end of Phase I of the programme. However, this assertion has not gone uncontested, by both government and non-government institutions. A survey released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) one month after this claim was made, in November 2019 titled 'Drinking water, sanitation, hygiene and housing conditions in India', claimed that 'about 28.7 per cent of rural households across India still lacked access to any form of latrines. Moreover, 3.5 per cent of those who have access to latrines, don't use it' (*The Hindu data team*, 2020). Other studies have also contended government's claim, like the one reported by the Institute of Labour Economics in January 2019, which maintains that despite a significant increase in toilet ownership in rural India, 'the fraction of people who now own a latrine, but who nevertheless defecate in the open, did not change between 2014 and 2018' (Gupta et al., 2019). This research study tracked changes in 1,558 households of 157 villages of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and showed that 50 per cent of the population in these states still defecated in the open, indicating no improvement. This same study also reported on the survey conducted by Deshpande & Kapur (2018) in Udaipur, Rajasthan between April and June 2017 for the Accountability Initiative of the Centre for Policy Research, which found that of 82 per cent of toilets constructed in Gram Panchayats of Udaipur, only 70 per cent were functional and only 49 per cent were used regularly. The subsidy provided under the scheme has also been found to be insufficient, as a study exploring the perspectives on open defecation and latrine use, in rural Bihar, found that ₹ 12,000 provided by SBM-Rural, for latrine construction was not enough to cover the costs for poor households (Jain et al., 2020). This has

also been corroborated in another study[2] and considering the fact that SBM - Urban provides a much lower subsidy (of ₹ 6,500), we are left to ponder how this amount would be sufficient for toilet construction in urban areas. This contrast and relative insufficiency of subsidy among rural and urban areas again point to poorly envisioned policy goals as we circle back to the deficiencies in the policy design.

Apart from access and ownership, another aspect which impacts regular toilet use is the functionality and safety of the toilet constructed which is predicated by the technology used. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) (earlier a ministry) suggests that the twin pit pour flush toilet (TTPF) technology has been found to be the most responsive technical option in most geographies (DDWS, 2017) but it does allow for changes to the toilet technology or modification to TTPF toilets, depending upon the local context. Interestingly, in a study conducted by WaterAid India about the quality and sustainability of toilets being constructed under SBM, the key findings included: TPPF was used in 57 per cent of households, single pits in 22 per cent and septic tanks in 21 per cent. The study further stated that 31 per cent of the constructed toilets, nonetheless functional, were in fact unsafe (Srivastava, 2019). The TPPF latrines recommended by the government for rural households need to be emptied once full. This has resulted in many people wanting to get larger pits constructed, as they would not require frequent emptying. However, building larger pits increases the cost of constructing toilets beyond the amount of subsidy. The emptying of sludge from latrines is also another cost which the toilet-using household have to bear by hiring labourers or tankers, and '[A tanker] is a big cost. They take ₹ 2000, ₹ 2500 if poor people don't have it, of course, they'll defecate outside' (Jain et al., 2020, p. 6). This points to the persistence of revulsion among caste Hindus, from having anything to do with their faecal discards, which is considered ritually polluting. Instead, they opt to incur costs in hiring services, from sources of labour which they regard appropriate for such work, that is, mostly the lowest sub-castes among Dalits in that specific geography.

In fact, most types of technology that have been used for constructing toilets under SBM would require manual removal of sludge from pits, at some point, if not retrofitted and connected to piped sewage disposal systems. Like the TPPF toilets, recommended by DDWS, which consist of two alternating pits connected to a pour flush toilet, where blackwater or greywater is collected in the pits and allowed to slowly infiltrate into the surrounding soil. Over a period of time, the solids are dewatered and the sludge that remains has to be removed manually (Tilley et al., 2014; Tayler, 2018). Septic tanks, which are also very commonly constructed, 'retain solids, supernatant liquid and scum, and must be regularly desludged' (Tayler, 2018, p. 17). Similarly, other self-contained, on-site systems of sanitation like the single pit toilets, will also require removal of partly digested faecal sludge at frequent intervals (Tayler,

[2]Other research has also found that for the type of toilet preferred in rural India, the cost of construction of ₹ 12000/- is not enough. May refer to; Gupta, A., Khalid, N., Desphande, D., Hathi, P., Kapur, A., Srivastav, N., Vyas, S., Spears, D. & Coffey, D. (2019). Changes in open defecation in rural north India: 2014-2018. IZA discussion paper No 12065.

2018). An estimate suggests that a septic tank will need to be pumped out or emptied every five years, if it is serving 10 people, if it is serving 100 people it will need to be desludged every six months (Doron & Jeffery, 2018). Another estimate suggests that septic tanks designed and operated using best practices will require desludging at an interval of 2-4 years (Tayler, 2018).

The unpropitious state of India's sewage system makes it even more obvious who will service these pits once they start filling up, and needing to be emptied. Gatade (2015, p. 32) notes that 'the equation between excreta and pollution in Hindu society has led to the scandalous neglect of sewage management.' By 2020, as per the Central Pollution Control Board, of the 72,368 MLD of sewage which was generated, only 20,235 MLD, or about 28 per cent was captured by sewage in towns and cities and ended up at treatment plants (CPCB, 2020). Even in urban areas, as of the last Census, only 32.7 per cent of India was serviced by sewers (GoI, 2011). Hence, the emptying of pits and the handling of waste is indeed fundamental, but it remains largely undiscussed in policy documents of SBM Phase I. In recent times, while cleaning of septic tanks and pits in unsewered urban areas has become a well-established service, still 'the guidelines of SBM-Urban say almost nothing about how contained sludge is supposed to be collected and transported when the toilets and pits are emptied' (Prasad & Ray, 2019, pp. 339–340). The cleaning up of pits and tanks, which was a requirement for urban households is fast becoming a reality in rural India as well, replacing the cleaning of dry latrines. Those carrying the burden of cleaning remain unchanged.

In order to improve the system of solid and liquid waste management in villages, through developments in public infrastructure for waste collection and sewage disposal, the budgetary provisions for SBM - Rural do provide funds under the head of Solid Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) activities. This funding may well be considered a proxy indicator for the elimination of some of the most degrading menial jobs and improvements in the working conditions of those employed in the waste and sanitation economies, by acquiring better equipment and modern technologies. The funding under SLWM activities is capped at ₹ 7 lakh, ₹ 12 lakh, ₹ 15 lakh and ₹ 20 lakh for gram panchayats having up to 150, 300, 500 and more than 500 households, respectively. Under phase one of SBM - Rural, the grand total of expenditures from the Government of India on SLWM activities accounted for less than 1 per cent of all expenditures on SBM till 2018. In 2018-19 only 4 per cent of total GoI's expenditure under SBM was on SLWM and in 2019-20 (till 3 July 2019), on average, only 5 per cent of total expenditure from the SBM funds was on SLWM. This underscores the dismal state of funding for SLWM activities under SBM-Rural. If we consider the state-wise trends, in 2018-19, states like Kerala (83 per cent of total allocation), Himachal Pradesh (72 per cent), Haryana (37 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh (24 per cent) managed significant expenditure on SLWM, whiles states like Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar and Odisha reported zero expenditure on SLWM activities. Similarly, in 2019-20 (till 3 July 2019) of the total funds allocated to states under SLWM activities, the highest share of expenditure

was done by Mizoram (91 per cent of total allocation), Meghalaya (30 per cent), Uttarakhand (21 per cent), and Himachal Pradesh (20 per cent). Conversely, 26 states and UTs reported no expenditure on SLWM out of GoI's SBM funds (Kapur & Deshpande, 2019; Kapur & Malhotra, 2020). On parallel footing, the SBM - Urban, in its first phase, also provisioned for funds to improve solid waste management systems and out of the total funds allotted, 68 per cent were released by GoI from October 2014 till September 30, 2019, with only five states and UTs receiving cent per cent allocation under the mission, including Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu. Whereas, ten states and UTs received less than 50 per cent of the total allotted funding including Uttar Pradesh (45 per cent), Kerala (43 per cent), West Bengal (41 per cent), and Uttarakhand (22 per cent). Of all the funds received under this head, only 40 per cent were utilised by the states and UTs (till September 30, 2019) where four states and UTs, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, and Puducherry, spent 100 per cent of the SWM funds received from GoI, on the other hand, 5 states and UTs, including Kerala, reported zero expenditure on SWM (Kapur and Malhotra, 2020). This further highlights the priorities of central and state governments when it comes to improving the solid and liquid waste management systems and eradicating caste-based menial jobs that pervade them.

As discussed, the hierarchies of caste prejudices are interwoven with the tasks of cleaning and transporting human waste (Doron & Jeffery, 2018). The SBM as a policy intervention, with its dedicated focus on private infrastructure, access and ownership, has it seems, remained reticent to recognise those who labour to provide for the availability, affordability and perpetuity of sanitary services, even with a dismal system of sewage and waste disposal. It is as if the policy isolates itself from the Indian social context and starts from an objectivated and detached stance of just cleaning India. However, as Mary Douglas's seminal work on ritual pollution and purity tells us, 'dirt … is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system' (2003, p. 36). The SBM, in its non-recognition for the system of caste operating within the sanitation landscape, has all the potential to transmogrify into a structure which further institutionalises caste prejudices, in the medium and long run. In the sanitation and waste sector, the SBM continues to trammel upon the occupational choice of the Dalits and reeks of retrogression towards a colonial past.

In spite of the uninspiring performance during SBM Phase I, as the discussion earlier mentions, the SBM Phase II (2020–2025) has already shifted the goal post. The SBM - Rural, in this phase, focuses on the management of biodegradable waste from agriculture and husbandry, maintenance of ODF status and disposal of solid and liquid (DDWS, 2020). SBM Urban also shifted focus to wastewater management, disposal of garbage, management of faecal sludge, and more public awareness (MoHUA, 2021) However, without provisioning for trunk infrastructure and public toilets, without mandating sanitation standards and practices by law, without taking mismanaged urban local bodies to task and nudging those citizens who can afford private toilets to link up with trunk infrastructure, the SBM presents itself only as a poorly designed conditional cash transfer scheme (Kedia, 2022).

The policy document about the guidelines for Phase II of SBM mentions that 'Sanitation workers and Safai Mitras, a largely ignored section earlier, have become a key stakeholder for the Mission, with initiatives being taken to ensure safe, healthy and improved living conditions for them, and providing them with better livelihood options, dignity and respect' (MoHUA, 2021). Although, nowhere in the document one finds mention of specific initiatives which have indeed improved living conditions, ensuring safety and health, providing dignity, etc., to the sanitation workers. The same document mentions 'used water management' as a new complement included under phase II of the mission with two objectives: i) To safely collect, treat and reuse all used water to the extent possible and stop the discharge of untreated used water into water bodies or the open environment, ii) To collect, treat and reuse by-products from faecal matter and septage. But it does not lay out any provisions for how will the management of faecal sludge and septage be affected, especially from on-site sanitation systems (like septic tanks), apart from suggesting that urban local bodies may procure desludging/ cleaning equipment, or give contracts to private operators for this task. As researchers have shown, the cleaners of these septic tanks are mostly Dalits, who clean and dispose of the faecal sludge, without any form of protective gear and there is usually no designated place of dumping this sludge, which leads to indiscriminate disposal at sites like storm drains, open manhole and/or farmlands (Prasad & Ray, 2019). In many urban metropolises, the task of cleaning tanks and pits is now undertaken using trucks or other vehicles fitted with vacuum pumps and suction hoses, but this has its own limitation, as such vehicles cannot reach everywhere, even in urban areas, and are yet to penetrate rural settings. The fact remains that even in urban municipalities most sewage workers still have to enter sewers on a regular basis and also come into direct contact with human excreta in course of their work (Ingole, 2016), thus any claims by any institution regarding mechanisation of these processes remains disputed. The Government of India outlawed the practice of manual scavenging through two Acts, first in 1993 and then in 2013 by passing the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act. If one defines manual scavenging simply as dealing with human excrement with bare hands, then the legislature has not translated into any prohibition. In the Act, the definition of the practice of Manual Scavenging is quite conservative, with a specific focus on dry latrines and carrying of faecal waste with hands, rather than on any act which pertains to human contact with faecal waste. The enforcement of the provisions of the Act is also lacklustre. The rules laid down under the act state that no sewer worker should physically enter a manhole, however, in case of an aberration, only such a worker who has received proper training can enter a manhole or chamber, provided he is accompanied by a team of three, with one supervisor and the chamber has been tested, by holding a lead acetate paper over its opening, for inflammable or harmful gas. In the municipal corporation of a modern city like Pune, Ingole (2016) found that the sewage workers employed had not received any form of training whatsoever before entering a chamber and to judge the presence of combustible, toxic gases, they mostly used light a matchstick and hold it at the mouth of the sewer. This does provide a hint as to why '22,000 sanitation workers

reportedly die every year servicing India's sewers, sewage treatment plants, and septic tanks' (Tyagi, 2017, as mentioned in Prasad & Ray, 2019, p. 339). These deaths and the indignation of dealing with someone else's filth would not be ameliorated by just the construction of new toilets, which by themselves most certainly would not lead to the creation of a *Swachh Bharat*. The SBM, in order to achieve any semblance of success, would need to merge the construction of physical infrastructure with the social construction of a consciousness that enables the decoupling of caste and human waste in Indian society.

The prevalence of caste consciousness in Indian society was witnessed in two significant accounts of deaths that took place in February 2017. One was a Dalit research scholar from the University of Hyderabad. He had died by suicide, hanging himself, not before writing a poignant note. The reason behind it was a clash on campus between his Dalit organisation and a Bharatiya Janata Party-affiliated student organisation, which led to his subsequent ostracisation and institutional boycott, compelling him to suicide. The other account of death was of four Dalits who had died of asphyxiation after entering a septic tank at a Chennai hotel. Both these deaths found their way to a front page of a leading English daily, *The Hindu*, with varied prominence and column space, as the suicide of the research scholar garnered greater attention. Doron and Jeffery (2018) in the book claim that 'both these stories of appalling, avoidable deaths relate to problems of sewage, public sanitation, and ideas about purity in India.' This thought-provoking assertion is indeed suggestive of the all-pervasive nature of caste ideology in India and its operation within and outside the spheres of sanitation. The death of these individuals were not accidents, rather being born as Dalits were for all of them 'fatal accident'.[3]

Conclusion

The landscape of sanitation and waste in India presents unique challenges for its static composition and hereditary association. The Dalits or the untouchables are the ones who continue to carry the disproportionate burden of cleaning India. The flagship program to clean India, SBM, focuses on toilet construction and sanitation coverage and then doubles down these aspects through financial commitments and institutional arrangements specific to the program. In its larger vision to clean India, the program fails to see or purposely ignores the reality of caste that pervades the sanitation and waste collection operations across India. This strategic blindness of the state and of its interventions in sanitation is not a recent phenomenon, conversely, from colonial times all endeavours to sanitise public spaces in India have been framed with the assumption that labour from a certain community (the most backward castes among Dalits) would be easily and widely available to deal with the filth of the society. Administrators, whether imperialists or nationalists, do not have to regulate what they do not see.

[3]The research scholar, who died by suicide, in his last note refers to his birth as a 'fatal accident'. For more on this, kindly see; The Wire. (2019) https://thewire.in/caste/rohith-vemula-letter-a-powerful-indictment-of-social-prejudices

The SBM, similarly, does very little to challenge this assumption while doing a lot to strengthen the institutionalised nature of sanitation work in India, as it focuses on front-end aspects of access and use of toilets and ignores back-end aspects like removal, transportation and safe disposal of discarded waste. What this suggests is that as access and ownership of toilets increases, the question of removal and disposal will also become starker, and so would the need for services to haul and dispose of faecal waste from toilet pits.

This article starts with a narration, which tries to convey the transformative potential embedded in the act of seeing. The deliberate sight of the phenomena of cleaning sewers by a fellow human is revolting and enduring. It leaves with us a moral disgust towards the sensibilities of Indian social organisations. It makes it obvious that a '*Swachh Bharat*' cannot be achieved till caste Hindus keep perceiving some of our own as '*Aswachh Bharatiyas*'.

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Hariprasad Tamta: Father of Shilpkar Revolution in India

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Abstract

Uttarakhand is a region replete with social diversity. This can be observed in its culture, customs and language. The social perspective of these diversities is outwardly similar but in the social and economic perspective the discrimination between Dalits and upper castes can be easily seen. The Shilpkar (the term used for Dalit caste) here also suffer from untouchability, inequality, humiliation and discrimination like Dalits of other areas. Munshi Hariprasad Tamta fought against these inequalities and untouchability throughout his life to educate, create awareness and provide leadership to the Shilpkar during the British and post Independence era. Hariprasad Tamta: The Father of Shilpkar Revolution has remained anonymous in the local history of Uttarakhand. This article attempts to re-analyze the personality, political and social works of Hariprasad Tamta and to provide new insight into the Shilpakar struggle. Alongside, an attempt has also been made to redefine the prevailing concept of social scientists to define the ideology of Hariprasad Tamta as class interest and pro-British.

Keywords

Shilpkar, consciousness, contempt, suppression

Introduction

Hariparasad Tamta was named as Himshilpi for supporting Dalits & their wellbeing (Shilpkar referred to in the hills). In the extreme times of social discrimination, he ignited a new consciousness in the heart of Shilpkar by standing firm even in adverse conditions like the Himalayas, as no less than a guide in establishing humanity and social equality. The life of the Shilpkar then and even today is still very sore. Even today, Shilpkar face social discrimination, disdain, boycott, untouchability and social stigmas which make their life more painful. Hariprasad Tamta is not less than that

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Jyotipunj, which will burn itself and provide the path of illumination to the Shilpkar society with its own light. Not knowing that the full moon of the month of Shravan that had risen on 26 August 1887 would always be remembered as a new chapter in Dalit history, Hariprasad Tamta was born on this day. His father's name was Govind Prasad and mother's name was Govindi Devi. There were two brothers and one sister in the family, the brother's name was Lalta Prasad and sister's name was Kokila Devi. His father Govind Prasad was a famous trader of copper, due to which his family background and status was better than others in the Shilpkar community, and his family was respected in society. At the age of 14, he was married to Panna (Parvati Devi), a resident of Pahal village, according to the wish of his father. She was a soft spoken, cultured, kind and Dalit loving woman like Hariprasad Tamta.

After the death of his father in childhood, he came under the protection of his maternal uncle Krishna Tamta, who was then a famous businessman of Almora city. Krishna Tamta was a leading social worker, under whose guidance he moved towards social service. The early and middle education of Hariprasad Tamta was completed in Diggi Bangla School and Mission School respectively. He had good knowledge of Hindi, English, Persian, Urdu, and Kumaoni languages that is why he also assumed the title of Munshi. Hariprasad Tamta's role is significant in bringing forward Shilpkar suffering from social and economic difficulties in the social sector. He died on 23 February 1960 at Prayag, the place of confluence.

Hariprasad Tamta has an important contribution in giving a new conceptual dimension to the Shilpkar consciousness. The factors that were involved in the formation of this consciousness were contempt and oppression. This contempt and oppression has been with the Shilpkar for centuries. Shilpkar have always been considered as bearing an inferiority complex by the oppressors, which they have used only to fulfill the principle of social, economic, and religious superiority. Hariprasad Tamta had to bear the brunt of oppression and contempt throughout his life. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar had suffered with the same disgusting and contemptuous mentality throughout his life, the same situation was also in the Kumaon, getting education was like an arduous dream for the Shilpkar's. Weaker sections and untouchable persons were not allowed to enter into any school at that period of time (Tamta, 1995). Untouchables did not have the right to sit on the mat like the upper castes. The upper caste persons would abhor untouchables.

Hariprasad Tamta wrote in the editorial of "*Samta*" on 6 May 1935 in the context of contempt and harassment: "Even after a long time, i.e. 25 years, I have not been able to forget that incident of 1911. The coronation of George Vth took place in 1911 and happiness was celebrated all over India. I and my brother [had] not got the right to celebrate this in the court which was held for the celebration on the honor of coronation in Almora Badreshwar. Still I remember that people had even said that if you "people like me (untouchable)" attend this event then there is a possibility of insurgence. Thanks a million to those peoples for such a thing that they woke me and my brothers from the sleep".

The above incident took place in this manner:

On the fixed day, Hariprasad Tamta and his maternal uncle Krishna Tamta got ready and set out to see the court. When he reached Badreshwar Maidan, he saw the pandal and the podium, the cloth was given by Hariprasad and the podium was decorated with it. It was a beautiful scene. When both of them reached near the stage, they saw that there were chairs, they put their hands on two chairs and intended to sit, at which moment two upper caste individuals came there. The upper caste individuals did not allow them to sit on the chair, and using very contemptuous language said, 'How dare you sit on par with us? Stay in your position, you people are untouchables, your place is out there, look from there.' Krishna Tamta said that we have given a lot of money. They shouted again, 'If you donated, will you sit next to us, get out from here or else there will be insurgence (Ram, 2014).'

In the words of Bhikhu Parekh, for the removal of contempt due to lack of social recognition, the dominant culture should be strongly criticized and the structure of economic-political power should be changed unequally. Hariprasad Tamta wanted the complete abolition of the elements of the structure of contempt of Shilpkar. The aims and objectives of Tamta Sudhar Sabha, the first Shilpkar organization established by Munshi Hariprasad Tamta in 1905, were as follows:

- To propagate education among all the sub-castes of the untouchables.
- To encourage youth to acquire proficiency in art and handicrafts.
- Establishment of cottage industries in hilly areas.
- To inform people about health.
- To find out schemes for the mental development of youth.
- To create awareness among the people about their backwardness.
- To inculcate moral values in the youth.
- Finding employment/self-employment avenues for youth (Ram, 2014).

In 1914, Tamta Sudhar Sabha was renamed as Kumaon Shilpkar Sabha. Tamta was elected unanimously as the president of Kumaon Shilpkar Sabha. He remained its president for life (Ram, 2014). The following works were done by the Shilpkar Sabha for the benefit of the Shilpkar:

- Demand from the government and district and municipal boards to make elementary education compulsory and free in Kumaon.
- In Kumaon, the Shilpkar should get the right to send representatives to the panchayat, district and municipal boards and to the council according to their numbers, like the Muslims.
- Like in the Punjab province, some pieces of land should be provided to the Shilpkar.
- Make arrangements to open more schools for Shilpkar according to Section77 of the Provincial Legislation.

- Our fellow countrymen, those called upper caste have invented the word Dom for us out of hatred and malice. This is a hindrance to our progress. Therefore, the government should immediately reject it from official documents and use the word Shilpkar in its place.
- A branch should be opened in every village of the Sarva Kumaoni Shilpkar Conference, which should do the following: prohibition of child marriage, promote widow marriage, drug prevention, publicity for health and virtue, education and home crafts, etc. Art skills should be promoted among men and women. Every Shilpkar should give at least Rs. 2 to the assembly at the end of every crop or six months so that the Shilpkar bank can be established by which expenditure should be made for the education of Shilpkar's, social reform (Sharma & Sharma, 2015). (The above demands were placed in the Shilpkar's conference by the Shilpkar's Sabha Kumauon at Deyolidanda, Almora.)
- Apart from this, the Kumaon Shilpkar Sabha, under the leadership of Hariprasad Tamta, in its suggestion submitted to the Delimitation Commission in 1935, asked to reserve a seat for women in Kumaon. And on January 9, 1941, organized the first Shilpkar Teachers Conference at Almora Narsinghwadi.

The biggest problem in the context of harassment and contempt was having a respectable name and identity. The Shilpkar is not focused only on one name or caste group, but it is an invented journey of identity, which has progressed historically by discarding the abhorrent names like Dom, Untouchable, etc. The Shilpkar's name and identity have arisen against the culture of marginalization, oppression, and exploitation, that they have received over the centuries as a result of the caste system. In the traditional Uttarakhand society, the position of the Shilpkar was that of an outcast society, from which not only the upper castes kept a distance, but this entire social group was considered polluting and infectious. They were often considered worthy of impure rituals or deeds such as leatherwork, animal carcasses, rubbish removal, etc. The struggle for the name and existence of the Shilpkar is the result of a long struggle journey, for which many ideological levels were fought. Limiting it to the struggle of just one person is equivalent to tying the Shilpkar's ideology to a limited scope. On the other hand, an ideology of the Shilpkar leadership struggled to get the name of the Shilpkar on the basis of persuasion and applications from the British government. At the same time, the second ideology of the Shilpkar leadership inspired the struggle of identity not only to include the Shilpkar in the mainstream by sanskritizing them, but by connecting them with the stream of the national movement, the work was done to link the struggle of the Shilpkar's name and identity in the national perspective.

The first call for the name Shilpkar was made by the nationalist leader Lala Lajpat Rai. In the Janeu program held in Sunakia in 1913, he condemned the lower caste people from being called untouchables by the upper castes and asked to use the name Shilpkar in its place because they are good artisans. Hariprasad Tamta sent a report to this effect to the British government. But after not getting any positive

assurance, Hariprasad Tamta, along with Khushiram (a supporter of Gandhian and Arya Samaji ideology), sent a report named Shilpkar to the British government in 1925 in the Shilpkar's conference of Doolidanda. And continued to put pressure on the British government for this. Finally, in 1926, the British government notified the Shilpkar caste, accepting the demand of Hariprasad Tamta. In this way the Shilpkar's completed the first battle of their name and existence.

Till 1920, to reach Almora, the journey could only be done by foot. These mountain hikes were very painful. Hariprasad Tamta started Hill Motors Transport Company in 1920 to facilitate the commuters from Almora to Nainital-Haldwani (*Amar Ujala*, 5 June, 2000), and also established training institute for drivers in Haldwani. It is worth mentioning here that Almora was a city of intellectuals and rich people. If it is called Bhadralok of Uttarakhand, then it will not be an exaggeration. And the mainstream party of the freedom struggle, the Congress had an epi center in Uttarakhand. Still, this important problem went unnoticed, because the main objective of the freedom struggle was to get political power and to get only a few facilities of representation in those times. Social problems were not referred to independently. This was replaced as a post-independence problem.

The year 1925 proved to be a revolutionary year in the history of the Shilpkar class of Uttarakhand. This year Hariprasad Tamta organized two huge Shilpkar conferences. The first conference was held in Narsinghbadi in 1925 and the second conference was held at Deyolidanda on 24–25 September (Samata Swarna Jayanti, 1984). Through the 1925 Deyolidanda Shilpkar Conference, he created a new social consciousness and a sense of respect among the Shilpkar. With the efforts of Hariprasad Tamta and leaders of the Arya Samaj, a grand Shilpkar's conference was organized at a place known as Granite Hill near Almora. This was a historic convention. It was the first step in Indian history when the British government provided 30,000 acres of land to the landless Shilpkar class. Reservation in local seats, free education, army recruitment, a local bank and free land grants were demanded in the conference. The speakers complained to the British government that the upper castes did not allow them to use their own flourmills, their cattle were driven away from the pasture. They were refused a share of the crops from the land on which their ancestors had been tilling. All this when the freedom movement was raging in the region (Joshi, 2012).

On the one hand, the war of liberation from colonial rule was being fought on the principles of liberty, equality and justice, while on the other hand the horrific form of caste hatred against the low caste Shilpkar of their own region continued. When the Shilpkar's organizations demanded the allotment of land for the Shilpkars, the administration started thinking of a solution to this issue. Land areas were identified for building their houses. Although these were not in the main city areas, but in the forests adjacent to the towns. If this is not the case, the upper caste anger would be provoked. In this regard the Deputy Commissioner of Almora wrote to Hariprasad Tamta in 1934 – 'Dear Raisaheb, I am happy to inform you that the Government has approved the proposed Shilpkar Colony' (Joshi, 2012). On the basis of the above facts, it is to be noted that the landless Shilpkar were removed from the main administrative

centers and towns areas by the Bhadralok and Congress leadership of the freedom movement and given land on the forest side, or urged the British government for this.

The important fact here is that most scholars consider these areas made of land allotted to them, which have been named as Harinagar, related to Gandhi's Harijan-uplift movement, but in fact these areas are named because of the efforts made by Hariprasad Tamta, related to his own name. Many villages were named after Hariprasad Tamta like Haripur in Champawat, Harinagar in Nainital (which is in Nathuwakhan, Aksoda, Chandadevi) and Harinagar, Harikot, Haripur, etc., in Almora.

During the Poona Pact and the Second Round Table Conference in 1931, Hari Prasad Tamta fully supported Babasaheb Ambedkar in the matters of Dalit representation and reservation and fulfilled his responsibility by sending a telegram to London on this issue to be with Ambedkar and by declaring him a Dalit representative in the round table conference. It is worth mentioning that Gandhi continued to refuse Ambedkar as a Dalit representative. The importance of liberation for Shilpkar's creativity is known from Hariprasad Tamta's personal life. He started the publication of Hindi weekly paper *Samta* in 1934 with the aim of including the Shilpkar in the mainstream and to give a public platform to the problems of the Shilpkar. Hariprasad Tamta's personal thoughts also affected his family, his niece Lakshmi Devi Tamta was the first Dalit graduate of Uttarakhand and the first woman editor (*Samta*). In 1934, Hariprasad Tamta used to say:

> Do not take out the swords, nor the swords, If the cannon is suitable, then take out the newspaper (khechonakamnoko, natalwernikalo, gertoapmukabil ho, to akhbarnikalo)

When Mahatma Gandhi came to Almora in 1935, Hariprasad Tamta presented a copy of *Samta*. Gandhi said to him, 'I was very surprised that how did you choose such a beautiful name?' At present, *Samta*, the weekly paper is operated from Tamta Printing, Press Hari Niwas, Thana Bazaar, Almonda. *Samta* newspaper was published at a time when casteism was at its peak.

The year 1934 has been of special significance for all the depressed classes of India, including the people of Uttarakhand. The Uttar Pradesh Depressed Class organized a conference on 7 January 1934 in Lucknow. Hariprasad Tamta presided over the conference where thousands were present. After this a meeting was convened in Kanpur on 11 March 1934 and Hariprasad Tamta was elected the President of Kanpur Depressed Classes Association. Seeing his popularity, the then government appointed him as a special magistrate in 1935 (*Samta*, 10 July,1935). In the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1937, he was elected unopposed as an MLA from Gonda.

In 1940, Hariprasad Tamta donated his land in the city area for the establishment of a high school in Almora. Whereas before this the big upper-caste wealthy class of the

city had refused to donate their land to the high school management, and Tamta had started building hotels on that land. But in the desire to help the future generation, he donated that land without caring about his expenditure. Such an example of human goodwill and inspiration will be rarely found in history. Apart from this, he also established "Gyanodaya Hostel" for the students of the Shilpkar's (*Samta*, 12 February 2004), and also opened a night school for the Shilpkar. On 9 January 1941, the first conference of Shilpkar teachers of district Almora was organized by Hariprasad Tamta under the chairmanship Balkrishna Patwari at Narsinghbadi. As Hariprasad Tamta was concerned about women's empowerment, he opened a women's craft school in her home. Thus, Hari Niwas also came to be known as Mahila Shilp Vidyalaya. Hariprasad Tamta used to pay 15 rupees per month to each female trainee on his behalf.

In 1943, there was a terrible famine in North India. Due to the Second World War, the British were ignoring this problem faced by the Indians. The Shilpkar class was affected the most in the hills due to starvation, due to poverty and social status. At such a time, Hariprasad Tamta opened cheap galley shops in Kumaon, so that the poor could get food items at affordable rates. In 1944, an infectious disease called influenza made a big attack in the hills. The most sick were the Shilpkar. In these difficult circumstances, Tamta appointed 1500 scouts, whose job was to provide free medicines from village to village. He himself used to bear all the expenses. Such a true lover of humanity is rarely seen in history.

In August 1941, as a distinguished citizen of India, the Third Battalion of the Pioneer Regiment Honored Rai Saheb Hariprasad Tamta with the Guard of Honour at Lucknow. He was the first Indian civilian to receive the Guard of Honor from the army. Hariprasad Tamta was a member of the Municipal Board Almora from 1941-44. He was elected the chairman of Almora Municipality in 1945. The upper caste people did not like that their head should be of a Shilpkar class. The residents of Almora were facing the problem of drinking water for a long time. When Hariprasad Tamta took over the post of Municipal President in 1947, he tried to solve the water problem, and proposed Dol Water Project. The scheme was beneficial as well as economical. But due to the personal interests of some people, this plan was not allowed to be implemented. One of the reasons for this was that this plan was brought by a Shilpkar. The Indian Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950. Caste discrimination and caste prejudice started showing its effect in administrative work. On 13 February 1952, a no-confidence motion was passed against Hariprasad Tamta. In the context of this no-confidence motion, he said: "I knew it was certain to happen, but it was not certain that it would happen so soon. I can claim with confidence that not a single illegal or illegitimate or partial act has been done by me and I am fully satisfied that I have performed my duty with complete truth and honesty. On this occasion, I would like to say that I have no complaints against my opponents. I am grateful to all the

citizens of the city who have shown complete faith in me by taking out a procession in thousands of signing and sending telegrams and letters to the authorities. I am good at this goodwill and full trust of people" (Tamta, 1995).

In 1953, he was the Senior Vice President, District Board, Almora. Hariprasad Tamta had a special contribution in the electrification of Almora city. On 13 October 1953, Govind Ballabh Pant had said in reference to Hariprasad Tamta: 'Tamtaji has done a very good job of development and maintenance of Almora city. In the context of temples, Hariprasad Tamta had said – 'What can be the benefit of entering temples made of brick-lime and stone with conditions. God can be worshiped everywhere. He is not imprisoned in their (Hindus) temples' (Jigyasu, 1934).

Hariprasad Tamta was given the title of Raisahab on 03 June 1933, and was the first Shilpkar of the hill area to get the above honor (Ram, 2014). "He is presented by a large section of historians and social scientists within the pro-government image or pro-British image. One reason for this is that the politics of Congress was opposed by Hariprasad Tamta, Krishna Chandra Tamta, etc., leader of the alternative movement of Shilpkar. He demanded the creation of an independent situation for the Shilpkar. "Ambedkar's remarks on the nationalist character of the Congress and the representation of the whole of India during freedom struggle fit right – it would be foolish to assume that since the Congress is fighting for the freedom of India, it is also fighting for the freedom of the people of India and fighting for the smallest person. The question that Congress is fighting for freedom is not as important as the question of whose freedom the Congress is fighting for (Roy, 2019) ."

Like Ambedkar, Hariprasad Tamta strategically sought to maintain neutrality in the face of the colonial state. It was not possible for the resourceless Shilpkar to fight their two rivals simultaneously. He did not want to end and waste his limited resources on many fronts. He was attacking the roots of imperialism and all those so-called nationalists who were trying to eradicate colonial imperialism, but outright denied the internal imperialism that they were doing to the Shilpkar (Teltumde, 2016).

The colonial administration did nothing to change the discriminatory treatment of Shilpkars. Instead of removing the caste system, the British did the work of polarization. The provision and encouragement of separate schools for Shilpkar, digging of wells, special government assistance were part of this polarization. The leader of the Shilpkar movement (Hariprasad Tamta) was aware that if the British had not ruled India, they would not have been free from their caste shackles. All the leaders of the anti-caste movement were fully aware that the colonial strategy of the British was to exploit the people by creating discrimination, yet they used this as an opportunity to conduct their liberation struggles. In the context of the strategy of the British colonialists, the D.L. Seth explanation is important: "The colonial state adopted a dual character: their first role was that of a superior Brahmin in which he determined

the conflict between caste superiority and social existence according to the traditional hierarchies and it redefined the rights of its weak and poor subjects and helped to save the colonial, political economy of the state from emerging aggression. At the same time, the British colonialists induced the people to organize so that they could represent themselves in politics in the sense of caste identity and participate in the economy on their terms established by the colonial polity" (Teltumde, 2010). The institutions set up by the colonialists formed political representations. Hariprasad Tamta was actively involved in the state intervention to bring the Shilpkar into the modern realm, as this promised legal and social equality, but not in practice.

Here the fact becomes important that the Shilpkar's discourse and consciousness are often given a second fiddle. A large section of historians and social writers term the consciousness against the colonial rule as the real consciousness. It is defined as a national movement against imperialism, those with other views have been portrayed as supporting the British government or anti-national movement. The same Marxist ideology has been spreading the Shilpkar as a class narrow ideology. And on the basis of class consciousness, while limiting the discussion of the Shilpkar on economic basis, it completely denies social cozenage. It is important to note here that Hariprasad Tamta was financially prosperous. And as a resident of Bhadralok under the British rule, he was given the title of Rai Bahadur. But socially, they were the last rung of people who were harassed from time to time by the Bhadralok residents of Uttarakhand on the basis of religious and social representation. His position therefore was equal to that of an economically poor Shilpkar, and perhaps even worse. This was because they had the consciousness against that oppression, and also the means to fight against that oppression. But due to their socio-caste identity, they also endured that internal social oppression throughout their life, which the Shilpkar society has been suffering from centuries. But they have been successful in awakening the suppressed consciousness which dreams of establishing an egalitarian society. Hariprasad Tamta's life as a whole is a source of such human sensibilities, values, creativity, struggling inspiration, under whose influence even the light of the sun shining in the sky seems to be zero. He had envisioned an era without conservatism, social discrimination, untouchability, superstition dissipated, gender discrimination, free and selfless politics in that era when scientific ideological emptiness was at its peak and freedom of expression was a daydream. In such an era, Hariprasad Tamta, who envisioned the Shilpkar's new consciousness and social harmony and transformed it into reality, gave a sweet path to the consciousness of the Navrangs in the dawn of a new rise to the future generation, will surely make his place in history one day.

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Un'casting' Universities: Examining the Intersections of Inclusive Curriculum and Dalit Pedagogies in a Private University in Bangalore, India

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Abstract

Despite India's constitutional dream to achieve equity and justice, caste still remains an issue of concern. Especially in the context of education, reports indicate a disparity in access and participation across gender, caste and other parameters (Hickey & Stratton, 2007). The prevalence of caste-based discrimination across universities and Dalit student suicides continue to be widely reported (Anderson, 2016; Niazi, 2022; Shantha, 2023; Nair, 2023). While the University Grants Commission, especially Mandal Commission and the Thorat Committee have placed certain recommendations, many universities fall short of implementing the same and even if they do, they don't percolate to an informed student/ faculty/ administration policy (Sitlhou, 2017). Lack of a well-defined policy, its implementation and the disconnect between curriculum and pedagogy has resulted in an erasure of the discourse on caste within higher education institutions. Furthermore, the disconnect has promoted a sense of alienation in educational institutions wherein some students graduate from school or universities without any exposure to caste as a social problem and some students face humiliation routinely. This project is an autoethnographic study of classrooms in a private university in Bangalore to understand the gaps that emerge from the disconnect between curriculum, pedagogy and comprehension of students about caste and present an alternative pedagogical paradigm that is situated, participatory, historical and critical.

Keywords

Higher education institutions, caste, Bangalore, private universities, Dalit pedagogy

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Introduction

Universities are not insulated from societal stratifications. Beteille (2007) argued that universities in the twenty-first century need to adopt policies that are compositionally diverse and socially inclusive. Albeit challenging, but attainable if universities in conformance with the constitutional ideas, engaged with academic distinction and social inclusion simultaneously. Unfortunately, the latter is compromised in most contexts. Universities have become spaces where caste stratifications between Dalit and non-Dalit students are reinforced and Dalit students routinely encounter "overt and covert discrimination based on caste" (Maurya, 2018; Ovichegan, 2013, quoted in Maurya 2018) which forces them to dropout (Anveshi Law Committee, 2002; Vasavi, 2007).

In this context, classrooms become important spaces to navigate these volatile social stratifications. Abhaya (2021) iterates that higher education classrooms "have possessed the radical potential of allowing an instructor to discuss liberatory possibilities" through "critiques of traditional societies" (Abhaya, 2021, p. 2). On the contrary, the presence of caste in classrooms and the resultant discriminations have been reported widely (Singh, 2021; Jogdand, 2017). Jogdand (2017) observes that "caste permeates the Indian classroom and obliterates creation of a space where one participates in a collaborative activity of knowledge as an equal and worthy person. The classrooms, in the experience of Dalits, instead, work as sites where one confronts the brutal reality of caste." Social stratifications mark their presence quite overtly in classrooms and "who does/does not see caste in classroom, is associated with caste privilege" (Pan, 2022; Mittal, 2020). Hence, while on one hand, upper caste students claim "caste as a practice of the past and denies witnessing it in contemporary society" (2020, p. 106) often denying its existence (Pan, 2022), on the other hand, students from the marginalised communities maintain silence (Mittal, 2020) or look for alternative articulations of their identities. Even if the curriculum shows the potential of an equitable discourse, the disconnect between curricula and pedagogy affect classroom engagements. In addition, teacher motivations affect the comprehension of students and their critical awareness significantly (Mittal, 2020). If "the ideology, curriculum, and pedagogy become tools through which power is used to secure social control" in classrooms (Jogdand, 2017; Giddens, 1984), a pedagogy that is critical, situated, historical and attempts to understand the experiences of the marginalised communities with care (Jogdand, 2017; Biko, 1971) could make classrooms more inclusive and less humiliating.

Autoethnography as Methodology

This is an autoethnographic account of my experience as a teacher in a private university in Bangalore. Autoethnography is a "first-person inquiry into the researcher's own experience of a given phenomenon" to understand and examine personal experiences to critically reflect on cultural scripts (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015). Autoethnographic

studies have examined narratives of teachers in educational institutions (Ernst & Vallack, 2015; Granger, 2011; Hayler, 2011; Trahar, 2013; Wilson, 2011) to reflect on issues, data and methods which have not been foregrounded in other approaches. Autoethnography considers everyday encounters, diary entries from classroom observations as important sources of data because stories emerging from them show how people "make sense of their worlds and their lives (Richardson, 2001, 2008 quoted in Ernst & Vallack, 2015) which help us understand the "unseen" and "untheorized" aspects of experiences. This article is a reflection of my experience of teaching a specific course, Additional English (between the years 2017–2023) which follows a university mandated curriculum.

Additional English is a general course on literature that is offered across departments, including Arts and Humanities, Commerce, and Sciences to undergraduate students. It includes texts or selections from larger works that aim to critically engage with the ideas of nation, culture and other social issues. It is taught for 45 hours wherein the faculty engage with the students 3 hours per week. Additional English is designed for both first and second year students (2 semesters per year). While the syllabus for the third and fourth semesters facilitate an understanding of cultural, social, religious and ethnic problems across the world, the first two semesters have writing specifically from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The curriculum presents critical narrativisations of a nation; its location in the Indian subcontinent; familiarizes students with the literary narratives of the nation; helps in developing critical thinking skills that allow a revisiting of their ideologies, and enhances language skills across curriculum. The course aims to initiate students "into becoming more culturally, ethically, socially and politically aware" (Reading Diversity, 2022) to understand the tension that emerges from two distinct discourses: the anti-colonial and anti-caste discourses. Pan (2022) argued that "while the colonial curriculum was disjointed from the socio-religious and economic realities of India's feudal, patriarchal and casteist society, the nationalist models of education promoting 'unity' against the colonizers did not question the internal contradictions and hierarchies produced by caste (Batra, 2020; Rege, 2010)". The vision of 'unity' was challenged by the inherently stratified Indian society which justified caste differences "as rewards or retributions for one's actions in earlier lives and sanctified them through religion" (Naik, 1979, p. 42, quoted in Pan, 2022). In light of such discourses, Phule and Ambedkarite pedagogies and Dalit discourses in curriculum were seen as dissent and "antinational" (Rege, 2010). While in traditional curricula, educational privileges are justified by caste and patriarchy (Naik, 1979), the course I taught presented a critical orientation of the paradigms of nationalisms and implications of caste and colonialism in education.

Pedagogical Interventions: Amnesia to Uncasting the Curriculum

I have been teaching this course for the last 7 years (2016-2023). Teaching caste in classrooms is a difficult task, both pedagogically and ideologically and teachers need to

engage with the curriculum to present a critical perspective (George & Madan, 2009). Students often render caste as "exotic" and "distant" (Shankar, 2017; Mittal 2020). Hence, discussing caste in classrooms requires historicizing it and making students aware of their preconceptions. While some students could be aware of the four-fold classifications, they might not be aware of the inter and intra caste complexities, the labels and hierarchies and how pervasive it is in everyday experiences. On the other hand, students from diverse demographic profiles might connect with the "Dalit aspirations for freedom, dignity, self respect and equality" differently unless a context is presented (Tharu & Satyanarayana, 2013, p. 15). This is important to address for universities in Bangalore. Since Bangalore retains its status as a sought-after city for educational opportunities, students from different states and varied demographic profiles enrol for varied courses, especially undergraduate studies in Bangalore. While there is an inherent assumption that caste is "erased" in such urban spaces, I argue that caste operates in a significant manner in these spaces and is reflected in classroom interactions overtly or covertly. To reflect on caste in such classrooms, therefore, required me to engage with curricula, pedagogy and classrooms historically, critically and in a situated manner.

The Triadic Node: Curriculum, Pedagogy and Classroom Interaction

Curriculum

Mittal (2020) in her study of class comprehension among school students observed that there is a gap in comprehension about questions on caste. While select curricula show an indication of presenting, critiquing and sensitising students about caste and its atrocities, there still remains a chasm. Can student-driven interactions and their comments provide an alternative approach to address these questions? Can adding personal life narratives and experiential reflections of both Dalit and non-Dalit students (the acknowledgement of the latter's autonomy over self-categorisation should be prioritised (Jogdand, 2017), motivating them to engage in informed debates or exposing them to statistical information, policy documents and historical references provide a more inclusive classroom space? In agreement with Mittal (2020), I understand that while curricula can be designed to foster a sense of empathy and awareness, "the curriculum, however, does not produce knowledge by itself. It is imperative to understand how the text is transmitted and received" (Mittal, 2020). Pedagogy, therefore, becomes a significant aspect of the classroom experience.

Pedagogy

Reflective autoethnographic pedagogy chooses to "offer personal vulnerability for scrutiny from students" as they "create a safe space for students to share their experiences and struggles involved in making ethical and ideological choices" (Abhaya, 2021). While I presented information about caste, taking indications from the

leading questions presented in the teachers' handbook circulated by the coordinator, I was acutely aware of the pedagogy I was adopting. Hence, I presented narratives from my everyday encounters. Before engaging with a sociological, historical or textual analysis, I narrated instances of discrimination that I faced. Another important intervention in my pedagogy was informed by what Pan (2022) narrates as veering towards Dalit pedagogies informed by the pedagogy of Phule and Ambedkar (henceforth PA) which appeals teachers to situate and historicise caste. This implies that my adopted pedagogy had to be consciously dynamic and inclusive, critical and opposed to "narration sickness" (Freire, 2010) wherein the teacher remains a 'narrating subject' and her students, 'patient, listening objects' (Freire, 2000, p. 71). PA pedagogy requires me, the teacher, to be aware of their teaching methods, be conscious of whether my discussions are creating classroom spaces wherein dialogues, contestations and resistance can nurture self-dignity and inclusivity.

These underlying pedagogical motivations required me to orient the students to constitutional ideals, the historical context of Mandal Commission (1980) and Thorat Committee report (2007), the necessity of affirmative action, and finally offering statistical and documentary evidence showing the continuation of caste-based discrimination. For instance, I presented the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data which shows that "among the women in the age group 25-49 who have anaemia, 55.9 % are Dalits" whereas "the national average among Indians is 53%". Furthermore, NFHS data also shows that "the average age of death for Dalit women is 14.6 years younger than for higher caste women" (Masoodi & Sreevatsan, 2018).

I asserted that the caste system as practiced in India is a means by which individuals are socially differentiated through class, caste, gender, religion and so forth. Albeit, caste is not the only means of differentiation in societies, however, "it becomes a problem when one or more of these dimensions overlap each other and become the sole basis of systematic ranking and unequal access to valued resources like wealth, income, power and prestige" (Mittal, 2020). I informed them that the Indian Caste System is considered a closed system of stratification, which means that a person's social status is derived from and obligated to which caste they were born into. I spoke about how caste system "limits on interaction and behavior with people from another social status" (Deshpande, 2010) as it maintains an index of permissible manoeuvres that are possible, for example, limits of changing professions, limits of establishing marital connections, and a near-fixed hierarchical stratification of individual castes (Dumont, 1999; Mittal, 2020).

I had to connect caste and religion to argue that caste is often invoked, acknowledged and justified through a discourse on religion (Ambedkar, 1936; Pingle & Varshney, 2006). I clarified that we find caste-based practices in other religious communities in India (Ahmad, 1962, quoted in Mittal, 2020). The continuing classes included discussions on how unfortunately, socio-political and economic shifts have not altered their existence or perceptions completely. The idea of a nation as

an "imagined community" that overpowers, supersedes the caste-based identities and argues for a composite identity has been an issue of conflict or challenge for policymakers (Mittal, 2020). On the contrary, current socio-political situations have permitted caste to operate in different ways within the nation and beyond. Teaching them and based on my encounters with students within classrooms and outside, it did feel that my discussions had left two sets of impressions: I am pro-reservation and therefore, "those people" possibly referring to a person with radical and activist inclinations and second, I can be approached for any discussion on equity and justice. I delve now into three case studies wherein students engaged, debated and analysed what they learnt in class. Each of these classes were discussing the same curricula. However, the pedagogy adopted was changed to suit the classroom dynamics. Disciplines have significant effects on the ontological and epistemological perspectives of students in a classroom (Kumashiro, 2001).

Case Study 1: Humanities Classroom

While discussing the historical, social, economic and cultural aspects of caste, I requested the students to reflect and analyse in their own way, the issues pertaining to caste and what role, they thought, educational institutions played in such contexts. In the introductory classes, I received very few responses. The next few classes, students approached me personally and narrated incidents of discrimination. I asked for their consent to anonymize and speak about these experiences to which they readily agreed and suggested that they prefer this method instead of speaking out in class. In another incident from the same class, during the introductory lecture, an undergraduate student from my class shrugged and said, "It's too distant ma'am; this is a long time back. It's not now". A "teachable moment" (Govinda, Mackay, Menon, & Sen, 2020) indeed. To this, several others joined and argued that socio-economic class should be the primary marker and not caste. I realized at that moment that my secondary references and discussions perhaps presented a certain narrative that prioritises class and not caste. I probed further and asked about the secondary references and statistical evidence to which they responded with complete silence. It felt as if this information did not conform to their expectations and hence remained unprocessed. I feared that probing deeper would mean that I am imposing on them. I provided a range of materials to read from including advertisements, films, essays to news reports along with documentaries. As I was wrapping my class for that day after a discussion on access and participation of Dalit students in classrooms, one student said, "I am a Dalit and I will be in this classroom". Silence ensued (see Pariyar, Gupta and Fonseka, 2022 for a discussion on caste among Nepali diaspora). The student did not conceal her caste affiliation in spite of being aware of the complex dynamics of the class. Slowly, few other students started sharing experiences of caste-based discriminations and asserted that university classrooms have become clinically sanitized for holding discussions such as these. It is in these moments, students, by asserting agency over

self-categorisation, which is inherently contingent, reveal what is meaningful to them at a given moment. Belonging to a group does not automatically indicate that the person is psychologically involved with the group or the group membership is meaningful to them, especially "when one is a member of a devalued group in society autonomy over self-categorisation is often under pressure" (Jogdand, 2017). This was an important moment which revealed how students can transform classroom spaces by undoing "narration sickness" (Freire, 2007) and respond to "historical victimisation" and "psychological distancing" (Jogdand, 2017).

Case Study 2: Commerce Classroom

I had scheduled a debate session on the need for affirmative action. This was a conscious choice to make students from commerce who are generally insulated from sociological discourses on caste to unpack their own perspectives. Additionally, the demographic profile of these classes is quite distinct from Arts/Humanities classrooms—commerce classrooms are more varied in their class-caste compositions. Three students out of 97 in the class signed for the motion (affirmative action is required) and the discussion ended with a very tense moment in the class. Few students who were against the motion quickly escalated the discussion by attributing caste markers to individual students and citing concerns with meritocracy in Indian Universities. Few students, later, came and disclosed that they appreciate what I aspired to do but also disclosed that it is quite intense for many of them. These classes become overwhelming for them as other subjects, while based on economics and nation, in contrast to the ones I taught, force them to have an apolitical approach towards individuals and identities, erasing any form of discourse centring around caste. This experience will be discussed later as it made me reflect on the need to understand the volatile nature of caste-based discussions in classrooms.

Case Study 3: Science Classroom

The science class was supposed to study whether class or caste was prevalent in India. This was done primarily to counter the neoliberal tendencies to conflate caste and class and present them as different structural inequalities. The students conducted a survey; respondents were mostly in the age group of 18–26 from the same university but from different courses. While 71.1 per cent of their respondents claimed that India faces a more severe form of caste-based discrimination rather than class (28.9 per cent), 57.7 per cent of the respondents claimed that the system of reservation is unfair, 14.1 per cent considered it fair and the other 28.2 per cent were uncertain of the fairness. For most of the respondents the solution for caste eradication was education. Few respondents further argued that financial help should be given to the "needy" irrespective of the caste or financial conditions. Some of these arguments based on merit versus social justice were already challenged in my class. Hence, my interest was to understand the

students' approaches whom I had taught. I asked for their personal reflections on the data which presented a complex issue. I had shown them a documentary called, "India Untouched: Stories of a people apart" (Stalin, 2007). One student wrote,

> The notion of doing an analysis on this topic crossed my mind after watching the documentary "India Un-Touched" in the class which changed my opinion about making reservation a class-based affair. The idea was to know if people still believed in the caste system and being superior or inferior to somebody just because they belonged to a particular caste and it turns out that people still believed this. It was the smaller proportion who did believe in this orthodox ideology but for a developing nation like ours, that number is dangerous. When it comes to being discriminated or discriminating on the basis of class (financial status), the numbers were no less. If amongst a small sample of 80 we can get responses where people admit that they have been discriminated and they have discriminated people on the basis of caste or class then the bigger picture must be scary for a country of 1.31 billion population and approximately 5000 and more different castes. The caste system in India is a complicated web of several castes where each caste is discriminated from the other. When the system of reservation was taken as the complimentary question to the analysis, people believed it should either be caste-based, class-based or there should not be any reservation at all. I, personally, am of the opinion that there should not be any reservation and if it is to be there, it should be merit based. Help should be given only if there is will to work hard and earn the desired position.

This was an important narrative. The student was able to comprehend the issue, understand its complexities and situate their position within the argument. Pan (2022) mentions that "as a counter-hegemonic discipline, Dalit studies 'challenges the objectivity of knowledge and endorses the view that different belief systems and contradictory interpretations are possible' (Yesudasan, p. 621)" (Pan, 2022, p. 6). The aim of a critical pedagogy is not to convert or homogenise opinions but rather allow a space for articulating individual political choices. The student reflected on the latter and felt a sense of ease to differ from what was presented in the class. I see that as an unintended yet promising possibility: the possibility of plurality in articulations.

On the contrary, another student from the same class, echoing quite a few others, wrote that,

> I feel that the problem is still existing in the country only because of the mentality of some people, this kind of discrimination should be removed from the society and all people should be treated equally without any priorities. It can only be achieved by providing good quality education to the coming generations and creating awareness among people. [*sic.*]

Education can be transformative. The student articulated the need for a sense of criticality to achieve the same. What was important is their perspective wherein they

asserted the need for achieving equity together, in solidarity with the marginalised; the latter considered significant for transformative abilities of education (Rege, 1998).

Case studies 1, 2 and 3 are from the introductory lectures from diverse classes. The next excerpt is from Case study 4 wherein in conformance with Dalit pedagogy (Pan, 2022), I attempted to historicise caste using a literary text. I was teaching Meena Kandaswamy's "Becoming a Brahmin" which presents a sharp critique of India's continuing legacy of casteism and especially focusses on Gandhi's approach to eradicating casteism. The poem is performative, and iterates the impossibility of that vision. I spoke about how the "algorithm" presented like a code reminds one of "Mendelian eugenics which was practiced by the Nazis to produce a purely Aryan population" (Venkateswaran, 2021). The trajectory of a Shudra woman becoming a Brahmin by marriage and becoming a mother to his children presents a chilling critique of bio-racist ascriptions of caste prejudices and narrativises recurrent incidents of caste-based violence and killings. The automated and technical tonality of the text adds to the indifference that has been meted out to the discourses centring caste. Continuing with Venkateswaran (2021), the poem is a reminder of Dr Ambedkar's response to Gandhi's "toleration and catholicity" of Hinduism. Dr Ambedkar had called such approaches "indifference or flaccid latitudinarianism" (Ambedkar, 2020, p. 345). I reminded the students that many scholars opine that Gandhi's approach towards caste system, his naming of people as "Harijan" who were problematically referred to as "untouchables" continued the colonial legacy and made healing unredeemable, justice unattainable and an aspiration of socially and culturally sanctioned dignity unfeasible. A discussion on Brahminical patriarchy that controlled women and caste had to be brought forth for a nuanced understanding. However, I didn't present one narrative. I carefully placed the ideas of Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Meena Kandaswamy as an author and presented the interpretation of the two thinkers and activists so that the students can form their own ideas regarding the same while being informed about certain factual details, such as the document pertaining to the discussion held in Tirupur between Gandhi and B R Ambedkar.

A student from the class narrated their understanding of the class discussion. They presented a sense of nuanced criticality in their analysis of Meena Kandaswamy's poem as a satire. They said,

> It is considered as a satire, mainly because of the fact that the highest relationship that could exist between a Dalit and a Brahmin, is that of a servant master relationship. Even though it is a rare occurrence that a caste as low as a Dalit could work in the accommodation of a Brahmin. Now while talking about social stigma, it isn't considered "Brahminish" to marry a Shudra, as it downcasts the Brahmin and his social status would be so downtrodden as compared to what an elevated status he had, the Brahmin wouldn't generally do it. Considering these points and the usage of the word "beautiful", while

mentioning the type of Shudra girl in the first step of the algorithm itself is a way of how Meena Kandaswamy tries to present a satire on the basis of the caste system.

The student was able to understand the perspective that is underlying the poem: the perspective of challenging Brahminical hegemony in the knowledge traditions and social structures. The interpretation presents the critical interpretation of the circularity and thereby, absurdity in expecting Dalit perspectives to be objective and impartial. The student was able to understand the categories and uncover the idea of history and violence intimately linked to the people. This was perhaps the closest that I could reach to implementing a Dalit pedagogical approach (Pan, 2022) which argues for a historical and situated sharing of knowledge.

Transitioning from "Narration Sickness" towards Dalit Pedagogies: Identities and Vulnerabilities

These experiences made me reflect on my position as a teacher. The comprehension emerging from the classrooms were not identical. Most students felt that they were exposed to uncomfortable yet factual details. While few students could demarcate the concerns and identify few important issues that distinguish class and caste-based discriminations, others continued with the class-caste overlap. Did I fail to convince everyone in the class? The experience in the commerce classrooms did leave an impact on me. How do I ensure the safety of the voices who choose to speak out? The students who voiced their opinion were not from marginalised communities and were allies. However, given that the debate happened in a classroom which had students from marginalised communities, the incident exposed the discriminatory attitudes of many of their own friends. How should I have unpacked the varied semiotics of silences in class? The exposure of caste affiliations of individual students and explicit opinions could have led to unintended consequences of identification. While many individuals disapprove of identity concealment (others may continue to adhere to for safety) (Pariyar, Gupta & Fonsenka, 2022), the classroom spaces can be volatile and the ensuing implications could be difficult to negotiate for the marginalised students and teacher. How must teachers, who do not come from a homogenous group in terms of social locations, identities and intent, take these issues to class, especially since each of these have an influence on students and their learning (Thapan, 2009)?

Afterthoughts

Through this study, I wanted to understand the interactions between curriculum, pedagogy and students' comprehension of caste. Specifically, I wanted to examine how pedagogy and curricula are designed to address caste in university classrooms which have people from diverse demographic profiles. In line with Dalit pedagogy,

I believe that the discourse on caste can be participatory, inclusive and reflective if individual subjective experiences from diverse social (caste) and cultural backgrounds are brought forth and acknowledged. This would contribute to the work done by Tharu and Satyanarayana (2013) in bringing forth inclusive textbooks. I hoped that the adopted pedagogy could demonstrate the possibilities of challenging "narration sickness" and present an enabling educational environment that does not erase caste but rather presents it within a framework of pedagogy that acknowledges the personal, historical and social (Pan, 2022). I did see a significant difference in how classroom dynamics evolved and transformed—students from Dalit and non Dalit communities responded, articulated and narrated their understanding, privileged students who were initially complacent or uninformed about caste atrocities were able to understand continuing systemic discrimination and students from marginalised communities exercised autonomy over their self construal and responded in diverse ways. These interactions created a non-hegemonic discursive space. For discussing caste, individual classrooms should be contextualised and navigated differently to develop dynamic pedagogical choices, prioritising discussion and challenging "narration sickness", albeit with the anchoring of the course in a conscious ideological context. This is in line with the recommendations of the National Curriculum Framework (2005) which requires educational spaces to discuss and resolve issues pertaining to social justice and discrimination, including caste. This approach will provide a platform to discuss caste within the university so that the erasures of caste discourses are unpacked, encountered and understood using curricula and autoethnographic narrations of both students and teachers.

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'Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader'

Editors:
Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore
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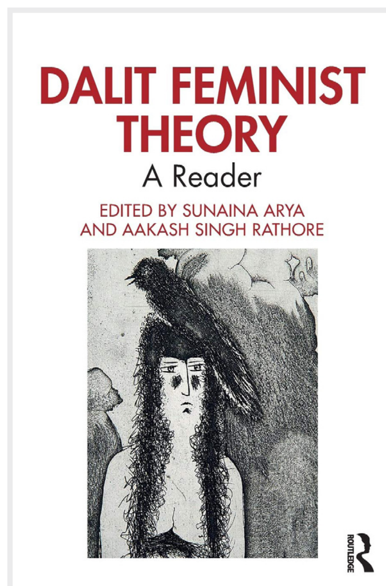

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This reader is a compilation of eighteen essays written by academics, feminists and scholar-activists from a Dalit Feminist Perspective. The editors, Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore introduce the book by theorizing Dalit feminism underpinning its ontology and epistemology. Critiquing the academic discourse of feminism which predominantly questions gender inequality on a single axis as a fight against patriarchy, Arya and Rathore pose the important question, '*Why Dalit Feminist Theory?*'. Although the dialogue on Dalit Feminist standpoints started during the 1990s, the core of the book lies in attempting to legitimize Dalit Feminist Theory due to the ubiquity of the caste question in Indian society, which cannot be overlooked in any circumstances. Thus, the book revisits the Indian Feminist discourse for feminists to critique the gatekeeping that 'upper caste' privileged feminists did to represent the issues of all women by homogenising the category of a woman based on a few percentages of upper caste women, leaving out Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi and minority women who form a much larger percentage in comparison. The book is an important read due to its critical engagement and initiation of a dialogue with Indian feminists to argue the need for Dalit Feminist Theory in reshaping Indian feminist discourse.

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The book is divided into six parts tracing the history of the feminist movement to contemporary times, reflecting on the understanding of Indian Feminist discourse from the Dalit feminist standpoint. It lays out the foundation for a Dalit feminist theory, re-examining and critiquing the Indian feminist discourse which often erased the voices of women from marginalised communities.

Part I contextualises the debates between Indian feminism and Dalit feminism. In the first essay, Menon argues that intersectionality as a concept is less important in the Indian context. For example, Menon emphasizes how a profession like sex work deserves respect as they choose to do this work. At the same time, the authors question the very aspect of choice and argue that Dalit women would choose another job over sex work if they could maintain their dignity while earning comparable pay. John and Gopal later in the book also criticised Menon on an understanding of the intersectional analysis in Indian feminism. They emphasize the immediate need for attending to the feminist issues in India from an intersectional framework, as it has been disregarded by mainstream feminist Nivedita Menon earlier. For example, one of the arguments that Nivedita Menon asserts in refuting the concept of intersectionality is by claiming that a person carries one significant identity at a given point in time. Hence, intersectionality is itself an 'empty location'. Such an argument discredits the theorisation of the concept, which has been countered by Gopal and John, that once again, Menon is looking at the categories of caste and gender in isolation; hence, there is no such thing as a single identity to a person.

Chapter 2 problematizes the contemporary theory of gender, and it argues that a woman is not a homogenous category. It further explains the linkages between caste, gender, class and community through specific events of history and the role of 'women' in them as feminist subjects. The authors contend that the events represented in the mainstream media obscure the whole caste, class and gender linkage so much that the categories of Dalits and women comprise only male and upper caste, respectively. Chapter 3 presents the excerpts on the category of 'Dalit patriarchy' by scholars such as Gopal Guru, Uma Chakravarti and V.Geetha which are critiqued by the editors who believe that such categories only misdirect the whole feminist movement and strengthen the already present divisions among each other. Arya (2020) critically analyses the formulation of the term Dalit patriarchy and explains that the coinage of the very term is vague. No caste group is devoid of patriarchy, but coining the terms for them differently will only further the divisions as it discredits the role that Brahmanical patriarchy plays in it. There's no denying that patriarchy affects Dalit women equally, but Brahmanical patriarchy should be questioned and critiqued.

Part II of the book historicises and contextualizes the concept of Dalit feminism. Paik (Chapter 4) reviews the position of Dalit women and tries to resolve Dalit women's questions, claiming that Dalit women don't simply comply or resist. Instead, they exercise agency in their ways according to their present contexts. She exemplifies her position by providing instances where Dalit women usually exercise agency via negotiating with the power structures. The article concludes by discussing the aspects of Dalit women's activism, including the origin, participation, forming alliances and

networks, issues they raised and negotiating between public-private while engaging in activism. The political engagement of Dr Ambedkar has been discussed throughout the chapter in detail which had a powerful impact on Dalit women. Sonalkar (Chapter 5) discusses Dalit women's politics by examining the category of 'Ambedkarite women', precisely the women who participated in the Ambedkar movement. Thus, it can be analyzed in the post-Ambedkar era when Dalit women started to produce and contribute to Dalit literature as much as Dalit men; they acknowledged the efforts of Ambedkar in these testimonies of freedom and liberation. Similarly, Rege in Chapter 9, analyses that Dalit women have been powerful agents of social reforms and contributed to Phule-Ambedkarite politics, schooling, literature, and academic realms of life as opposed to the dominant narrative which only see them as victims of power structures. Rege (Chapter 6) extends the political aspects of Dr Ambedkar's life and delves into aspects of his personal life. Mainstream feminism observes Dr Ambedkar as not 'feminist enough' in his personal life on the account that his wife Ramabai was not encouraged to engage in the politics of freedom movements he was leading. Thus, Rege critiques these arguments by historicizing and bringing out the truly personal accounts of Babasaheb's life and how he had an equal relationship with Ramabai.

Part III delves into the aspects of Dalit women's lived experience and contextualises Dalit 'difference'. Rege (Chapter 7) analyses how violence is a persistent concern for Dalit women due to their particularly vulnerable position which lies at the intersection of caste, class and gender as they have to work in the public realm for everyday survival. Rege further emphasizes the flaw of Indian feminism, which contributes to feminist theory on a single-axis framework and fails to recognize this intersectional difference. Bharti exhibits several instances from Hindu epics and analyses how Dalit women are represented in a demeaning manner with no respect and humanity as they are not considered pure and expected to bring misfortune (Chapter 8). Y.S. Alone also brings a different perspective by bringing the idea of aesthetics that has been challenged through art within contemporary artistic practises and responding to the demeaning representations of Dalit women as portrayed in the dominant narrative (Chapter 8).

Part IV historicizes and traces the idea of intersectionality, where it originated first, and how it adds to the theorization of feminist discourse. This part problematizes the academic engagement on feminism which originated from the perspective of most privileged white women in the West. Due to the lack and neglect of these First World Feminists, Black feminist thought emerged, which established the realities and struggles of Black women who are marginalized based on both gender and race in their daily lives. Crenshaw developed the idea of intersectionality based on Black women's "difference" from white women who have a racial advantage, filling the gap in First World feminism discourse that had neglected to address the problems of all women (Chapter 10). Similar to how American feminism developed, Indian feminism was influenced by caste-privileged women who failed to understand Dalit women's experiences and further marginalized them. Guru contends that the socio-economic and political deprivation of Dalit women over a long time has resulted in differences

in how they speak and live (Chapter 11). Rege (Chapter 12) issues a disciplinary challenge to Indian feminism by claiming that the inclusion of Dalit diversity is a prerequisite for establishing "real feminism".

Part V contextualizes the concept of intersectionality and the need for the same in India. Aloysius et al. argue that dominant caste feminists often disregard the caste-based exploitation of women that poses greater risks to Dalit women due to their caste location in the *varna* system. Therefore, Dalit feminists argue for a multiple-axis framework to understand the difference in the position of women due to the different locations occupied by women of different castes in this structure (Chapter 13). Tharu (Chapter 14) theorizes that gender and caste are linked, which is further complicated by class structure. Hence, the burdens multiply, rendering Dalit women at the lowest pedestal and marginalizes them to an extent that further invisiblised them in the society including scholars and intellectuals.

Part VI consolidates the book by arguing the need for a legitimate theory from a Dalit Feminist standpoint, which will require a close look at the contemporary feminist discourse, questioning its flaws and re-defining the issues of feminist politics from the vantage point of Third World women. A critique of modern feminist writings in India is provided by Julie Stephens, who contends that the term "non-Western women" is a fabrication insofar as it avoids a true engagement with its own "past" while fighting against Western hegemony (Chapter 16). Stephens also draws attention to how mainstream feminists have misappropriated the term "experience" in Third World feminism. Smita M. Patil uses categories from Marx, Mignolo, and Oyewumi to make the case that Dalit feminist thought poses a challenge to the veracity of knowledge and offers an epistemic turn for feminist thinking that must be acknowledged and adopted to advance the effectiveness of Indian feminist discourse (Chapter 17). Kanchana Mahadevan critiques the experience-theory dichotomy, which also presents a perceptive alternative that advocates theorizing by the collective shared experience of individuals who live, share, and communicate experience in a scholarly manner (Chapter 18). That is, a real theorization can only be made when the subjects and the objects of feminist inquiry are the same.

Dalit Feminist theory claims to address the gap in Third World Feminism by attending to the absent linkages of caste and gender-based experiences of women. However, it falls short of providing Third World feminism's different discourses due consideration. Mohanty (2015), analyses that the category of 'third world woman' is not monolithic but it has a geographic, historical, and cultural basis. The term 'third world women' entails many classifications on the intersection of caste, class, gender, religion, sexuality, region, culture, etc. The book is missing a perspective on current feminist politics based on religion and queer theory. Nonetheless, the book engages seriously with the feminist discourse, analyzes its pitfalls and suggests measures to the privileged 'upper-caste' feminists who engaged earlier. The book especially calls on

young feminists to correct the wrongdoings of the past by rethinking and revisiting the ground realities and lived experiences of Dalit women.

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'Breaking Barriers: The Story of a Dalit Chief Secretary' by K. Madhava Rao

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The book '*Breaking Barriers: The Story of a Dalit Chief Secretary*' published by Emesco Books Private Limited in 2022, and edited by D. Chandrasekhar Reddy, is a powerful account of a journey from fear to fearlessness, from subjugation to assertion and from being no one to becoming a revered exemplary civil servant. Authored by the former IAS officer Kaki Madhava Rao, the book explores the inner mechanism of the civil service at the ground level and casts light on micro policies and governance. Rao was a 1962 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer who superannuated as Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh. He also served as a Director at the Reserve Bank of India and as a member of the Board for Financial Supervision. He was born in 1939, in Pedamaddali village in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. This book is an inspiring account of an astonishing journey of the son of a *Parelu,*—a farmhand from a Dalit family who breaks the shackles of demeaning existence and challenges posed by the social systems and economic conditions, and emerges successfully to reach the highest echelons of bureaucracy.

Core Element of the Book

The author discusses his experiences and observations as a member of the civil service, with a particular focus on the dynamics of governance and policy making and implementation. The author also touches on his personal journey from rural Andhra

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Pradesh to the national stage, and his interactions with various political leaders during this period. It is likely to interest those in civil services, governance, and policy making, as well as those interested in the personal journey of the author from his childhood to that of an adult. Kaki Madhava Rao and his observations on civil service entwined with governance and policy-making; and implementation, is a rich account of the system, vividly showcased with its perils and safeties. It is a powerful book informing how policies are made and governments function. The book is spread over 14 chapters, showcasing the remarkable life of the author which enliven the proverb, 'Where there is a will, there is a way', albeit difficult, in this case. Against all odds, the author continues his journey as a child who was hampered from going to school by his father who in turn was made to believe by the dominant privileged people in the village that he and his children were meant to be farm hands, and therefore education was of no use to them. So he, unlike his wife, considered education as futile for his children. But his wife was determined to save the children from the clutches of penury and impoverishment caused by working as farm labourers. In defiance of her husband's belief, she started sending the children to school stealthily, at the cost of being beaten up by the adamant father of the children. While the beatings scared the author and his sibling, it did not deter the mother. It was her fortitude that led the little boy to educate himself and attain the highest office as a bureaucrat can aspire to reach in his career. This narrative from the author's childhood, highlights the grit and courage of a Dalit mother to fight the social (and economic) evils prevalent against Dalits to the extent of remaining undeterred by her spouse's wrath.

Early Days

The tone of the book is set in the initial chapters that describe author's childhood. Starting with his struggles against a social practice where the sons were to follow the father's occupation, and obey him with no right of choice or agency. Against this backdrop, the author experienced the tension between the father's authority and pride in being the 'best *Paleru'*,—farm hand in the region, and the desire to make his sons emulate him; and the mother's resolve to free the boys—the author and his sibling, from the clutches of inhuman compulsions perpetrated by privileged landlords. Madhava Rao's mother aspired to educate her sons—the author and his elder brother, Raghavendra Rao, to break free from the shackles of daily subsistence and that of his father who was determined to ensure that his sons follow his example of being the best farm hand in the area.

The first sentence of the first chapter reads: "*This is the story of the persons, authorities and events that made me who and what I am.*" —appropriately summing up the theme of the book. The first chapter titled "Village Days" is the core of the book. In recalling his early days, the author narrates some significant events. The most impactful being the thrashing he got from his father when he was seven years old for going to school stealthily at the behest of his mother and against the will of his

father. It made him fall silent but not condone that act of injustice. He endured living a frugal life in dirty, insanitary conditions, and often combating hunger, to pursue his ambition to study that taught him the values of self-discipline, self-control and single-mindedness.

Making of the Civil Servant

The initial chapters of the book describe in simple, yet lucid language, the almost impermeable constraints, and struggles of overcoming them. They also inform us about the values that Madhava Rao cherished most and followed diligently in all his official and personal dealings, subsequently as he held various offices. Chapters 2 to 5 give details on his exposure to the national stage of governance and functioning of the government. This was a realm different from the rural Andhra Pradesh of his childhood. These chapters are an account of a provincial young man maturing into an adult bureaucrat ready for the nation and world at large. These early years made the man he became, imbibing the dominant traits of his parents—from his mother the zealous sense of fairness and justice, and from his father belief in oneself to achieve the set goals through hard work. However, his years as a senior civil servant tested his stubborn commitment to his values and beliefs.

The subsequent chapters 6 to 9 cover aspects of administration such as pressures, politics and economics, formal and informal facets of manoeuvring the strings of governance. The strengths and weaknesses of state-level political leadership are used to represent the story of change in the country. These chapters traverse the author's journey as a Collector of Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh, to becoming the state's chief secretary. His work for the welfare of toddy tappers, tribals, Dalits and other labouring communities in Warangal district made him a hero of the marginalised. Madhava Rao was not only noticed but also marked when as the District Collector he stood by the marginalised groups against powerful political forces, resulting in his transfer. But he continued to fight for the rights and the welfare of the most marginalized social groups—the scheduled castes and tribes. In these endeavours, he was supported by another iconic officer, Shri S.R. Sankaran, enforcing the rule of law that often meant disrupting the status quo of caste hierarchies. Implementing the law banning bonded labour and freeing them from the landlords, who, for generations, thrived on such social exploitation, was a work of mettle which could be materialised only by the officers of his merit.

Political Complexities

Chapters 10 and 11 deal with the political economy of the country. They contain interactions with several leaders like Chenna Reddy, Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy, N.T. Rama Rao, N. Chandrababu Naidu, and N. Janardhan Reddy, to name a few. Drawing from his various postings, Madhava Rao reflects on the times when he worked in politically sensitive posts of State's Finance Secretary, Secretary in the Chief Minister's office and

later as the Chief Secretary of the state. This phase has been written in an exciting way as it is perhaps the most riveting of all. These chapters enable the readers to understand the dynamics of policy making, agenda setting, role of bureaucracy and the tensions that a bureaucrat goes through in navigating a toxic environment while holding onto and not compromising with one's principles. The chapters covering the periods when he worked as the Principal Secretary to N. Jananardhan Reddy and Chief Secretary under Chandrababu Naidu provide rich insights into the minds and thinking of the two leaders. These chapters elicit how IAS officers can solve problems, address tricky issues, and the extent to which a bureaucrat can accommodate political compulsions, without necessarily having to compromise on integrity, principles or the Constitution. The author remained uncompromising on principles, yet he did not hesitate in being flexible to suit the situation. The accounts of his association with Chandrababu Naidu reflect this aspect of his personality. In the interactions with the leadership, he proves his own mettle as a decision-maker. This characteristic is also evident in his role as State Election Commissioner. He went to the Court against the government and did not invite any adverse criticism, proves his righteousness and mature confidence. As evident in the book, all the offices he occupied like the Reserve Bank of India, Board for Financial Supervision, State Election Commission, etc., benefitted by the prudence of Madhava Rao as he engaged in the functioning of democratic processes during his tenure.

Through the meticulously arranged chapters the author provides numerous pertinent insights into the political, social, cultural, artistic and humanitarian aspects of our country. Besides understanding the events, people and the circumstances that shaped and defined him as a person, the author collates a firsthand account and a deep understanding of the social, political and economic transformation that the State was undergoing during that time period. This autobiographical account has its merit embedded in the remarkable simplicity and affirmation in the narratives. Despite the title announcing it as a story of a *'Dalit'* bureaucrat who reached the highest office of the chief secretary, the author refrains from seeking the readers' sympathy or kindness. On the contrary, the book reveals the grit required to earn every achievement of the author, not on the basis of his caste, but his sheer merit, competence and belief in self. A supportive, understanding and collaborative style of working with colleagues earned him respect and admiration. The book is nuanced in a firm narrative suggesting subtly and often upfront, what is required of those in bureaucracy and governance. It places clearly, that it is courage and belief to live by the constitutional values that Ambedkar gave India, to which they are bound, regardless of consequences.

Summing Up

This book is invaluable reading to understand that policy making processes are not easy. The policy environment is hard and calls for the effectivity of the officer in the form of being accessible and helpful. Perhaps for this reason, when the author was

first approached to pen down his memoirs, he was reluctant and tried his best to not get persuaded. But for the benefit of the generations to come, particularly of civil services officers, the persuaders prevailed. In the Preface, the author candidly reports on friends and family who were by his side in writing, editing and finalising the book in the form that it is today available to the readers.

He recounts the persuasion of Vijaykumar, Chairman of EMESCO who convinced him to write as his 'social and economic background' and his work experience was "Public Property". He was finally convinced to write when Ramachandra Murthy, senior Editor of multiple Telugu dailies too resonated the idea of Vijaykumar. In fact he also recalls how he persuaded P.S. Krishnan, fondly called PSK, the legendary and the first IAS Officer to identify with the poor and marginalized groups. The author also acknowledges three others who urged him to write his story—Kancha Ilaiah, who wrote 'Why I am not a Hindu?', Y.V. Reddy, former Governor of RBI and Gita Ramaswamy of Hyderabad Book Trust. It took him a while before he could agree to writing his memoir. The unfortunate demise of his wife of 61 years left him shattered and feeling terribly lonely. Then COVID happened, taking away the option of engaging in public activities. And this eventually led to the penning of his memoirs. The book shall remain an exceptional and vivid description of the grit to fight against all odds. The author defied social discrimination and suppression and became a source of inspiration for the oppressed. As a child he experienced every conceivable disadvantage associated with rural India of the mid twentieth century—poverty, inequality, social discrimination, which he overcame to eventually becoming the Chief Secretary of a state in independent India. This book is a realistic narrative of the blatant realities of our society, which makes it an essential reading for those who wish to understand the labyrinth of society, governance and policy with emotions.